

The HIDDEN DOOR

BY FRANK L. PACKARD

THE MASK

There was no mistaking the significance of the substitution of that wig of white hair that the man he had known as Buck O'Mara was pulling on now to replace the one just taken off. Colonel Hargreaves, Helme Schwarm, Buck O'Mara, the character that was now being assumed, all of those other characters represented by that array of clothing, were one and the same—the Mask.

Colin gripped Sergeant Mulvey's arm fiercely and breathed into the other's ear:

"That fawn, checked suit—Helme Schwarm. That Inverness cloak—the night he killed Reddy. Get it?"

"Sure, I get it!" Sergeant Mulvey breathed back. "And I'll get him! But you stay out of this now, or his mob'll get Clarke Lunn! Let's see who he is this time."

The erstwhile Buck O'Mara was working with incredible speed, leaning toward the mirror, dabbling swiftly at his face as his fingers dipped into this jar and that. It could have been scarcely more than a minute since he had begun his transformation.

And now he was donning a black coat, buttoning it to the throat. The next instant he had adjusted a steel-rimmed pair of spectacles upon his nose and a cane was in his hand. He turned slightly. It was old Keppelstein.

Sergeant Mulvey's revolver was in his hand as he stepped suddenly out on the floor and toward the other.

"Don't move, O'Mara, or Keppelstein, or whatever you want to call yourself," he said coldly. "The game's up."

The man did not move—he stood there as though frozen to the spot. But there was a sudden whiteness in his face that no pigment could defy, and his lips twisted jerkily for an instant.

"How did you get in here?" he asked hoarsely. "Who are you?"

"Never mind how I got in!" snapped Sergeant Mulvey. "And you know damned well who I am. According to your own story you kept pretty close tabs on me after you bumped off Reddy Turner. And so you're the Mask! Well, by God, you're well named!"

The man shook his head as he faced Sergeant Mulvey now.

"You're crazy," he cried out defiantly. "I never heard of him. Who said I was?"

"Cut it out!" There was an ominous snarl in Sergeant Mulvey's voice. "Where do you think that's going to get you? You said so yourself—the night you went to Mr. Bewitt's home in that Inverness cloak I see hanging up there."

The man's eyes roved around the room in a hunted way, and it seemed to Colin that he sagged a little as he supported his weight on the cane in his hand.

"It's—a lie!" The man's voice had suddenly become a craven, unsteady whim. "It's a lie—all a lie! I tell you it's a lie!"

"Sure it is!" agreed Sergeant Mulvey contemptuously. "And so's Helme Schwarm, and Colonel Hargreaves, and Buck O'Mara, and old Keppelstein and God only knows how many other aliases you're working—but I'd kind of like to know what the Mask himself looks like when he hasn't got any war paint on. I didn't get a look at your face in that mirror because the back of your head hit it."

He stepped abruptly toward the other. "I think we'll take that wig and those spectacles off, and—"

Swift as a lightning flash the cane swung up from the floor, cutting under Sergeant Mulvey's wrist, knocking the gun from his hand—and, with a jeering laugh, far from the craven, unsteady creature of a moment gone, the Mask leaped for the weapon with the agility of a panther and secured it.

But Sergeant Mulvey, too, was agile. Before the Mask, who had stooped for the revolver, could quite regain his poise, Sergeant Mulvey, hurling himself forward, had borne the other to the floor. And then, like madmen struggling, they rolled over and over as they fought.

And in that moment Colin forgot Clarke Lunn. It was the Mask who had the gun—not Sergeant Mulvey. And it was Sergeant Mulvey who counted now. He flung the packing case aside, wrenched his own gun from his pocket, sprang out on the floor—and came to a sudden halt as a shot muffled by close-hugged bodies rang out.

Colin leaved his snub-nosed automatic and lowered it again. It was Sergeant Mulvey, not the Mask, who was rising to his knees. The Mask lay there motionless, his hand that still gripped the revolver flung across his chest.

"It went off—the wrong way—for him," panted Sergeant Mulvey grimly, as he tore open the man's coat and shirt. "I guess he's a goner, but come and lend a hand."

Colin stepped to Sergeant Mulvey's side and knelt down over the Mask.

"He's dead all right," announced Sergeant Mulvey gruffly.

But the words were meaningless to Colin. He was staring at a bare right shoulder—at a long, jagged scar that ran parallel with the shoulder blade.

It was Joe Lazarre.

Colin stood at the window of room 608-A in the Kranway-Stratton and stared restlessly out into the rainy night. From somewhere a clock boomed out the hour of two. What was keeping Sergeant Mulvey?

Back there in the Wine Press, as they stood looking down on that lifeless form on the floor, he had briefly explained his connection with Joe Lazarre, and had told Sergeant Mulvey what little he knew of the man.

Then, on Sergeant Mulvey's advice, Clarke Lunn had unobtrusively left the place. From the Wine Press he had gone to the rooming house that for the last month had harbored him as one outside the law, packed his belongings, and with the simple but eloquent explanation that he had to scam, had paid his bill and departed.

A taxi had taken him to the Grand Central Station, and a redcap had taken his bags—to the parcel room. Ten minutes later another redcap had collected his bags, and another taxi had brought him here to the Kranway-Stratton—where he was not registered.

By the time any of the Mask's mobmen picked up the trail, if they ever did, Clarke Lunn would have ceased to exist.

But all this had been hours ago! Sergeant Mulvey had said he would be here by midnight—and he had not yet come.

Colin turned uneasily away from the window, and his eyes, roaming around the room, fixed and held on an open letter that lay upon the writing desk. Furrows gathered between his eyes. It was the letter that, under a pledge of secrecy, had taken him to Cap & O'rage. But Reddy was dead and Lazarre was dead now, and his promise to Reddy was no longer binding.

For that reason he had told Sergeant Mulvey at the Wine Press what he then knew about Lazarre; and for that reason here, on his return to this room extracting it from inside the lining of one of his bags where he had hidden it, he had opened and read the letter Reddy had entrusted to him.

It was a long letter—many pages of it, closely written on both sides of the sheets. He had spent an hour over it. And now he laughed out suddenly—mirthlessly. The memory of that night at the Cascade River and the burning clubhouses came vividly back to him.

A human life was a human life, and even had he then known that Lazarre was the Mask he still might not have acted very differently; but had he known what was in that letter, had he known what he knew now, he would have hesitated long before he had lifted even a finger to save Lazarre's life.

He raised his hand and brushed it across his eyes. Lazarre—the Mask! Queer that he had saved Lazarre's life at all!

The door opened and closed. Sergeant Mulvey came across the room, tossed his hat into one chair, and slumped wearily down in another.

"Began to think I wasn't coming at all, eh?" Sergeant Mulvey flung out. "Well, I couldn't help it. The first check-up started something hot, and I haven't had a minute. Anyway, I've got some news for you. French Pete's real name, you know, was Pierre Mireau. Well, Joe Lazarre's real name was Louis Mireau. They were brothers."

Colin's lips were tight. "I know it," he said. "It's rather ghastly."

"That!" exclaimed Sergeant Mulvey savagely. "Forget it! But how do you know they were brothers? You didn't know it when you were telling me about Lazarre down there in that dump, did you?"

"Monday, Colin learns the whole truth about the Mask."

BANK ROBBERS TAKE \$30,000 AND CASHIER

YORK, Neb., Sept. 21.—(AP)—Three men robbed the First National bank

today of \$30,000 and kidnaped the cashier to aid their escape. C. A. McCloud, president, said the men entered the bank, backed 15 employees and customers into a back room and scooped up the cash. William E. McCloud, cashier of the savings department, was taken as a hostage, but was dropped off their car at a hospital a mile from the bank.

CHICAGO STUDENTS CLUBBED BY POLICE

CHICAGO, Sept. 21.—(AP)—Squads of police, some of them swinging

clubs, today broke up attempts of striking high school students to march on the city hall in protest of school board economy slashes. More than 1,000 students participated. About 20 were arrested, but were freed on promise of an orderly return to classes.

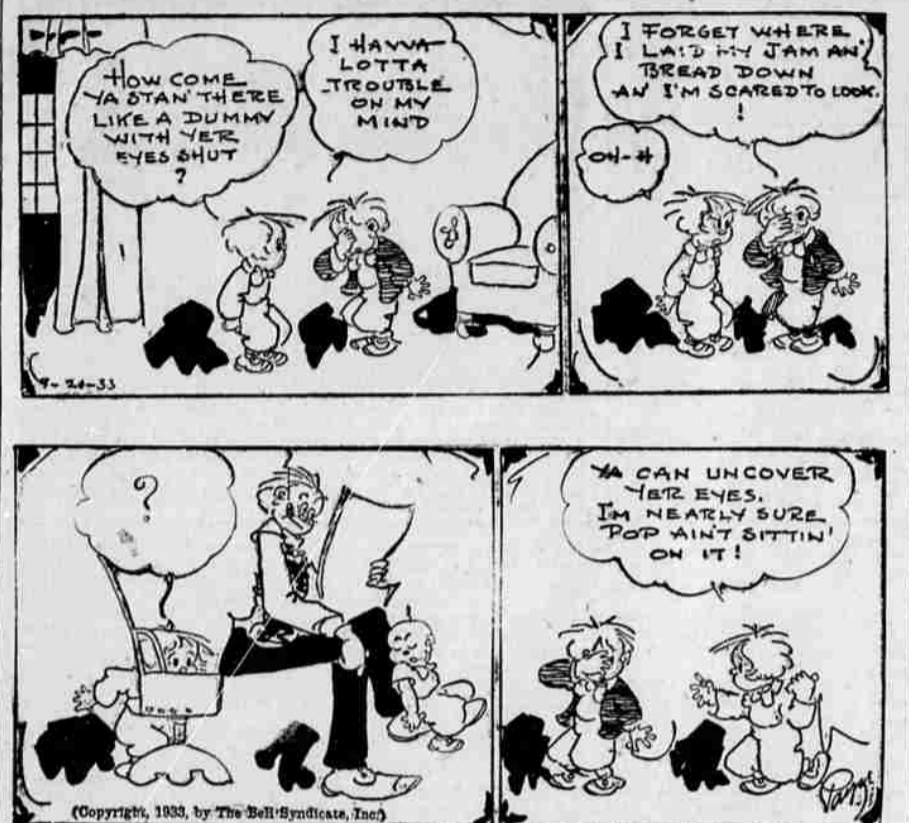
SALLY AND HOOT GET DIVORCE IN CHIHUAHUA

HOLLYWOOD, Sept. 20.—(P)—Sally Eilers, screen actress, said today she

had been granted a Mexican divorce from Hoot Gibson, film cowboy, in Chihuahua on August 28. "Neither Hoot nor I wanted any more publicity," said Miss Eilers. "So we just decided to get a divorce in Mexico and do it quietly."

'SMATTER POP—

By C. M. PAYNE



THE FAMILY ALBUM—PLEASURE STROLL

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



TAILSPIN TOMMY—Lest We Forget!

By GLENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORREST



BOUND TO WIN—Lig Marshall's Message

By EDWIN ALGER



THE NEBBS—Love Finds A Way

By SOL HESS



BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



WASHINGTON NAMED TO COMMERCE BUREAU
WASHINGTON, Sept. 21.—(AP)—President Roosevelt today appointed Nathaniel H. Engle of Washington state assistant director of the bureau of foreign and domestic commerce.

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