

The Unlatched Door

By Frank Price

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

(Continued)

"O. K., sir!" said the man beside the driver.

"Get everything you can. I must leave it to you because she knows me, and I don't want her to guess she's being watched. There she blows!" Aviee Carlake had appeared at the entrance. She gave an apparently casual glance to right and left, ran down the steps, and walked quickly away from the lights. "She's coming this way. Have a good look at her as she passes, Saunders. I expected her to turn in the other direction and find a taxi. You'd better follow on 'foot with the car close enough behind to be there if you want it."

He leaned back in the shadows of the hood as Aviee passed on the other side of the street. She was not in evening dress, as Kenway had half-expected, but wore a neat blue walking suit with a smart hat.

"Got her?" said the inspector. "O. K., sir!" said Saunders, who was a man of few words.

"Then go to it!" Kenway got out, and Saunders did the same. They stood in the shadow of the car while the inspector gave some final instructions; then they parted, Kenway walking briskly towards the lights, Saunders moving slowly in the wake of the girl. Presently the car followed.

Aviee went on at a good pace without looking back. She turned to the right, then to the left, and was in a busier and more brightly-illuminated street. Saunders shortened the distance between them and saw her enter one of the drab little foreign restaurants of which so many are to be found in Soho. He walked past and was able to see her being greeted by a man who had apparently been expecting her. The detective waited for the car to come up with him, so that he could explain the situation to the driver; then he, too, entered the restaurant. The girl and her companion had a table for two near the door. Passing them without a glance, Saunders found a seat from which he could keep them in view and apparently became immersed in a study of the menu.

The man Aviee had met was small and dark. He might have ranked as good looking if it were not for the straight, thin lines of a cruel mouth which showed beneath his tiny black moustache. He had soft, carefully-tended little hands with pointed fingers on two of which there flashed diamond rings and, with his elaborately-waisted and pressed grey suit, his wide bow tie and his marcelled hair brushed back from a curiously low forehead, the general effect he gave to a casual observer was one of effeminate neatness. This was marred at the moment by a large star of sticking plaster which decorated his left cheekbone.

"You are late—again!" were the words with which he greeted Aviee. His voice was soft, with only a faint trace of accent and what he said seemed innocent enough, but some undertone in it set Aviee to excusing herself eagerly.

"I couldn't help it this time, Luigi—really I couldn't! A detective came just when I was getting ready to come out!"

"Why did he come to you?"

"To— to ask me about something I— we told him last night."

"We? Who are 'we'? And how came you were telling a detective things last night? Were they things about him—the pig, Borden?"

"One of the plump, soft hands, went up to caress the cheek where the plaster was."

"Yes. There were three of us—Tony Revelstone, Sammy Lander, and me. The boys had been in my place having a drink—"

"Pah!" He almost spat at her. "Why have them in your flat drinking your drinks. What good are they to you—to me? They have no money—no value at all! And you tell me they are in your flat, drinking your drinks! I do not like that Aviee!"

"I couldn't help it, Luigi—"

"Again! There is so much you cannot help! You make me annoyed. You are a fool and always will be. I have told you that before, yes? And I suppose you had drinks with them—Revelstone and that idiot Sammy! And then detectives come to question you about Pig Borden! How was that?"

"It was just bad luck. I had been trying to get rid of them for a long time but they didn't want to go. When they did start we got out on the landing at the very time when a man and his wife from Number 9 had found what had happened."

"Well?"

"He kept us talking while his wife was gone for a policeman. He found that we knew Roger—"

"Who told him?"

"I don't know. I think Tony said something and Sammy was babbling about how glad he was that Roger had been—that he was dead. When the police came this man from No. 9 told them we were friends of Roger's. But they would have found that out, anyhow—about me and him, I mean."

"They would have found the truth—or as much of it as it would be well for them to know. Was that what you told them?"

She did not answer at once, and something in her face made him lean across the table to say, with a softness that obviously terrified her more than violence would have done: "I suppose you lied—some of those silly, foolish, useless lies you tell when you flatter yourself you have brains and are being oh so clever! What was it?"

"It was about the time we got to my flat. His eyes held hers as though she were fascinated, and she seemed to have no choice but to answer. "Really, I got there first."

"When?"

To be continued

BURGESS BEDTIME

Continued from page 10

that not all big folk were to be feared.

Wandering, not knowing where he was going, was fun, yet it wasn't fun. There were times when he felt lonesome and forlorn. He wanted to be with his brothers and sisters, and he couldn't be, for he hadn't the least idea where they were. He didn't know that by this time, they also were out in the Great World on their own; also homeless and wandering.

Almost every day he met someone whom he had never seen before. Once it was Bobby Coon. He didn't like the looks of this stout stranger with rings on his tail and a black mask across his face, and who wasn't the least bit afraid of him. He kept his distance. He met Uncle Billy Possum. This time he wasn't afraid. Without knowing how he knew, he did know that there was nothing to fear from this sharp-nosed neighbor with the queer tail. Anyway, it was a queer tail to the little Fox. You see, when he first saw Billy, the latter was hanging to a limb by his tail.

Then, one day he met Buzztail the Rattlesnake. He didn't like the looks of Buzztail, but he wasn't afraid. He had killed and eaten two or three small Snakes. He felt sure he could kill this fellow too. He began to circle-around Buzztail looking for a chance to spring on him. Then, just as he saw a chance, he was knocked sprawling, just as he had been the time when he had been going to jump on one of Jimmy Skunk's children. This time it was Mother Fox who had been just in time. He was being watched over after all.

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