

**THE  
SMUGGLERS'  
SECRET**



**HUGH LLOYD**

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THE EARTH WAS RUSHING UP—THE MOUNTAINS!

A HAL KEEN MYSTERY STORY  
THE SMUGGLERS' SECRET

By

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# THE SMUGGLERS' SECRET

## CHAPTER I

### SKY GIANT

Hal saw it first against the frowning background of a black cloud, all that marred an otherwise perfect autumn-blue sky. The great tri-motored plane lingered in this shadow but a moment, then shot out into the sunlight and directly above the airport.

A sudden hush fell over the watching crowd below. The people seemed entirely to have forgotten the other half-dozen planes performing for their entertainment only a moment before; and now every eye was centered on the big white plane directly overhead as it circled into position.

At each turn a big black letter B could be seen upon either side of the wing. Hal thrilled with the rest of the crowd at this reminder of the pilot's identity and he experienced a secret pride in the knowledge that a famous stunt flyer like Hank Bellair had not long ago talked with him as a friend.

Hal shifted excitedly in his seat and glanced covertly at Tony Marsh who was resting his arms upon the wheel of his sport roadster and scanning the sky expectantly. Tony suddenly frowned, however, and Hal followed the line of his gaze with troubled eyes.

Bellair's plane had manoeuvred back into the shadow of the cloud again and seemed to be having some difficulty in getting out of that particular position. Tony *would* frown at a thing like that, Hal thought. Knowing his roommate as he did it was easy for him to deduce that young Marsh was having one of his frequent superstitious moments. The frown told the story.

"Wish he wouldn't always circle back under that darn cloud," Tony muttered darkly. "Don't like the looks of it!"

Hal grinned. "What is it now, forty days of rain or something like that? Listen, Tony, if you mean that cloud's a sort of jinx for Hank Bellair, you're crazy! Hank Bellair is the flyer without a jinx, that's what airmen say about him. He's as lucky as Lindbergh. If you don't believe me...."

Tony Marsh put up a warning finger. "Listen to that, Hal," he interposed, "don't that sound like his engine's giving him trouble?"

Hal listened to the unsteady palpitation for a few seconds, then nodded understandingly. "Maybe he's doing it himself. Shutting her off and on. He told me that he liked to kind of scare a crowd sometimes—likes to get them on edge just before he does his big stunts."

Tony looked skeptical and continued to frown in silence. Hal smiled and leaned back comfortably, shading his eyes with his hands from the glaring

blue of the sky. Bellaire had eased the plane into the sunlight again and a throaty “Ah!” issued from young Marsh’s direction.

As the plane swooped gracefully in a nose dive, Hal chuckled. “Great guy, Bellair, huh Tony? Reckless as they come. He showed me a funny kind of a mark he had tattooed on his right forearm. Said it kept away the jink. You ought to like him, Tony—he’s just like you in that respect.”

Tony laughed, but the laugh was ended abruptly by a new manoeuvre of the plane which had suddenly swerved in an upward climb. Hal held his breath during the dizzy ascent and shared young Marsh’s frown as the sky giant seemed to hesitate uncertainly. The crowd, too, watched with bated breath and as the flyer swooped in an outside loop a man standing near the roadster remarked that Bellair didn’t seem to be handling her as well as usual.

Tony looked at Hal inquiringly.

Hal shrugged his broad shoulders. “I don’t know anything about it, more than we’ve all read in the papers,” he said. “I never saw him fly before, just spoke to him two or three times on the boat coming up from Panama last year. Thought he was a darn nice fellow, that’s all. Got you to stop here today for that reason.”

The man standing near the roadster began to make loud comments to a companion. “Nope,” he was saying, “Bellair ain’t up to snuff today, I can see that! Maybe he’s all broke up about that brother o’ his—Ted Bellair. It ain’t in the papers yet, but I got it straight that they’re looking for him in connection with the murder of that customs inspector last month up at the border. The saying goes that this Ted was smuggling something or other from Canada. He must be the bad lot of the family, hah? Good flier too, I hear, only not so good as Hank, I guess. Well, such is life!”

Hal nudged Tony. “Why buy a newspaper, huh? Or a radio? A gink like that is worth his weight in gold only sometimes he’s over-weight. Just the same I’d like to bet he can tell me one thing. Wait ...” He leaned over and called to the man. “Know whether Bellair is going to make a landing here afterward?” he asked.

The man smiled pleasantly. “He ain’t scheduled to, fella,” he answered. “A mechanic here told me Bellair sent word to the airport this mornin’ that he’ll do his stunts and beat it ’cause he’s got an appointment, so he won’t be down unless he comes down accidentally!” The fellow laughed uproariously at his own witticism.

Hal turned away scowling. “Some people have strange ideas of humor, huh Tony? Gosh, I’m darn sorry I won’t see Bellair to say hello. Thought I’d be able to introduce you too. Oh, well...”

“Well, is good,” Tony said without taking his eyes from the gracefully dipping plane. “I hope all goes well with the chap after that broadcasting. Some remark to make at a time like this.”

Hal smiled, pleased with the sturdy way in which the stunting plane had come out of her loop. She was now riding gracefully down the wind getting ready for the most daring of her feats, so they learned from their gossipy neighbor. The motors were roaring perfectly, it seemed—everything was in readiness. The moment had come!

She swooped, her shining white nose pointing earthward. The same hushed silence pervaded the crowd, one, two seconds ... What was it? It was time for her to be climbing upward again! Nearer and nearer to earth she came—nearer to the dusty brown field of the airport. Suddenly it came to Hal that this wasn't any spectacular nose dive—it was stark disaster—falling to earth!

He shouted hoarsely and in a moment the crowd was swiftly backing away from that hurtling death. Women and children screamed, men roared and suddenly a dull boom sounded in the air.

A second later—a pile of burning débris fluttered to the dusty field, while a piece of broken wing with the letter B painted in black upon it—landed gracefully just inside the airport fence.

Hal leaned out of the roadster, then leaped to the ground impulsively, and ran.

## CHAPTER II AFTERMATH

Hal was too handsome and too tall a figure to be refused a simple request such as he made. One respected him if only for his powerful physique and deep, commanding voice. Certainly the mechanic could not refuse him.

“Poor Bellair ain’t much to see now, young fella,” the begrimed employee explained. “I got orders not to let anybody go in till the coroner comes but if you say you were a friend of his....”

“Well, sort of a friend,” Hal said modestly. “You see, I thought he was a swell fellow and—well, I’d just like to take a farewell look, that’s all. I can’t believe it yet that he’s really....”

“The jinx gets the best of them sometimes,” said the mechanic grimly. “Even a guy like Hank Bellair can’t beat it at its own game when it means business, I’ll tell the world!”

Tony slipped his arm through Hal’s. “Guess that tattoo business on his arm didn’t keep it away after all,” he murmured. “We better hurry, Hal.”

Hal looked toward the little outbuilding in which the lifeless flier lay. “Mm, guess we better, Tony,” he said softly.

“In a hurry?” the mechanic asked pleasantly.

Hal smiled. “Just to get up in the wilds of the Adirondacks before dark,” he answered. “My friend and myself are roommates in college. We stopped here to see Bellair and talk to him if we could. Thought maybe he’d even like to spend his Thanksgiving vacation with us.”

The mechanic seemed to understand. “Well, that’s the way sometimes. Too bad that brother of his wasn’t the one, hah?”

“I’ve thought of that too,” Hal answered. “But Hank probably wouldn’t have had things different, anyway. He told me he’d do anything for his brother Ted.”

“Hmph,” said the mechanic contemptuously, “Ted and his tricky moustache. A conceited guy, that’s all he is. The kind of a fella you or me wouldn’t waste a breath on, hah?”

“Love is blind,” said Hal thoughtfully, “even between brothers.”

“You said something that time, fella,” said a man’s sharp voice behind them. “I’ve been thinking that myself—ever since I saw Bellair in there.”

Hal turned in time to see a short, stockily-built man pointing his forefinger toward the little outbuilding. A frown puckered his sallow brow

and after a thoughtful scrutiny of the two young men and the mechanic, he smiled.

“You knew Bellair, eh?” he asked Hal.

“Sort of,” Hal answered wonderingly, “why?”

The man shook his head unsmilingly. “Curiosity,” he answered. “It’s a satisfaction to me to hear someone say they know one or the other of these Bellairs. Few seem to know much about them outside aviation.” He smiled and sauntered away.

Hal turned to the mechanic. “What’s the idea?”

The workman waited until the man was well out of hearing. “He’s a federal man, I think. He’s been hanging ’round here ever since this morning and the word’s been passed that he was waiting to ask Hank Bellair a few questions when he came down.”

“Well, he came down but not to answer questions,” said Hal. “I wonder what’s the idea of him asking me what I know about Hank Bellair?”

“He probably heard you say you knew him,” the mechanic answered. “He was standing in back of you two fellows for a little while before he spoke. I guess he’s out for all the information he can get about these Bellairs and he figured every little question helps.”

Hal shrugged his shoulders and slipping his arm through Tony’s led him over to the silent little outbuilding. Used as a sort of warehouse for the odds and ends of an airport’s discarded machinery, the gloomy interior was now plunged into a tomblike silence by the grim presence of Death. Disused tools and divers parts of antiquated planes loomed up grotesquely in the shadowy room and amongst this motley array of steel and iron, reposed the lifeless body of the flier.

They did not attempt to go further than the threshold, contenting themselves with a glimpse of the once strong young arms now lying inert and exposed under the covering. Neither one seemed to have any desire to see more. Hal glanced at the dangling hands, then backed away, thoughtfully.

“Going already?” Tony inquired softly.

Hal looked up, startled. “I—I, gosh, you frightened me, Tony,” he said in whisper. “Guess I was thinking about something else. It’s sort of spooky in here, huh? Come on, let’s go!”

They went out into the sunlight again, silent and thoughtful, and walked across the wide field until they reached the parked roadster. As Tony started the car, Hal glanced back toward the outbuilding, his wide, tanned brow furrowed in abstraction. Suddenly he saw something that brought him back to realities.

The detective had come from behind the building and was smilingly watching their departure.

## CHAPTER III FOLLOWED

“Ted Bellair must be in serious difficulties,” said Hal after drawing Tony’s attention to the man. “But what I can’t understand is, why that fellow’s watching us so closely.” He smiled.

“You should wonder that, when your own uncle is a federal man, Hal!” Tony said in a gentle chiding tone. He guided the car out of the airport road, then turned again to his friend. “I don’t know whether you realized it, but you gave him every reason to suspect that you knew *something* about the Bellair brothers. One word from you that Denis Keen was your uncle would have sent the man about his business. He’d have known immediately that the nephew of a great secret service man like your uncle wouldn’t be holding back anything in this Bellair business—he’d have known that Hank Bellair was a shipboard friend and nothing else. Why didn’t you tell him that?”

“Why?” Hal repeated with a mischievous chuckle. “Just because I didn’t like his nose way, and that’s a fact! It’s a good thing that Uncle Denis is over in England and not able to spend the Thanksgiving holidays with your grandmother as he usually does. If he was up there tonight when we arrived and I told him that Bill Connover was questioning me in regard to the Bellair case, he’d have a fit—a double one if I told him what answers I gave to his nose subordinate.”

“You mean to tell me you knew all the time who that man was?” Tony asked, amazed. “You mean to tell me he’s your uncle’s subordinate?”

“Righto, Tony,” Hal laughed. “He’s been in Unk’s department for three years and I don’t like him any better now than I did three years ago! No, he don’t know me from Adam, but I know him from pictures Unk showed me of him, and I know him still better from his reports that Unk’s gone over when he’s been visiting at our house. Oh, Unk thinks he’s one of the best men the department ever had, but I don’t. He’s too cold and calculating—a bit of human warmth in all his detective make-up. I knew him the minute I set eyes on him.”

“Regular fish eyes, huh?” said Tony with a smile.

“Bet your life. I always promised myself if I ever met Connover face to face, I’d give him a run for his money. Lead him on a wild goose chase.”

“And that’s just what you’re doing,” said Tony peering intently into his mirror overhead. “Connover got into a car soon’s we left the airport drive



and he's following us. I'm certain of it. I made the last turn on purpose just to see if he'd turn too!"

Hal chuckled. "Then he means business. That's the way he works, Unk told me—right in the open. He don't make any bones about following up a clue. The trouble in this case—the clue is somewhere else. He wouldn't be driving along so confidently if he knew what little I know about Ted Bellair."

Tony stared up into his mirror thoughtfully. "Still following," said he. Then: "Do you mean to tell me you think he'll follow us right up to the Adirondacks like this?"

"Perhaps not all the way, Tony," Hal assured him with a mischievous grin, "but most of the way. He'll follow us till he's pretty sure where we're headed for and then he'll drop off just to disarm us. But you can bank on it that he'll have every constable and state trooper along the way informed that we're passing through and to keep an eye out to see where we go. What's that little town we get to before we climb up into the wilderness to your grandmother's camp?"

"Hightown."

"Well, at Hightown we'll be met by some bewhiskered official or other who'll stop and chat with us in a friendly way and try to wriggle our destination out of us. When he learns that, he'll say so-long to us and let us go on, then he'll trot right to the nearest phone and inform the waiting Conover where we're headed for. Now that's Conover's tactics, Tony! By tomorrow morning or before he'll have made Hightown his headquarters and during our Thanksgiving holiday week he'll make many visits to Delamere Camp—only perhaps we won't know about it."

Tony shifted gears and they went speeding over the Jersey state line into New York. "You seem to have it all figured out, huh Hal? Well, let me tell you something first—the constable at Hightown happens to know I'm Tony Marsh. He knows this roadster and he knows my grandmother and all about us, since we've been going up to Delamere Camp every year for five years and do our shopping and so forth in Hightown. He won't have to stop us and ask us anything except perhaps he'll be curious to know who *you* are if Conover's really going to send word about you along the line."

Hal laughed aloud. "Make up your mind that Conover will do that very thing, Tony," he said in high glee. "I'm not discouraged by the news that you and your grandmother are well acquainted with Hightown's constable, but I *will* be discouraged if you let on to him who I am. Conover is not to know that your little friend Hal is the proud nephew of Denis Keen, do you hear?"

"Sure, I hear," Tony answered, laughing. "But it seems to me you're looking for trouble in leading that man on a fool's journey."

“Tony, don’t lose sight of the fact that I’m not leading Connover anywhere. He’s doing this on his own hook and besides I’m not supposed to know that he’s even following us. Neither are you supposed to know it, see?”

“I still insist that you’re looking for trouble, you red-headed scamp!” said Tony with a quiet smile.

“Sure, I’m looking for trouble,” Hal agreed mischievously. “And I say, the sooner, the better. What else are holidays for, Tony?”

## CHAPTER IV

### ROAD TO HIGHTOWN

Sunset was painting the Western sky a vivid scarlet when the roadster climbed the dusty road to Hightown. The roofs of its few simple houses and general store could be seen between the trees. Hal glimpsed them eagerly and not a little thankfully, for their long, tiresome journey was over and the chill of early November was in the air.

They had the narrow highway completely to themselves—Connover had disappeared soon after they left New Jersey behind. Indeed, Hal had almost forgotten about the alert federal man and it was only when Tony alighted in front of Hightown's general store to purchase some cigarettes that he was reminded of the long arm of the law.

His school chum had not walked two feet away from the roadster when a short, gray-haired man made his appearance from behind a nearby post. He hailed Tony cordially, then squinted over at Hal quite curiously and strolled leisurely into the store talking with the newcomer in an undertone.

Tony came out after a few minutes smiling significantly. He hopped behind the wheel and said nothing, however, until they had left the little village and were climbing up into the Adirondack wilderness. Then he chuckled aloud.

"Hal," he said, "you were absolutely right about Connover. That man that spoke to me was Constable Collins and he quizzed me about you like the dickens. Wanted to know who you were and all that but never let on why."

Hal laughed outright. "Didn't I tell you? What did you say?"

"I told him you were my roommate at college and he wanted to know if I knew very much about you and your friends."

"And why not!" Hal laughed.

Tony glimpsed at the shadowy woods which they were approaching and switched on his lights. "We have about an hour's ride mostly through forest like this," he explained. Then: "I never let on to Old Collins who you were, though. Honestly, I don't know why in heaven's name I aid and abet you in these crazy schemes of yours, but still I do. I just can't seem to help myself!"

"Real friendship, Tony," Hal teased. "You said yourself that Delamere Camp is pretty dead, so I'm just doing my part to whoop things up a bit. Connover's kick won't last but a second; soon as he finds out who I am it'll

be over. But depend upon it, it'll be a kick while it lasts. That gink won't take that kind of a trick gracefully—specially when he finds out that he turned the trick on himself!”

Tony smiled indulgently at his friend and suddenly whipped out a newspaper from his pocket. “Here,” he said, pulling up his emergency brake, “take a look at this and read it to me. I bought it along with the cigarettes when I was in the store. Noticed the headlines mentioned Ted Bellair.”

Hal spread out the paper and held it up to the fading light. “Seems they don't know yet what it was Ted Bellair was doing,” he read, skimming over the reprint from the morning edition. “The customs inspectors simply got a tip that a plane was taking off every few nights from a certain field a little outside Toronto. They acted on the tip and watched, saw the plane land and went to ask the pilot his business. The one inspector, named Roberts, hardly got the words out of his mouth when there was a shot and down he fell. The other inspector saw the pilot run back and climb in and after an exchange of bullets, the plane took off like a shot.”

“Mm,” said Tony, “how do they know that Ted Bellair was the pilot, then? And how is it they're just finding it out when it happened a month ago?”

“I'm coming to that,” Hal said perusing the sheet. “It says the other inspector, named Brown, saw the marks on the wing. They hunted it up and traced him through his license. Good stuff, huh Tony? Now reading on here,” he continued, “it says that detectives have visited Bellair's home outside of a little village called Reardon in New York State. Sequestered place, nestled at the foot of the mountains and theirs is the only house within five miles. Mrs. Bellair, a middle-aged lady, is very shy and retiring and couldn't say where either of her sons was.”

“Guess she knows where Hank is by this time,” Tony interposed sympathetically.

Hal nodded and went on. “The article concludes with an account of the aviation feats that Hank has performed in marked contrast with the ne'er-do-well accomplishments of Ted. He seems not to have done anything more heroic than to fly aimlessly about the country. Outside of that nothing could be learned from Mrs. Bellair who very sweetly and politely told all inquirers that her family and family history were distinctly her own and her family's concern.”

“Then that's that, huh?” Tony queried, interested.

“That's that,” Hal replied folding up the paper. “Funny people, huh? Come to think of it, Hank wasn't very chatty about his folks either. He seemed to think a lot of his brother Ted though and I remember how he mentioned that his brother was a sort of father to the family. Their own

father died when they were very young. Well, that's ended. Little I thought I'd be in on the closing chapter of anybody's life this afternoon. Listen Tony, I'm going to let you in on a little secret....”

Three distinct rifle shots rang out in rapid succession, followed by the patter of running feet. Hal felt the momentum of the bullet that whizzed past his face and turned to see Tony slumped in his seat behind the wheel.

Suddenly a tall, dark young man rushed out from between the trees.

## CHAPTER V

### BLAKE

“Is he hurt?” he asked hoarsely rushing over to the car.

Hal gasped, almost stunned. Despite the moustache he detected a certain nervous twitch in the young stranger’s upper lip. “He seems to have got it in the shoulder——”

“Blake’s my name, fellow,” said the other crisply. “We’ve got to get right out of here. There’s hunters around ... that’s where the shots came from.”

Hal blinked his deep blue eyes. Such bare-faced lying was beyond him. *Hunters! Blake!* But time was precious for Tony’s sake alone and it was evident that he was in a dead faint. He attempted to lift his friend tenderly.

“I’ll hold him—you take the wheel—if you can drive,” Blake added.

“Can’t you drive?” Hal queried.

“*No—I can’t drive anything!* Let’s get going. I’m sort of general utility man for old Mrs. Marsh. This her grandson Tony?”

“Yes,” Hal replied starting the car. “You know him?”

“No. She was expecting him and I just guessed. This your first trip up here?”

“Yes, so you’ll have to direct me. Far?”

“Not as distance goes up here, but far enough. Between that and going back to Hightown, Delamere Camp is the best bet. We can phone for a doctor right away and give him first aid. Hope it isn’t a bad wound.” Anxiety made his voice sound more hoarse than ever. “Hospital’s south of the town on the main road.”

Hal looked at him out of the corner of his eye and saw that the fellow was looking straight ahead into the darkness. There was not a sound save the soft purr of the throbbing motor. The little roadster was doing fifty-five despite the uphill climb and the rutty road. Nothing mattered but to get to Delamere Camp as quickly as possible.

Tony revived a few minutes later, dazed. Hal looked at him anxiously propped against Blake’s shoulder.

“Feel better, Tony?”

Tony managed a smile and a look of understanding spread over his face. “Mm,” he murmured, “I remember now. That bullet hit me, huh? I got it in my shoulder, I guess—it’s throbbing.” He turned his face and stared at Blake.

Hal introduced him. “Blake is your grandmother’s general utility man, Tony,” he explained.

“Oh,” said Tony. “You came along, huh Blake? You heard those shots?”

“Mm,” answered Blake. “I had to dodge them myself. The woods are full of hunters this time of year.”

Tony brought his hand up to his shoulder painfully. “You mean to say that was a hunter’s bullet that hit me!”

Blake’s dark eyes scanned Tony’s face a moment. Then he answered: “Sure. Who else?”

Tony leaned back weakly. “Then it’s time the game warden was notified. Hunter or no hunter—none of them should get the idea they can go round these mountains taking pot shots at everything. What do they....”

Hal instinctively stepped on the gas at the sound of Tony’s faltering voice. “Don’t talk,” said he feelingly, “it takes too much energy.”

Blake turned sideways in order to support Tony the better. He put both arms around the other’s body. “You won’t feel the jar of this terrible road so much,” he explained. “I can sort of hold you up from the bumping anyway.”

Hal smiled his thanks and asked, “Much further now?”

“No, about a half a mile,” Blake answered turning his head slightly and looking behind. His forehead was puckered in a frown.

“Tony’s right about notifying the game warden,” said Hal. “Hunters shouldn’t be allowed to pot shot and endanger human beings.”

“I know,” said Blake tersely, “it’s too bad you fellows happened to be there at just that moment. I’ll notify the game warden myself—soon’s we see how Marsh comes along. He’s not hurt so badly.” Then, as a glimmer of light shone through the trees, he said: “Here we are—just after we turn this next bend.”

“You mean you don’t want to notify the game warden if you can possibly help it, huh Blake?” Hal persisted.

Blake levelled his dark eyes upon Hal. “I guess you pretty well surmise what I’m getting at—er——”

“Keen’s my name,” Hal interposed.

Blake frowned. “I’ve my reasons, Keen,” he said in an undertone, “and I’m depending on you to respect them—for a few days anyhow. I just can’t tell you now—I can’t tell anybody, much less a game warden!”

“Then you stick to it that Tony was hit by a hunter’s wild bullet, huh?” Hal asked as they turned round the bend.

Blake nodded. “Here we are, Keen,” he said simply. “This is Delamere Camp.”

Hal brought the car to a stop before a long low rambling lodge and set his teeth determinedly. “So this is Delamere!” he said solemnly.

“Yes,” Blake repeated in a voice strangely tense, “this is Delamere!”



## CHAPTER VI

### A GYPSY SHADOW

Tony was resting comfortably by midnight. The doctor had announced that the bullet could not be found, having lodged itself so deeply that nothing but an X-ray picture could reveal its position. Consequently, Tony was scheduled to accompany the medical man to the hospital the next morning.

The doctor had retired to one of the guest rooms leaving Hal and Blake alone with little, white-haired Mrs. Marsh. The old lady, being naturally of a nervous disposition, was terribly upset by her grandson's misfortune.

"Just when he had a chance to have a nice long Thanksgiving vacation," she said wistfully, rocking back and forth in a big chair.

Hal looked up from where he was sitting and smiled. "It's a mean trick, that's a fact," he said, "but I'm glad he's not hurt any worse. Another thing, if he's got to stay at the hospital for a few days he won't mind it. The doctor says there's some mighty pretty nurses in that place." He winked at Blake who stood before the fireplace.

Mrs. Marsh smiled indulgently. "You're just like your Uncle Denis, Hal," she said in a gentle chiding tone. "Just the same, I'm awfully thankful you came for if Tony can't be here with me I just have to have someone else and I'm glad it's you. You see, Blake, since he came to me two weeks ago, insists on sleeping in the servants' quarters upstairs and that has left me all alone on this lower floor every night. I've been so nervous that I have had but little sleep. And I stayed over from the summer season on the doctor's advice that I need the peace and quiet and mountain air at this time of the year. My, I'm afraid it's been anything but peaceful for me since that gypsy woman showed up here one morning."

"Gypsy woman?" Hal repeated politely.

"My, yes," said the old lady, evidently glad to pour out her troubles. "That was about four weeks ago when Mr. Dudley came. Such a nice young gentleman he was too."

Hal looked at his hostess inquiringly. She smiled.

"Mr. Dudley happened by here and asked if I had any work he could do. It seems he was willing to do anything and said that he simply wanted to be up here for his health and would not require any pay, just his board and room if I could give it to him. Of course I was delighted for my chauffeur, James, like most modern chauffeurs, doesn't care to do much general utility

work like chopping wood and so forth. Also it took some of the work from Mary's shoulders (she's my cook) and besides I liked him immediately."

"And that was when the gypsy woman came, huh?" Hal asked as a little reminder.

"Yes, but she was very lovely for a gypsy woman and spoke English quite well," the old lady chattered. "She wanted to tell my fortune and, of course, that's one of my weaknesses—superstition. I told her that and we had a good laugh over it." She smiled reminiscently.

Hal grinned. "No wonder Tony's got it so bad then. He comes by it honestly."

"Your uncle always teases me about that failing," she said good-naturedly. "As many years as he and I have been friends he seems never to tire of teasing me about it. Nevertheless, even he wouldn't laugh at the apparent truths that gypsy woman told me. Two of the events she foretold have come to pass and one happened within the week of her telling. She said that Mr. Dudley would suddenly disappear and that I would never know the reason why, or where he disappeared to. *And he did disappear!*" Hal smiled skeptically. "He could have walked off just as quickly as he came, couldn't he?" he suggested, consolingly.

"Of course," said the old lady, "but he gave no indication of it, and he left behind some nice clothes. The night he disappeared—it was after supper—he said he was awfully pleased with everything and loved the place. Then he said he was going out for a walk. Mary and James and I all saw him sauntering off down the road. That was the last we saw of him."

"Granted that there is something mysterious about his disappearance, Mrs. Marsh," said Hal, "how about the gypsy woman? Where did she come from?"

"I really don't know," the old lady replied. "Mr. Dudley said he thought they had a camp in the thick of the woods about five miles from here. He wasn't positive, but he said he saw a little smoke rising from between the trees in that direction one day when he was out collecting firewood."

Quite by chance Hal happened to look Blake's way and caught that silent young person staring hard into space. A curious expression filled his straight, aquiline features, and that he was suppressing some very great emotion was obvious.

Mystified, Hal turned again to Mr. Marsh. "Where did this Dudley come from?" he asked quickly.

"I really couldn't tell you, Hal," the old lady answered nervously. "He never said and I hesitated to ask him. Mary said he wrote letters in his room during the week he was here and James saw him mail them one day when they were down in Hightown shopping."

“And what was the other catastrophe that the gypsy foretold, Mrs. Marsh?” Hal asked whimsically.

“Oh, you can laugh, young man,” said she graciously, “but I can’t help but think that I should have taken her advice and gone to the city as she warned me.”

Hal bit his under lip thoughtfully. “She advised you to go to the city, did she?” he asked.

“My, yes,” said the old lady with surprising naivete, “and I guess she knew what she was talking about at that. She said the Fates were going to go against me if I stayed.” And despite the fact that she was a singularly bright and intelligent woman, it was obvious that she implicitly believed in the gypsy’s prophecies for she added: “Besides it came about that the house *did* catch fire, just as it was predicted. I smelled smoke and I got up to find that our back pantry was afire. It was a fortunate thing that Mr. Blake had just come along that day for it took the four of us to put it out. Mary and James and I could never have done it alone. Goodness, I fairly shiver when I think how near we all were to being burned alive in our beds!”

Blake met Hal’s inquiring glance with smiling equanimity. “It was exciting while it lasted,” he said simply.

Hal grinned sardonically. “I dare say, it must have been,” he agreed. Then he turned to Mrs. Marsh: “Does that conclude the list of hair-raising predictions?”

“My, no,” answered the old lady nervously, “that’s why I’m so glad to have you stay here with me a little while. There are to be a series of fires and one that will finally consume the camp, and finally there is to be *a death!*” The last the poor, frightened old soul fairly whispered in terror. “You see why I shouldn’t stay....”

Hal got to his feet. “That gypsy ought to be put in jail for frightening you like that!” he exclaimed. “It’s an outrage! Now listen, Mrs. Marsh, you go to bed and put all those fool notions out of your head.”

“I have given Mrs. Marsh that same advice, Keen,” Blake said quietly. “That’s why I’m intruding here tonight, sort of—she’s insisted on someone being with her all the time. You see she hates to be alone!”

“I see,” Hal said, levelling his eyes on Blake suspiciously. “Good thing you happened along, huh?”

“My, yes,” Mrs. Marsh interposed. “Blake happened along miraculously—just like poor Mr. Dudley.”

“For his health, I suppose?” Hal asked, politely sarcastic.

To his surprise, Blake answered, “Yes indeed—for *my health!*”

Mrs. Marsh arose at that juncture and announced that she would retire. “Now that you two young men know each other,” she said, “I’ll get along so

I can get up to get Tony and the doctor off in the morning, early. I'm going to sleep with a contented mind," she said sweetly, appraising Hal's powerful physique with maternal satisfaction, "knowing that you're going to snore in the room next to mine."

Hal managed a grin. "I never heard myself snore, so I don't believe I do," he said gaily, and wished her a pleasant good-night.

When the door of her room had closed, Hal turned to Blake. "Want to come outside and have a smoke with me before we turn in?" he asked, strangely solemn.

Blake nodded, his face drawn and weary looking. "Don't mind if I do," he answered hoarsely.

## CHAPTER VII PLAIN FACTS

A glittering galaxy shone down upon the Adirondack wilderness that night. The friendly starlight enabled Hal to see a good part of the ten acres comprising Delamere Camp, ten acres levelled out of the vast mountain wilderness. The main lodge, two barns and a few small outbuildings, stood clustered about in a sort of group as if to fend themselves against chance solitude. Beyond, in the wide meadows, stood a plane, its graceful lines looming up like some spectral bird in the night.

“Whose bus?” asked Hal laconically, staring at Blake over the red glow of his cigarette.

Blake puffed on his pipe a moment, studying the silent plane abstractedly.

“Belongs to Mrs. Marsh,” he answered. “James pilots it.”

“Oh,” said Hal, “so she’s air-minded?”

“Just this summer, I understand—a new fad I guess, for her,” said Blake tonelessly. “You don’t know her very well?”

“No,” Hal answered studying the other’s face intently. “She’s an old friend of my uncle’s branch of the family—he usually pays her a visit at least once a year, around Thanksgiving if it’s possible. Old family custom you know. Anyway, who did I meet at college this fall but Tony! We fell in together pronto, became roommates and so forth and before I knew it I was urged to carry on the tradition of the turkey this year because Unk’s in England and besides, the old lady wouldn’t take no for an answer. She must see Denis Keen’s nephew, and there you are! I suppose you know Tony’s an orphan and that Mrs. Marsh is his only relative.”

Blake’s dark eyes blinked. “Yes, she told me that,” he said quietly. “But why—*why* do you tell me all this, Keen? Specially since I’m here only in the capacity...”

“Of a general utility man?” Hal interposed softly. “I’ll tell you why, Blake—I wanted to see how much you knew about me and how much you knew about the Marsh family! You see I sense that you’re not of the stuff of which general utility men are made! Handy-man—Jack-of-all-trades and any other name in that category just doesn’t fit well with you.”

Blake’s eyes met his squarely. “Do you think you would have formed that opinion of me if this afternoon’s episode hadn’t taken place?” he asked.

“You mean about the hunters?” Hal returned. “That’s hard to say, honestly. How can we talk about things that didn’t happen—much less give an opinion of them? All I know now is that something *did* happen down there this afternoon. I know I heard shots and I know that Tony was hit with a bullet and as soon as I saw you and heard you say those shots came from a hunter’s gun, I knew you were lying, keeping something back.”

Blake glanced quickly back at the lodge, then turned and looked at him. “You don’t for a moment think that *I* fired those shots, do you?” he asked hoarsely.

“It’s hard not to believe it,” Hal replied, “since not another shot came from that brush after we started the car and you were with us. In fact, there wasn’t another sound after you came out from between those trees that time.”

“I admit the whole thing has put me in a very peculiar light,” said Blake almost worriedly. “Still, common sense ought to tell you that I wouldn’t have any reason in the world for wanting to kill Tony Marsh or even injuring him.”

“Common sense does tell me that, Blake,” Hal assured him. “That’s why I’m not accusing you of anything until I know for certain! That’s why I asked you to come out here and have a smoke with me—so you could kind of square yourself!”

“I know, Keen,” Blake said sincerely, “you’re as decent as can be about it in the face of things. I’d be swallowed up with curiosity too, if I were in your place. But you see there are some things a fellow just can’t tell no matter how badly he wants to. That’s my misfortune right now.”

“And by that same token it is Mrs. Marsh’s misfortune, too. You must admit I can’t very well stand by and see an old lady frightened out of her wits at the thought of coming doom predicted by some fake fortune teller! My gosh, any fool can see that it’s eating her up!”

Blake wheeled around. “You don’t connect me with that gypsy business, do you?” he asked angrily.

“Why not?” Hal countered. “You seemed pretty well shaken up when Mrs. Marsh mentioned about that Dudley disappearing. If you meant to look innocent then, you didn’t make a very good job of it! Why, I’d stake my life on that one look of yours, Blake—you knew Dudley and you can’t deny it!”

Blake stopped in their casual circling stroll before the lodge, and knocked out his pipe against the broad trunk of a towering pine.

“Very well,” he said nervously, “I won’t deny it! I knew Dudley, but I have no more idea where he is now than you have. I came up here because I suddenly stopped hearing from him and you’ve no idea what that meant to me. When I came I learned without asking that he had disappeared. That’s

all I can tell you now, Keen, and why I've confided in you this much—heaven only knows!"

Before Hal could voice any surprise, the knowledge was borne in upon them that a car was laboring up the mountain road and heading straight for the camp. Neither spoke but waited until the gleam of headlights came into view around the bend. The driver, presently aware of the presence of the nocturnal strollers, drove only a few feet further, shut off his motor and stepped out of the car.

As the man came toward them, Hal chuckled. "Hello, Mr. Connover," he said gaily, "it'll be a nice day if it don't rain?"

Mr. Connover stopped in his tracks and stared.

## CHAPTER VIII CONNOVER ADVISES

“Why didn’t you tell me you were Denis Keen’s kin!” was Bill Connover’s caustic complaint when Hal had made himself known.

“How did I know you were going to chase me all the way up here to find out?” Hal returned. He introduced Blake, then returned to the subject. “Still, I suppose a clue’s a clue, huh Mr. Connover?”

“Betcha life,” answered the detective in better spirits. “I ain’t leavin’ no stone unturned in this Bellair business. Even if things don’t look so bright, I ain’t discouraged.”

Blake took a few steps back to the shelter of the tree to relight his pipe for a buoyant November wind was blowing. “Perhaps you want to talk something confidential over with Mr. Connover?” he asked Hal.

“Nah, nah!” protested Mr. Connover, “there ain’t nothin’ young Keen can tell me that I don’t know a’ready. Hank Bellair cracked up in his plane this afternoon. Mrs. Bellair acts dumb and says she don’t know where either of her sons are and when I ask her for a picture of Ted she shows me a picture of Hank and about that time I’m disgusted! So what can young Keen tell me about it, hah, except that he met Hank one time on a boat comin’ up from Panama? That ain’t helpin’ me get the low-down on this Ted and I’ve lost a lot of time a’ready on this fool journey, chasin’ this feller Keen. Nah, I’m goin’ to beat it back to that hick village of Hightown and bawl out that Collins—he might ’a’ told me that was Tony Marsh in the roadster and I’d ’a’ got wise that Keen here wasn’t mixed up with any clue that I could use.”

“Then you won’t stay for the night?” asked Blake, his face almost hidden in the wreath of smoke about his head.

“No,” answered Connover, “I won’t even go in and pay my respects to Mrs. Marsh. Guess she’s dead to the world anyhow, eh? Well, I’ll turn that flivver ’round and beat it back. Got to get back to Hadley Heights airport and work out from there again. No time to lose because it must be after two o’clock now.”

“If it is, then I have some fires to attend to,” said Blake. “Mrs. Marsh gave me orders to see that the house is good and warm when the doctor leaves at four o’clock with young Marsh. You’ll excuse me?”

“Sure,” said Hal lightly. “I’ll see Mr. Connover off with a gay bon voyage and then come in myself. Getting kind of chilly out here.”



Blake went in and as Hal walked toward the parked car with Connover he asked, "Notice Blake?"

"Sure. Kind of a thin, worried-looking guy, eh? Why ask me, though?" Connover queried gruffly. "What's the matter with the man?"

Hal gave a detailed account of all that had transpired from the time of the shots that he and Tony had heard in the forest up to Blake's denial a few moments before Connover's arrival. The story of Mrs. Marsh's gypsy fortune teller elicited a few sarcastic grunts from the detective but that was all. He held his peace until Hal had finished talking.

They had reached Connover's car by that time and each one put a foot on the running board. "Well," said the detective with a yawn, "that's a pretty peppy soundin' story the way you tell it, but I think you got too good an imagination (all due respects to the fac' that you're Denis Keen's kin) and that don't get you on the real track. Now take it from me, young feller, we don't catch criminals the way you read that they do in detective stories. If this Blake does know this Dudley—what about it? If Dudley disappeared and Blake came up here looking for him, it looks as if Dudley owed Blake some money, eh?"

"But it happened that Blake came the same night as the house caught fire!" Hal protested.

"You ain't goin' to tell me you're swallowin' that gypsy stuff or thinkin' that that fire was anythin' but an accident, are you?" Connover asked sardonically. "Great Scott, Keen, you better find out how your uncle and me works first before you try and discover fairy stories on your own hook!"

"All right," Hal said chuckling good-naturedly, "you ought to know a clue when you hear about one, huh? Still, you can't make me stop thinking about things, and forming conclusions of my own."

Connover gave a conceited little chuckle. "Yere, and you got a lot to learn, boy. You got to learn that there's a whale of a difference between conclusions and deductions. You got to get the goods on a feller before you begin to talk about the law and what it can do—see! If you were to form conclusions about everybody you saw, the jails couldn't hold all the criminals that you'd turn over. Take it from me!"

"I'm always willing to learn," said Hal cheerily. "In fact, I thought I *was* learning something when Blake as good as refused to tell me about that shooting."

"Yere, well that ain't any business of a government man anyway," said Connover with a certain pride. "A little thing like that is the business of that simpleton Collins—it's his business to enforce county laws. Gypsy fortune tellin' and illegal huntin' ain't in my line, boy. No siree!"

“I see,” said Hal with a curious smile. “Maybe I was wrong.” And as Connover turned the car around toward town, he added to himself: “But then again, maybe I’ll be right.”

## CHAPTER IX CAMP SMOKE

Tony departed in the doctor's car next morning long before sunrise. He was in gay spirits despite a constant throbbing pain in his shoulder, but assured them that he would be back in a day or so. Then the soft purr of the sedan could be heard as it glided down the steep mountain road and finally it faded off into the distance leaving Hal alone in the chill, misty dawn.

Mrs. Marsh had gone indoors intent upon getting a few more hours of sleep. Hal hunched himself up in a comfortable rustic chair that was set at the eastern end of the wide veranda. He pulled his warm windbreaker closely about him, got out his pipe, and turned his eyes toward the far horizon.

Patches of light showed here and there and it was possible to see the shaggy range that rose to the right, looking dark and formidable with its forests of eternal evergreen. Early rising birds twittered feebly at first, their chirpings growing gradually louder as the dawn broke clear and bright.

Hal sat enchanted, leaning forward in his chair as the growing light slowly revealed to him the silver depths of Delamere Lake lying placidly beneath the camp. Its silent surface stretched a little to the east then turned abruptly north into a sort of cove and was finally lost to view among the miles of towering trees and precipitous slopes.

Mary was now about her household duties for the breakfast long since cleared away brought other tasks in the vast living room. The sturdy patter of her feet could be heard back and forth, back and forth, and so unconsciously was Hal keeping mental time to her footsteps that he was startled to see Blake standing beside him.

"Never heard you, Blake," he explained. "Enjoying the scenery and the dawn."

Blake looked thoughtfully toward the east. "It *is* beautiful—especially at dawn. I really think it's more beautiful now than it would be in summer. There's so many more miles to be seen when the trees are leafless. Too bad the evergreens don't fall in line too—then the view would be great."

"Great as it is," Hal responded heartily. "There'd be something lacking without the winter coat of evergreens."

Blake said nothing but stood staring off to where a thin column of smoke rose straight out of the forest on the lower range. His dark eyes seemed to drink in the picture and Hal would have thought that he was lost in the mere

love of beauty except for a deep scowl which grew worse as the smoke column increased in volume.

“Some camp down there do you suppose?” he queried casually.

“Looks like it,” Blake commented, biting his under lip. “James and I were talking about it yesterday morning. He’s got today off on account of you being here, and he said he’s going to take a little hike down there and see who lives there.”

“Probably some woodsman or trapper, huh?” asked Hal. And when Blake made no response, he asked: “Isn’t that just about where those gypsies were supposed to be?”

“If it is I won’t be long in finding out,” said a voice from the doorway. “I’ll get that gypsy woman and haul her back here to retract that bosh she told poor old Mrs. Marsh. It’s a shame to have such a kind, generous person as she is scared out of her wits because of a filthy thief like that gypsy woman was.”

It was James, a short, energetic young man. Blake introduced him to Hal and the chauffeur acknowledged the introduction heartily.

“Good to have another fellow around for a week or two,” he said pleasantly. “We may have some trouble with those people. Anyway, I intend to see. If they’re nasty I’ll call Collins up from Hightown tomorrow and you and Blake can come along and help us rout them out, eh?”

“Glad to,” Hal answered. “There’s nothing I like better than a tussle. Never tried one with gypsies though.”

“Well, you may have a chance tomorrow,” James said as he moved off the porch steps. He hoisted a rifle over his shoulder and drew on a pair of warm gloves. “May have a chance to do some hunting,” he explained. “I haven’t been off a whole day in a month. Mrs. Marsh has been too upset.”

“Then I’m glad I’m here to give you the chance to go,” Hal said, and turned to Blake. “How about you—don’t you want to go along?”

Blake shook his head wearily. “Mrs. Marsh likes a bodyguard of two,” he answered. “And you can’t blame her at her age.”

James hesitated a moment. “Did either of you fellows hear a plane anywhere around here early this morning?” he asked.

Neither of them had. Hal explained about Connover’s fruitless visit, however. “It might have been the noise of his junk wagon,” he suggested.

James laughed aloud. “No, I heard that too. This noise I heard was later. I even got up and looked out of the window, thinking perhaps it was Blake monkeying around our own bus, but it wasn’t. It was light enough for me to see her standing all snug and tucked in her tarpaulin.”

Hal turned to Blake. “Oh, you can pilot too, huh?”

Blake shook his head vigorously. “James has an idea I’d be able to, that’s all. He says I look air-minded. But talking about hearing a plane, Jim, I’ve thought several times since I’ve been here that a plane has been passing somewhere near us in the early morning hours.”

“Hmph,” said James, and turned out toward the road. “So long, see you in church!”

Hal laughed. “Good luck! Be careful!”

“Very good advice,” James called back, laughing. “Maybe I’ll need it, eh? They say gypsies are hard luck to deal with.”

“Then you’ve got your gun,” Blake reminded him, scowling.

The young man waved gaily and went off down the road. It was just nonsense that they had been talking, yet Hal felt that it all would have been better left unsaid. Somehow a strange sense of foreboding stole over him when he thought of his airy wish, Good luck! One sometimes invited disaster in just that manner.

He drew himself up and laughed aloud. “Can you imagine, Blake!” he said. “I’ve been actually thinking that our advice to the departing James augured evil. That’s what living among superstitious people does to a chap! Even in a short space of time. Tony’s been my roommate since the beginning of October and believe me I’m beginning to realize that I’m getting as bad as he. Some nut!” He laughed at his fears.

“Just the same,” said Blake softly, “I’ve that feeling myself. I’d like to go along with James, but then.... Say, Keen, look down the road ... down by the lake and in through those trees—doesn’t it look as if a man is moving in and out among the trees?” Hal stared ahead of James’ departing figure, then nodded. “Certainly does look like it. Got a pair of field glasses, Blake? All right—get ’em, huh? Something looks funny ... darn funny....”

## CHAPTER X

### DELAMERE LAKE

By the time the field glasses were brought both James and the tree-dodging stranger had disappeared among the verdure of the lower forest. It almost seemed as if Blake had only imagined he saw someone.

"If you hadn't seen it first and spoken of it, I'd swear I had been day dreaming," Hal declared disappointedly. "Guess it was just someone hunting firewood, don't you think so? I know," he said as he saw Blake's skeptical expression, "his actions weren't exactly open and aboveboard scooting behind trees that way when James came along. Suppose I take a hike down there just to make sure everything's all right, huh?"

"Sh!" Blake warned. "Mrs. Marsh is up and moving about inside. Don't mention anything about it—no, don't go either! She'd be sure to guess that we were anxious about something."

"Then you *are* anxious?" Hal persisted in a whisper.

"No," Blake replied evasively, "I'm anxious that Mrs. Marsh shouldn't get all stewed up about nothing. Jim can take care of himself—he's a good shot, you know."

Blake dismissed the subject with that and presently Mrs. Marsh called out that the morning repast of coffee and toast would be served in the living room in a few minutes. Hal got up and followed the general utility man indoors, silent and thoughtful.

A half hour later, Hal suggested that they catch some trout for lunch when Blake's duties for the morning were over. Mrs. Marsh thought the idea a splendid one and proposed that the young men go alone while she sat on the eastern end of the veranda and watched them down at the lake. She seemed quite happy that morning and the look of haunting fear upon her sweet old face, so evident the previous night, had disappeared.

Hal felt relieved and was ashamed that he felt relieved, to get away from the lodge. There was something in the atmosphere of it that depressed him and he noticed too, that Blake seemed not so worried once he was down at the lakeside, casting his line.

The air was cold and clear and the sun shone warmly upon them. Before an hour had passed they had made a catch sufficient for luncheon. Blake suggested taking up to the kitchen what they had caught so as to give the cook time to prepare them. Then he would return and they could try their luck at something else, he said.

Hal lay back on the hard, dry ground when Blake had gone and let the sun pour down upon him. He felt a sense of delightful exhilaration, being warmly clothed and able to lie inert in the gripping cold of an early winter's day. He smiled at the thought of doing such a thing at home, or anywhere else this side of the tropics, in November. But here the air was so clear one did not mind it.

Still, he could not maintain his position very long for his feet soon became numb and tingling. He rolled over on his stomach to pick himself up and saw that something moved between the two towering trees just across the road. He could not be sure at first, but he had the feeling that someone was peering out at him.

He rose with affected nonchalance and saw that Blake was coming down the road, walking with long, swinging strides. He held his breath knowing that the young man would presently be passing those trees just before he turned into the short lake path. In a second, however, he had surveyed the thick woods opposite and though his scrutiny to an observer would have seemed no more than a casual, curious glance, he had assured himself that there *was* a human being hiding between the trees.

Hal's leap to the roadside would have delighted the eye of any football coach. To the surprise of Blake, he grasped him and veered him away to the right of the path and through the dry, withered grass.

"I don't like paths when they make it necessary for a chap to go past certain trees," he said in a laughing whisper.

"What's the idea?" Blake said plainly startled.

Hal drew him gently but firmly to the edge of the lake. "Pretend we're fishing—pretend—let's really fish!" he said enigmatically. "There now," he said casting his line with a satisfied grin. Then: "Blake, there's a man behind those trees, *behind us!* That's my story, and I'm going to stick to it, but I don't know about sticking here."

Blake's gasp was audible. He grew pale as death. "Who—*when*—" he stammered nervously. Then: "When did you find it out?"

"Just a minute ago," Hal said soothingly. "But hold your hat, Blake—don't go off the handle about nothing—maybe it's nothing!"

A sardonic chuckle began in Blake's throat and ceased before it escaped his lips. "Nothing?" he repeated. "Keen, it's *something!* Else what would the fellow be hiding for?"

"We'll soon find out," Hal answered confidently. "We'll ask him. I'll jump up and make a dive for those trees before he'd be able to say 'Jack Robinson.' Then I'll ask him out and out, what's the idea of the snooping!"

"You may jump up," said Blake tonelessly, "but he'd shoot you down. He's certainly armed. Don't let's give him the slightest indication that we

know he's there and we can slip away from here after a few minutes."

"Not me, laddie," said Hal. "I'm awfully nosey in that respect. I want to find out the reason for all this Santa Claus business and what's more—I *mean* to find it! I can perform one of my zigzag leaps and before old Mr. Whoeverheis can raise his trusty musket, little Hal will have bounced on him and raised Cain instead. You may not believe it, Blake, but I've an awful wallop without even having to count ten, see?"

Blake was in no mood for nonsense. His face had the look of doom. Suddenly he glanced up the hill and let his eyes rest a moment upon the figure sitting on the veranda. Hal saw too, understood and compromised.

"I'll go on up with you and steer her into the house for lunch," he said, "then I'll come back. I've got to see who that gink is!"

They drew in their lines preparatory to leaving when suddenly they heard a most pitiful cry and turned to see a ragged little man, his face and arms bleeding, gesticulating wildly as he ran out from between the trees.





SUDDENLY THEY HEARD A MOST PITIFUL CRY—

## CHAPTER XI

### JOHN DOE

He ran straight toward them, uttering frightened little moans, his eyes beseeching the startled young men. He was muttering a gibberish that was unintelligible and suddenly it occurred to Hal that he was speaking in some foreign tongue, appealing to them for protection.

Hal gasped at the sight of several deep wounds on both his arms. "Where on earth...." he began sympathetically.

The man understood that questioning sympathy and immediately fell to making significant gestures, swinging his hands up and down several times, then making motions toward his arms where the wounds were. Hal slowly understood and went a few feet to pick up a dried hickory stick. Then he came back and pretended he was going to whack Blake on the arm with it.

The man nodded violently, trying to smile through a mist of tears that had gathered in his eyes. Hal put his arm about the poor fellow's shoulder and touched his back significantly. To that the man gave the same smiling acquiescence.

"Somebody's lashed him on the arms and back, Blake," said Hal. "Who could be the brute to do it? He's run away, that's about the size of it."

Blake shuddered visibly. "Awful," he murmured. "Why, he's really hurt, Keen."

"Sure he is," said Hal and, taking the man's arm, pointed up toward the lodge. "We'll fix you," he assured the poor creature. "Make your arms well and your back too."

The fellow seemed to understand despite his bewilderment at Hal's words. A look of relief came into his face as the two young men got on either side of him and supported his weakened body up to the lodge.

"Starved, that's what he is," Hal observed when they had neared the top of the hill. "How and where do you suppose he ever got into this condition?"

At that moment the man turned and looked back east whence he had apparently come. An expression of horror filled his sunken features and he made several gestures toward the thick forests spreading out below. Hal and Blake gazed behind but could see nothing save the vast expanse of mountains and the calm serenity of the forests.

Blake divined the man's meaning this time. "He evidently believes there's someone chasing him up—the fellow that gave him the lashing, perhaps."

"I wish it was," Hal declared stoutly. "I just wish it was! I'd like to meet the brute who could do such a thing."

Blake pursed his lips. "No doubt this will set Mrs. Marsh off the track again," he said indicating the old lady who had risen from her chair and was anxiously watching the strange creature, hobbling along between the two young men. "It's too bad it had to happen now."

"I know," Hal agreed, "but it's better for Mrs. Marsh to be a little upset than make this poor chap go on his way without care and food."

"She'd never stand for that," Blake protested quickly. "She'll shower attention upon him no matter how upset she is. Of course we'll have to tell her the truth about this fellow."

"And after that—what are we going to do about him?" Hal asked, puzzled. "When we don't know where he came from, how are we going to find out where he's going?"

"Trust to luck!"

To be sure, it seemed like asking too much of that fair lady of fortune for they could find neither money nor information on the tattered person of "John Doe" as Hal nicknamed him, explaining that the fellow had to be called something. When they were almost in desperation, "John" procured a dirty and much thumbed piece of paper from the recesses of a vest pocket. It contained the name and address of one Jacques Brule in Jersey City.

They received many violent nods from poor John as they read the address and concluded that that was the fellow's destination. How he came to be in the Adirondacks and in such a pitiable condition, they were all at a loss to understand. Even Blake seemed to forget for the time his own secret fears and inhibitions. A wealth of sympathy, care and attention was lavished on the man throughout the day. Mrs. Marsh, too, forgot her superstitions and the gypsy prognostications and smiled when Hal informed her that John Doe was sleeping soundly after having been bathed, shaved and fed.

"As soon as James returns," she said, "we'll have him drive the poor man down to Hightown and put him in Constable Collins' care. He probably knows what to do with such cases better than we and will no doubt get in touch with this Brule man."

"What time do you suppose James will come back?" asked Hal.

"He said he'd be back before dinner tonight," replied Mrs. Marsh. "Why do you ask, Hal?"

"Because this poor chap seems to be obsessed with the idea of getting out of these mountains. His constant gesticulations finally told me the story. It seems he's in constant fear of this brute who inflicted the whippings."

"Whippings, did you say, my dear boy?"

“Exactly that. He has scars on his back that tell the tale of many such beatings as he probably got yesterday. I’ve come to the conclusion that he escaped from the scoundrel’s clutches last night in some way. Anyway, the point is, the chap evidently thinks he’s not safe while he stays here. He seems to think that this enemy of his will either choke him or shoot him to death and I had to promise him that while he’s taking a much needed rest in that bedroom, either Blake or I will stand on guard.”

“Poor man!” exclaimed the lady. “What he must have suffered.”

“Clearly it’s a case for the police. He’s either Belgian or some mixture of French, I think. Anyway, some of his words sound French and the name of this Brule is French sounding. I’d like to get in touch with him somehow. Maybe he can throw some light on it.”

“Perhaps. But we’ll wait for James. Certainly I’ll see that the poor fellow is financed until he can be put into the care of his friends. You and James can determine what to do, however.”

Hal was still waiting for James to come an hour after dinner had been eaten and cleared away. And for many hours past the vast mountain wilderness had been silent in the grip of night.

## CHAPTER XII

### WAITING

At ten o'clock Hal's patience was exhausted. They had been gathered before the fireplace, saying commonplace things, repeating empty phrases, yet thinking fearful thoughts of James' continued absence. No one had actually spoken his dread thought but they parried about what might have happened—until the clock struck the hour of ten.

"It's long enough!" Hal declared. "Something *has* happened to him! Let's not fool ourselves about it any longer. Blake, let's do something!"

"But what can we do?" Blake protested. "Neither you nor I know anything about this country. It's difficult enough to find one's way about in the daytime, much less at night. James knows it like a book—we'd never find him if we did go out to search! Besides, he had that rifle...."

"I've had that in mind," Hal said as he walked across the room to the eastern window. "A full moon's coming up—we'll have plenty of light to hunt around here a little way at least. It'll make me feel that I've tried to do something, even if the search is futile."

"Oh my," sighed Mrs. Marsh nervously, "what could have happened to him? He *can't* be lost."

"If he is, he'll find his way back in the moonlight," Hal said confidently. "And if he don't come it'll be evident that we've got another mystery on our hands."

"Like poor Mr. Dudley," the lady sighed.

Blake got up from his chair and rested his arm on the stone mantel over the fireplace. His face looked drawn and wearier than ever and when he lighted his pipe Hal noticed that his hands trembled. It was evident that the fellow was more and more beset by some terrible haunting fear.

Hal was determined to find out—determined to know, once and for all, what was the reason for Blake's peculiar behavior. He was convinced now that the fellow's reticence was caused by a fear of something. Of what? If that were known would it tear aside the thick veil of mystery that seemed to be slowly dropping around the whole vicinity of Delamere Camp? He wondered.

Suddenly he had an idea. He wheeled about from the window. "Listen, Blake," he said, "we're going to hunt until midnight. We'll call—we'll do all in our power to see what's become of him. Then if nothing comes of it, I'm

going to call Collins out of his bed down in Hightown and have him bring a searching party up here. This thing can't go on any longer."

"Do—do you think it's necessary to call Collins and a—a searching party?" Blake asked hesitantly.

"Of course I think so!" Hal answered tersely, and it occurred to him in a flash what was the matter with Blake.

*He was afraid of the law!*

"I'd feel safer if you got Mr. Collins up here as soon as he'd be able to come," said Mrs. Marsh worriedly. "*Please*, Hal! I think we ought to have his protection right at once."

Hal strode to the telephone at the far end of the living room. He was conscious of Blake's pleading stare and constantly aware of poor John Doe's restlessness. While he was waiting for the connection to be made, he assured the little man with smiles and nods that there was nothing to fear and that he would soon be taken care of.

Finally Collins' voice answered at the other end of the wire. He listened impatiently while Hal spoke of the strange occurrences that had taken place at Delamere Camp and also while he told of the dreadful condition of John Doe who had come to them for protection that afternoon and ended by relating that James had failed to return in the same manner as the missing Mr. Dudley two weeks ago.

Collins sniffed audibly. "Don't see anything so much yeh got to worry ye," he said. "Most likely the two of 'em jest got lonesome up thar an' decided ter stay out once they got out! Seems ter me that ain't any excuse fer me comin' way up thar this hour o' the night."

"Don't make me laugh, Collins," Hal said with some show of annoyance. "Two men don't just intend to stay away when they have clothes and money at the camp here. Dudley didn't have but a few dollars, Mrs. Marsh tells me, but he had a few suits of good clothes and other things that a fellow wouldn't just leave behind. James, on the other hand, has bankbooks with a tidy sum to his credit, I'm told, and he too has lots of clothing here. Now don't make excuses because you'd rather go to bed—you're to gather a party of searchers and come up here as quickly as you can! You can make it by midnight and I'm not asking you to do any searching yourself—I'm asking you to come up here and give Mrs. Marsh your protection while Blake and I and your own men go out and hunt for James."

The constable yawned and said, "Hmph!" then banged down the receiver.

"He's coming, all right," said Hal, "and we'll wait. But if Collins is a typical example of rural police efficiency, deliver me! I'd rather have Connover and his conceit any time."

Blake said nothing, but knocked out his pipe, then walked the length of the living room, clasp ing and unclasp ing his hands.

## CHAPTER XIII

### SEARCH

Collins arrived at midnight, but he arrived alone. Stupidly, indifferently, he explained that none of the men he had called upon to join in the search had thought James' absence sufficiently alarming to warrant their losing a night's sleep.

"They said like I say," the constable chattered, "that a feller like Miz Marsh's chofer what knows the country so well ain't gittin' lost. He mos' likely got th' idee that it'd be pleasant ter stay an' do some night huntin' too. He got a license frum me only las' week—in case he wanted to take a shot or two in season, that's what he said!"

"Oh, he did, huh?" Hal said sarcastically. "I didn't say, Collins, that we thought James was lost—I said he had promised to be back here for dinner tonight and he didn't come. We have Mrs. Marsh's word for it that her chauffeur isn't a fellow likely to spring any sudden 'idee' as you mention, and decide to stay for a night's hunting. He's a chap that keeps his word and what's more he was too concerned about the lady here, just as the rest of us are. In fact, he was *so* concerned about her that he mentioned just before he left, that he was going to take a hike down to that supposedly gypsy camp down there in the lower east range and find that woman that so upset Mrs. Marsh with her gloomy predictions!"

Collins left his flivver standing in the roadway before the house and went indoors with them. "Who said 'twas a gypsy camp down thar on east range?" he queried, eyeing Hal skeptically.

"I didn't say any of us said it—I said all of us supposed it to be, for James said it was in that direction that the gypsy woman went after she left the house that day."

"Hal is perfectly right about that, Constable Collins," said Mrs. Marsh. "James did see her go in that direction!"

The constable seated himself in the most comfortable armchair, first removing his coat. "Might's well make myself ter hum," he said leisurely. "'Tain't no gypsy camp down thar now—if thar ever was one. Feller what's sort o' a hermit lives thar, if it's his camp smoke what you seen. Trapper he is an' the likes o' that. Give him his permit I did."

"Oh," said Hal, "so you're game warden too, huh?"

"Sure thing, young man, sure thing."



Hal was exasperated. He turned to Blake. “Come on, we’ll go out—see if we can find some trace of him.”

Blake seemed relieved and hurried to put on his coat and gloves. Hal hadn’t failed to notice that he was not quite so constrained since Collins had done nothing but bid him a curt good evening when he came along. In point of fact, the constable was as indifferent toward Blake as he was toward everything else.

Before the two young men left the lodge, Hal called a warning to the yawning, blinking-eyed constable. “Take good care of Mrs. Marsh and our friend John,” he said crisply. “If nothing else seems important to you—*they are!*”

Collins nodded and was engaged in some country gossip before Hal and Blake were out on the roadway. It did seem as if nothing could disturb the man’s placid demeanor. To Hal, such calm and indifference in the face of the insidious mystery that held Delamere Camp in its grip, was the last straw. He told Blake so, vehemently.

“And you’re not helping things either, fellow,” he charged the other, irritably. “As if things aren’t bad enough without you going around mooning and acting every once in a while as if some goblin was going to get you. Oh, I know you’ve got a pile of something or other stored up in that little old head of yours—I’m observant enough to see that. Besides, Blake, you can’t deny that you’re afraid of the law! I didn’t miss how nervous you were for fear Collins would pay a little too much attention to you—or recognize you. Now come on—what the dickens is it all about?”

Blake stopped and looked Hal squarely in the eye. “Keen,” he said wearily, “do you realize that it might be hard for me to protect my own interests and tell you what I know? To ship off the burden on my mind even to my dearest friend (and, remember you have only known me about thirty-six hours) might bring disaster tumbling about the head of an innocent person. If it was just me, I wouldn’t give a continental. But there’s so much at stake! One thing, though, I could take an oath that neither I nor anyone connected with me have anything to do with this darn mystery here.”

They had reached the lake then and were trailing along the embankment, looking cautiously from left to right. The moon in all its splendor swept the vast mountain wilderness with its silvery light picking out each twig and bush and tree for miles around. The surface of the lake had been transformed into a great shimmering pool of molten silver and one could see each gentle lap of the water as it swayed against the embankment.

The eerie echo of wildcats sounded from afar and somewhere within the dim confines of the nearby forest an owl hooted constantly. Despite Hal’s

annoyance and disappointment at Blake's continued evasiveness, he laughed aloud.

"Hear that old bird, Blake?" he asked cheerfully. "It reminds me of one of Tony's pet superstitions."

"And what is that?" asked Blake forgetting his own troubles for a moment.

"The owl, so Tony informs me, is the mother of the moon—in nut lore. The old bird's wail is not supposed to augur good fortune at all. In fact, it portends the most awful luck to all those who are unlucky enough to hear it."

"And what about those who hear it by accident," Blake chuckled. "When an owl's about and cries everyone is bound to hear it who happens to be anywhere near the bird. So what explanation does superstition find for that?"

"None," Hal said, "except that everybody has bad luck. The only one who is lucky enough to keep from hearing it would be an ostrich. They can stick their heads in the ground and tell the old bird to go to thunder."

Blake smiled. "Nevertheless we've just heard it good and plenty. But it doesn't faze me. One reaches a point when nothing does. I've had my share of evil days without the owl telling me."

A feeling of sympathy welled up in Hal. "Blake," he said softly, "I'm not going to rag you any more about your business. I've got a hunch about you even if I have been annoyed with the air of mystery you wear so well. I've got a hunch that you're the victim of circumstances, that's what. No fellow who looks me in the eyes as you've been doing right along, has his own guilt on his conscience. You're carrying somebody else's load—am I right?"

Blake held out his hand and clasped Hal's. "You're right, Keen, and what's more you're aces up for saying that! While we're on the subject I might as well tell you, I *was* afraid of Collins seeing me. You see, I'm wanted! That's all I can tell you."

Blake's hands dropped to his sides. He looked lonely, despairing and almost beaten. Hal slipped an arm through his and they walked along the lake's edge in silence, gazing out across the still, shining surface, each intent upon his own thoughts.

"We'll keep going along the lake trail, huh?" Hal asked after a long pause. "That takes us due east and down *there*. How long do you suppose it will take us? James said he figured it was five or six miles."

Blake grinned a little. "I'm afraid I can't help you much on that subject, Keen. I'm as rotten a woodsman as you. No scouting instinct whatsoever. Never had time. Too busy helping my mother, I guess. Father died when we were little shavers."

Hal heard but half of Blake's little confidence for something out on the lake had suddenly caught his eye. It was some floating object, dark against the moonlit water and it took some minutes for him to even guess at what it might be. For the moment he dared not speak his thought ... he could only press Blake's arm and stammer out meaningless gasps.

"*Look*—look, Blake!" he hissed. "Is that..."

"A *man*!" Blake whispered hoarsely.

Hal ripped off his windbreaker, kicked off his shoes and in a second was clipping the icy waters of Delamere Lake.

## CHAPTER XIV

### JUST JAMES

Mrs. Marsh had gone to bed when they stole up toward the lodge with their tragic burden. They could see Constable Collins sitting in the big chair, sound asleep with his stockinged feet propped comfortably upon a stool. In the next chair nearer the fireplace sat John Doe dozing contentedly before the brisk blaze. As he peeked through the wide windows, Hal wondered what effect this new tragedy would have upon the complacent rural officer.

Dripping and shivering from the effects of the icy water, he stole inside while Blake grimly kept watch at the constable's parked flivver. John slept on soundly but as the bedraggled looking young man stepped across the threshold, Collins awoke.

"Eh?" he murmured, bewildered.

Hal put his fingers to his lips and motioned for him to step outside. The man fumbled clumsily for his shoes which were placed beside the chair and took occasion to glance skeptically at Hal's wet hair and trousers. Finally, with his coat on, he seemed to hesitate.

"Hurry!" Hal whispered. "It's so we don't wake Mrs. Marsh."

Collins shook his head doubtfully and looked pale as Hal held the door open and urged him outside.

"What's the idee, eh?" he asked as the door shut softly behind him.

"The idea," Hal said tonelessly, "is that we've just found a man in the lake—*dead. Shot to death!* Bullet through his temple."

Collins looked about nervously and stepped down the steps with Hal, then followed him out to where Blake was waiting beside the flivver. His teeth chattered audibly and he seemed not able to speak.

"Where's he?" he asked at length.

"In your car," Hal answered grimly.

"We used your blanket and it wouldn't be a bad idea to take him right to town. Mrs. Marsh must never know about this. And it can be arranged! She can't read the newspapers because of her poor eyesight—she need never know!"

"Who is it, young man—*who is it?*" the constable asked falteringly.

"*James!*" Hal whispered hoarsely. "*Just James!*"

## CHAPTER XV BLAKE RETRACTS

Collins stood where he was for some minutes seeming unable to comprehend this sudden intelligence. He wiped a bony hand across his moist forehead and set his hat at a different angle. Then he looked from Blake to Hal.

“Yer mean he’s wrapped up in my car—yer actually mean yer found him a-floatin’ down thar in th’ lake?” he asked with bated breath.

“That’s what I told you,” Hal reminded him, “and never forget that I told you, Collins! You seem to have a faculty for construing things your own way for your own special convenience. I’m referring to your indifference about James’ disappearance.”

“I—I jes’ didn’ think he’d really disappeared, young feller, an’ that’s a fac’,” said the man, truly frightened. “I jes’ never thought ’twould come ter this—I jes’ never thought it!”

“Plain murder,” spoke up Blake in a quivering voice. “It’s too much. Such a darn nice fellow he was too. It’d be different if he hadn’t gone down in Mrs. Marsh’s interests. Whoever it was down there—*they did it!*”

“It certainly looks that way,” Hal agreed. Then turning to Collins, he said: “On account of this you better come back after John early in the morning. And when you come, Constable—don’t forget to bring a searching party with you!”

Collins nodded. “Er—er, mebbe it might have been hunters, eh? Mebbe....”

Hal frowned and glanced toward Blake bitterly, his truce forgotten for the moment. “Tony’s down in the hospital right now because of *hunters!*” he said sarcastically. “It couldn’t be possible that they’re all so careless—all such punk marksmen. Besides, it isn’t possible! There’s powder marks on poor James’ forehead,” he added.

“Better go in and change, Keen,” said Blake feelingly. “You’ll be good and sick if you don’t be careful.” Then suddenly, in a hushed voice he said, “Don’t turn, either of you—there’s two or three or maybe more, men coming along under those trees up the road!”

Hal was instantly on the alert. “All right,” he said in an undertone, “let’s sort of stroll toward the house and see what they do.”

“Better idee,” said the constable throatily, “is ter go indoors and make out kinder thet we’re retirin’ an’ turn out th’ light, eh? We kin see ’em better

from th' dark an' watch what they're a-goin' ter do."

"It mightn't be a bad idea, huh, Keen?" Blake argued.

Hal didn't know but he wanted to change his uncomfortable clothing before anything else. "Then I can think," he said, "meanwhile you may as well come inside too and watch out while I'm changing in the bedroom."

They encountered Mary, the cook, coming down the stairs from the servants' quarters. A big, courageous looking woman, she was, demanding to know what was going on.

Hal told her in a few words. "Poor James is out in the constable's car," he said. "We have an idea that maybe it's that gypsy gang from below sneaking up here. Do all you can to keep Mrs. Marsh in her room, Mary, and whatever happens, don't let her know about James!"

"Indeed I'll not let her, Mr. Hal!" the good woman whispered, "I can better afford to lose my sleep than that poor old soul—she's had enough for any woman her age."

"All right then, Mary," said Hal. "You stay around and keep an eye out the windows with Blake and the constable. I'll hurry into my room and change."

John was fully awakened by this time and thoroughly frightened. Hal was unable in so short a time to explain to the bewildered man why it was necessary to turn out the lights and why they weren't yet ready to take him away from the mountains which he hated.

"I'll take him into the bedroom with me while I change," Hal whispered to Blake when the constable extinguished the lights.

It seemed to Hal that he had been in the bedroom only a few seconds, certainly no longer than it took him to get into dry clothing. He was about to put his brushes to his red, wavy locks and smiling the while into John's troubled face, when Blake sneaked into the room.

"Keen," he whispered hoarsely, "we're in a fine fix! There's a man standing at the door outside and demands us to hand over to him——"

"Not *John*?" asked Hal, his brushes stopping in mid-air.

"Just what," Blake answered quickly. "Can't tell you how it all happened—ishn't time. Main thing, he says he knows we've had a certain, short man in the house all day and that he's crazy! Anyway, he says he wants him and if we don't hand him over he'll make us! He's got a gun and I imagine there's four other fellows outside just as well armed!"



HAL HURRIED THE TREMBLING JOHN DOE TO THE PLANE

“Where’s Collins’ gun—what about Collins retaliating, huh?”

“Collins says he left his gun in the flivver.”

“Oh, my gosh! What luck!” Hal wheeled around and catching a glimpse of John’s pleading face he added: “Blake, the poor devil isn’t crazy—they

want him for something else! What, I wonder? Suppose they're the same ones that did for James?"

"I know—I thought of it too! Hurry and think of something—I told him you had taken John into a bedroom—the leader of the bunch—the one that's doing the talking, called him 'the nut.'"

John, with that universal instinct, sensed that it was he who was being discussed—he who was in danger. He rushed forward and clung frantically to Hal like a whipped and pleading child and his eyes spoke volumes.

Hal buried his face in his hands a moment, thinking. Blake strode up and down the room. Only John remained motionless then as if waiting, waiting for something. Expectant, yet fearful, one couldn't tell what the poor, cowed creature was thinking.

Hal looked up suddenly. "We just can't turn him back to that brute, Blake!" he announced decisively. "We've got to get him away or something ... wait! If we could only turn him over to this Brule in Jersey City. You can tell by the way John acts that Brule must be a good friend that he wants to go to. Oh, if I could only manage that plane on a journey like that—we could be off and leave that bloodthirsty rascal and his gang standing at the door!"

Blake whirled around. "Keen," he said in hushed tones, "*we will go by plane*—straight to Jersey City! Or the nearest point."

"*How?*" asked Hal. "I don't trust myself—I don't..."

"I'm not asking you," said Blake decisively. "I'm going to pilot it *myself!*"

Hal stopped, aghast. "But," he stammered, "you said you couldn't..."

"Never mind what I said," Blake flung back, "and don't ask questions. You and John climb out that window and sneak back into the bus. It's all primed—luckily—I oiled it up and looked her over early this evening. *Now get!* I'll go into the living room and tell them you're bringing John right out. Then I'll be with you in a second—start her up when you see me coming. Think you can do that?"

"Sure," Hal replied breathlessly. "I'm sure!"

"Great!" Blake said and hurried out of the room.



## CHAPTER XVI

### ESCAPE

It seemed an eternity before they actually left the ground. It seemed an eternity since Hal had pulled the trembling and bewildered John Doe out of the window after him and run across the intervening meadow to the trim little plane. But all had gone well with the fleeing trio.

Blake had his hands at the controls and steady hands they were too—able, practised hands, Hal noticed immediately. Without a word exchanged between them they ascended and suddenly the anxious and puzzled little foreigner seemed to comprehend that the flight was being taken for his benefit. He beamed happily and cried out his thanks in his own tongue.

Hal was seated in the mechanic's corner in the cockpit and moved over to allow the fellow to squeeze in beside him. Blake nodded and smiled and motioned toward the declining stars above. It was nearing dawn.

"Whew!" said Hal. "What an escape, huh? I hate to ask you, Blake, but how about Mrs. Marsh?"

"Guess she woke when she heard this bus all right," Blake answered. "But don't worry—Mary promised to tell her we were just taking John to his friends. I bet that gang beat it when they heard us start off."

"Do you think it really was a gang, Blake?"

"Sure, I saw them—three beggars all standing in the roadway." He chuckled. "Guess they never dreamed about anyone trying to make a getaway or they wouldn't have all stuck in one place."

"How did it come about, Blake—you didn't have time to tell me in the bedroom."

"I know. There isn't much to tell. You know when Collins turned out the lights? Well, he didn't even see you take John in your room. He was busy looking out the window. Anyway, we watched and soon we saw this kind of short bird sneak out across the roadway and up the path. Before I knew it he was at the door and he kind of hissed it out that he knew we were in there and not to make any trouble or nonsense. Then he said very calm like that he came after 'the nut'—meaning John of course. He said he heard we had him here but that he was his property and we better produce him quick!"

"What was Collins doing all that time?"

"Shaking like the brave man he isn't." Blake peered at his altimeter and let the plane climb.

“Listen, Blake—Collins didn’t know we were making any getaway, did he?”

“No—why?”

“Just a hunch. I don’t imagine we would have made it if he had.”

“You mean, you think....”

“I mean I think ... wait a minute. Did you see this fellow’s face that was after John?”

“No, he stayed at the door to make certain we *wouldn’t* see his face. He gave us fair warning not to turn on the lights again too. So Collins stayed at the door—to pacify the man, he said.”

“Mm,” said Hal thoughtfully. “I thought so. It’s as plain as day, Blake. Collins is in with that crowd!”

“Gosh, I didn’t think of it, but it sort of looks that way now that you speak of it!” Then: “And *he* was the one that suggested turning off the lights.... Of course he was! Keen, you’ve got a head.”

“Not a head, but a hunch,” Hal laughed modestly. “I’ve just been putting things together, Blake, that’s all. The suspicion started in my mind when Collins was speaking to me on the phone. He hesitated about coming—remember? What’s more, I think he lied about trying to organize that posse—he didn’t want anybody but himself because he’s in with that bunch. And it looks as if he tipped them off about John, else how did they come straight to camp so nice and pat?”

Blake agreed and swerved the plane upward again, flying out over the open country and leaving the mountains behind. Hal turned to the foreigner and smiled reassuringly and in return received a hearty handclasp and a little cry of thanks.

Blake smiled. “Funny little bird he is, Keen. But not crazy. No doubt it’s us that seem crazy to him. Wonder if he’s ever flown before?”

“Looks that way, doesn’t it? Most Europeans do, even the peasants, I’ve heard. I noticed after we made our getaway from the house and went toward the plane he smiled. Gee whiz, he almost kissed me when I pushed him up inside the cabin, and he acted as contented as a cat when we once got him started away.”

“Well, nobody’s happier to get him away than I. The question now remains about this Brule. It would be great if he could speak English and we could learn something. I can’t make head nor tail of what that cutthroat was so anxious to get John back for, can you?”

“No, except that he was afraid the poor devil could tell something that he didn’t want told. John’s made me understand pretty well that he got his beatings because he tried to run away. Now all we have to do is to find out why he wanted to run away. If good luck favors us with this Brule we may

find it out! But you may be certain of one thing, Blake—there’s something rotten in Denmark when a fellow like Collins is in the clutches of a lawless gang. And they must be lawless or John wouldn’t be in such a condition.”

“What ought to be done about it, I wonder!” Blake said more to himself than to Hal. “The state police will get hold of it on account of James and they’ll do something.”

“They’ll do something,” said Hal, “if Collins doesn’t take it upon himself to take a hand. Without meaning any offense, Blake, he seems to like the idea of accidental death at the hands of unknown hunter or hunters. As game warden, he *could* do it!”

Blake winced and brought the plane into a little dive in order to escape some bad winds. Once on an even keel, he said, “I know, Keen. I lied about those hunters that day. The actual truth is that I don’t know who fired the shots. They were fired at me, though, and not at Tony Marsh. You see I was snooping around, thinking I might find some trace of Dudley when suddenly I heard a move behind the trees. I started to dodge and run when the first shot was fired, so I kept on going while they let go the other two and when I reached the road, there was young Marsh slumped down behind the wheel.”

Hal stirred uneasily. “But why did you lie about it, Blake? If you didn’t know who it was that fired the shots—why the lie?”

Blake scowled. “Because I had my reasons not to let the police know,” he answered slowly. “Even now—even with this awful business about James, I don’t want them turned over to the police. I’ve got to find out something first—something that means a whole lot to someone I know and the only way it can be done is to get the admission from the lips of a certain scoundrel. If the law gets them first it will be too late for me.”

Hal’s head reeled. With all Blake’s admissions, with all his confidences, the mystery seemed only to deepen. So much seemed involved—so many. To penetrate the web was to weave it tighter so that the spider was free to tighten his silken threads at will. The spider?

Hal leaned forward and looked Blake straight in the eyes. “This brute who was after John,” he said weighing his words, “you think he’s the same one—the scoundrel, as you call him?”

“Sure I do, but that’s as far as I can get. I can’t be certain. The man I was to find is a certain Peter Borg who is running some sort of illegal traffic between this country and Canada. He’s a brute—he’s a fiend, from the accounts I’ve heard, but what this traffic is he runs I couldn’t tell you. The only other information I had about him is that his secret den or whatever it is, happens to be located about five or six miles from Delamere Camp, and lies just inside the cove or inlet of the lake.”

“The same route that James took yesterday morning, huh?”

“Exactly,” Blake answered. “They killed him, there’s no doubt of it and I’d have met the same fate if they had got me the other day too.”

Hal started. “That’s right! It was just about five or six miles below camp where you came upon me that day.”

“That’s where it was. And now you know about all that it’s possible for me to tell.”

Hal looked at him eagerly. “Do you mind telling me if Dudley knew all about this?”

“No, I don’t mind telling you. Of course he knew. That’s why he got the job with Marsh’s. He wanted to be at Delamere so’s he could sneak up on this Borg unaware.”

“And he probably did get the chance to do that very thing, huh?”

“At the cost of his life, Keen,” Blake answered grimly. “That’s why I came along next. But someone *has* to make Borg come across with the truth!”

Hal held his breath, ready to touch off what he thought to be the last fuse on hand. “Blake,” he said steadily, “you deliberately lied to me about your knowledge of planes. I guess if it hadn’t been for John’s desperate plight you would never have gone near this plane.”

“Not while anybody was around to see me,” Blake admitted. “I oiled her up and looked her over well last night before dinner and removed her tarpaulin so that I could take a little trip between midnight and dawn. Don’t ask me where for I won’t tell you. On my way back I meant to have a look at Borg’s place down the cove and see how large a clearing he occupied. I wanted to convince myself whether an airplane could slide in there. You see he carries on his dirty work by plane.”

“Oh,” said Hal with a new light in his deep blue eyes. “James’ disappearance spoiled it for you—spoiled the plan of your going, huh? But wouldn’t he have known it—wouldn’t someone have heard you taking off and coming back?”

Blake shook his head. “You noticed how far back from the house James kept the plane? Just far enough back that when I took off and came back again they would think it was nothing but a passing plane. You see I got the idea when James mentioned that he had heard a plane passing overhead sometime early yesterday morning. No, it wasn’t me. This was to have been my first attempt to leave the camp since I’ve been up here. I was hoping to see whether a plane would make a landing in Borg’s direction before dawn.”

Thoughts came thick and fast in Hal’s whirling brain. Doubts, accusations, wonder, all took their part in a continual procession. One thought held sway, however, and he meant not to lose hold of it. Blake kept on talking as if he must.

“You see everything might have gone right if it hadn’t been for James’ terrible luck,” he was saying. “I was figuring that he’d be back and asleep in his room by that time. He sleeps on the left side of the balcony upstairs and he sleeps like a top. Never hears anything. Neither does Mrs. Marsh despite what she says about being a light sleeper.”

“I believe that,” Hal cut in with a light laugh. “After all the bustling about the lodge we did, she must sleep pretty soundly.”

“She’s a little deaf besides,” Blake said. Then, noticing that Hal was unusually preoccupied, he said: “Don’t fall asleep, Keen, whatever you do—I’m depending on you to guide me once we get out of New York State.”

Hal glanced suspiciously at him out of the corner of his eye. “*Guide you?* What’s the idea—don’t you know the Jersey airports?”

Blake shook his head but did not raise his eyes. “I don’t know Jersey at all.”

Hal turned in the seat, squeezing poor John over into a tiny corner. “Do you mean to tell me you’ve never been down on Hadley Heights Field?” he asked.

“No,” answered Blake with a funny little cough, “I’ve heard the name but I’ve never been there.”

Somehow Hal felt chilled by this admission. Nevertheless he kept his voice steady when he said, “Well, that’s where we’re going now, Blake. It’s the nearest field to Jersey City. I live not more than fifteen miles above the airport.”

“Yes?” Blake said politely. His voice sounded hoarse. “You’ll phone this Brule from the field, I suppose?”

“Yes, that’s what I’ll do. Hope I can get him.” Then: “Listen, Blake, did you hear Connover tell me the other night about Hadley Heights Field?”

“Some of it, I heard,” Blake answered slowly. “I was lighting my pipe, I think, and stood a little way from you. Why?”

“Just that I was wondering if you heard. You know I was down at Hadley Field myself that afternoon. I made Tony stop there on our way up to the camp. I wanted to see Hank Bellair, the aviator, doing his stunts at an air circus they gave there. It ended in Bellair cracking up.”

“Yes?”

“Ever see Bellair fly?”

“No.”

“Blake,” said Hal crisply, “I think you’re lying.”

Blake levelled his eyes upon his accuser. “That’s where you’re wrong, Keen,” he said vehemently. “I’m not lying—I never saw Hank Bellair fly!”

## CHAPTER XVII

### CONFIDENCES

Hal was left somewhat puzzled but he did not have much chance to dwell upon it as he was busy guiding Blake over into Northern New Jersey for the next few minutes. They were flying straight into the dawn, gliding along in a thin, gray mist because of their low altitude.

Hal had to admit to himself that Blake acted green enough in that territory. In point of fact, he was almost ready to retract his quick accusation when another significant hint was dropped by the worried looking pilot.

“Nearing Hadley Field?” he inquired anxiously.

“Almost there,” Hal assured him. “Getting tired?”

“Guess we’re both done in when it comes to that, huh?” Blake returned a trifle wistfully. “Two nights’ sleep we’ve lost. Realize that? No, I’m tired, but that isn’t what’s on my mind. I just wanted to ask you if you’ll do the phoning for Brule and everything like that at the airport. And I’m hoping against hope that the waiting won’t be long for I’ll have to beat it if any inspectors happen to be around. You see, Keen, I haven’t any papers—nor a license. If they should ask me—I’m lost!”

Hal stared. “You mean you’re not a licensed pilot, Blake?” he asked, aghast.

“Yes, I’m licensed—that is, I was. Listen Keen, there’s no use asking me a lot of questions about it. If I had a license I wouldn’t dare show it in any quarter of the United States right now. It would be taking too great a risk. Your cue is to try and dispose of little John to his friend Brule if it’s possible. If that doesn’t work, why you must come right back and let me know and we’ll get our heads together on another plan. The main thing is to not let this bus get cold waiting. You see, I won’t get out at all. I’ll wait at a convenient spot.”

“I see,” Hal murmured, annoyed. “You’re afraid of being recognized.”

“Exactly. But look here, Keen—there’s no use in getting peeved. You know only half of it. I’m the one to be annoyed with the way the bad breaks have been coming. Believe me, I hadn’t any strong desire to come here but I couldn’t see John ... in short, I’d never have attempted it except that it’s so early and little chance of many folks being around.”

“The airports are full of government inspectors lately,” said Hal with a sudden impulse to protect Blake against exposure. “I read that in the papers. Do you think....”

“Thanks. I’ll be all right as long as I don’t have to hang around too long and leave a way for them to question me. Tell them this is Mrs. Marsh’s plane and that’s everything.”

“I’ll do it, Blake!” Hal said vehemently.

“You’ve taken this chance to help a poor fellow and I’ll take a chance with my conscience and the law to help you, no matter what it is you’ve done. Now here’s the field right ahead. You can shut her off soon’s we drop lower. See, she’s quite a big field!”

Blake’s eyes kept watch on the gauges and Hal’s heart filled with pity as he noted the worn, hunted look in them. Certainly he couldn’t have done anything so terrible! He didn’t look the part. Besides, hadn’t he spoken once about someone being innocent. Was it himself?

Hal leaned toward him. “Blake, I’ve come to a conclusion about you,” he said. “I’ve got the darndest faith in you somehow. Guess I’ve had ever since I laid eyes on you ... Oh, I know I’ve suspected you a dozen times for this and that, but at the bottom of my heart I’d fight like the dickens for you—wrong or right. My Unk would have a fit to hear me say that—the law comes first with him. So it does with me, but there are instances when I’m not blind to the fact that the law isn’t always right. Anyway, I just want you to know that nobody can ever make me tell what you’ve told me so far. I give you my word. And I’ll watch out once we land and give you a signal if I think anything’s going wrong for you. I’ll wave three times and you go back without me. I can go home and get my flivver and come up later.”

Blake didn’t speak immediately. He nodded thankfully and smiled, then set about circling the vast brown field below. He shut off the motor and guided the plane into an easy glide and turned her twice before they were able to taxi across the hard, frozen ground.

Except for two planes, the great airport seemed deserted and here and there a light could be seen in the scattered buildings. Certainly they seemed secure enough from curious, unfriendly eyes and as the plane came to a dead stop, Blake put out his hand to Hal.

“This is on your faith in me, Keen,” he said with a ring of feeling in his voice. “If I have to beat it—I want to thank you for your sporting words. I’ve been a sort of coward about things, but no criminal.”

Hal smiled. “I’ve got a hunch that you’re aces up even in your past.”

“A past that wouldn’t bear inspection here, though,” Blake said a little fearfully. “So hurry, huh? I’d flounder if they asked me who I was and where I came from.”

Hal laughed and got up. “Who *are* you and where *did* you come from?” he asked lightly, not really expecting an answer.

But Blake took him up and answered in a clear, cold voice.

“I’m Blake Ames,” he said. “And to satisfy your curiosity, I’m an escaped convict from Dorian, Texas.”



## CHAPTER XVIII

### SUSPENSE

Hal was still in a daze when a sleepy looking pilot directed him to the nearest phone. It was in an outer office in the main building and to this he went, guiding the silent and smiling John along with him.

He noticed as they entered the building that it was quite deserted except for a few sleepy attendants. Blake's chances so far looked good. He hurried to the business on hand thanking Providence as he succeeded in finding Brule's name in the telephone book.

He was quite annoyed, however, a few minutes later, when he began talking to Brule, to find that the mechanics and attendants had come out of their early morning coma and were listening intently to every word he was saying. He had no choice but to talk on, for the phone was inconveniently placed out in the open room.

To add to his annoyance, Brule seemed not to understand for some minutes, speaking thickly as if he had been awakened out of sound sleep. The saving grace in the situation was that Brule could actually speak English!

Hal persisted. He described John minutely and explained their finding of him and his pitiable state. He could not tell Brule what the little man's name was. But suddenly he had the brilliant idea of handing the phone over to John himself.

It worked! John had the receiver in his hand only a moment when he cried out with a heart-appelling cry of gladness, then plunged into an interminable talk in his native tongue. At intervals he would turn to Hal and smile gratefully. Finally he motioned him to take up the receiver again.

Brule shouted joyfully at the sound of Hal's voice.

"He is my cousin, Pierre Fausse, from Brittany!" he shouted. "Ah, he has been terribly treated, my frien', an' I am much thankful for you to bring him away from that Borg butcher!"

So, it *was* Borg! Hal murmured that he was doing nothing but a human kindness.

Brule protested that it was more than that. He would not delay. He would be out at the airport in his car in a few minutes. Not more than twenty anyway! Suddenly he lowered his voice.

"My frien', you have not say nothing to nobody about my cousin yet, eh?"

“No,” said Hal.

“Then please don’!” pleaded Brule. “You do dis one more kindness for my cousin, eh? You see, he might get in trouble wiz ze government,” he added darkly.

Hal promised and put back the receiver. What next? Now the government! And there was Blake—Blake Ames sitting out there in the plane, waiting fearfully—an escaped convict! Was there anything more unlawful that he could let himself in for?

Aiding and abetting criminals and lawbreakers of all kinds—that’s what his uncle would say.

Nevertheless he disregarded that momentary twinge and looked about to make sure that the field was clear for Blake. No one had asked more than the usual questions and it was an easy thing to put an end to the attendants’ curiosity about Fausse for he marched him outdoors to await Brule’s arrival. No one would follow them there—it was too cold.

Hal smoked at intervals and exchanged violent gestures with Fausse who was now happy to the point of delirium. A quarter of an hour passed and soon mechanics began drifting along to their day’s work. A plane rumbled out of the west and after making a few graceful spirals, glided around preparatory to landing.

Hal observed immediately that it was a government plane and felt not a little tightening around his heart when it stopped. Two men climbed down from its cabin and the pilot trailed after them, his papers in his hand, all three coming straight toward the main building.

Hal took Fausse’s arm and walked him casually away toward the roadway. The men, however, were deeply intent upon their conversation and paid no attention to the pair, disappearing into the building.

Certainly it was nothing to be apprehensive about, yet Hal did not feel at ease from that moment on. The attendants and mechanics had all heard his conversation with Brule—they were probably talking about it yet. Fausse’s deplorable appearance alone was enough to inspire talk!

“I’m borrowing trouble,” he told himself with a grin. “What *could* they get out of my conversation with Brule anyway? I said—what did I say? Oh yes. Nothing but that we’d found him below the camp and that he couldn’t talk English. What else ... oh, that I’d brought him down because I thought he was the victim of a lawless gang! Oh, oh, oh....”

Here he stopped to berate himself for having a loose tongue. Of all things, he shouldn’t have mentioned the word *gang*, and he realized it immediately. Of all the words in the English language it was the one to attract the most attention when spoken at the time and under the circumstances that he had just spoken it. He could have said enemies—

anything but what he had said, instead of tempting Fate when Blake feared the first chance stranger that might approach.

Ten minutes passed, however, and nothing happened. Hal's spirits rose again despite the sickly sun that gave but little cheer and warmth to the new day. A cold, damp mist rose from the surrounding meadows. It seemed that Brule would never come.

Fausse was not losing heart, he noticed. But then he was evidently happily anticipating his meeting with his cousin. Certainly it was *something* to deliver him out of Borg's hands. The thought brought Hal back to the immediate present.

The thing to do was to find out about Borg and Brule was the one to tell him everything, he thought. But to take the time to stand and talk with Brule, while the government plane was there, with the unpleasant memory of his careless phone revelation—it seemed dangerous. Blake had too much at stake!

Fausse uttered a little cry of pleasure presently as a new looking sedan came bumping along the rough road. Hal realized that it was Brule and some seventh sense prompted him to take out of his vest pocket one of his visiting cards and scrawl on it his address and phone number at Delamere Camp.

Brule stopped the sedan and with all the fervor of his race took his cousin into his arms, kissing him on either cheek and crying alternately. Then with equal enthusiasm he turned to Hal and poured out a volley of thanks, accompanied by whispered hints of reward.

Hal smiled deprecatingly and, with caution uppermost in mind, thrust his card into Brule's hand. "You see, I've got to hurry back," he explained. "Write or call me up and tell me why this Borg kept your cousin John—I mean your cousin Pierre in such captivity—why he kept him there at all! It means a lot for me to know, Brule, so let me hear from you, huh?"

Brule promised if Meester Keen would not get into trouble his cousin, Pierre. "They put him out of country," he said in parting.

"All right," Hal promised, half-hearing in his haste to get away. "Only let me hear from you."

He leaned in the sedan, gave Fausse a handclasp and a smile and was off. He did not know it but he was almost running and unconsciously steered clear of the airport's main building, veering off more than three hundred feet from it.

He was on the field when he heard a call and his heart skipped a beat or two as he realized that he hadn't heard it clearly.

Someone had simply yelled, "*Hey, there!*" If it was meant for him he did not know it. Suddenly the voice called louder.

“Hey, you from the Adirondacks!” came the voice. “I want to talk to you!”

Blake had turned on his starter and presently there was a roar. Hal’s legs felt queer and hollow and though the plane wasn’t ten feet away he seemed an age getting to it and into the cabin. If the fellow was still calling him, he had the satisfaction of not being able to hear it.

Hardly had he secured the cabin door behind him when he felt the plane moving under him. Blake had already started! Hal peered out of the window nearest him and got a swift glimpse of several figures moving out from the airport’s main building and coming toward them across the field. But they were too late!

The plane had cast off the shackles of earth and was flying up, up into God’s free air!

## CHAPTER XIX

### SPEED

Hal reeled excitedly up into the cockpit. Blake nodded worriedly but did not speak, keeping his attention upon the immediate business of getting the plane out of sight of the airport as quickly as possible.

“Did you hear them call after me, Blake?” Hal asked a little abashed.

Blake nodded. “That’s why I started her. Lucky I did. Look back down there, Keen—isn’t that someone starting out after us—that government plane?”

Hal felt a lump in his throat. “It’s that plane all right, Blake, but why do you say they’re after us?”

“I hope they’re not, but why did they call after you like that?” Blake returned tonelessly. “Did you, by any chance, let anything slip, Keen?”

Hal threw himself down in the mechanic’s seat opposite and admitted that he might possibly have said too much to Brule in the hearing of others.

“I never thought how that gang business would sound,” he explained apologetically. “I never thought at the time that it would rouse the curiosity of the fellows sitting around, but I sensed that it did when I walked out with Fausse. Gee whiz, Blake, I didn’t mean to bring unwelcome attention on you especially through a fool word like that. *Gosh!*”

The airport was out of sight and Blake guided the plane up above the cold mist. A cluster of northern New Jersey towns lay below and soon they too were lost to view and Hal espied the graceful slopes of his own Ramapos with their undulating hills rising out of the southeast. He would have liked to point out the shining white streets of his native town, Ramapo, and the eminence above the village where his home was situated but he had not the courage to break the silence that Blake was keeping.

When he could stand it no longer he said, “Good and sore at me, aren’t you, Blake?”

Blake started and smiled. “Sore? You’re crazy, Keen! No, of course I’m not sore. You couldn’t help a slip like that, especially when you were having the devil’s own time trying to make Brule understand your English.”

“But I could have....” Hal began.

“Never mind, now. All we have to do is to get this bird clear out of sight of our pursuers.”

Hal straightened up. “*Pursuers?*”

“Look behind you! See that white speck? That’s them and there isn’t any maybe but what they’re following. They knew you came from the Adirondacks—Mrs. Marsh’s?”

“Yes, I told them,” Hal admitted fearfully. “But that’s what you told me....”

“Yes, I know. You *had* to. Don’t worry, they’ll never find that camp from the air. It takes one two or three times to pick it out. I was up with James last week and couldn’t find it until the third time. Besides, luck is with us, I think. Sun’s going down—notice? And look, Keen; it’s snowing.”

“That’s the first good news I’ve heard. Anything I can do?”

“Yes. Poke out your head every once in a while and tell me how they’re progressing, will you?”

Hal obediently took his place in one of the forward seats. The sun seemed to have set under the gathering storm clouds and as he opened the window and looked out, the biting wind and flying snow lashed his face and had the effect of temporarily refreshing him. His eyes were heavy with sleep.

“Want to let me handle her for a little way?” he asked Blake. “Go back and sit down by that window and wake yourself up. It’s great! I can keep my eye on the compass and not get off the course.”

“Due north,” warned Blake. “A couple of good deep breaths and it will keep me going until we sail down behind camp.”

Hal slipped into his seat and soon got the feel of the air. He was glad of the chance—it kept his drowsy senses alert, and there was a thrill in “giving her all the gas” he could at the sudden commands of his companion.

Their pursuers had not yet lost track of them despite the fact that they had left the New Jersey line before they passed over his home town of Ramapo. That was in New York State. Now Albany was in sight—just ahead.

Blake left the window and came forward. “Do you know, Keen,” he said, “I don’t like this! We’ve got to lose them before we go much further.”

Hal nodded. “The snow’s getting thicker, that’s one thing.”

“I know, but they’ve probably got more speed in that bus than we have in this. Come on, let me handle her again. I’ll see what I can do to help her vanish into the north.”

Hal relinquished his control and began pacing back and forth from cabin to cockpit. At intervals he would stop at the window and look fearfully to see what progress the pursuing plane was making. He was decidedly worried after they left the snow-covered town of Albany behind, to see that they had not yet eluded their pursuers.

After some time of morbid contemplation, he rushed into the cockpit. “Blake, is there a ’chute or two around this bus?”

“A half dozen or more,” Blake responded. “Why?”

“Don’t laugh at me, but I’ve got a hunch,” answered Hal.

Blake *did* laugh. “That we’re going to be caught?” he asked.

“Nope,” Hal admitted in all seriousness, “I got a feeling we ought to have a ’chute on—both of us. Where are they?”

“Back in the storeroom—in the tail,” Blake answered with a ghost of a smile on his lips. “Put one on if it’ll make you feel better, Keen. I don’t want one. They’re too pesky when a fellow’s trying to make a bus like this give all she’s got.”

Hal made a hurried trip back to the tail and with characteristic persistence rejoined Blake with two parachutes. They were already approaching the rugged peaks of the Adirondacks. He put one on, adjusting it carefully.

“Now,” said he, when that was accomplished, “I’ve got one here for you, Blake. You’ve *got* to put it on!”

Blake protested a little but eventually gave in, letting Hal take his place for the time.

“When you get an idea in your head, it certainly stays put, doesn’t it, Keen?” he said with a quiet smile. “Where do these famous hunches of yours come from?”

“Search me,” Hal replied, again relinquishing the control. “All of a sudden it popped into my head that we ought to have on ’chutes. I’d have been in misery the rest of the way if I hadn’t obeyed the impulse. That’s all I can tell you about my hunches. Funny, I didn’t have one thought like that coming down. I could see us landing in Hadley Heights Field just as neat as anything.”

“But somehow you can’t visualize us coming down so neatly at Delamere Camp, huh?” Blake queried with a soft chuckle.

“You’re right, Blake. I can’t. Suppose you think I’m just plain cuckoo, huh?”

“I certainly do. But now that we’re encased in these things, we’ll make the best of it. Just take a look and see if our friends are near enough for us to call yoo-hoo!”

Hal peered out into the howling storm, fearfully. He could not see them, but then the storm was too thick. Now they could not know whether or not they were still being pursued. It was as hard one way as the other and their only hope, he realized, was to put sufficient distance between them so that the pursuers could not sneak up on them while they were trying to find the

camp. In such weather as that Blake would have a difficult time finding it himself, particularly in the daylight.

He hurried up into the cockpit and was startled to see the look with which Blake greeted him. Too, there was a peculiar sputtering sound that he could not seem to place.

“Hear it?” Blake asked him hoarsely.

“That noise?”

“Yes,” answered the other as if he were delivering an ultimatum. “*Engine trouble*—that’s what!”



## CHAPTER XX ULTIMATUM

“Can I help you do anything?” Hal asked, realizing how hopelessly ignorant he was about a plane.

“No, thanks,” Blake answered, busy at the control board. “Don’t think I can do much myself. James had a little trouble with it last week. That’s why he took me up to try it out. Seemed all right then.”

“What’ll we do about it, then?” Hal persisted.

“If it keeps up, we’ll have to make a forced landing. Else it might sputter and go out for good. Notice how she stays out longer each time she does go?”

The admission that he did notice it contributed nothing to Hal’s peace of mind.

“See where we are, Blake?” he asked. “Not far from camp—we can’t be, huh?”

“I’d have to go down some to find out and I’m even afraid to put that strain on her if we have to climb again. From what I can see,” he said glancing apprehensively through the window at his elbow, “we’re in the heart of things.”

“Mm, the heart of the mountains,” Hal said grimly. “Think you can’t trust yourself to take a dive, huh?”

For a few breathtaking seconds the sputter had stopped and nothing but the whine of the storm could be heard. Then she started again and Blake shook his head gloomily. With each passing second he glanced anxiously from the window.

Hal sat down, then got up again. “Maybe it’ll wear off, huh?” He tried to sound cheerful but found it pretty difficult.

Blake ran his fingers through his black hair. “Guess we’ll wear off if we don’t land on something solid soon. There isn’t time to turn back and take a chance that way. Listen to her?”

Hal wished he hadn’t the sense of hearing that was peculiarly his. Even to his untrained ear, he could pick out the hissing throbs as the revolutions of the motor lessened. Suddenly Blake took hold.

“I’ll take a chance and break through the worst of it,” he said determinedly. “Just a little dive and then maybe we can see where we are.” With a click he shut off the motor and pointed the nose of the plane earthward.

Hal held his breath, all thoughts of the pursuing plane forgotten. They seemed to take an interminable time to make the dive and as they rushed down it looked as if the snow was coming up to them. Then at last they flew out at an even keel and the blessed sight of green appeared from the mountains below. The storm had not yet done more than spread a thin covering of white on the frowning slopes.

Blake seemed to be getting some response again and Hal was hopeful. Still there was nothing in sight to give them the slightest encouragement to land, nothing but one jagged precipice after another and mile after mile of thick forest.

Hal sighed. "Aren't we anywhere near camp?"

"Haven't come to Hightown yet," replied the other grimly. "Nowhere near it that I can tell."

Then, after a particularly long silence on the part of the missing engine, Blake turned to Hal. "Listen, Keen—in three minutes it'll be either the plane dropping with us or without us. Which shall it be?"

"Let it drop without us!" Hal declared.

"All right," Blake said between set teeth, "I'll let her climb again so we can give her a wide berth when we jump." He leaned over, gave his stick a tug, then jumped up. "There—*come!*"

They rushed to the door. Hal hesitated for half a second. "If we lose each other, make a smudge signal, Blake. I'll do the same. *So long!*"

He jumped blindly into the storm and Blake followed after.

## CHAPTER XXI

### ALONE

There is nothing sweeter in the world than the peace of mind that is born of the knowledge that one's parachute has opened satisfactorily. At least that was Hal's opinion that early morning when he felt the grateful buoyancy of the wind under the 'chute. He was dropping at an alarming rate, but at least he was dropping to safety somewhere.

Once he thought he caught a glimpse of Blake, but that was all. The wind was freakish. He would just have to trust to luck that they would land not too far apart. Of the plane, he hadn't seen or heard a thing. It might have gone on climbing, doomed to climb into eternity for all he was aware. Certainly it hadn't fallen anywhere about him and he hoped that Blake had been as fortunate.

The earth was rushing up—the mountains! Forest after forest seemed to pass by his reeling head until he felt that he had swooned. Then he had the sensation of being carried along instead of down and soon after that he heard a gentle swish and felt a tug at his body.

He opened his eyes, alarmed, and saw that his 'chute had become caught upon the topmost limb of a fir tree. He was hanging in mid-air almost, but by kicking out his feet, he managed to swing over to a branch. He sought to balance himself in order to get clear of his belt, but it took a great deal of patience and more than ten minutes as he observed by his wrist watch.

The tree, like most fir trees, grew its lowest branches almost twenty feet from the ground. Hal looked down skeptically. He would have to slide and the bark was rough and dry. And to discourage him further, he seemed to be in the thick of the forest with no path or trail in sight.

It took him several minutes more to decide upon it and when his numb feet slid down onto solid ground he was pierced through each trouser leg by the briars and prickly creepers growing about on all sides. For a moment he stood, disheartened, and wondered if Blake had encountered such a landing place.

"Still," he thought, "things could have been worse. We could have plunged."

He smiled at the recollection of his timely hunch and set forth through the dry, crackling thicket. After going a few feet he thought of Blake again and called loudly, thinking that if they had come down near enough to each other, his voice might be heard.

Blake did not answer, however, but somehow Hal did not expect him to just then. It was too much to hope. The snow seemed to have stopped falling, but the woods were so thick that he could not be sure.

He plunged along, stopping now and then to peer up into the gray heavens. At last he convinced himself that the storm had stopped and hadn't amounted to anything after all. But still the sun seemed loath to show itself and that meant disaster to Hal for he had a poor sense of direction and was counting on the sun to help him out of his difficulties.

After a time of weary plodding he turned and tried to recall the direction from which he had come, but he soon gave it up as impossible. There was nothing he could do but keep on going and as for finding Blake, he knew it was futile to try while he was still in the forest. He could only hope that Blake would find shelter and rest and food sooner than he.

He did not allow himself to think about sleep for his eyes seemed weighted down at the least thought of it. And food? He hadn't eaten a morsel since dinner last night, but that might as well have been ages ago for he couldn't have felt any hungrier.

The question of shelter entered very much into his thoughts—he wasn't dressed to meet the requirements of a November day in the Adirondacks. He had just slipped on a light suede jacket for the flight to Hadley Field and he soon began to feel the piercing north wind blowing against his body. Still it would be worse if he had been lost in the open country and he tried to content himself with that thought.

He remembered that Blake, too, was lightly clothed for such an adventure as they had plunged into. But evidently Fate took no account of such things as that. Hal grinned and it was that never failing sense of humor of his that kept up his spirits throughout the long, weary hours of the morning.

He was still in the deep forest at noon-time and was at the point of despair when a friendly squirrel hopped down the trunk of a tree opposite. It sat on its haunches and looked him over quizzically, then scampered away.

Hal went to the tree and after foraging around for a moment, found a hole through which he could put his hand. He smiled as he felt what he had been looking for and with a chuckle brought out a small fistful of nuts.

“Can't help it, Squirry, old boy,” he said whimsically, “but when a guy like little Hal gets hungry—man alive, he's hungry!”

There was little satisfaction in the stolen food, however. The nuts were rather dry and the shells so hard to crack that he started a tooth aching and he went on in disgust. No one, he told himself, could ever convince him that it was possible to live long and comfortably on what one found in the woods. Not in winter anyhow!

At two o'clock in the afternoon he was exhausted and still in the woods! Despairingly he looked about and spied a goodly pile of clean, dry leaves and without another thought of anything but the immediate present he went over to it and flung himself down.

Little by little, he burrowed into the pile until the warmth of his body had made it a fairly comfortable blanket. A woodpecker looked saucily down at him from a neighboring pine but he only grinned back sleepily, and when the energetic little creature went to work with his constant tap, tapping, Hal was already sound asleep.

The afternoon waned and the premature twilight of the forest settled down about the sleeping young man. He would have been quite startled to know that a wildcat, having freshly risen from his day's sleep, stopped before the mound of leaves and inspected the sleeper quite curiously. Suddenly, however, Hal opened his generous mouth emitting a loud snore, which sent the stealthy animal scampering upon its travels.

Hal slept on into the dusk and only vaguely remembered waking then. After that all was a blank to him save the subconscious knowledge that the denizens of the mountain forests passed him occasionally in the heavy darkness and stopped to sniff about with true animal curiosity, then went peacefully about their own pursuits.

And so the night passed.

## CHAPTER XXII

### HUNGER AND....

Hal woke with a start and with a feeling of guilt next morning to find a mere slit of golden sunshine struggling through the forest. He jumped to his feet and spent a few moments trying to get the blood in circulation through his cramped, numb limbs.

His first thought was of food and the next thought was of Blake. At least the sun was in his favor and he set about planning his journey from its direction. He laughed aloud at himself as he turned this way and that in order to find the north.

He glanced at his watch. It was eight o'clock. Long past breakfast time at Delamere Camp, he thought. He tried lighting his pipe, but it proved a fiasco on an empty stomach. Then for the next two hours he trudged, hardly taking his eyes from the sunlit sky above. He stumbled and almost fell two or three times, simply because he wasn't looking where he was going, but he was not discouraged.

Perhaps that preoccupation with the sun was the reason that he had been walking along a trail for some seconds before he was even aware that he had left the forest! He laughed heartily and shouted for joy and before the echo had died he sent two more cries into the wilderness for Blake. When that brought no answer he bethought himself of his promised smudge signal.

By three o'clock that afternoon, he had made four different smudge fires in four different sections of the lower slope. He built the fifth immediately upon reaching the next level but went about it half-heartedly. He was now too hungry to care much what came or went if only he could have something to eat—anything!

Trudging back and forth into the forest for damp leaves he thought he heard the distant sound of a footstep. He had just come out from between the trees, but as it came nearer, he stepped back again, fearing that it might be some unfriendly person. Suppose, after all, that he should be in the vicinity of Borg's camp or that of someone equally lawless?

He waited, hardly daring to stir, lest he should betray his presence and so the footfalls were already going past him when he saw that it was Blake, trudging by aimlessly.

"Blake!" he yelled and rushed out of his hiding place.

Blake simply turned and smiled as if he were not greatly surprised. "You, Keen?" he said rather thickly.

Hal looked at him, puzzled. “Why—er—you don’t seem ... what’s wrong, Blake. Aren’t you glad to see me? Gee whiz, I’ve been in the forest down below. Lost! Looking for you ever since this morning. Was just going to make another smudge.”

“Don’t bother now,” said Blake queerly. “I found a shack with no roof. Slept there ... came out looking.”

“For me?” asked Hal.

Blake stared at him with feverish-looking eyes.

Hal understood all at once. “You’re sick, fellow,” he said quickly. “My gosh! You look sick.”

Blake nodded wearily. “Got a cold on my chest. I’m all kind of hot and cold. Where’s a drink of water?”

Hal’s heart went out to him. “First, Blake—where’s this shack without a roof?”

Blake smiled vaguely and Hal realized that he was bordering on delirium. He put his arm about the young man’s shoulder and started him toward the west. That was in the direction of Hightown.

They never did find the shack without a roof. Hal believes to this day that Blake never found such a place but simply spoke of it as a figment of his delirium. Be that as it might, sunset found them still struggling along and Blake getting worse with every hour. At length they halted.

“No more, do you hear!” said Hal. “We’ll duck in the woods and gather up some leaves and sleep as I did last night. It’s better than nothing.”

Blake was too sick to protest, but sank down in the makeshift bed that Hal provided and was soon breathing with that long-drawn snore that is caused by lung congestion. He didn’t stir again until nearly morning.

Hal slept little. The hunger he felt was akin to pain and it was only his fear of Blake’s serious condition that kept him from thinking too much about himself. What to do he did not know and he waited anxiously for the sun to rise upon another day. A day of what?

He had no idea where they were. It was all wilderness to him and he had no desire to sleep another night in it. What rest he had had was continually disturbed by the hooting of owls and the howling of beasts. He was chilled to the bone and he felt a premonition of certain disaster if he didn’t find some help before the coming day was over.

While Blake had been sleeping during the night, he had traversed the trail as far as he dared go, hoping against hope that it would lead to some other trail—a trail into civilization. But apparently it didn’t. Now in the light of day, another day, there might be hope....

He stood up and limped out to the trail once again. Dejected and unkempt with his ragged red beard and disheveled hair, he strode a few feet

west and stopped to look through a little gorge that was visible from where he stood. To his utter joy he could see beyond it a motor car lumbering lazily up over a roadway.

Greatly excited he turned and saw a narrow fork in the trail that most certainly led down to the road. Why hadn't he seen that the night before? Just his luck, he thought, and ran back for Blake.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### TONY AND NEWS

It took considerable time and patience to get Blake even to his feet. He was unwilling, it seemed, to go further and protested incoherently at leaving a soft, warm bed. Hal realized that he had discovered the road none too soon and he hoped that another car would appear when they reached it.

It was up to him most of the way to bear Blake's weight and their progress was very slow. But when finally they stumbled out onto the well-worn road the certainty came to him instantly that they were within a stone's throw of Hightown village, for the little white building down the road to the right with the bright red across its front windows was unmistakably the hospital.

Hal urged Blake on tenderly, chagrined that he had been within calling distance of help and relief all that time without knowing it. As he glanced back it was borne in upon him that a few lessons in scout lore would benefit him greatly, for the forest on the lower slope in which he had wandered so many hours ran to the right of the back road which he and Tony had taken going up to camp that first day. And almost on the edge of the woods a tell-tale bit of white fluttered from the top of a big tree—his parachute! What was more, singularly, another 'chute floated its silken fabric from a tree directly above on the next level where he had found Blake the previous day.

They had been within calling distance of each other! But the wind and the storm, perhaps, had drowned out their cries. Certainly as far as Hal could recall there had been nothing but a tomblike silence until he heard the welcome sound of Blake's footsteps.

A car stood just outside the long, rambling hospital building and as Hal and Blake approached two figures came from the doorway, and walked toward it. Suddenly one of the two hesitated, and as he turned to watch the two unkempt looking young men trailing down the road, Hal could see that his left shoulder bulged considerably.

He uttered a weak cry. It was Tony! "Tony," he repeated to the dazed and muttering Blake. "What luck! Here he's just getting ready to start back for camp!"

Tony shouted too and before Hal could gather his reeling senses, it seemed that they had been surrounded by doctors and nurses—the whole hospital staff! Tony's doctor took charge of them almost bodily and escorted them indoors.

Hal refused to lie down and rest. He asked nothing more, he said, than to wash his face and comb his hair and be given a good breakfast. “With a tub full of steaming hot coffee,” he laughed. He consented, however, to sit quietly and relax while the meal was being prepared.

Tony sat by in the hospital reception room and smiled with relief. “Grandmother’s been scared out of her wits, Hal,” he said. “She said she’d rather lose a dozen planes than have anything happen to you. They’ve been waiting on pins and needles up there, she and Mary. Yes, I know all about James ... it’s awful! Mary didn’t let grandmother know about it, though. She’s got all his belongings out of the house and shipped them to his brother, the only relative the poor guy had. Well...”

“What’s the doctor got to say about Blake?” Hal interposed anxiously.

“Lung congestion and exposure, but he’ll probably be all right,” Tony answered. “Don’t get yourself all worked up by telling me how it all happened—that can go till later. The doctor said it’s lucky *you’re* not flat on your back too!”

“You can’t kill me,” Hal laughed cheerfully. “Look at all the good campus food I’ve been getting for the past month or so, huh? Just the same I’d never want to live these two days over again. It was torture and worse to see Blake in such an awful condition. That’s what kept me going—just watching him. I knew I had to keep my head about me. But boy, when I saw that road!” Then: “Tell me, Tony, is Blake’s condition serious?”

“Rather,” Tony admitted, “but the doctor says he’ll pull out with flying colors. He’s got good heart action. Another day in the wilds, though, and things might not have gone so well with him, huh?”

“Next summer, I’m going to turn back the clock and be a boy scout for a few weeks,” Hal said laughingly. “Gee whiz, I had to wait a whole day because the sun wasn’t out—didn’t know which way to turn. East, west, north and south—they all looked alike to me. And hungry! Boy, do I smell coffee?”

“You do,” Tony assured him. “They’re getting the chef to make it up per orders. You won’t do a thing to a meal, will you?” Then: “You say you and Blake landed so near to one another?”

“We might have landed at the two poles for all we knew that day. Guess Blake must have started in with that terrible cold when we left camp. I noticed he was awfully hoarse. He’s had some tough breaks, Tony. Darn nice chap. Think they’ll be good to him here?”

“And how!” exclaimed Tony vehemently. “If they don’t they’ll have grandmother to answer to. She’ll demand lots, and more besides that! She thought it was a swell thing for him to volunteer to fly that foreigner down. No, she didn’t know he could handle a plane, but she says if she ever found

him he could start right in where poor James left off. She thinks he simply walked out a.w.o.l.”

“James?”

“Yes, it’s better so. Collins drove her down here to the hospital yesterday. Mary was with them too. Good old scout, Mary.”

Hal pursed his lips. “You say Collins drove her down here?”

“Yes. Kind of him, huh? Grandmother begged him to stay with her when you and Blake didn’t show up that day. She was all in a stew, believe me. Collins was only too tickled to stay I guess. She says he did nothing but sleep. Lot of company! Nevertheless, he’s a typical Hightown breed, slow, easy-going, but honest. He told me on the quiet and so did Mary that he was going to make it pretty hot for these pot-shooting hunters roaming around here.”

“*Hunters*, did you say, Tony?” Hal asked, amazed.

“Mm. That was the verdict given at the inquest. Coroner corroborated it. Why, what’s wrong about that, Hal? What makes you look so funny?”

“*Funny?*” Hal repeated. “I shouldn’t look funny the way I’m feeling right now. *I should look awful!*”

## CHAPTER XXIV

### HAL HAS PLANS

Hal insisted upon going back to camp with Tony after he had eaten. The doctor announced that he would not be able to go, for he wanted to be near Blake where he could see him at intervals. Consequently the two young men prepared to make the journey in a borrowed car.

“We can bring it down tomorrow,” Tony assured one of the interns who had loaned the car. Then turning to Hal, he said: “I’ll call grandmother and let her know the best and the worst.”

“The best about us and the worst about the plane, huh?” Hal flung after him.

Tony smiled when he came away from the telephone. “Doesn’t give a fig about the plane, she told me to tell you. She wants to buy a bigger and better one anyway and says that Blake will have to take her up in it on the try-out. Got great faith in him, you know that? Wants us to bring her down tomorrow so she can visit him. Nobody like grandmother.”

“Nobody that I’ve heard of,” Hal agreed as they started away. “Anyway, most people *would* have faith in Blake. But I’m satisfied he’ll get along. And now for camp and sleep, huh?”

“Mm, you must just be half dead, Hal.”

“I was before that gallon of coffee passed through my hands. Now I feel as if I’m sitting on top of the world, all except for a good bath and a shave. I remind myself of a hermit when he first starts to hermit-ize.” He laughed. “How’re you feeling yourself, Tony?”

“Great, except for my sore shoulder. The doctor wouldn’t let me stir until yesterday afternoon and that’s when I made him. Couldn’t stick around much longer after hearing about you not being found. Gosh, I thought sure you had cracked up with the plane. By the way, there’s been no word of it. Where do you suppose it landed?”

“We should worry now,” Hal answered. “There wasn’t time to think or care. It was a case of every man for himself. Listen, Tony—have you seen the papers? Yesterday’s or today’s?”

“Nope. Why?”

“I’ll let you in on something, but it won’t be more than a little until Blake gives me permission to tell you. I’m in his confidence about something. But the main point is, a government plane chased us clear from Hadley Field until after we passed Albany. Then the snow got too thick for

us to see whether it had fallen behind or not. You see, Blake warned me not to answer questions too much and when a fellow called me back from the main airport building that morning, I let on I didn't hear him. I was too nervous for Blake's sake."

"A government plane?" Tony repeated. "Why, the doctor told me about that. They reported you had taken off from Hadley just before they did, but that they lost sight of you because they made a landing just beyond Albany. They weren't chasing you! At least it didn't sound as if they were, for they simply responded when grandmother had an alarm sent out for you night before last. Whoever called you mightn't have wanted anything more than a friendly chat. Trouble was you had a guilty conscience, huh? What about it?"

"Most likely. But that's done and I'm not sorry. There's still a lot of loose threads in this business, do you know that? To begin with, I'll tell you some surprising little details about your slow, easy-going and honest Constable Collins."

He plunged into a recital of Collins' probable duplicity, pointing out how easily he had managed to persuade them that night to watch in the darkness and how soon after that the man Blake supposed to be Borg had come to the door. He concluded with a denunciation of the constable for hiding the true cause of James' death.

"Don't you see it, Tony!" he said excitedly. "Collins is in with that gang and this last account clinches it. He doesn't dare hint that it might have been murder, for he doesn't have backbone enough. The state police and too many others would drag him into it and he knows it. Besides, I doubt if the gang would let him live long enough to report it honestly. I told him that Blake and I saw those powder marks, but I sensed then that he was beginning to hedge. He was fairly shivering with fright that night. Didn't expect the big boss to go as far as murdering an innocent man like James, that's about the size of it."

Tony swung the car up around the last bend, smiling. "Hal, you're a corker," he said. "I'd never have doped it out that way, but leave it to you. Still, what can be done? Even if you do stand head and shoulders above most human beings, it doesn't say that you wouldn't prove a good mark for this supposed Borg guy. Sounds to me like some sort of racketeering and Collins was just unfortunate to get in their clutches, that's all."

"But a man doesn't get in the clutches of such people unless he shows some sign of dishonesty himself," Hal reminded him. "He's been foolish and dishonest enough to take some pay for overlooking something he shouldn't overlook. That's about the size of it. That's the way they all start in, Unk tells me. Then look out! Once in, they never get out. Still I can't help

Collins' hard luck one way or the other. He'll have to take what's coming when it does come. I know that I intend a coup on this Borg wherever his place is and I've got a darn good plan. You see, Tony, there isn't any good calling the police in till we find out what the man's been doing—get a confession from him some way, or in police parlance, catch him with the goods, huh?"

Tony grinned. "Why on earth are you wasting your time studying engineering? Your uncle ought to be here now and listen to some modern methods of sleuthing."

Hal shrugged his shoulders. "He'd laugh me down just the same as Connover did the other night. He'd tell me too that I ought to go back to reading fairy stories. Oh, I know Unk."

"But believe me," said Tony admiringly, "he doesn't know you. Not as I do, anyhow, Hal."

And for the second time that week Hal drove into Delamere Camp with Tony.

## CHAPTER XXV

### MR. BORG

As they drove toward the camp they saw by the ornate looking car parked in the driveway that there was a visitor. Hal determined to go to his room and get some sleep no matter who it was and Tony admitted too that he'd like nothing better than to go about as he pleased without feeling he had to entertain.

But all these plans were set roughly aside when Mrs. Marsh met them smilingly at the doorway and announced her visitor. "A man who wants to buy the camp," she explained almost gaily. "He likes the location so well and says he isn't a bit superstitious about the recent worries we've had here."

"*Grandmother!*" Tony chided her. "You won't sell it? Tell me you won't sell it! After all these years—gee whiz, I promised Hal we were going to have a regular time together up here next summer!"

"But we can get another camp, Tony," said the old lady gently. "We can get another camp where the atmosphere won't be quite so depressing—where it won't be so far away from the heart of things. This wilderness and mystery!"

At that juncture all three walked into the living room and Hal was startled to see a very short man with a peculiar face standing beside the fireplace. He had sharp features though small, with beadlike eyes, and his hair was sparse and straggling, reminding one as it fell a little over his pockmarked forehead of a rodent. Hal always afterward thought of him as "the rat."

He bowed very graciously and Mrs. Marsh smilingly introduced him. "Mr. Borg," she said proudly, "my grandson and his college chum, Mr. Hal Keen. Hal's uncle, you know, is the famous federal detective, Denis Keen."

Mr. Borg was bowing stiffly, and Hal had to catch himself quickly so that he might not betray his feelings. His face felt hot and cold all at once and he could hear Tony gasping beside him. He put out one of his long arms and wound it about his chum's neck, giving him a soft, significant pinch.

"So!" Mr. Borg was saying in an unusually high pitched voice. "So, your grandson don't want you should give up this camp, eh?"

Mrs. Marsh smiled. "Tony loves it so here. So does Hal, but...."

Hal cleared his throat. "I think it would be a darn good thing for you to sell out here, Mrs. Marsh," he said like a thunderbolt. "Darn good thing, if

you ask me.”

Tony started again, but Hal quickly silenced him with another pinch.

Mr. Borg’s smile widened fifty degrees. “So, the young Mr. Keen is a sensible young man, eh?”

“Well,” said Hal forcing a grin, “I don’t think Mrs. Marsh ought to be here alone when she’s so nervous and I think it would be just as well to go some place else. One place’s good as another, huh?”

“You thought....” Tony began.

Hal favored him with a terrific pinch that time. “I think maybe for a change it would be good for her to spend a summer out west—on a ranch maybe. That’s the life. Good and peppy.”

“Very thoughtful, Hal,” said Mrs. Marsh, pleased. “I do think I’ll consider the proposition.”

“So?” Mr. Borg inquired politely. “We’ll talk business—yes?”

“I believe I will,” said Mrs. Marsh.

“I bring my lawyer—*when*?” asked Mr. Borg politely persuasive.

Hal chuckled. “Tony and I are going to the movies down in Hightown tomorrow night. Come then, huh, Mr. Borg? Gee whiz, I hate to be around when people are selling property and there’s a lawyer in sight. I guess Mrs. Marsh don’t mind how soon, huh?” he asked turning to the slightly startled old lady.

“Why, no, I’d be rather glad to get it over with,” she answered uncertainly.

Mr. Borg beamed and started for the door. “So? Young Mr. Keen don’t like it here exactly, eh?” he asked with a bland face.

“Sure, I like it here—I think it’s great!” Hal answered. “Only I think it’s a little too wild and spooky for an elderly lady like Mrs. Marsh. But, then, of course that shouldn’t be my business,” he added apologetically.

“And that’s just what it should be,” Mrs. Marsh spoke up. “I’m so glad to have someone agree with me about it.”

Mr. Borg was genuinely pleased. He would be back with his lawyer the next night. Hal went to the door with Mrs. Marsh, leaving Tony still standing in the center of the room, puzzled and speechless.

“Stopping at Hightown?” Hal asked casually at parting.

“Yes, yes,” answered Mr. Borg. “My lawyer I’ll wire from New York tonight right away. I like it here to come from my worries. It is peaceful and so nice to sleep, eh? Good for my health.”

“Yes,” said Hal with a pleasant smile, “I should imagine it would be good for your health. Very good.”

“Then tomorrow evening at seven, eh?” said Mr. Borg politely.



Mrs. Marsh nodded smilingly and watched the prospective buyer climb into his car and drive away. As the big car rumbled down over the old east road she turned to Hal inquiringly.

“I really don’t want to sell the place at all, Hal,” she said naively, “I really don’t now that I have the chance.”

Before Hal could speak, Tony cut in abruptly. “What the dickens is the idea, you crazy nut?” he asked. “What’s the idea of giving in to that cutthroat and gangster or whoever he is?...”

Hal laughed outright. “Let’s sit down a second, all of us. I’ll tell you what a corking idea I’ve got, then I’m going straight to bed and sleep. Say listen—I was as bowled over as you, Tony, to see him.”

“You know him?” inquired Mrs. Marsh not a little alarmed.

“I’m beginning to know him very well,” Hal laughed. “He’d be quite surprised if he knew how much. He’s no other than the supposed gypsy camp leader down below, Mrs. Marsh, and I imagine it was his own wife who was the gypsy fortune teller that came to you that day. They’re a lawless gang and I’m going to find out their racket before tomorrow evening is over. Yes, we’re going to hatch up a plot between the three of us. Come on in, Mary,” he called to the breathless cook who was standing at the kitchen door, “you can make a fourth and there’s no doubt that we’ll need your help too.”

“And I’ll be glad to give it,” said the big woman eagerly. “There’s that about the man I don’t like, sir. And begging your pardon, Mrs. Marsh,” she added apologetically, “I took the liberty of standing near the door the whole time he was here—I was that suspicious of him and his slippery talk. He’s two-faced and too smilin’ to suit me.”

Mrs. Marsh smiled at her cook gratefully. “Your loyalty is delightful, Mary,” she said sweetly, “but I really don’t think the man is such a scamp as to try and harm me. Just the same I’ll be glad to know what Hal has to tell us about him.”

“Well,” said Hal, “what I know is partly guess work and partly from something Blake has told me. I knew that there was a Peter Borg carrying on some kind of illegal traffic about here somewhere, but I never thought I’d have the luck to have him fall into my schemes so nicely. I wouldn’t have had a very good chance to carry out my plans if he hadn’t decided he wanted to buy up this camp site. Of course, Mrs. Marsh, you’re not going to sell it to the man at all. But it’s a good thing for him to think so until he gets here tomorrow night. I’d rather not have had the extra trouble of the lawyer for he’s probably a bad one too, but we’ll plan it out how to catch him also.”

“Hal,” said Tony brightly, “I’m beginning to see at last. You’re going to lure Borg here to make him come through, as it were, huh?”

“Atta boy, Tony—you’re coming on.” Tony laughed good-naturedly. “Why do you suppose he wants to buy up this place?”

“Now you’ve asked a question worth answering,” Hal answered thoughtfully. “I’ve figured it out that he wants it simply because this place is a little too near his scene of operations. He wants the whole side of this range to himself so that no one can watch the comings and goings of his gang and of the airplanes that carry on his traffic. It didn’t matter so much in the summer, for the mountains are too well covered for one to see far. But as fall came on and the trees got bare he began to worry, knowing that Mrs. Marsh intended staying through the greater part of this winter. He probably thought she’d see a little too much through the leafless trees. And so he decided to send his wife here as a gypsy fortune teller to play on her weakness and predict the most awful doom if she didn’t go away.”

“By George!” exclaimed Tony. “If that doesn’t just fit!”

Mrs. Marsh nodded approvingly. “But how would this Mr. Borg know I was superstitious enough for a fortune teller to play on my weakness, as you call it?”

“Collins. Tony told me coming up here that the old scamp knows you very well and he’s a wise enough guy to have hit upon that. He’s told Borg that you could be persuaded not to stay the winter if your peace of mind was disturbed by some thing. And so Borg probably hit on the plan of getting his wife to tell you that there’d be fires in order to thoroughly frighten you. Most women living alone dread fire more than anything else. And as for Dudley disappearing—well, I’d like to bet anything that that was foretold on the spur of the moment. Dudley, as you people may not know, was up here primarily after Borg. He too was trying to find out his game and I’m pretty certain that Borg’s wife must have known him and recognized him to predict his death and disappearance, for they probably waited to catch him off guard some day.”

“And poor James must have met the same fate,” said Mrs. Marsh to the surprise of them all. “I’ve had an idea that you all know he did, but you’ve been trying to spare me. If you have, please don’t, for I can stand it now. I’m not so nervous since you’ve told me the truth about things, Hal—you’ve opened my eyes and I won’t rest until I know this terrible man, Borg, is being punished.”

“Punished indeed!” exclaimed Mary, greatly exercised. “I’d like to see him have half the many welts on him that were on poor John Doe.”

“Oh, and that reminds me,” said Mrs. Marsh getting up and hurrying across the room. “I brought a letter up from the Post Office yesterday for you, Hal. It’s from that man, Brule, poor Mr. Fausse’s cousin, didn’t you say?”

Hal took the letter and tore it open. He studied it in silence for a moment, then smiled. "Boy!" he exclaimed. "This clinches things. Not only is it a case for the state police, but it's a pretty hot one on the government. Man alive, what a joke on Connover! Listen," he said jumping up excitedly, "this Borg smuggles aliens in from Canada by plane! He goes to Europe every once in a while and finds some ignorant peasants who want to come to this country, but can't on account of the quota and other things. What does he do then, but get them for a certain price (he took five hundred dollars from Fausse) to take a ship to a Canadian port. His agent then meets them and they board a plane under cover of night and slip into the States."

"That's what I call a racket!" Tony exclaimed in astonishment.

"That's not all," said Hal, "Brule says after he gets the poor devils into his place below here, he makes them wait instead of getting a job right away as he promised. He beats them and starves them and if he sees fit he puts them into some shady business as one of his hirelings and makes them work for little or nothing. Some character, huh? And the worst of it is they can't complain to the police or the government because they'd be put out of the country themselves."

"Then what about poor Mr. Fausse?" Mrs. Marsh inquired anxiously. "It does seem a shame to have him deported now. He was so ignorant, he probably didn't realize what a grave mistake he was making."

"I know," said Hal. "Brule made me promise I wouldn't tell on his cousin because he said Fausse gave all his life earnings to Borg, and if he were deported it would go badly with him to go home. Well, I'll see if Unk can't get him a visitor's privilege and by that time maybe his quota will be open. But one thing, we've got Borg where we want him!"

They talked on, telling Mrs. Marsh the true story of James. Then they schemed and planned the trap into which the smiling Mr. Borg should fall on the following night. Hal's cheeks burned and his heart thumped with the excitement, for he knew as they did not know that the capture of the man involved a great deal more than the smuggling of aliens and his mistreatment of them. It involved the peace of mind of Blake Ames.

He longed to tell Tony the things that were swirling round and round in his mind, but he could not betray Blake. The mills of the gods were grinding slowly, but they were grinding in Blake's favor and that meant much.

Indeed, it meant everything.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### A FACE AT DAWN

Hal slept all through that afternoon and into the night. He awoke before dawn, famished, and being a resourceful young man crept silently out of his room, stole across the living room and was soon peering into the pantry and the icebox. He nibbled at this and at that and then decided that Mary wouldn't mind if he made himself a cup of coffee.

While he was waiting for it to boil he went back to his room and put on his clothes. Stealing back and forth on tiptoe he was careful not to make a sound to waken Mrs. Marsh in the next room. But still it seemed that every time he took a step he made a queer shuffling noise and finally he decided to get on the bed and put on the rest of his clothing.

Then he realized that the shuffling noise went right on at intervals. So it hadn't been his footsteps at all. He listened, trying to decide whether it came from downstairs, upstairs or the servants' balcony; but he found that it wasn't inside the lodge at all—it was outside.

He pulled on his shoes, slipped into a sweater, gave his mass of red hair a hasty pat and made his way to the living room door on tiptoe.

It was too dark yet to see outdoors and he did not fancy the idea of lighting the living room lights and making himself conspicuous. Also he was too cautious to open the door and go outside without knowing who was out there. He had had no light in his bedroom, only in the kitchen and one couldn't see that from the front.

He crept up to one of the windows, pressing his face against the cold pane and his heart almost went dead within him.

Another face was pressed against the outer pane looking in!

He jumped back, tingling all over. Whoever it was had seen him! He was wondering what to do next when suddenly he heard a light tapping against the glass. It was soft but insistent.

Hal was no coward and he hurried to the door. He felt that if the visitor was bent on evil, he had the physical strength to combat him. Also he had the advantage over the stranger by being on the inside looking out, for the storm door and the little entrance hall favored the defender.

Consequently, he swung open the outer door with his long, powerful arm and took a leaping step back into the entrance hall. It was darker in the house than outdoors, he realized, for he could see the rubble-stone columns of the veranda very clearly. He heard the light patter of feet coming across

the veranda and in a moment the figure of a fairly tall young man stood before him.

Hal could not see his face, for his jacket collar was turned up and his cap pulled down. "Well?" he asked in a whisper, "what is it?"

The young man peered into the dark hall as if he could not see Hal clearly. "Guess you don't know me," he said in a pleasant-low voice, "but my name's Dudley!"

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE DEAD SPEAKS

Hal swallowed hard. "*Dudley?*" he repeated. "My gosh! Come in!"

"Everyone asleep?" asked the young man apologetically.

"Yes," answered Hal with a soft, nervous chuckle. "I woke up—hungry! Making some coffee in the kitchen. Come on out and have some with me."

Dudley shut the doors behind him and tip-toed after Hal until they reached the kitchen. The coffee was bubbling merrily through its spout, spurting all over Mary's immaculately kept stove and issuing steam into the room.

Hal rushed to it while Dudley took off his coat and cap and after repairing the damage he turned to greet the long lost young man. He gasped, stared a moment, then walked over to him.

"*Hank Bellair!*" he whispered hoarsely. "*Hank Bellair!*"

The other held out his hand and smiled. "Hal Keen! I'm just as surprised to see you also!"

Hal gripped his hand. "Sit down," he said, stammering foolishly. "Honest, I can't—you're supposed to be dead!"

Bellair looked up, startled. "*Dead?*"

"Yes—*dead!* You're...."

"I'm quite alive," Bellair smiled. "Quite!"

Hal ran his fingers through his hair, rushed to the cupboard, got two cups and poured the coffee. He handed one to Bellair with an unsteady hand.

"You didn't know it?" he asked hesitantly.

"That I was supposed to be dead? No. That is, I wasn't supposed to be dead to—well, as Hank Bellair I didn't know I was supposed to be dead—that's about the size of it. To these people here—the Marshes, I mean—I guess they thought I just walked out on them and disappeared." His brown eyes lighted up with a smile. "But you see I came back."

"I see," Hal said sipping his coffee abstractedly.

Bellair leaned forward. "Where," said he a trifle whimsically, "was my death supposed to have taken place? And when?"

Hal put down his cup and saucer on Mary's shining table. He glanced up at the big windows set high at either end of the kitchen, then drummed his fingers against his knees.

"You see, Hank—well, Tony Marsh—he's my roommate—we were on our way up here to spend Thanksgiving vacation—two weeks they're giving

us on account of some repairs to be made. I happened to remember about you being scheduled to stunt in the circus at Hadley, so I got Tony to stop so we could see you. He even proposed that I should ask you to come up here and stay with us. The more the merrier—that's Tony! So we stopped."

Bellair's tanned face was growing white. "And—and you saw my—my plane?"

"Sure," Hal said getting up and striding up and down the long room. "I'd never seen you fly, you know, but I heard the rest of the crowd gasp when that big plane with the letter B ... you feeling all right, Bellair?"

The aviator nodded and took a drink of his coffee. "Go on, Keen."

"Sure. All right then. There's not so much to tell except that the pilot seemed to be having engine trouble. All—all of a sudden—he cracked up. That's all."

Bellair buried his face in his hands a moment, then he looked up. "Ted—Ted," he murmured more to himself than to Hal, "it must have been Ted!"

Hal's heart went out to him and he walked over and patted him on the shoulder sympathetically. "Gee, I'm sorry, Hank—that's a fact! Think he took your place, huh?"

"Who else?" Bellair returned brokenly. "I—I suppose you read in the papers about——"

"Yes, I know," said Hal. "But forget it ... here, have another cup of coffee, huh?" He poured some out and grinned. "Strong enough to curl your hair, huh? Mrs. Marsh'll be glad to see you back. We've had a lot of trouble ever since I've been here. James...."

"I read it in the paper only last night," Bellair interrupted, more at ease now. "Was he *really* killed by a hunter?"

"Not so you'd notice it," Hal answered. "This Borg and his gang—you know them?"

"*You* know them?" countered Bellair.

Hal told him something of his knowledge. "And that brings us to the point of why you went away?" he asked in conclusion.

"Borg," Hank answered. "He shadowed me that night—the night of the day Mrs. Borg came here as a gypsy fortune teller. I didn't realize it until I sneaked down there and saw her walking outside their cabin. That was later in the day. She spied me behind the tree and yelled and Borg came out on the run and shot at me. I fell down right away so's to make him think he'd killed me."

"But weren't you hurt at all?"

"No, not a scratch. Borg was too excited to look though. Guess he thought I was a goner for he rolled me over and pushed me in the lake. I let

myself go down and swam under water for a while until I was at a fair distance. Then I swam for dear life.”

“Must have been just what he did to James.”

“Most likely,” said Bellair. “He’s an arch-fiend, Keen, take it from me. I wanted him to think I was dead, that’s why I didn’t come back here. Even tonight, or rather this morning, I had to be careful for I happened to know that he was having this place watched.”

“Think so?” Hal asked, alarmed.

“He’s a wise, wise rat,” said Hank vehemently. “Don’t think you ever put anything over on *him*—he’s had two men watching this place for the last three days, for I’ve been trying to come here myself.”

“Just one thing, Hank?” asked Hal curiously. “Where have you been all this time?”

“Boarding with a trapper about two miles the other side of the lake. He brought up a paper from Hightown last night and I saw in it an account of you and....”

“Blake?”

“Yes, I couldn’t get here quickly enough to find out—Is he all right?”

“He will be,” Hal assured him. “The doctor says his constitution will pull him through. He confided a lot in me, Hank—not everything, but enough to let me know he was terribly anxious about your whereabouts too.”

“I know,” said Bellair wearily, “I couldn’t get a letter written until a few days ago. My mother must have been frantic, with me and then Ted....”

“But cheer up, Hank,” Hal said soothingly. “It might have been better than if he had to face the consequences of....”

“Borg committed that murder up in Canada,” said Bellair grimly. “I know he did! He was in the plane that night and shot the inspector before my brother could speak. Besides Ted didn’t know that Borg was carrying on such a dirty business—*he didn’t know!* I believe what he told us. Now you know it, Keen—my brother was associated with that skunk, Borg.”

“I’ve guessed it right along,” Hal said calmly. “In fact, I’ve been having a lively time of it trying to reduce everything to its common denominator. Only one thing bothers me, Hank. What is Blake Ames to you?” he asked.

“My stepbrother,” replied Bellair softly. “The best brother a fellow ever had. You know?”

“He told me about his fear of the law.”

“And it’s my fear now, also. Poor Blake, he just couldn’t stand it! A fellow can practice that blessed is the man that lays down his life for a friend stuff for just so long. But from what he told me, a Texas prison can take it out of you after a couple of years. And Blake is human after all.”



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### SPIES

Hal sat quietly for a moment. Hank Bellair was the picture of sadness, bitterness; all that a grieved human being could look. He had not the heart to ask him what had put Blake Ames into prison—not just then, anyway.

A thin ray of sunlight was beginning to creep in through the windows at the eastern end of the room. Hal kept watching it abstractedly when gradually he saw the head and face of a man rising above it. Quickly he averted his own head pretending he didn't see it and turned to Bellair.

"Don't look, whatever you do, Hank!" he warned. "Someone's watching outside the window!"

Bellair straightened up but didn't turn.

"Borg's man. Where there's one there might be two," he said.

"Then they've seen you?"

"I suppose they have. I had to come to find out about Blake!"

"I know," said Hal thoughtfully rising. "Are they there now? No one? All right, we can't let them get back to Borg and tell him you're here. Collins has probably passed the word that I knew you, and Borg might think you've told me something. Nothing must interfere with that deal tonight!" Then: "How many men do you suppose he keeps in such a capacity?"

"Four, I've heard. He's probably keeping two around here to find out how much you know about him. That old fox doesn't sleep. I'd like to bet he was a little suspicious that you changed Mrs. Marsh's mind, for her."

"Perhaps you're right," Hal said thinking of Borg's gleaming smile. "Perhaps I'll have to use my old bean to trick him some other way, huh? Feel like having a good run? All right—fine, because we must get those two chaps—somehow!"

"And I know just where they're hiding," whispered Bellair as they sneaked out through the living room. "They stay behind that clump of poplars just across that road. We can steal up on them from behind if we're careful." Then as an afterthought, he said: "But Borg will miss them!"

"No, he won't," said Hal. "I'm going to be very considerate of Borg today—he's going to be told that his men aren't coming back."

They were at the door then. Bellair's mouth opened with amazement. "What?"

"Sh!" said Hal. "There's no time to lose—I suppose they work in shifts and get back to their boss after daylight, huh? I thought so. Well, if Borg

sends any more spies up here today they'll be accorded the same treatment. Don't stare at me that way, Hank—you'll find it all out later."

## CHAPTER XXIX

### AN OMINOUS JOKE

Borg's men were indeed surprised, so surprised that they had not time to make even a show of defense. Hal's powerful arms had held them as if in a vise while Bellair swiftly removed their only means of protection, laughing the while to think of thus avenging himself after having waited many weary days because of their dangerous presence.

Their hiding place behind the poplars, he explained to Hal afterward, he had luckily come upon in quite an accidental manner because of his fear of walking along the open road. It was an excellent shelter for such a purpose as these men had, being on the edge of the vast evergreen forest that stretched its creaking boughs straight on down to Borg's camp site. Sitting on two moss-covered boulders they could command a view of the lodge without any danger of exposure to themselves.

A pile of half-smoked cigarettes lay about, revealing that in this manner had the men been whiling away the long, night hours. One glowing tip, burning in a pile of dead leaves, Hal stamped out with his foot.

"That's not being boy scouts," he said whimsically to the two sullen men. "Don't you know that one of the first things a scout learns is to be certain that all fire is out before leaving a camp?"

"Whatcha goin' tuh do wit us?" asked the shorter of the two men, whom Hal immediately dubbed, "Dumpy."

"You're going to have a nice long day of rest," Hal laughed. "Over at Mrs. Marsh's. You must be tired after sitting up all night. We'll let you sleep—with a guard. Come on—forward march, fellows!"

Hank Bellair laughed for the first time since Hal had seen him that morning.

"Better find out if there'll be another shift, huh Keen?"

Dumpy soon talked with the pressure of Hal's hand on his arm. "Won't be no other shift," he said grumpily. "The other two guys gotta stay and mind the honkey bunch on account of Borg goin' to Hightown to meet his lawyer."

"Then he *does* intend to come?" Hal queried. "That's fine. What do you mean by honkey bunch?"

"The twisted tongues," Dumpy answered readily. "The bunch Borg brought over from Canada last."

Hank Bellair grasped the man's arm just before they got to the lodge veranda. "Were you on the trip—the last trip that Bellair made with Borg?" he asked in a quivering voice.

Dumpy shut up instantly and could not be urged to speak a word the rest of the way. Hal was not discouraged, however—things were going smoothly and Borg's timely absence from his camp fitted in perfectly with his plans. He was satisfied that the men were quiet and gave no trouble, for after all it was Borg from whom he wanted to get the needed information.

The household was soon awake and inspecting these new guests, Tony with the others. Hal and he picked out a disused room in the servants' quarters where the window sash had lately been broken.

"They won't be able to open it," Tony explained. "It's too big a drop to the ground anyway and we'll take turns guarding them. Even Mary's willing."

Hal laughed. "She'll guard them with a look and if they get fresh she can talk to them, huh?"

Mary did just that while the young men and Mrs. Marsh were eating breakfast. Hal excused himself before the end of the meal to make a few important telephone calls, he explained.

"Don't want to have Borg worrying about his men," he said. "It wouldn't do at all, after the trouble we've gone to."

Tony grinned at Bellair. "You've got to know Hal to understand what a nut he is, Dud—I mean, *Hank*."

Bellair colored. "Hank is better," he said softly. "I took the name of Dudley and came up here because of my—my brother. I thought it would set the police off so that they wouldn't bother my mother. But now there's no need since Ted doesn't ... oh, well ... I'll go home tomorrow, soon as we get Borg to come through."

Hal called for Collins in Hightown. Soon the constable's sharp voice answered at the other end of the wire.

"Got bad news for you again," said Hal, smiling to himself.

"Yeh?" Collins said with a change of voice. "What's it?"

"Two men," Hal answered lowering his voice. "Most terrible thing, Collins. I saw flames coming out from behind the poplar trees across the way early this morning and just as I was going to go over to beat them out, two men came running out all afire. Their clothes, you know."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Collins.

"Terrible, huh?" Hal continued. "They ran straight down to the lake and jumped in, and Tony and I ran after them."

"Get 'em?" asked Collins eagerly.

“Nope, that’s why I called. They must have sunk right away. We did all we could, but there wasn’t a sign of them. Too bad, but if they hadn’t gone so fast ... Guess they were a couple of hoboes sleeping in under the leaves.... Cigarettes, probably.”

“Jest about,” agreed Collins gloomily. “Smokin’ half the night and not puttin’ them out. Wa’al, I spose not much good to git excited ’bout hoboes, hah? I’ll be up ’s afternoon tuh drag th’ lake. Stay tuh supper if Miz Marsh wants me.”

“Certainly,” said Hal, “she’ll be delighted. In fact, we’ll all be delighted!”

“What’s the idea?” asked Tony as Hal turned away from the phone.

“I thought it would be lovely to have the constable in our little gathering tonight,” said Hal grinning. “He and Borg have much in common and as long as we have Hank added to our forces, one more guest won’t hurt. Have you got plenty of rope in the house, Mrs. Marsh?”

“Plenty,” the lady answered, smiling. “Enough to tie up a dozen men.”

Hal chuckled. “Well, I hope it won’t be a dozen, but goodness knows how many we may have to contend with before we’re through.”

Bellair studied Hal, puzzled. “What does one do to acquire that quality?” he asked.

“What quality?” Hal returned.

“Making things come one’s way,” answered Bellair wistfully. “I’ve been trying for a month in these lonely mountains to think up a scheme that would make Borg come clean. Here you’ve been here not a week and I dare say you’ve only actually known of his existence for about twenty-four hours, yet you’re laying the slickest trap for him without any effort apparently. How do you do it, Keen?”

“Oh, Borg helped me in this partly,” Hal answered modestly. “I had planned to get him up here on some pretext or other, but he chose the easier way of coming here himself to buy the camp. A reasonable and dependable fellow at times, I suppose. But the rest, Hank,” he said, shrugging his broad shoulders, “is imagination. I thought of that little story to tell Collins because of the pile of cigarettes we found behind the poplars. It just suggested a good, colorful story and I always act on suggestions as good as that one. Did it ring true?”

“*Ring true!*” Tony repeated. “My gosh, I could almost see those two hoboes running down to the lake with their clothes afire as you talked. I could even see the pile of leaves burning.”

Hal shook his finger playfully at Mrs. Marsh’s worried face. “Now don’t start worrying about that,” he said, “that’s one pile of leaves that hasn’t burned.”

## CHAPTER XXX

### A NAME OF DEATH

Hal's next phone call was to the nearest quarters of the state police. He talked long and earnestly assuring himself before the conversation was ended that there would be no hitch in his plans. The men were to be there at eight o'clock, for at that hour it would be dark and he would be back at the lodge himself with Borg's own men as witnesses against him.

That accomplished he put in a long-distance call for Connover and was disappointed to hear from New York that Connover was out. But he was expected to return soon, he was told. Would they have him call? By all means, came the answer.

Hal had many hours of suspense, however, for Connover did not call until mid-afternoon. Collins was down dragging the lake with three of Hightown's citizens, and while Hal felt sorry that the citizens must toil on such a futile job, he had not one moment's sympathy for the constable.

He could watch them in their backbreaking task as he sat talking to Connover. Collins stopped now and then to mop his perspiring brow, for the sun was warm; it was a windless, hazy November day. Hal chuckled.

"What's the joke?" asked the federal man. "What you want me to come out there again for? On a fake clue, eh?"

Hal grinned. "Not so you'd notice it if you were here right now," he assured the man. "This is the biggest clue you ever didn't stumble on, Connover. It was right under your nose and yet you dashed back to New York. If you'd just stayed that one night...."

"It ain't got nothin' to do with the Bellair case, has it?" asked Connover anxiously.

"*And how!*" Hal assured him. "That's what I'm trying to tell you, Connover. I caught the scent of it next day and I wasn't reading fairy stories, either!"

Tony smothered a laugh where he sat at the other end of the room. "Give it to him thick, Hal! Lay it on!"

Hal winked and went on talking. "Well, do you want to come out here and grab your man? I'm going to get him and tie him up and make him come clean, as they say around here, but I haven't the authority to arrest him."

"I'll be out!" shouted Connover. "But I can't make it in a car and it's too late for a train—Great guns!"

“How about a plane?” Hal asked.

“That’s a suggestion,” answered Conover. “I don’t like ’em too much, but I’ll stand it in a pinch. Any need to be careful about coming any particular time?”

Hal pursed his lips. “Try and make it around eight, huh? We’ll have four beacons out—remember, *four*! Tell your pilot that he can count about twenty minutes from Albany with good winds and to make it northeast!”

“All right, then,” said Conover, “thanks for the tip, kid. Thanks!”

“No thanks at all,” Hal said restraining a laugh. “I’ve studied under two good men—Unk and you!”

He put down the receiver with a hearty chuckle, which was suddenly interrupted by a loud call from the direction of the lake. They all hurried to the window and saw that Collins and his companions seemed to be in distress.

Hank was on guard at the henchmen’s door, so Hal relieved him, sending him and Tony down to discover the cause of Collins’ cries. Mary predicted that the constable was simply tired of hunting for nothing and chuckled all the way back to the kitchen. Hal was sitting contentedly, enjoying his rest, when Tony returned in great excitement. He brought back with him one of Collins’ citizens, as excited and voluble as himself. Hank, it developed, was following.

“What’s the matter?” Hal laughed. “Did the constable drag a pot of gold out of the lake or something?”

“Don’t joke, Hal,” Tony said seriously, “I wish it was only a pot of gold. But it happens to be too awful. You see they were dragging and all of a sudden they felt something heavy....”

“We pulled,” interposed the citizen, “thinking it was one of them hoboos. But it turned out different. We were all so dumbfounded we couldn’t believe our eyes. It was a woman!”

“Man alive!” Hal exclaimed.

Dumpy emitted a grunt from within the room that was not caused by the close confinement. His partner responded with a significant cough.

Tony nodded. “It’s Mrs. Borg,” he said loudly so that the prisoners could hear him.

“And she was dressed in funny kind of gypsy clothes,” the citizen added. “Collins didn’t seem ter know who she was. How I recognized her—I’ve seen her down in the village many a time and she drives that swell car of Borg’s.”

“Gypsy clothes, huh?” said Hal feeling suddenly chilled. “I guess that poor woman never dreamed that she was predicting her own death when she put them on!”

Tony nodded grimly. “Gee, that’s right, Hal,” he said. “When she told grandmother there’d be a death, I guess she didn’t bring it on James so much as she brought it on herself.”

Hal shivered. The very name of Borg seemed to spell death.



## CHAPTER XXXI

### HAL STEPS AHEAD

“What do you know about this, Dumpy?” Hal inquired of the man a few minutes later.

Dumpy looked at his inquirer disdainfully. “Spose youse birds have us where you want us anyhow, so I might’s well tell you. She and Borg had an argyument about that one trip.”

“Bellair’s trip?” Hal persisted.

“Yere. She happened to know things and the talk is that she threatened to tell how it was. Yuh see, she took the trip that night too an’ she kinda liked that Bellair kid. Anyways, we saw her one night and we didn’ see her next mornin’. Boss told us she’d left him to go on a long trip.”

“Some long trip!” commented the partner, with a shrug.

“Anyways, she wasn’t a bad scout. She kinda felt sorry for the honks, but she never could say much. Borg was boss over her too. I always kinda had a hunch she was a real gypsy one time. She had that way ’bout her.” Dumpy was evidently telling all he knew.

Hal felt a strange sense of foreboding as the afternoon hours wore away into early evening. He ascribed it to the effect that Borg had upon him and the insidious evil that seemed to cling about the lodge, about the whole camp, just with the thought of his coming.

Collins’ hand at last was forced, but they all agreed that it would not have been so had the townsmen not been with him at the time of the discovery. The tragic episode had also deprived him of his dinner at Mrs. Marsh’s, but Hal felt satisfied that the state police would take care of his part in Borg’s crimes later.

Bellair showed little spirit and seemed to be more depressed than ever after dinner.

The afternoon’s discovery had helped to contribute to his gloominess for he was skeptical about Hal’s forcing Borg to such a paramount issue as was being contemplated. He did not think it could be done. Borg was too canny, too possessed of the devil, he argued, to admit that he had committed all those heartless and atrocious crimes!

Hal gave him a friendly slap on the shoulder. “Why start worrying now about it, anyway?” he said good-naturedly. “I’ll admit that it would help your cause considerably to have had Mrs. Borg spill it herself, but now ... well, Hank, I told you I’d do it somehow and I will. I also told Blake I’d do

it. He's counting on me too, so I'm not likely to fail. I realize that the police couldn't force it from Borg—I just asked them to come to witness something and take him away when it's over. We don't want to keep him here overnight, goodness knows! Dumpy and the other one have to go too. But the main thing is—your brother's name will be cleared and that's what you want, huh?"

"You bet that's what I want!" Bellair said decisively, then he turned to Hal with outstretched hand. "Keen, if you did that—if you're able to do it, I'll never forget it as long as I live! It means more to me—it means more than my brother—it means my mother's peace of mind! She's had nothing but worry since we were babies."

Hal realized that he had taken a pretty big task upon his shoulders, but he wouldn't admit it, not even to himself. Only one thought remained fixed and clear in his mind—he had made a gesture that he would have to carry out. There still were some loose threads to catch hold of, threads that would break the entire web if allowed to flutter free.

He had been waiting patiently ever since Collins' departure for town with his gruesome find. He had been waiting to hear from the chief operator of the phone company whose little exchange faced the main street and railroad and whose staff of two operators could see all who came and went in the village. The chief had promised to call and report as soon as the constable came along and at six-thirty, as soon as dinner was over, the phone rang merrily.

Hal hastened to it, not without a little misgiving. The cheery voice of the operator only added to his doubt until he heard her mention Borg's name.

"He left up the back road at almost quarter after five," she said, "so he got to his camp at about the same time Mr. Collins got here which was ten minutes ago."

"Fine," said Hal. "Anyone with him?"

"No," the young lady answered brightly, "and he seemed to be quite annoyed. He waited for the train to come in, but he was disappointed."

So much the better, Hal thought. "And what about Collins?"

"He's been trying to get in touch with Mr. Borg's camp ever since he came. He's in his office now. I've kept telling him that no one answers. Is that right?"

"That's splendid!" Hal said. "Keep right on telling him and if you get tired of talking to him, tell him the phone is out of order. You'll get your reward from a very famous aviator—Hank Bellair. Do you know anything about him?"

"He's dead," answered the young lady promptly.

“Not so’s you’d notice it,” Hal answered and put down the receiver smiling.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE TRAP OPENS

Hal received Borg in the living room alone. Mrs. Marsh had retired to her room flanked at the door by Mary. Tony was standing just inside the kitchen and Hank guarded the sullen men upstairs. The house was curiously silent.

Borg looked about as he entered, a little flushed of face but bland as before. His hair, Hal thought, seemed to have straggled a few inches further down his pockmarked forehead since the previous day.

“So your lawyer gave you the slip, huh?” Hal said in greeting him.

“So?” Borg queried, with a puzzled smile.

“Your lawyer, I said. He didn’t come. Perhaps he doesn’t think this place would be so good for your health after all, huh?”

Borg’s face was inscrutable. “You did not go to town after all to the movies with your young Marsh, eh?” he returned casually.

“No,” said Hal bluntly, “I decided I’d much rather stay and see the fireworks.”

Borg raised his thick eyebrows perceptibly. “Mrs. Marsh?”

“She decided to go to bed,” Hal answered. “She doesn’t think it’s going to be healthy for you here either, so she’s going to keep the place.”

Borg’s smile vanished and he made a quick movement.

Hal stepped toward him, a tower of muscle. “Listen, Borg, your tactics don’t work in this house, so don’t try them. I don’t need a gun to keep you sensible, but if you try any nonsense with that one of yours, it’ll be out of your hands before you can say peep. Tony’s watching you from behind and I’ve got both eyes right on you, so you might as well sit down and get ready for a nice long chat.”

“So? I have nothing to say if Mrs. Marsh don’t want to sell,” said the man coldly. “What for should I chat with you, eh?”

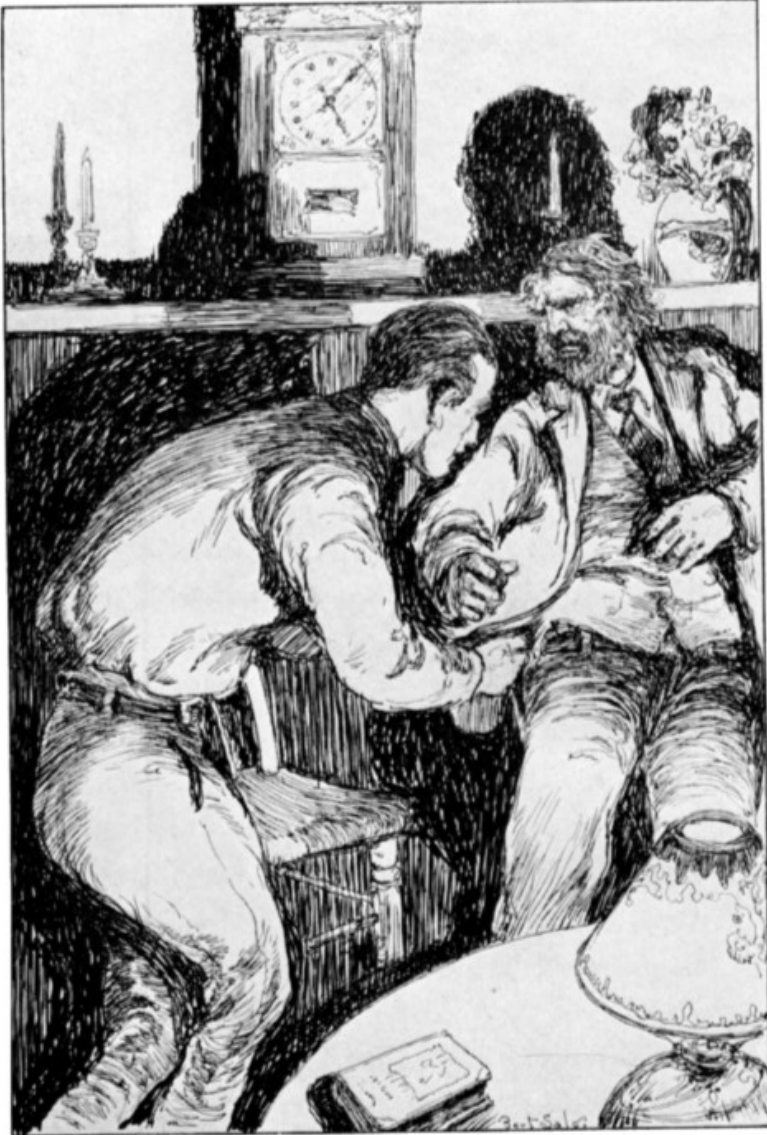
“About several little things of mutual interest,” Hal answered flatly. “For instance, there’s that little affair that happened in Canada with Customs Inspector Roberts. You shot him down over Bellair’s shoulder.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” said Borg smiling again.

Hal grinned back, though shivering inwardly at the man’s callousness. “Then,” he went on coldly, “there’s the affair of James, Mrs. Marsh’s chauffeur, and now this afternoon your wife was found....”

He waited a moment, but the man did not stir. Hal told of the tragic find in detail and Borg simply shrugged his narrow shoulders and frowned.

“So? You try to make me say I put her there—yes? Well, I not say such thing. She go on long trip—that’s all I know. She got gypsy blood and she sometimes crazy.”



HAL STEPPED TOWARD HIM, A TOWER OF MUSCLE.

He coughed, then stared into the fireplace indifferently.

“Tony!” Hal called. “Come! Tie him up!” he added, and sprang at the man’s pocket, filching a small automatic from it before Borg was aware of what had happened. Then he turned to the stairs: “Hank! Bring ’em down!”

What chagrin Borg felt they never knew, for his expression changed but little except when Hank came down the wide stairway behind the two prisoners. Tony declared that he felt the man’s whole body convulse, for he was then in the act of binding him fast to the chair. Certainly it was obvious that he stared harder at the aviator than he did at his henchmen, to whom he gave but a passing glance.

Tony tied them up also for, as Hal explained it to even Hank’s amusement, he put the job up to young Marsh because he was so good at tying up packages. Borg was the only one who did not smile.

“You can tie me up always, but you can’t make me talk what I don’t want,” he said coldly.

“Then maybe someone else can!” Hal flung at him. “Pierre Fausse, for instance, Borg—he’s got it on you good and plenty and I’m here to tell you. Well, be a good little rat until we come back, Hank and I, huh? We’re going to take Tony’s roadster and pay a visit to your poor honkey bunch, as Dumpy calls them. Tony’ll watch out and see that nothing happens to you, and oh, I forgot Mary....”

Mary came out of hiding with a military stride, armed with the lodge’s prize rifle. Smiling, she took her place at the door. “And,” said she menacingly, “don’t any of you gentlemen think I ain’t a good shot, because I am. My father was in the Irish Fusileers and I can prove it!”

Tony followed as far as the door. “Good luck,” he said softly. “Don’t worry about Mary and me—we can take good care of them.”

“It’s a load off my mind,” Hal whispered.

“The police’ll be here, remember! Let them in from the kitchen when I send in my prize scholars from the front door. And if Connover comes, make him wait for the crucial moment too. Keep Borg and the other two with their backs to the kitchen or my plan’s ruined. If they see the police or Connover....”

“Yes, I know,” Tony interposed. “They won’t talk! Now so long!”

Hank spread his hands deprecatingly as they swerved out of the driveway and onto the road. “I admire your spirit, Keen—truly I do, but it seems so futile for you to go to so much trouble. Only to be disappointed. You heard what Borg said! You see his attitude....”

Hal sniffed the air. “I smell smoke, don’t you?” he said lightly, but having other things on his mind, he dismissed the thought of it.

A moment later, the roadster had disappeared into the darkness.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### A CLEVER COUP

Borg's camp was as sordid as the man. Comprised of one main cabin and several smaller ones, it bore all the earmarks of lawlessness and neglect. Its several acres were hidden from the old road by a small woods through which one followed a path to the premises. Beyond that lay the cove and the silent waters of the lake.

Hal had driven the car to the path, and walked stealthily in under the trees with Hank following close at his heels. They stood for a moment scrutinizing the few sordid acres from which Borg did his trafficking in aliens. The smaller cabins were in darkness, but the larger one was lighted up and cast out bright rays into the wide, darkened field beyond.

"Must be where the planes landed, huh?" Hal asked.

Hank nodded. "He didn't seem to have his own. Wanted men who operated their own. He advertised, you know."

Hal understood. "Never let on to his prospective employees what was the nature of it, huh?"

"No. Let's see what the other two fellows'll have to say," Bellair said tonelessly.

Hal went up to the cabin and knocked. Two men, counterparts of Dumpy and his partner it would seem, responded. Perhaps they were stouter and taller, but certainly no friendlier than their comrades.

The taller of the two glared at the visitors. "Whatcha want?"

"To see both of you," Hal grinned. "Can we come in?"

"Who sent you?" called the other, who was sitting in the room at a center table.

"No one," said Hal casually, "I came because I thought you'd like to know the pretty mess Borg's got you in. He's put all the blame on you two fellows."

"What blame?" yelled the taller man.

By that time Hal and Hank had gained a foothold in the doorway and the man seemed not to resist their entrance any longer. He was too interested.

"The blame about his wife and that affair about Roberts, in Canada," Hal said looking straight at the man. "Also James, Mrs. Marsh's man. Borg says you two fellows did it and not he. He says in a signed confession that you're the guilty ones and the state police are up there now."

Both men made a furtive move. Hal held tight to the automatic he had filched from Borg. "Listen," said he, "there's no sense in either of you trying to run away from it. Both roads are blocked with police and you'd only starve in the woods. They know Borg did it all—we know he did it all, so why not come up and make him face the lie, huh? He's ready to go to pieces anyway—one word from you both and he'd have to admit it whether or no."

"The rat!" hissed the taller man. "So he's giving us the bit, hah? Well, he don't have to admit it—we got the goods on him about it all. We can tell any state copper that Borg's hand pulled the trigger on Roberts and everybody else he didn't want around. Even the lady—poor thing," he added feelingly. "After all, they can't give us nothin'—the coppers—we wuz just like watchmen around except that one night with Bellair we took a ride 'cause there wasn't many comin' back. Me an' my pal here and Mrs. Borg went and Borg too. Well, we're here to tell any copper what happened!"

Hal felt Hank's arm press close against his own.

"What about the honks?" queried the shorter man at the table. "We can't leave 'em alone."

"My friend here will stay until you come back," Hal said quickly. "He'll watch out for them."

The taller man laughed. "We won't come back tonight, fella," he said. "They won't let us off that easy, but it's better'n gettin' up for somethin' we didn' lay hands on. Anyways, your friend kin stay until the coppers come for the honks."

Hank stayed almost joyfully and whispered two words to Hal as they left, "*It worked!*"

Hal drove the car mechanically, hardly aware of the two irate men sitting beside him. The success of his ruse seemed to have completely overwhelmed him and he could hardly wait until they got back to Borg.

They had still three miles to go when the acrid smell of smoke again assailed his nostrils. Suddenly he felt a significant wave of heat around his head and before he had time to speak of it he saw just ahead some burning trees on either side of the road.

"The whole place is smoulderin'," said one of the men. "All of a sudden it'll burst out an' believe me we ain't skimmin' through none too soon."

Hal stepped on the gas and as the roadster shot ahead, they heard a heavy booming sound. Looking behind they saw the whole outer edge of the forest bursting into flame which was traveling on down the road at an alarming rate.

At that juncture, a car came speeding down the road and Hal slowed up a little and waited. Nearer and nearer it came and suddenly swooped up past them.



Hal shouted and the car slowed down. A young man with dark complexion and a small moustache peered out from the driver's seat. "Hank Bellair down at Borg's?" he asked excitedly.

"Yes," Hal answered, "but you can't go through now. That just burst out after we passed."

"How do you know when you get to Borg's?" the stranger asked.

"After the second bend," Hal answered, annoyed, "but you can't go through it, I tell you! He'll ... it's a pathway to the camp. Don't...."

The young man was gone and they could hear the roar of his motor above the noise of the crackling branches. Hal stepped on the gas to get out of the heat.

"*Hank Bellair, hah!*" the men murmured in unison.

Hal made no comment except to say that something had to be done.

"He'll see it comin' and he can take the honks in the old Lizzie in the barn there an' beat it straight on the back road to th' village," said the taller man.

"I only hope he does," Hal said, worried, yet wondering who the stranger was who could want to see Hank so badly.

Then soon they were at the lodge.

## CHAPTER XXXIV ANOTHER GHOST?

Hal always regretted that Hank was not present at Borg's final humiliation. To him, it was the perfect setting when the villain's most trusted henchmen rushed into Mrs. Marsh's living room, and accused him of double-crossing them and shoving his burden onto them, as they expressed it.

The room had been empty of all save Tony and the prisoners themselves, just a moment before. But as Hal's new recruits made their dramatic entrance, a little company of state police filed from the kitchen silently, unknown to Borg, but forming a background that was effectual.

The men flung their accusations in Borg's face, one after the other. Suddenly he lost something of his jaunty manner, and became fear-ridden and craven. He did not know what it was all about and like all men of his ilk he covered down before the inevitable gun.

"Will you take it back and tell 'em if we hold off the trigger, Borg?" the taller man shouted.

Borg made an unlovely picture as the coward he was. He cried that he would tell them he did it, whoever *them* happened to be. His men pointed to the line of police standing behind.

Borg turned and gasped with dismay and Hal always remembered the way his straight black hair tumbled down over his pockmarked forehead, covering up the left eye entirely. In point of fact, he was so interested in this rather physical disfigurement of so dominant a criminal that he did not see Connover standing in the doorway, regarding him with some amusement.

"Well, young fellow," he said, smiling. "I must say you've picked me up a prize package here."

Hal grinned appreciatively, then turned to hear Tony's worried account of the fire. "I telephoned to Borg's place, but got no answer. Hank's shuffled them out of there and gone around to town, I guess. At least I hope so, for it looks as if the fire's traveling down there fast."

"Well," said Hal, "I hope not any faster than that chap I met who was going down after Hank."

"That's what I've been so anxious to tell you about," said Tony, troubled. "He stopped here right after the cops came and asked me if I knew where Dudley was and when I said did he mean Hank Bellair, he said yes, all

excited like. I told him a little of what happened and he said he couldn't wait till Hank came back here, so he started to rush off."

"Who was he?"

"That's what I asked him. And do you know what he yelled back?"

"No—what?"

"He said that he was *Ted Bellair!*"

"*What!*" Hal exclaimed.

"That's what I said and I yelled that Ted Bellair was dead. The answer he gave me was that I was dead too!"

Hal leaned up against the door uncertainly. "You know, Tony," he said seriously, "this is absolutely the last straw!"

## CHAPTER XXXV THE VEIL IS LIFTED

They had a little midnight supper to celebrate the “lifting of the veil” as Mrs. Marsh called it. Mary prepared it and they sat down with relieved minds. The fire had burned itself out at the lake, leaving a charred, smoking ruin of the entire stretch of forest down to Borg’s camp. That, too, had been completely mowed down as if the gods had wreaked a double vengeance against the man.

Hank explained his miraculous escape with the whimpering little handful of aliens left in his care. “I smelled the smoke and heard the roar of the flames,” he said. “Then I heard the klaxon of a car going full blast and then I heard it drive in. The voice I heard almost took my breath away—*my brother, Ted!*” He turned to the smiling young man at his side. “I had thought, since Hal told me this morning, that he was dead and buried. Anyway, he hurried us out of there and around to the village.”

“And that was two of you we’ve thought dead,” said Tony.

Hal spoke up then. “I knew Hank wasn’t dead—I knew it that afternoon in the outbuilding at the airport—after the accident. Remember the poor fellow’s arms? Well, I told you I knew Hank had a tattoo mark and I didn’t see one, so I knew there was something funny about the whole thing. Then I was going to tell you about it, Tony, just before you were shot.”

Tony nodded. “I do remember. You said you were going to tell me a secret.”

Hank smiled. “Observant you are, Hal,” he said admiringly. “No one’s putting much over on you. But to get back to Ted, here—there’s a sad and tragic story—a lifelong one, connected with this mystery. It’s that of my brother, Cyril, who’s been an epileptic and irrational all his life. Blake Ames, as you know, is my foster brother really. My mother and father adopted him when he was only a baby. We lived in Texas and we grew up—all air-minded,” he said with a poignant smile at Ted. “Even Cyril we taught, though we never then let him handle a plane alone. We thought it would strengthen him—his mind especially.”

“They do say it has that effect,” said Mrs. Marsh sweetly.

Hank nodded. “It didn’t seem to do it for him,” he said wistfully, “for right about the time he was doing well, something happened. He got into an argument with a young chap in our town and knocked him down. The poor fellow never got up. You see, it happened at night and there were no

witnesses and Cyril came home whimpering and took one of those fits after he told us. Mother was crazy—couldn't bear the thoughts of him being put in jail, as irresponsible as he was, yet if she told the authorities that, she dreaded them putting him into an institution."

"Mother-like," murmured Mary.

"Well," Hank continued, "Blake begged to take the blame on his shoulders. We were both older than he—Ted and I, and more able to help mother, so it was decided that he take the burden of the thing. And he did—for three years—he was supposed to serve ten. Then we came east and put Cyril in a sanitarium. Two months ago he came out seeming to be cured. We didn't make friends in Reardon because of him—mother didn't want people to know and pity him, so we thought we'd wait a while and see how he acted before we mixed with people much. We let him take up the plane, then finally we thought it would give him a sense of responsibility to go solo. He did and after a week or two he came home one night and said he'd got a job through an ad. in the paper, working one night a week bringing passengers over from a certain place in Canada to a health resort in the mountains here. We thought it was great—just once a week, and so we let him use the plane. The rest you know."

"He sure was roped in," Hal commented and began to eat some of Mary's chicken salad. "How about Blake, Hank?"

"He came home the very night that Cyril had the trouble. You can imagine how upset my mother was. Blake, an escaped convict and Cyril about to be hunted for murder! On top of it, he got those convulsions from the excitement and went right back to where he started. That's why Ted decided to take the blame until we could find this Borg and make him confess, for Cyril swore to us he didn't do it. Ted kind of kept under cover around near home and so did Blake. I came here as Dudley and there you have it. Then when the day of the circus came...."

"Someone had to show up," Ted interposed. "We didn't want the police to think that Hank was ducking too. Then it would have looked funny. I couldn't show myself for there had been several detectives watching. Cyril was feeling all right by that time and mother said he insisted that he could handle Hank's plane well enough to make a showing. He even let the detectives think he was Hank. He tore himself away from mother—that's the way he was. Then Keen and Tony here saw him in Hadley."

"But he's better off by far," said Mrs. Marsh with true sympathy. "Some day he would have regained his mind and that would be worse than death."

Hank smiled. "Mother's reconciled to it now," he said. "She made a fetish out of his illness and felt peculiarly about letting people know it.

She'd rather keep him in hiding. It was always a problem to Ted and Blake and me. But that's all past now—she wants us home.”

“We'll drop you off at Reardon,” said the energetic little pilot who had brought Connover up from New York. “No trouble at all and your ma won't be alone another night, eh?”

Connover yawned. “Well, Buddy,” said he to the man, “if you don't mind, I ain't goin' back in any plane tonight. I got the offer of one of Mrs. Marsh's rooms and I'm going to take it. Besides I got Borg to think about in a few days after the state gets through with him. By that time, it'll be Thanksgiving so I might as well stay here for turkey if I'm asked.”

Mrs. Marsh smiled. “There's always enough turkey for one more,” she said.

Hal battled to keep his eyes open and rose from the table with his hostess. “Talking turkey,” he said with a grin, “how about some sleep? Hank and Ted want to get going home and I want to pop in the hay, so I make a motion, we cut it short.”

“But not without giving you three cheers or something like that,” Hank said.

“What for?” Hal asked with a yawn.

“For bringing Borg around,” Ted spoke up. “For being so darn white with Blake and for promising to visit him tomorrow and cheer him up till we can bring mother back to see him.”

“Then why not make it a merry party on Thanksgiving Day anyway!” Tony said hospitably. “We've got to do something to whoop things up.”

“We'll do that very thing!” exclaimed Hank delightedly. “We'll have a toast to Hal, a toast that I've been thinking up ever since this evening—a toast to the chap of a thousand hunches and every one of them right!”

Hal grinned modestly. “That's the trouble with me,” he said with a mischievous twinkle in his blue eyes. “Connover says they don't catch criminals that way. He told me I read fairy stories and tried them out in real life, or something to that effect. He told me too, that this wasn't a chase for a government man—oh no, it wasn't! It was something in Collins' line—that's why he's locked up in his own jail this minute.”

Connover laughed good-naturedly. “Rub it in, young fellow,” he said, “I deserve it. And don't forget what I told you about not knowing a clue when you saw one, too. You certainly didn't see one—that's no story—you saw a couple. And mighty good ones too!” he added with a wink at Hal.

Hal thoughtfully regarded the man, then winked back and burst into a hearty laugh.

THE END

[The end of *The Smugglers' Secret* by Percy Keese Fitzhugh (as Hugh Lloyd)]