

Happy Landing

BY BASIL HAYE

"Officially I believe, I am not," Bond remarked. "On the other hand there are people who still remember what happened three years ago, and that is not exactly helpful to you now."

"Absurd. To-day you have money and position. On the other hand, I don't intend that to make any difference as to your agreement with certain people—"

"I don't know," van Kronen! "I replied. "After all, the idea of mine, wasn't it? Why think I should back out? But—I must work in my own way—"

"Excellent! I appreciate that, and shall report accordingly. You can't, I am sure, have any too friendly feelings for those people who drove you out three years ago, as you yourself have said. However, there is not much time. This plan which is being prepared by the command staffs—"

"Don't worry!" Bond intervened. "If there's a way to secure it—"

"—or good information about it—I'll be ready on that account, for all I may seem I am doing nothing. I had a code message from Holland about that plan only this morning, as a matter of fact."

He took a letter from a pocket—handing it to the other.

"Reads to the uninitiated as if it were a simple tradesman's discourse about his beautiful Dutch bulbs!"

"You're warningly-laid his hand on the other's arm, for one of the doors was being opened after a hint of rattling knuckles outside. "It's really quite amazing, isn't it. How full of interest the Dutch bulb business can be, when you come to look into it?" Bond was remarking to Welsh made a respectful response.

Van Kronen had lumbered to his feet. One might have sensed that he was annoyed over this interruption, which quite definitely precluded any further privacy in conversation.

"You will not forget, dear Mr. Bond, that I am only just down-pairs, and should like a further friendly talk, if you will kindly look in there later," he suggested in an obvious alternative when Bond saw him out.

Back in that pleasant bachelor-room, Bond found himself being asked by Welsh.

"Sent off that wire, sir, according to instructions, I did," he reported and added: "What you meant by all that talk of backing horses, which I never have known you do, and me holding in my hand a message what wasn't about horses at all, while you said out it was—I couldn't quite understand—"

"But you covered it up very effectively, Welsh, and that's what mattered most, apart from sending it off—"

"Which I did right away sir. . . ."

Welsh regarded Bond with a puzzled expression. "If I may ask, sir, this Mr. van Kronen, is he on the friendly list, or otherwise, in the way of speaking?"

"On neither, Welsh, for the moment," Bond replied. "He's a gentleman who's interested in Dutch bulbs, a subject we were discussing when you came in, as doubtless you heard. Actually, he knows as much about Dutch bulbs as I do about racing. I feel it's time, Welsh, I took you a little more into my confidence. Sit down, help yourself to one of my cigarettes and listen very carefully. . . ."

CHAPTER XII FOR BULBS — READ BOMBS

"Well, sir, I've seen the likes of that on the pictures, and said to myself that's all bunk and couldn't happen in real life!" Welsh exclaimed under his breath in amazement after he had been listening for some time, and Bond had reached the extent of the story he felt disposed to tell.

"What it really comes to is this, sir," Welsh summed up. "You being more or less slung out three years ago, under suspicion-like of selling secrets to the enemy—or what might be an enemy—went out there another way and the other—got properly hitched up to the spying business—"

"Not against my own country, you understand, Welsh," Bond reminded him.

"Of course not, sir. But now—with you coming back here like a gent, having pots of money and all—these foreign folk are after you to do a swat on the land of your birth. Which, if I may say so, sir, it isn't in your nature to do, anyways."

"There is such a thing, Welsh, as leading very persistent people up the garden-path," Bond remarked.

"There might be a deep well waiting for them at the far end of the path, you know."

"And this Dutch gent that knows all about bulbs—"

"For bulbs read bombs, Welsh. However, I've told you quite enough now for you to know pretty well how the land lies. I can't tell you yet what my plans really are, or what is going to happen. I only thought it right and wise for you to know something of the situation, for you're pretty well the only person in whom I can confide."

"Besides," Bond went on, "you'll understand that I had good reason for warning you that I stood in some personal danger. You'll have to be ceaselessly on guard so that someone doesn't get me in the back, see?"

"And that, sir, you must know you can depend on me to see doesn't happen! Not likely, while Slesher Welsh is about! You can look straight to your front, sir, and make sure your back's safe enough! As for this Dutch bulb gent—"

"That's where you must use true Cockney tact, Welsh. He mustn't be allowed to suspect that you know anything at all. He mustn't get the very slightest hint of what may lie at the far end of that pleasant-looking garden path."

"I'll polish it up for him, so it looks like the Garden of Eden, sir." Welsh, or that will be just as bad. I expect he's got a servant of sorts with him—"

"He has, sir. A long slippery eel of a man with a squint in one eye."

"I know him!" Bond nodded, smiling. "And the eye you want to watch, Welsh, is the one that isn't looking at you. Meantime, while—"

(Continued on page 8, Col 1)

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