

The HIDDEN DOOR

BY FRANK L. PACKARD

CHAPTER 44
ON THE STAIRWAY

THE car had been ordered to wait half a block away, where Colin was to rejoin it and then continue on to Spinelli's.

He followed Buck O'Mara now along the alleyway that flanked the tobacco store, and turned into the lane behind. It was intensely dark, but as they began to skirt the rear of the building he could distinguish the outline of a door. They passed this—and halted before another one a few yards farther on.

He remembered what Benny Malone had said. The first door was the one common to the mob; this one, of course, was the private entrance to the quarters above that were ascribed to the big shots. He would very much like to see those quarters. But would Buck O'Mara invite him inside, or would he be told to wait out here for the money he was to take to Spinelli?

Buck O'Mara had been fumbling in the darkness with his key. He opened the door and stepped inside. "Shut the door after you, and follow me," he said; "I'll save me coming downstairs again."

Colin obeyed—and then, unheralded, as he moved across the threshold into an unlighted interior, a sudden inspiration flashed into his mind. His brain was virile, working at lightning speed now.

Suppose that instead of merely visiting these quarters as he was now obviously going to do, he could spend a night here! He would give a great deal to spend a night in the Wine Press! Much might come of it, or nothing might come of it, but it held untold possibilities.

There was Buck O'Mara himself, for instance. After what had happened in the last few hours, O'Mara was almost certain to communicate with the Mask tonight. Would it be from here? How?

The night might answer those questions—and others—if only he could stay here! And there was at least a possible way whereby he might succeed in doing so. He meant to try it now anyway. It was too big a chance to lose.

If the ruse worked, it worked; if it failed, he lost nothing, for certainly now, with the events of the early part of the night to endorse him, Clarke Lunn would hardly be suspected of guile!

His arm had been bleeding a little again on the ride in. He had felt the blood soaking through the bandage, but it had not run down on his hand. Buck O'Mara had not noticed it—and he, Colin, had said nothing about it. It would take very little to start the blood flowing as profusely as ever; it would look infinitely worse than it really was, and—

A light went on. Buck O'Mara was mounting a flight of stairs whose rather shabby carpet, Colin noted, was strictly in keeping with the Barneys' floor coverings downstairs.

"Come on," O'Mara called over his shoulder.

"Sure!" said Colin—and, gripping his coat sleeve, wrenched at the bandage underneath. He felt the bandage give—and, by the time he had mounted, three or four more steps, a trickle of blood upon his hand. He kept his hand behind his back. It would not look serious enough yet.

KEEPING close behind the other, he reached the topmost stair and stepped out into what proved to be a narrow hallway carpeted like the stairs—and here Buck O'Mara spoke again:

"Wait here, Clarke," he directed. "I'll take me two or three minutes to get the kale, and then you can go back the way you came."

"Sure!" said Colin for the second time.

And then, as Buck O'Mara moved away along the hall, Colin squeezed at his wounded arm—and bit his lips. It was painful now—but the blood was flowing freely. His hand was red with it. As for the rest—

that remained to be seen! The stage was set, anyway.

His eyes searched swiftly around him. Buck O'Mara had disappeared through the doorway of the farther one of the only two rooms that led off from the hall—and had even left the door open behind him. A gesture on O'Mara's part that cost nothing, since from O'Mara's casual reference to the emergency safe it was certainly no secret from the rank and file that there was one here!

The two rooms, of course, were the two bedrooms of which Benny Malone had spoken, and which obviously looked out on the alleyway, since they were on his left.

On his right was a sort of heterogeneous wall, some of it ornate in both plaster and wood, relics no doubt of the old Wine Press in its heyday—and some of it of newer but cheap construction, undoubtedly the parsimonious handwork of old Koppelstein when he had made the building into two.

At the far end of the hall was another stairway—the one, of course, that led to the Barneys' quarters below, and that he had seen when he had come in through the tobacco store. Nothing else!

It was a bit bizarre, of course, with its two stairways and its crazy-quilt wall; but, since these were readily explainable to anyone as being but an inheritance from the old Wine Press, there was nothing else about the place to excite comment, let alone suggest that it was the lair of gangster and mob leaders.

His inspection at an end, Colin moved over and leaned against the wall. A minute, two, another passed. His eyes were on the doorway of Buck O'Mara's room now—and he was nursing his arm and hand, and sagging heavily against the wall as Buck O'Mara, carrying a large, bulky envelope in his hand, stepped out into the hall.

Buck O'Mara came to an abrupt halt. Mechanically he took the cigarette he was smoking from his mouth.

"What the hell!" he ejaculated. Colin stayed a little.

"I'm sorry, Buck," he protested. "I didn't mean to let you down. I— I feel kind of weak."

WITH a perplexed scowl Buck O'Mara crossed the hall and fronted Colin. He stared at Colin's hand.

"Why didn't you tell me about this before?" he demanded.

"I did," said Colin. "In the cabin."

"But you said it wasn't anything."

"I didn't think it was. Then, my arm began to bleed—bad." He was jerking out his words heavily. "Some of the mob put a bandage on it for me, and it stopped. But coming back in the car it began a little again and—"

"Well," Buck O'Mara cut in bluntly, "why didn't you say something about it then?"

Colin clutched vaguely at the wall—stunned himself.

"Aw, say, I didn't want to wretch on you," he explained earnestly. "It wasn't bad enough for that—only a drop or two. It was only when I was coming up the stairs that it got like this. The—bandage must've slipped or—something."

Buck O'Mara laughed out shortly.

"Well, anyway, you're not as bad off as Benny!" he flung out. "I guess you're some kid, all right."

"It don't amount to anything," asserted Colin weakly, "except that I—I'm afraid I couldn't get very far right now. It's only that kale for Spinelli I'm thinking of. Gee, I'm sorry about this, Buck."

"Forget that!" said Buck O'Mara crisply. "Barney can attend to it. But I can't send you to a hospital with a gunshot wound even if it's not serious, so it looks like you'd have to rest up here for a few hours. I'd let you stretch out in that other room only I'm expecting Helms'll blow in, and want it. But there's the sofa downstairs in Barney's parlor that you can have, and Mrs. Barney'll fix your arm up for you."

Colin's right hand went to his wounded forearm—and tightened over sleeve and bandage. He had lost all the blood he cared to spare! He knew a sense of exultation. Nothing might come of it; but at least he had won the first trick—he would spend the rest of the night in the Wine Press.

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Monday, Colin gets some advice from Mrs. Barney.

BUTTER SELLING PACT IS AGREED

SEATTLE, Sept. 14.—(AP)—After Portland distributors withdrew a protest against having southwest Washington included, a proposed butter marketing agreement adopted by Washington, northern Idaho and western Montana distributors, was adopted here today and sent to Secretary of Agriculture Wallace.

The agreement is planned to stabilize prices and eliminate unfair practices in the industry. If approved by Wallace it will go into effect immediately. The hearing was conducted by Dr. William A. Schoenfeld, Corvallis, Ore., consulting adviser for the department of agriculture, and W. P. Staley, Portland, assistant solicitor for the department.

The agreement regulates prices of butterfat, trade practices, discounts and resale margins, and prohibits sale of butter containing less than 80 per cent butterfat.

Thompson left here at 6:30 o'clock last night for San Francisco was found today hanging on a high power electric line with Thompson's carred body in it at Beliear, Solano county.

Thompson was instructor in the Summit Flying School here, which is a branch of a San Francisco company.

Trainmen of the Sacramento Northern railway noticed the plane hanging on the wires at 5:30 o'clock this morning and reported the accident.

Thompson's plane evidently hit the power line at 7:03 o'clock last night as trainmen reported that at that time lights in the vicinity of Miller went out.

PILOT CREMATED BY POWER WIRE

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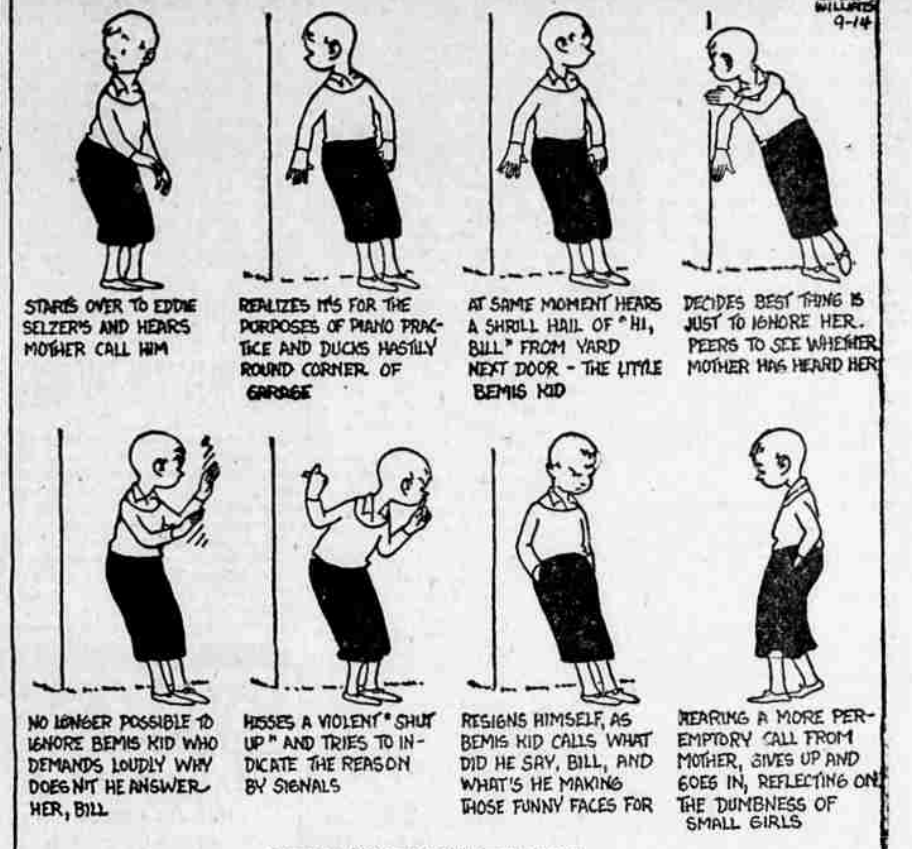
S'MATTER POP—

By C. M. PAYNE



IN HIDING

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



TAILSPIN TOMMY—What Price Treasure Now?

By GLENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORREST



BOUND TO WIN—Ben's Fear

By EDWIN ALGER



THE NEBBS—The Low Down

By SOL HESS



BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



PATRONAGE CAUSE OF DEMO UNREST

WASHINGTON, Sept. 14.—(AP)—Patronage, that trouble zone of politics, produced in the capital today rumbles of Democratic unrest that resounded even above the intensity of

President Roosevelt's recovery drive. A group of party stalwarts in the senate was reported to have sponsored a round-robin to the chief executive, asking jobs for old-line Democrats. These senators protested the appointment of Republicans—particularly by Secretary Ickes, Wallace and Perkins.

At the other end of the capitol, speaker Henry T. Rainey blamed the "old Republican set-up" in the farm credit administration for failure to give the farmers "adequate" mortgage relief.

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