

# The HIDDEN DOOR

BY FRANK L. PACKARD

## Chapter 47 HOUSE OF DEATH

THEY stepped into the dark shadows of the lane and, silently now, made their way along it with Sergeant Mulvey in the lead.

Somewhere ahead, Collin knew, was the rear of the Wine Press and the alleyway that flanked Michael Barney's specious tobacco store, but it was so dark that he could scarcely see Sergeant Mulvey's form in front of him—so dark, in fact, that when finally Sergeant Mulvey halted suddenly Collin bumped into him.

"Here we are!" cautioned Sergeant Mulvey under his breath. "It was much like last night, much like that other door—which could not be many yards away—only that tonight, instead of Buck O'Mara, the big shot of the Mask's murder squad, it was Detective Sergeant Mulvey of the Homicide Bureau who acted as guide.

Sergeant Mulvey opened the door soundlessly and closed it behind the soundlessly—and then for a full minute they stood motionless, listening.

Then Sergeant Mulvey spoke. "Kind of force of habit," he grunted, as the ray from his electric torch stabbed suddenly through the blackness, "even though I know there ain't anybody here." He thrust his wrist watch into the flare. "Twenty minutes yet. Lots of time for a look-see around."

The rooms were comfortable, scantily furnished, containing scarcely the bare necessities—no one giving them a single glance would question the status of old Keppelstein as a miser of the first degree.

By contrast, the mural decorations, untouched, obviously, except by age, since the days when the Wine Press had been in its prime, were ludicrously grotesque: here a pointed jungle scene, there a group of nymphs dancing in the moonlight—above a rickety kitchen table! But Sergeant Mulvey seemed little concerned with these details. His flashlight poked persistently and inquisitively into cupboards and corners and out-of-the-way places.

"Nothing down here in the shape of any private wires or that sort of stuff," he announced finally, "unless they're damn well hidden."

"That trick door opens on the floor above," Collin reminded him. "Yes, I know. Force of habit again. Well, let's go up."

There was only one room on the second floor, and Collin's eyes followed the round, white circle of light as Sergeant Mulvey's flashlight traveled from the threshold slowly around it. The room ran the entire depth of the house and had, once, it was quite obvious, been the cabaret's combination dance floor, bar, and main dining room.

Little alcoves, where tables for two, inviting tête-à-têtes, might have been placed, still punctuated the walls at irregular intervals while the walls themselves were adorned with huge plaster casts, depicting scenes even more fantastic than those painted on the walls of the rooms downstairs. The only windows in the room looked out on the street, and the shutters of these were tightly closed.

At the rear of the room and stretching across almost its entire breadth were the remains of a bar, a decrepit and wobegone affair now, the mirrors above it streaked and blistered until they were almost beyond recognition. There were no furnishings whatever—just litters of rubbish piled, or rather thrown, in heaps here and there about the floor—a veritable catch-all—old packing cases, chairs, and various pieces of furniture broken beyond repair, and all now covered thick with dust.

"I CAN'T say this listens good to me!" exclaimed Sergeant Mulvey dubiously. "It looks like this was just another way out, without anybody knowing it, through Keppelstein's front or back door."

Collin shook his head stubbornly. "If that's all it amounts to," he answered tersely, "why did Buck O'Mara use it last night—when he didn't have to? And tonight—there's nothing to prevent him from making a bolt down that private staircase. If he does that, of course, the only thing that's left for us to do then will be to go home and begin all over again."

"Well, we're here—and we'll see," returned Sergeant Mulvey crisply. "Where would you say that hidden door was?"

"Run your light along the wall over there again. Not so fast! There! Allowing for the stairs on

...of course, I'd say it must be just about there."

The light was focused on a plaster barge à la Antony and Cleopatra that was decidedly daring in its conception, and which floated on what had once doubtless been, in color, though calamitously faded now, a sunlit azure sea. It was about midway along the wall.

"Some dump!" ejaculated Sergeant Mulvey. "Before my time on the force. Those were the days, eh?—when the highlights were down here, and before they turned the good old Bowery into a morgue! Well, come on! Time's nearly up." His flashlight circled again. "How about getting down behind that old packing case up there against the wall on this side near the bar? It's big enough all right. We'll be facing that trick door then, and I'll be able to see plenty without being spotted."

"All right," agreed Collin briefly. The flashlight pointing the way, they moved up the room, and lifting the dilapidated case out a little way from the wall crouched down behind it. Given anything to see, by peering around the ends of the case, or even with due caution over the top of it, the view would be practically unobstructed.

"It's ten o'clock," said Sergeant Mulvey, "but I'll take the boys a few minutes to work their racket."

"Right!" said Collin. The flashlight went out. It was inky black. Collin could not see an inch in front of him. And there was no sound—though he strained his ears to catch one from the other side of the wall. No movement now from Sergeant Mulvey. Just stillness and blackness everywhere around him.

And now time itself seemed to have stopped. Had a minute, two, or three, or ten passed since Mulvey had switched off the torch? He grew uneasy. This room here, this house, as Sergeant Mulvey had said, did not look very promising—there was nothing to inspire confidence in the belief that the link between the Mask and the big shots of his mobs was here.

Certainly the Mask himself was not here. Sergeant Mulvey and he were unquestionably the only two persons in the house. Surely by now Buck O'Mara would have come if he were coming at all. Was this, after all, merely another exit and entrance sacred to the big shots—and Buck O'Mara in flight had chosen instead the private stairway?

He shook his head doggedly in the blackness. There was too much to point the other way. It must be here, somewhere, somehow, that the contact between the Mask and his lieutenants was made. His brain churned on.

The silence grew heavy and oppressive. It began to palpitate audibly and finally to thunder at his eardrums. In spite of himself, uneasiness and misgivings were beginning to obtain the upper hand. There had been more than time enough by now, and—

There came a faint sound from across the room—indefinite. And then suddenly a cluster of ceiling lamps went on and the room was ablaze with light. His eyes blinked in the glare. The barge bearing Antony and Cleopatra seemed to have bobbed up and down as though it had ridden on a swell. His vision cleared. A figure was running across the room in the direction of the bar—Buck O'Mara—and Buck O'Mara was tearing off his coat as he ran.

And now there came another sound—a distinct click this time. Collin, peering around the edge of the packing case, mechanically rubbed his eyes. The bar was revolving upon itself—and now it presented the reverse side.

It had become a huge wardrobe. Rows of clothing, wigs and hats hung there from end to end—and in the center, below a mirror, was a sort of shelf, waist high, strewn with small pots and jars and tubes in endless variety.

Something was thudding at both Collin's heart and brain. His eyes swung back to O'Mara. O'Mara's outer clothes were off now, the sandy hair was gone—and the back of a short-cropped, black-haired head presented itself to view. He could not see the face.

Again Collin's eyes shifted and, as though drawn by a magnet, fastened, amongst the rows of clothing, on an inch-square checked suit of light fawn, and hanging on a peg above it, a brilliant red tie and a straw-colored wig. That was Helmie Schwarm!

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Many mysteries are plain, tomorrow, to Collin.

# FRUIT SORTING BASIC PAY SET

HOOD RIVER, Ore., Sept. 20.—(AP)—A basic wage scale of 20 cents an

hour for fruit sorters has been established for the mid-Columbia districts of Oregon and Washington by a vote of the Hood River Traffic association and its affiliations in all districts. It was announced today. Definite action has been postponed for two weeks, however, pending decisions from the Oregon and Washington State Welfare associations, which were asked for modifications

of their previous rulings applying a 27½-cent hour minimum for at least 35 per cent of the women workers in fruit warehouses. Growers have declared they are unable to meet the higher wage request because of lack of assurance of more profitable returns. Broken windows glazed by Trowbridge Cabinet Works.

# CUT CANNED GOODS RATE VIA CANAL

WASHINGTON, Sept. 20.—(AP)—The lowest freight rate on canned

goods from Pacific coast ports thru the Panama canal to the Mississippi valley ever put into effect between these sections was upheld today by the Interstate Commerce commission. The commission refused to order a suspension of the proposed charge and it goes into effect tonight. It will be the first through water and rail rate to be applied on canned goods through the Panama canal.

The rate, 76 cents per 100 pounds from 15 Pacific coast ports, was filed by the Luckenbach Gulf Steamship company, the Gulf Pacific line, and the Gulf Pacific Mail line, Ltd. The will of the late Mrs. Mary Panny Scott of Miami, Fla., provided \$1,000 to buy religious reading material for her only son.

# S'MATTER POP—

By C. M. PAYNE



# WEATHER CONFERENCE

GLUYAS WILLIAMS (Copyright, 1933, by The Bell Syndicate, Inc.)



# TAILSPIN TOMMY—Exit The Golden Pig!

By GLENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORREST



# BOUND TO WIN—"Where Ignorance Is Bliss—"

By EDWIN ALGER



# THE NEBBS—Just A Big Man

By SOL HESS



# BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



**VIRGINIAN NAMED MOLEY SUCCESSOR**  
WASHINGTON, Sept. 20.—(AP)—President Roosevelt today appointed R. Walton Moore, former member of congress from Virginia, to succeed

Raymond Moley as assistant secretary of state. The president also named George V. Moore, as marshal for the northern district of California.

Farmers own 30 per cent of the 400,000,000 acres of commercial forest area in the United States.

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