

"I forgot," he said slowly. "It's the eading dog we want—not the puppies hat run after him yapping." He spun ound on his heel. "Have you fin-shed?".

The rope-artist bestowed a final uch to the last knot, and surveyed is handiwork with justifiable pride. "Cold mutton," he remarked tersely, would be lively compared to him hen he wakes up."

"Good! Then we'll bring him to." Lakington took some crystals from jar on one of the shelves, and placed em in a tumbler. Then he added few drops of liquid and held the ass directly under the unconscious an's nose. Almost at once the liquid gan to effervesce, and in less than a inute Drummond opened his eyes and ared dazedly round the room. He nked foolishly as he saw Longworth d Sinclair; then he looked down d found he was similarly bound him-lf. Finally he glanced up at the n bending over him, and full real-ition returned.

"Feeling better, my friend?" With mocking smile, Lakington laid the nbler on a table close by.

"Much, thank you, Henry," mur-red Hugh. "Ah! and there's Carl." e grinned cheerfully, and Laking- struck him on the mouth.

"You can stop that style of con-nation, Captain Drummond," he re-rked, "I dislike it."

Hugh stared at the striker in si-ce.

"Accept my congratulations," he l at length, in a low voice which, pite himself, shook a little. "You the first man who has ever done t, and I shall treasure the memory hat blow."

"'d hate it to be a lonely memory," arked Lakington. "So here's an-r, to keep it company." Again he ck him, then with a laugh he ed on his heel. "My compliments Miss Benton," he said to a man ding near the door, "and ask her e good enough to come down for w minutes."

he veins stood out on Drummond's head at the mention of the girl, otherwise he gave no sign; and, lence, they waited for her arrival.



It, Lakington." His Voice Was rs as He Caught the Other's Up-ed Arm.

came almost at once, a villain-ing blackguard with her, and saw Hugh she gave a pitiful moan and held out her hand to

y did you come, boy?" she cried. t you know it was only a for-that note?"

was it?" said Hugh softly. it, indeed?"

interesting point," murmured gton. "Surely if a charming girl le—or unwilling—to write her-her fiance, her father is a ble person to supply the defi-Especially if he has been kind-wed by Nature with a special e for—er—imitating writing. time presses. And I don't go without telling you a little the program, Captain Drum-Unfortunately both Mr. Peter-d I have to leave you for to-but we shall be returning to-morning—or, at any rate, I You will be left in charge of s—you remember the filthy —with whom you had words r night. As you may expect, rtains feelings of great friend-affection for you, so you ot lack for any bodily com-ch as may be possible in your somewhat cramped position. morrow, when I return, I pro-try a few experiments on you, ugh I fear you will find them it's a great thing to suffer in of science. . . . You will al-the satisfaction of knowing little Phyllis will be well With a sudden, quick movement, he seized the girl and kissed her before she realized his intention. The rope round Drummond creaked as he struggled impotently, and Lakington's sneering face seemed to swim in a red glow.

"That is quite in keeping, is it not," he snarled, "to kiss the lady, and to strike the man like this—and this—and this? . . ." A rain of blows came down on Drummond's face, till, with a gasping sigh, the girl slipped fainting to the floor.

"That'll do, Lakington," said Peterson, intervening once again. "Have the girl carried upstairs, and send for Heinrich. It's time we were off."

With an effort Lakington let his hand fall to his side, and stood back from his victim.

"Perhaps for the present, it will," he said slowly. "But tomorrow—tomorrow, Captain Drummond, you shall scream to heaven for mercy, until I take out your tongue and you can scream no more." He turned as the German came into the room. "I leave them to you, Heinrich," he remarked shortly. "Use the dog-whip if they shout, and gag them."

The German's eyes were fixed on Hugh gloatingly.

"They will not shout twice," he said in his guttural voice. "The dirty Boche to it himself will see."

TWO

"We appear," remarked Hugh quietly, a few minutes later, "to be in for a cheery night."

For a moment the German had left the room, and three motionless, bound figures, sitting grotesquely in their chairs, were alone.

"How did they get you, Toby?"

"Half a dozen of 'em suddenly appeared," answered Sinclair shortly, "knocked me on the head, and the next thing I knew I was here in this d—d chair."

"Is that when you got your face?" asked Hugh.

"No," said Toby, and his voice was grim. "We share in the matter of faces, old man."

"Lakington again, was it?" said Hugh softly. "Dear Heaven! if I could get one hand on that . . ." He broke off and laughed. "What about you, Algy?"

"I went blundering in over the way, old bean," returned that worthy, "and some dam' fellow knocked my eyeglass off. So, as I couldn't see to kill him, I had to join the picnic here."

Hugh laughed, and then suddenly grew serious.

"By the way, you didn't see a man chewing gum on the horizon, did you, when I made my entrance? Dogrobber suit, and face like a motor-mascot."

"Thank God, I was spared that!" remarked Algy.

"Good!" returned Hugh. "He's probably away with it by now, and he's no fool. For I'm thinking it's only Peter and him between us and—" He left his remark unfinished, and for a while there was silence. "Jerry is over in France still, putting stamp-paper on his machine; Ted's gone up to see that Potts is taking nourishment."

"And here we sit like three well-preserved specimens in' a bally museum," broke in Algy, with a rueful laugh. "What'll they do to us, Hugh?"

But Drummond did not answer, and the speaker, seeing the look on his face, did not press the question.

Slowly the hours dragged on, until the last gleams of daylight had faded from the skylight above, and a solitary electric light, hung centrally, gave the only illumination. Periodically Heinrich had come in to see that they were still secure: but from the sounds of the hoarse laughter which came at frequent intervals through the half-open door, it was evident that the German had found other and more congenial company. At length he appeared carrying a tray with bread and water on it, which he placed on a table near Hugh.

"Food for you, you English swine," he remarked, looking gloatingly at each in turn. "Herr Lakington the order gave, so that you will fit be tomorrow morning. Fit for the torture." He thrust his flushed face close to Drummond's, and then deliberately spat at him.

Algy Longworth gave a strangled grunt, but Drummond took no notice. With a quiet smile, he looked up at the German.

"How much, my friend," he remarked, "are you getting for this?"

The German leered at him.

"Enough to see that you tomorrow are here," he said.

"And I always believed that yours was a business nation," laughed Hugh. "Why, you poor fool, I've got a thousand pounds in notes in my cigarette case."

"You hof, hof you," the German grunted. "Then the filthy Boche will for you of them take care."

Hugh looked at him angrily.

"If you do," he cried, "you must let me go."

The German leered still more.

"Naturlich. You shall out of the house at once walk."

He stepped up to Drummond and ran his hands over his coat, while the others stared at one another in amazement. Surely Hugh didn't imagine the swine would really let him go; he would merely take the money and probably spit in his face again. Then they heard him speaking, and a sudden gleam of comprehension dawned on their faces.

"You'll have to undo on. of the ropes, my friend, before yo. can get at it," said Hugh quietly.

For a moment the German hesitated. He looked at the ropes carefully; the one that bound the arms and the upper part of the body was separate from the rope round the legs. Even if he did undo it the fool Englishman was still helpless, and he knew that he was unarmed. Had he not himself removed his revolver, as he lay unconscious in the hall? What risk was there, after all? Besides, if he called some one else in he would have to share the money.

And, as he watched the German's indecision, Hugh's forehead grew damp with sweat. . . . Would he undo the rope? Would greed conquer caution?

At last the Boche made up his mind, and went behind the chair. Hugh felt him fumbling with the rope, and flashed an urgent look of caution at the other two.

"You'd better be careful, Heinrich," he remarked, "that none of the others see, or you might have to share."

The German ceased undoing the knot, and grunted. The English swine had moments of brightness, and he went over and closed the door. Then he resumed the operation of untying the rope; and, since it was performed behind the chair he was in no position to see the look on Drummond's face. Only the two spectators could see that, and they had almost ceased breathing in their excitement. That he had a plan they knew; what it was they could not even guess.

At last the rope fell clear and the German sprang back.

"Put the case on the table," he cried, having not the slightest intention of coming within range of those formidable arms.

"Certainly not," said Hugh, "until you undo my legs. Then you shall have it."

Quite loosely he was holding the case in one hand; but the others, watching his face, saw that it was strained and tense.

"First I the notes must have." The German strove to speak conversationally, but all the time he was creeping nearer and nearer to the back of the chair. "Then I your legs undo, and you may go."

Algy's warning cry rang out simultaneously with the lightning dart of the Boche's hand as he snatched at the cigarette-case over Drummond's shoulder. And then Drummond laughed a low, triumphant laugh. It was the move he had been hoping for, and the German's wrist was held fast in his vise-like grip. His plan had succeeded.

And Longworth and Sinclair, who had seen many things in their lives, the remembrance of which will be with them till their dying day, had never seen and are never likely to see anything within measurable distance of what they saw in the next few minutes. Slowly, inexorably, the German's



With a Sudden, Quick Movement He Seized the Girl and Kissed Her Before She Realized His Intention.

arm was being twisted, while he uttered gasping cries, and beat impotently at Drummond's head with his free hand. Then at last there was a dull crack as the arm broke, and a scream of pain, as he lurched round the chair and stood helpless in front of the soldier, who still held the cigarette case in his left hand.

They saw Drummond open the cigarette case and take from it what looked like a tube of wood. Then he felt in his pocket and took out a match-box, containing a number of long thin splinters. And, having fitted one of the splinters into the tube he put the other end in his mouth.

With a quick heave they saw him jerk the German round and catch his unbroken arm with his free left hand. And the two bound watchers looked at Hugh's eyes as he stared at the moaning Boche, and saw that they were hard and merciless.

There was a sharp, whistling hiss, and the splinter flew from the tube into the German's face. It hung from his cheek, and even the ceaseless movement of his head failed to dislodge it.

"I have broken your arm, Boche," said Drummond at length, "and now I have killed you. I'm sorry about it; I wasn't particularly anxious to end your life. But it had to be done."

The German, hardly conscious of what he had said owing to the pain in his arm, was frantically kicking the Englishman's legs, still bound to the chair; but the iron grip on his wrists never slackened. And then quite suddenly came the end. With one dreadful, convulsive heave the German jerked himself free, and fell doubled up on the floor. Fascinated, they watched him writhing and twisting, until at last, he lay still. . . . The Boche was dead. . . .

"What was that blow-pipe affair?" cried Sinclair hoarsely.

"The thing they tried to finish me with in Paris last night," answered Hugh grimly, taking a knife out of his waistcoat pocket. "Let us trust that none of his pals come in to look for him."

A minute later he stood up, only to sit down again abruptly, as his legs gave way. They were numbed and stiff with the hours he had spent in the same position, and for a while he could do nothing but rub them with his hands, till the blood returned and he could feel once more.

Then, slowly and painfully, he tottered across to the others and set them free as well. They were in an even worse condition than he had been; and it seemed as if Algy would never be able to stand again, so completely dead was his body from the waist downwards. But, at length, after what seemed an eternity to Drummond, who realized only too well that should the gang come in they were almost as helpless in their present condition as if they were still bound in their chairs, the other two recovered.

"All fit now? Good! We've got to think what we're going to do, for we're not out of the wood yet by two or three miles."

"Let's get the door open," remarked Algy, "and explore."

Cautiously they swung it open, and stood motionless. The house was in absolute silence; the hall was deserted.

"Switch out the light," whispered Hugh. "We'll wander round."

They crept forward stealthily in the darkness, stopping every now and then to listen. But no sound came to their ears; it might have been a house of the dead.

Suddenly Drummond, who was in front of the other two, stopped with a warning hiss. A light was streaming out from under a door at the end of a passage and, as they stood watching it, they heard a man's voice coming from the same room. Some one else answered him and then there was silence once more.

At length Hugh moved forward again, and the others followed. And it was not until they got quite close to the door that a strange, continuous noise began to be noticeable—a noise which came most distinctly from the lighted room. It rose and fell with monotonous regularity; at times it resembled a brass band—at others it died away to a gentle murmur. And occasionally it was punctuated with a strangled snort. . . .



"And Now I Have Killed You. I'm Sorry About It."

"Great Scott!" muttered Hugh excitedly, "the whole bolling bunch are asleep, or I'll eat my hat."

"Then who was it spoke?" said Algy. "At least two of 'em are awake right enough."

And, as if in answer to his question, there came the voice again from inside the room.

"Wal, Mr. Darrell, I guess we can pass on, and leave this bunch."

With one laugh of joyful amazement Hugh flung open the door, and found himself looking from the range of a yard into two revolvers.

"I don't know how you've done it, boys," he remarked, "but you can put those guns away. I hate looking at them from that end."

"What the devil have they done to all your dials?" said Darrell, slowly lowering his arm.

"We'll leave that for the time," returned Hugh grimly, as he shut the door. "There are other more pressing matters to be discussed."

He glanced round the room, and a slow grin spread over his face. There were some twenty of the gang, all of them fast asleep. They sprawled grotesquely over the table, they lolled in chairs; they lay on the floor, they huddled in corners. And, without exception, they snored and snorted.

"A dandy bunch," remarked the American, gazing at them with satisfaction. Then he turned to Drummond. "Say now, Captain, we've got a lorry load of the boys outside; your friend here thought we'd better bring 'em along. So it's up to you to get busy."

"Mullings and his crowd," said Darrell, seeing the look of mystification on Hugh's face.

For a few moments Drummond stood, deep in thought; then once again the grin spread slowly over his face. "Get the boys in, Peter; and get these lumps of meat carted out to the lorry. And, while you do it, we'll go upstairs and mop up."

THREE.

Even in his wildest dreams Hugh had never imagined such a wonderful opportunity. To be in complete possession of the house, with strong forces at his beck and call, was a state of affairs which rendered him almost speechless.

"Keep your guns handy," whispered Hugh. "We'll draw each room in turn till we find the girl."

But they were not to be put to so much trouble. Suddenly a door opposite opened, and the man who had been guarding Phyllis Benton peered out suspiciously. His jaw fell and a look of aghast surprise spread over his face as he saw the four men in front of him.

Hugh stepped past him and was smiling at the girl who, with a little cry of joyful wonder, had risen from her chair.

"Your face, boy," she whispered, as he took her in his arms, regardless of the others, "your poor old face! Oh, that brute, Lakington!"

He laughed gently, and for a moment she clung to him, unmindful of how he had got to her, glorying only in the fact that he had. It seemed to her that there was nothing which this wonderful man of hers couldn't manage; and now, blindly trusting, she waited to be told what to do. The nightmare was over; Hugh was with her. . . .

"Are there any cars outside?" Hugh turned to the American.

"Yours," answered that worthy.

"And mine is hidden behind Miss Benton's greenhouse unless they've moved it," remarked Algy.

"Good," said Hugh. "Algy, take Miss Benton and her father up to Half Moon street—at once. Then come back here."

"But, Hugh—" began the girl appealingly.

"At once, dear, please." He smiled at her tenderly, but his tone was decided. "This is going to be no place for you in the near future."

With no further word of protest the girl followed Algy, and Hugh drew a breath of relief.

"Now, you ugly-looking blighter," he remarked to the cowering ruffian, who was by this time shaking with fright, "we come to you. When does Lakington return?"

"Termorrow, sir," stammered the other.

"Where is he now?"

The man hesitated for a moment, but the look in Hugh's eyes galvanized him into speech.

"He's after the old woman's pearls, sir—the duchess of Lampshire's."

"Ah!" returned Hugh softly. "Of course he is. I forgot. When does Peterson come back?"

"Termorrow, too, sir, as far as I knows," answered the man.

"And what's he doing?" demanded Drummond.

"On the level, guvnor, I can't tell yer. Strite, I can't."

At that moment Darrell's voice came up from the hall.

"The whole bunch are stowed away, Hugh. What's the next item?"

Hugh walked to the top of the stairs. A grin spread over his face as he saw half a dozen familiar faces in the hall, and he hailed them cheerily.

"Like old times, boys," he laughed. "Where's the driver of the lorry?"

"That's me, sir." One of them stepped forward.

"Good," said Hugh. "Take your bus ten miles from here: then drop that crowd one by one on the road as you go along. You can take it from me that none of 'em will say anything about it, even when they wake up. Then take her back to your garage; I'll see you later.

"Now," went on Hugh, as they heard the sound of the departing lorry, "we've got to set the scene for tomorrow morning." He glanced at his watch. "Just eleven. How long will it take me to get the old buzz-box to Laidley Towers?"

"Laidley Towers," echoed Darrell. "What the devil are you going there for?"

"I just can't bear to be parted from Henry for one moment longer than necessary," said Hugh quietly. "And Henry is there, in a praiseworthy endeavor to lift the duchess pearls. . . . Dear Henry!" His two fists clenched, and the American, looking at his face, laughed softly.

But it was only for a moment that Drummond indulged in the pleasures of anticipation; all that could come after. And just now there were other things to be done—many others, if events next morning were to go as they should.

(To Be Continued.)

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