

Bull-Dog Drummond

The Adventures of a Demobilized Officer Who Found Peace Dull

by CYRIL McNEILE

"SAPPER"

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"Really," remarked Drummond, "I think, sir, that you must be right in your diagnosis of your chauffeur's mentality." He turned courteously to Peterson. "When something goes wrong, for a fellow to stop his car, by braking so hard that he locks both back wheels, is no bon, as we used to say in France. I thought, judging by the tracks in the dust, that you must have been in imminent danger of ramming a traction engine. I wonder if I could help your man." He continued, "I'm a bit of an expert with a Rolls."

"How very kind of you," said Peterson. "I'll go and see." He went over to the man and spoke a few words. "Isn't it extraordinary," remarked Hugh, "how the eye of the boss galvanizes the average man into activity. As long, probably, as Mr. Peterson had remained here talking, that chauffeur would have gone on tinkering with the engine. And now—look, in a second—all serene. And yet I dare say Mr. Peterson knows nothing about it really. Just the watching eye, Mr. Lakington. Wonderful thing—the human optic."

He rambled on with a genial smile, watching with apparent interest the car in front. "Who's the quaint bird sitting beside the chauffeur? He appears to me immensely. Wish to heaven I'd had a few more like him in a chance to turn into snipers."

"May I ask why you think he would have been a success at the job?" Lakington's voice expressed merely perfunctory interest, but his cold, steely eyes were fixed on Drummond.

"He's so motionless," answered Hugh. "The bally fellow hasn't moved a muscle since I've been here. I believe he'd sit on a hornet's nest, and leave the inmates guessing. Great gift, Mr. Lakington. Shows a strength of will but rarely met with—a mind which rises above mere vulgar curiosity."

"It is undoubtedly a great gift to have such a mind, Captain Drummond," said Lakington. "And if it isn't born in a man, he should most certainly try to cultivate it. Shall we be seeing you this evening?"

Drummond shrugged his shoulders. "I'm the vaguest man that ever lived,"

he said lightly. "I might be listening to nightingales in the country; or I might be consuming steak and onions preparatory to going to a night club. So long. . . . Hope you don't break down again so suddenly."

He watched the Rolls-Royce start, but seemed in no hurry to follow suit. And his many friends, who were wont to regard Hugh Drummond as a mass of brawn not too plentifully supplied with brains, would have been puzzled had they seen the look of keen concentration on his face, as he stared along the white dusty road. He could not say why, but suddenly and very certainly the conviction had come to him that this was no hoax and no leg-pull—but grim and sober reality. In his imagination he heard the sudden sharp order to stop the instant they were over the hill, so that Peterson might have a chance of inspecting him; in a flash of intuition he knew that these two men were no ordinary people, and that he was suspect. Two thoughts were dominant in his mind. The first was that there was some mystery about the motionless, unnatural man who had sat beside the driver; the second was a distinct feeling of relief that his automatic was fully loaded.

THREE.

At half-past five he stopped in front of Godalming postoffice. To his surprise the girl handed him a wire, and Hugh tore the yellow envelope open quickly. It was from Denny, and it was brief and to the point:

"Phone message received. AAA. Must see you Carlton tea day after tomorrow. Going Godalming now. AAA. Message ends."

With a slight smile he noticed the military phraseology—Denny at one time in his career had been a signaler—and then he frowned. "Must see you." She should—at once.

He turned to the girl and inquired the way to The Larches. It was about two miles, he gathered; on the Guildford road, and impossible to miss. A biggish house standing well back in its own grounds.

"Is it anywhere near a house called The Elms?" he asked.

"Next door, sir," said the girl. "The gardens adjoin."

He thanked her, and having torn up the telegram into small pieces, he got into his car. There was nothing for it, he had decided, but to drive holdly up to the house, and say that he had come to call on Miss Benton. He had never been a man who beat about the bush, and simple methods

appealed to him—a trait in his character which many a boxer, addicted to tortuous cunning in the ring, had good cause to remember. What more natural, he reflected, than to drive over and see such an old friend?

He had no difficulty in finding the house, and a few minutes later he was ringing the front-door bell. It was answered by a maidservant.

"Is Miss Benton in?" Hugh asked with a smile which at once won the girl's heart.

"She has only just come back from London, sir," she answered doubtfully. "I don't know whether . . ."

"Would you tell her that Captain Drummond called?" said Hugh as the maid hesitated. "That I happened to find myself near here, and came on chance of seeing her?"

Once again the smile was called into play, and the girl hesitated no longer. "Will you come inside, sir?" she said. "I will go and tell Miss Phyllis."

She ushered him into the drawing-room and closed the door. It was a charming room, just such as he would have expected with Phyllis. Big windows, opening down to the ground led out on to a lawn, which was already a blaze of color. A few great oak trees threw a pleasant shade at the end of the garden, and partially showing through them, he could see another house which he rightly assumed was The Elms. In fact, even as he heard the door open and shut behind him, he saw Peterson come out of a small summer-house and com-



"It's Very Dangerous for You to Come Here," She Remarked Quietly.

mence strolling up and down, smoking a cigar. Then he turned round and faced the girl.

Charming as she had looked in London, she was doubly so now, in a simple linen frock which showed off her figure to perfection. But if he thought he was going to have any leisure to enjoy the picture undisturbed, he was soon disillusioned.

"Why have you come here, Captain Drummond?" she said, a little breathlessly. "I said the Carlton—the day after tomorrow."

"Unfortunately," said Hugh, "I'd left London before that message came. My servant wired it on to the post-office here. Not that it would have made any difference. I should have come, anyway."

An involuntary smile hovered round her lips for a moment; then she grew serious again. "It's very dangerous for you to come here," she remarked quietly. "If once those men suspect anything, God knows what will happen."

It was on the tip of his tongue to tell her that it was too late to worry about that; then he changed his mind. "And what is there suspicious," he asked, "in an old friend who happens to be in the neighborhood dropping in to call? Wherefore your telephone message? What's the worry?"

She bit her lip and drummed with her fingers on the arm of the chair. "If I tell you," she said at length, "will you promise me, on your word of honor, that you won't go blundering into The Elms, or do anything foolish like that?"

"At the present moment I'm very comfortable where I am, thanks," remarked Hugh.

"I know," she said; "but I'm so dreadfully afraid that you're the type of person who . . . who . . ."

She paused, at a loss for a word. "Who bellows like a bull, and charges head down," interrupted Hugh with a grin. She laughed with him, and just for a moment their eyes met, and she read in his something quite foreign to the point at issue. In fact, it is to be feared that the question of Lakington and his companions was not engrossing Drummond's mind, as it doubtless should have been, to the exclusion of all else.

"They're so utterly unscrupulous," she continued hurriedly, "so fiendishly clever, that even you would be a child in their hands."

Hugh endeavored to dissemble his pleasure at that little word "even" and only succeeded in frowning horribly.

"I will be discretion itself," he assured her firmly.

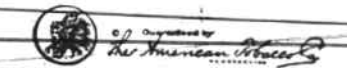
"I suppose I shall have to trust you," she said. "Have you seen the evening papers today?"



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"I looked at the ones that come out in the morning-labeled six p. m.; before I had lunch," he answered. "Is there anything of interest?"

She handed him a copy of the Planet. "Read that little paragraph in the second column." She pointed to it, as he took the paper, and Hugh read it aloud.

"Mr. Hiram C. Potts—the celebrated American millionaire—is progressing favorably. He has gone into the country for a few days, but is sufficiently recovered to conduct business as usual." He laid down the paper and looked at the girl sitting opposite. "One is pleased," he remarked in a puzzled tone, "for the sake of Mr. Potts. To be ill and have a name like that is more than most men could stand. . . . But I don't quite see . . ."

"That man was stopping at the Carlton, where he met Lakington," said the girl. "He is a multi-millionaire, over here in connection with some big steel trust; and when multi-millionaires get friendly with Lakington, their health frequently does suffer."

"But this paper says he's getting better," objected Drummond. "Sufficiently recovered to conduct business as usual."

"If he is sufficiently recovered to conduct business as usual, why did he send his confidential secretary away yesterday morning on an urgent mission to Belfast?"

"Search me," said Hugh. "Incidentally, how do you know he did?"

"I asked at the Carlton this morning," she answered. "I said I'd come after a job as typist for Mr. Potts. They told me at the inquiry office that he was ill in bed and unable to see anybody. So I asked for his secretary, and they told me what I've just told you—that he had left for Belfast that morning and would be away several days. It may be that there's nothing in it; on the other hand, it may be that there's a lot. And it's only by following up every possible clue," she continued fiercely, "that I can hope to beat those fiends and get daddy out of their clutches."

Drummond nodded gravely, and did not speak. For into his mind had flashed suddenly the remembrance of that sinister, motionless figure seated by the chauffeur. The wildest guess-work certainly—no vestige of proof—and yet, having once come, the thought stuck. And as he turned it over in his mind, almost prepared to laugh at himself for his credulity—millionaires are not removed against their will, in broad daylight, from one of the biggest hotels in London, to sit in immovable silence in an open car—the door opened and an elderly man

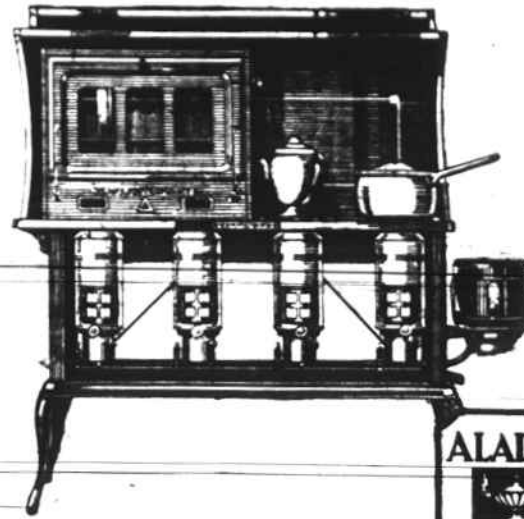
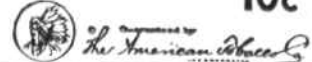
(Continued on Page Seven.)

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