

The HIDDEN DOOR

BY FRANK L. PACKARD

SYNOPSIS: In his effort to track down the murderer of the Mask, underworld ruler, the writer, Colin Hewitt has himself accepted as a member of one of the Mask's gangs under the name Clarke Lunn. With Buck O'Mara, lieutenant of the mysterious Mask, and Benjie Malone, Colin has gone aboard the Alonette to put its owner, Captain Doltaire, on the spot and steal the liquor cargo to avenge Doltaire's wrecking the Mask's counterfeit plant. But suddenly Doltaire turns on his would-be executioners and fires into their midst. Colin dashes the lamp to the floor and Doltaire disappears.

Chapter 41 THE SLAUGHTER

There was a stinging sensation in Colin's left forearm—like the sting of a burn. Strange! He heard Buck O'Mara groaning, stumbling over the companionway, then the rattle of the cabin door as it was shaken violently; then Buck O'Mara's snarl:

"Locked! You, there—Benny!" There was no answer.

"What's the matter?" demanded Buck O'Mara sharply. "Strike a match, Clarke, and see what's wrong with him."

Colin obeyed. Benny Malone was still on the settee, only he was slumped there now with his head sagging to one side. Colin crossed to the settee and bent over the other while the match burned itself out.

"Well, what about it?" Buck O'Mara rapped out. "Is he hurt bad?"

Colin felt his lips twitch as he answered.

"He's got his," he said tersely. Buck O'Mara, lighting a match in turn, came down the companionway into the cabin.

"That's a tough break!" he exclaimed with a bitter oath. "Benny was one of the best of them. But if there's any knowing anything where he's gone, he'll know that he's the last man Doltaire will ever put on the spot, which would help some. You hurt?"

"No," said Colin; "nothing to talk about. Got a little grase on the arm, maybe, but that's all. How about you?"

"I'm all right," Buck O'Mara replied gruffly. "But you didn't get that lamp out any too soon. The last slug hit the floor about an inch from my head. Thanks, Clarke."

"Aw," said Clarke Lunn modestly, "that was nothing, Buck."

And then Buck O'Mara laughed out in ugly jubilation.

"It won't take long!" he promised grimly. "The boys'll let us out in a minute or two. Listen!"

But Colin had already been listening. Almost from the moment Doltaire had slammed the cabin door he had been subconsciously aware, while he had been primarily occupied with Buck O'Mara and the dead man on the settee, of a medley of ominous sounds from the deck above.

He gave his whole attention to them now. They were the muffled sounds of shrieks, and yells, and curses, and whimpering cries—and an almost constant rat-tat-tat like the muffled roll of snare drums. But the sounds were growing momentarily fainter, and presently, as he listened, they died away.

And then the cabin door opened, and a lantern showed at the head of the companionway.

"You down there, Buck?" a voice called out.

"Yes," Buck O'Mara answered. "Who's that?"

"Smudge Kilrea. Come on up."

Colin followed Buck O'Mara to the deck. Three men stood there in the lantern light—Smudge Kilrea, Klengel, and Geordie Napp. Instinctively Colin's glance traveled around the deck. A few lanterns glimmered at various points, but the comparative darkness was merciful. Here and there he could discern sprawled shapes. He did not look again. He did not want to see more.

"Well!" demanded Buck O'Mara curtly. "What's the tally?"

"All of them," grinned Smudge Kilrea, "and none of us."

"You're sure you got Doltaire?"

"Every one, I tell you. Sure, we got Doltaire! But how'd he make his getaway from the cabin?"

Buck O'Mara lit a cigarette meditatively.

"He got his gun on a neat play," he said quietly; "I'll give him credit for that—and he got Benny."

"The hell he did!" Geordie Napp sucked in his breath. "That's—"

"Yes; it is!" Buck O'Mara broke in, his voice gone suddenly hard. "Only I don't want to talk about it. You fellows got your orders from Helmie for the rest of the night?"

"Sure," said Klengel. "We know

where the revenue birds are tonight, so that's jake. We've got time enough before daylight to get the goods off. Then we put the crew to bed in the hold with the hatches on and sink the schooner." He chuckled. "Ever hear of ships being lost at sea with all hands, and never heard of no more?"

"All right," said Buck O'Mara tersely. "That's your and Helmie's end of it. Remember what I told you about tomorrow night. There'll be a juicy cut in this for all of us. The Mask'll pay bigger for tonight than he ever did before even if there ain't a case landed. That's all just velvet. It was Doltaire he was after—and we all know why. Smudge, get my mob together, and take us ashore."

"That listens good to me," said Geordie Napp. "But, say, Buck, what about Benny? What are we going to do with Benny? He sure was one swell guy, and he deserves a swell funeral."

Buck O'Mara lifted his shoulders in an important shrug.

"A parade, you mean," he said, "with the papers asking where the corpse was found and who did it? Think it out for yourself, Geordie. I don't like it any more than you do, but he'll have to go with the rest."

"That's tough," muttered Geordie Napp; "but—well, I guess you're right, Buck."

"It isn't a guess," said Buck O'Mara. "Good luck, you fellows. Let's scam, Smudge. Come on, Clarke."

Blood was trickling hotly down Colin's head as he boarded the motor cruiser. He saw Buck O'Mara and Smudge Kilrea enter the wheel house, then he made his way down into the cabin, where the rest of Buck O'Mara's murder squad were gathered.

He took off his coat and rolled up a blood-soaked sleeve. It was a fresh wound, no more than that—nothing serious about it except that it had been bleeding profusely. Some of the mob put a rough bandage on for him. They asked no questions. This time he felt physically a little giddy, a little nauseated. He went up on deck again.

The boat was speeding for the shore. The wind whipped his face. The faintness passed. There was but little pain in his arm, scarcely enough to make him conscious of it. It was not his arm, it was his brain that tortured him. And, fight against it as he would, the night with its scenes and sounds of unbelievable horror kept passing again and again in review before him.

Only one thing stood out in compensation. He must inevitably have grown in Buck O'Mara's estimation—and Buck O'Mara was the one man now on whom he was depending to bring him into contact with the Mask. How, or where, he did not know; but at any cost, or through any means he could devise he must cultivate Buck O'Mara.

A wharf showed up out of the darkness; a house, still more shadowy, loomed up beyond. And then a light appeared suddenly in one of the windows of the house—and went out again.

Buck O'Mara came out of the wheelhouse as the boat drew up to the wharf.

"You go back in the same car you came in with me, Clarke," he said. "I'll drop you somewhere in the city slick around."

"Thanks," said Clarke gratefully. The mob departed, and Buck O'Mara dismissed them at the shore end of the wharf.

"Wait here for me, Clarke," he instructed. "I've got to go up to the house for a minute."

In the blackness Colin could see little—only the vague outlines of the wharf and house. He heard several cars depart. He heard the motor cruiser start away again—to assist the other two boats presumably in emptying the Alonette's hold. Perhaps ten minutes passed, then Buck O'Mara came toward him through the shadows. Buck O'Mara was grumbling and cursing audibly to himself.

"Anything wrong, Buck?" Colin inquired solicitously.

"Yes," growled Buck O'Mara. "You heard Benny and me talking about Spinelli, didn't you? Well, he's in a jam all right. He's got to have some kate tonight for his fear. It's Helmie's racket, but nobody's been able to connect with him, so I guess I'll have to take it on—and it looks like you weren't through with your job yet tonight either."

"That's all right by me," declared Colin cheerfully.

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But Colin does not go to Spinelli's, to-morrow!

Canadian Migration Drops.

ROCHESTER, N. Y.—(UP)—The number of Canadians entering the United States this year has dropped sharply as compared with previous years, according to Mrs. Florence P. Alexander, chairman of the American

canian committee of the D. A. R. During the fiscal year that ended July 1 only 4823 Canadians entered as compared with an average of 50,000 a year immediately preceding 1930.

C. E. Rose for Elbertae.

JUDICIAL REFORM COMMITTEE NAMED

SALEM, Sept. 13.—(UP)—A committee of 15 men, including seven

laymen, was appointed by Governor Julius L. Meier today to consider proposals for reform in judicial procedure to meet changing conditions in the state, and to recommend these changes to the state legislature. Richard Montague of Portland was named chairman of this committee. The committee was named pursuant to a resolution passed by the association, to appoint a committee

of 15 from the bench, bar and laymen to consider proposals deemed desirable because of changes in procedure in the administration of justice. Others on the committee include: C. H. Carey, Justice George Rosman and John Carson of Salem; L. T. Harris and Wayne H. Morse of Eugene; Dexter Rice of Roseburg; Alan A. Smith of Baker; J. R. Raley of Pendleton and B. F. Irvine, Ben T. Os-

borne, Nicholas Jaureguy, Arthur C. Spencer, O. L. Price and A. E. Clark of Portland.

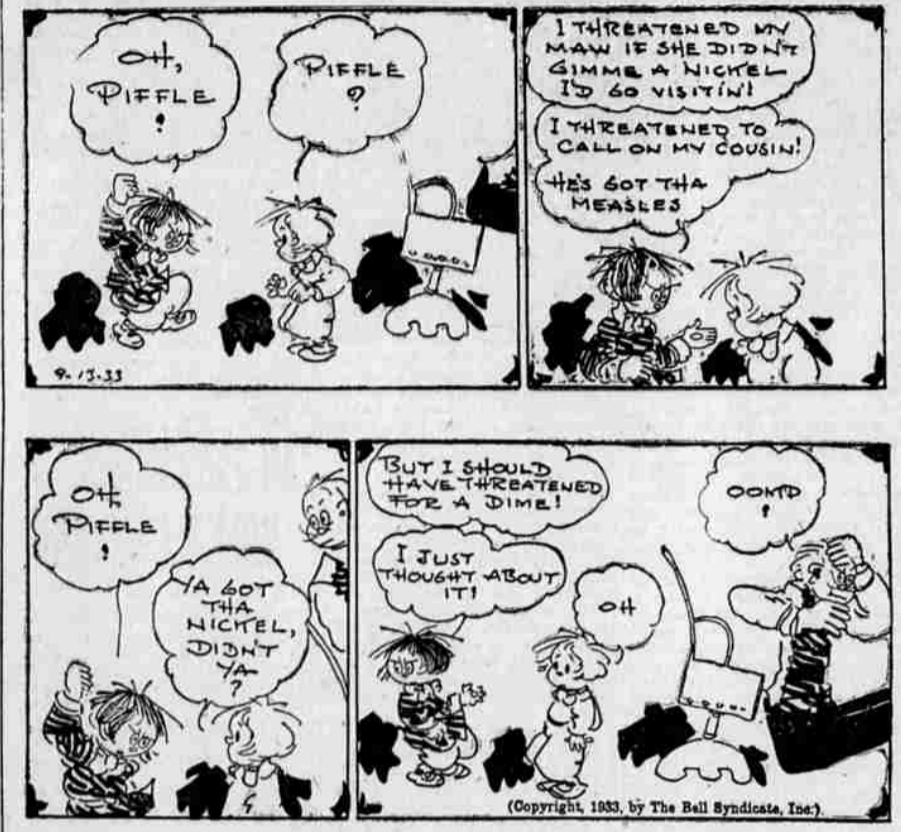
FEW SCHOOLS WAIT FOR LATER OPENING

All the schools of the county with the exception of Medford, Central

Point and Agate are now opened. These three will open next Monday, September 18. Sixteen schools opened Monday, as follows: Jacksonville, Phoenix, Bush, Uniontown, Lome Pine, Talent, North Phoenix, Applegate, Lost Creek, Forrest Creek, Dead Indian, Prospect, Little Butte, Hatchery, Shady Cove and Fern Valley.

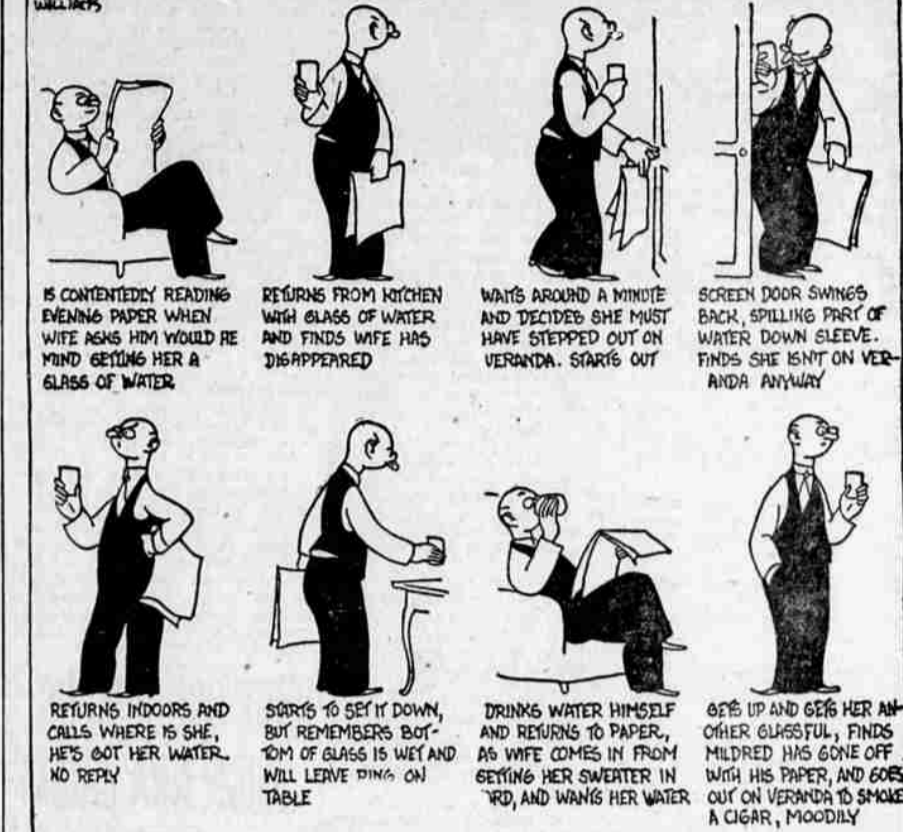
S'MATTER POP—

By C. M. PAYNE



THE FAMILY ALBUM—A GLASS OF WATER

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



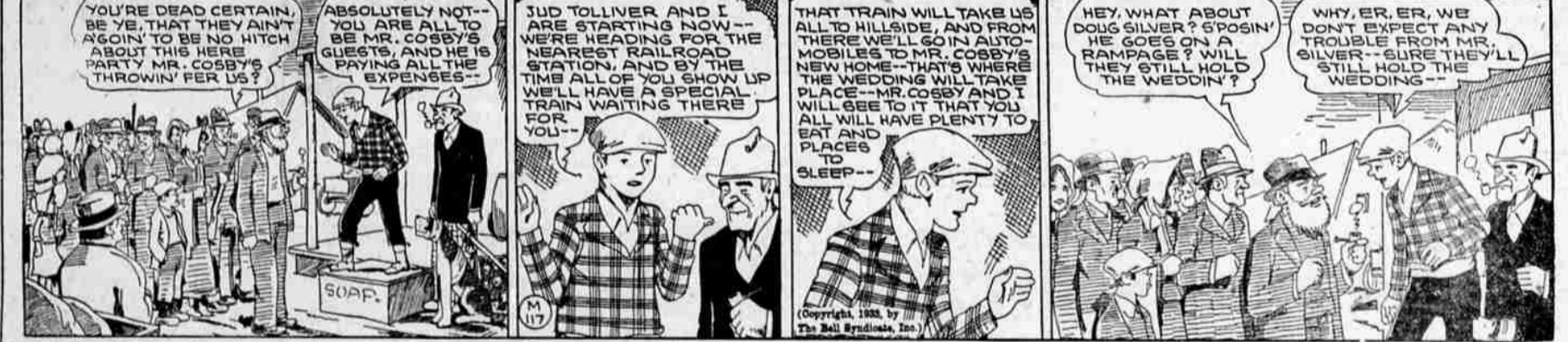
TAILSPIN TOMMY—Cargo Overboard!

By GLENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORREST



BOUND TO WIN—Final Instructions

By EDWIN ALGER



THE NEBBS—Birds Of A Feather

By SOL HESS



BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



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