

Happy Landing

BY BASIL HAYE

CHAPTER XV
POSTPONED RETURN

Michael Bond's immediate personal worry seemed to be Delma's news about the forthcoming American litigation. He was surprised to find how final it seemed to him that her future should be secure.

And when, on the Sunday night, she took it for granted that there would be no possible suggestion that she should return to town yet awhile, his protest was only half-hearted.

"Seems to me, sir, we're getting on very well down here, taking it as one finds it!" "Slosher" Welsh said as he moved to and fro in the bedroom, talking after an almost too eloquent manner. "Almost a shame, if I may say so, that we have to be going back to the flat, as I suppose is now the idea, sir?"

"It's a very nice flat, Welsh, and London is very pleasant."

"Which likewise is my view, sir," Welsh hastened to reassure him, and I'm not complaining about London and the flat. All the same, sir, London and that flat were pleasant still before that bulb got and squint-eye came along."

"I don't think there's any need for us to hurry back to London, Welsh, sir, all," Bond remarked, to the surprise and satisfaction of his manservant.

Bond had decided that he might linger a while. The inquest on Tino Gregorescu was the following day, and he would have to take Anna to town for that, bringing her back afterwards. There was still the matter of Van Kronen, which had to be considered. The further away from him at the moment, the better.

Not that Van Kronen really worried Bond, who had his plans laid more or less where this mysterious alien gentleman was concerned, and indeed where far deeper and far more deadly affairs were intimately involved.

He was more immediately worried over the dispute in America as to Delma Vivian's inheritance. He had gone through what papers she had during the week-end, as well as the documents her American solicitors had mailed her, together with cuttings from newspapers there. These had begun to make front-page stories of the legal fight soon coming on.

Indeed the publicity had reached this side of the Atlantic, too. During the morning, angry and a little indignant, Delma received several telephone calls from town newspapers indicating that they wanted to take up the American story from the British end, getting her version. They were sending down representatives to interview her, get her picture, and find out what chances she had in the fight for her money.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PAST

"Of course. I shall refuse to see them," Delma said unconvincingly.

Bond laughed. "I'm afraid we've got to face a regular invasion. It isn't as if you were a mere nobody, the mistress of Sunningholme—"

"Don't call me that—for anything's sake!" Delma protested suddenly almost violently.

"There isn't any mistress of Sunningholme," she said. "There won't be till you've married and taken the place back from me—"

She began to laugh, to ease the tension. "Isn't it queer how how things happen, quite opposite to the way one expects. Only a few days ago, I was furious with you, because you said you wouldn't extend the lease. Now it looks as if I shan't complete the present agreement, and you'll be turning me out—"

"That's not likely," he stopped her. "You know I'd never turn you out. Besides, you're putting up a stiff fight for that inheritance of yours, and your going to win. It's a fight on principle, not for what you may get out of it—"

"How well you know me! That is the only reason why I would fight. Honestly, I don't care if I lose the money or not—it is the principle of the thing that's at stake—"

"You know," she went on, "you yourself are like that. You'd only go into anything—anything troublesome—on a principle, because it was the proper course to take. Like that night in the Place Marc—"

"Must we go back into that ancient history again?" Bond questioned a trifle impatiently.

"It never will be 'ancient' to me," she insisted, smiling, yet serious. "It's one of those indelible pictures. And—by the way—it's one of those problem pictures, still waiting for the correct title. Is it never going to be given one?"

"Why should there be one?" Bond laughed disinterestedly.

"Because it's too good a picture to remain an unexplained canvas!" she insisted. "I know that, for all you've kept trying to minimize what happened that night. There was a real deal behind it, just as there has been behind what happened to Anna's father."

"Let it rest at present," he urged her, and pointed towards the utter brightness of green foliage and deep blue sky, of flowering blooms, of the ripened wheat, acres of it, the serrated ridges of the countryside hills against the cobalt dome overhead.

"Let's enjoy what we can see," he was saying, when she interrupted him.

"And live in a fool's paradise? No, this is the first honest-to-goodness chance you and I have had to understand each other better. Listen, Michael Bond, hasn't it ever dawned on you that I might know more about those Gregorescu brothers than I dared to let you know before?"

"Well," he questioned, looking down at her with no visible surprise, not even with marked interest, whatever he may really have felt. "Supposing you do know something, what has it to do with me?"

"Perhaps a great deal," she said. "I must have had something to do with you, because I had heard the Place Marc Gregorescu talking about you, before even I knew who that you were, or what you looked like."

"And what was the talk about?" asked Bond, still unmoved.

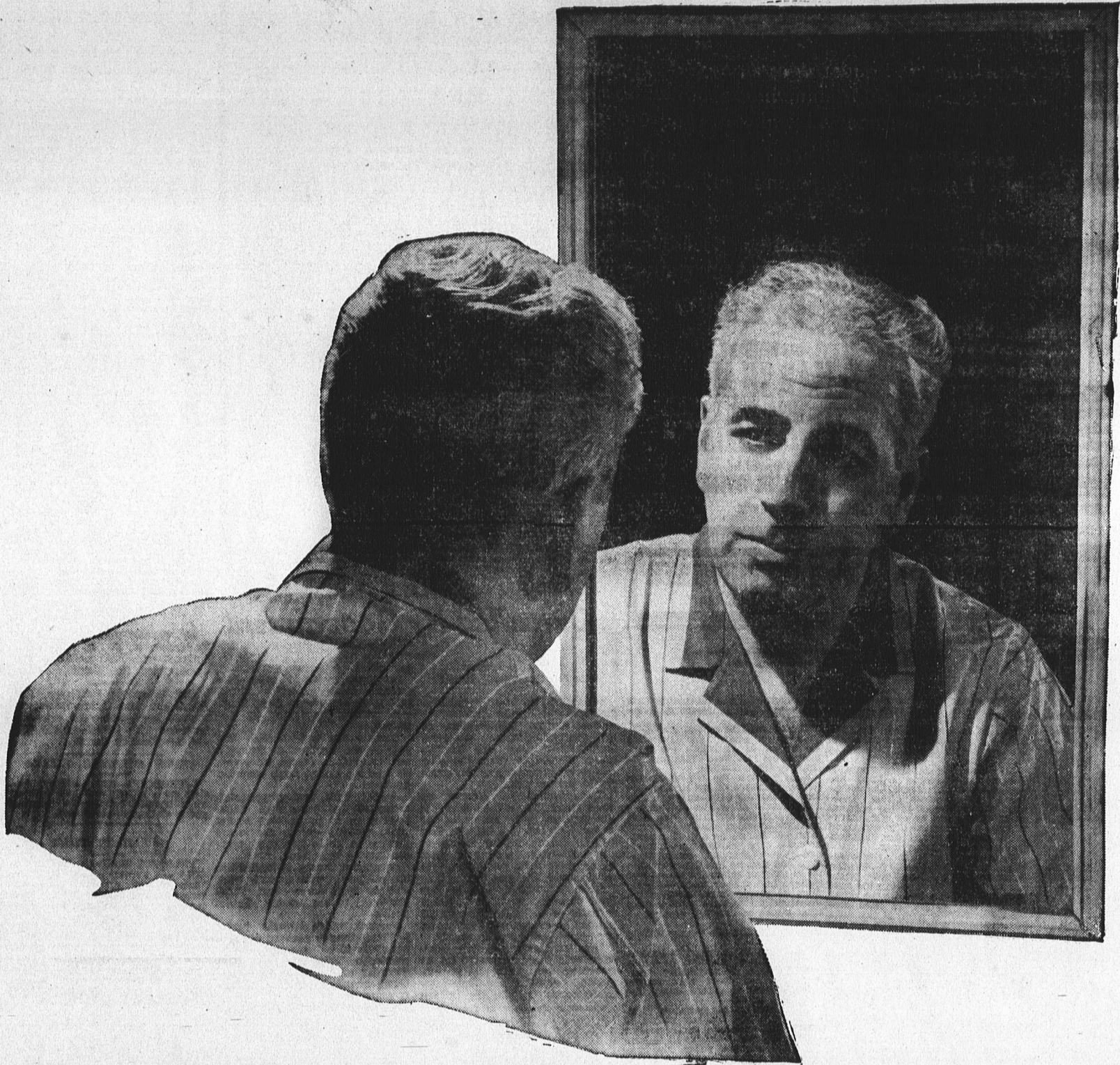
Delma was silent for a moment, and made no attempt to reply until she had glanced carefully around her in the trees surround by the forest, along which they were walking side by side. When she did speak, it was very softly and guardedly.

"THAT'S THE MAN"

"Well, some of it was about your past, about when you were in the Air Force, and about—how you had to resign your commission. Gregorescu said you had been too clever, that—though the military authorities never could prove it against you, they were right in their suspicions. You had sold some very important information to another country."

"So I did!" Bond retorted calmly. "I admit it. Is that what you want to know?"

"Why, no. I don't care what you admit. Nor am I sure that I believe"



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