

# Bull-Dog Drummond

The Adventures of a Demobilized Officer Who Found Peace Dull

by CYRIL McNEILE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY IRWIN MYERS

## CHAPTER VII.

In Which He Spends an Hour or Two on a Roof.

### ONE.

Drummond paused for a moment at the door of the sitting room, then with a slight shrug he stepped past Peterson. During the last few days he had grown to look on this particular room as the private den of the principals of the gang. He associated it in his mind with Peterson himself, suave, impassive, ruthless; with the girl Irma, perfectly groomed lying on the sofa, smoking innumerable cigarettes, and manhandling her already faultless nails; and in a lesser degree, with Henry Lakington's thin, cruel face, and blue, staring eyes.

But tonight a different scene confronted him. The girl was not there; her accustomed place on the sofa was occupied by an unkempt-looking man with a ragged beard. At the end of the table was a vacant chair, on the right of which sat Lakington regarding him with malevolent fury. Along the table on each side there were half a dozen men, and he glanced at their faces. Some were obviously foreigners; some might have been anything from murderers to Sunday school teachers. There was one with spectacles and the general appearance of an intimidated rabbit, while his neighbor, helped by a large red scar right across his cheek, and two bloodshot eyes, struck Hugh as being the sort of man with whom one would not share a luncheon basket.

Peterson's voice from just behind his shoulder roused him.

"Permit me, gentlemen, to introduce to you Captain Drummond, D. S. O., M. C., the originator of the little entertainment we have just had."

Hugh bowed gravely. "My only regret is that it failed to function," he remarked. "As I told you outside, I'd quite forgotten your manageria. In fact"—his glance wandered slowly and somewhat pointedly from face to face at the table—"I had no idea it was such a large one."

"So this is the insolent young swine, is it?" The bloodshot eyes of the man with the scarred face turned on him morosely. "What I cannot understand is why he hasn't been killed by now."

Hugh wagged an accusing finger at him. "I knew you were a nasty man as soon as I saw you. Now look at Henry up at the end of the table; he doesn't say that sort of thing. And you do hate me, don't you, Henry? How's the jaw?"

"Captain Drummond," said Lakington, ignoring Hugh and addressing the first speaker, "was very nearly killed last night. I thought for some time as to whether I would or not, but I finally decided it would be much too easy a death. So it can be remedied tonight."

If Hugh felt a momentary twinge of fear at the calm, expressionless tone, and the half-satisfied grunt which greeted the words, no trace of it showed on his face. Already the realization had come to him that if he got through the night alive he would be more than passing lucky, but he was too much of a fatalist to let that worry him unduly. So he merely stifled a yawn, and again turned to Lakington.

"So it was you, my little one, whose fairy face I saw pressed against the window. Would it be indiscreet to ask how you got the dope into us?"

Lakington looked at him with an expression of grim satisfaction on his face.

"You were gassed, if you want to know. An admirable invention of my friend Kauffner's nation."

A guttural chuckle came from one of the men, and Hugh looked at him grimly.

"The scum certainly would not be complete," he remarked to Peterson, "without a filthy Boche in it."

The German pushed back his chair with an oath, his face purple with passion.

"A filthy Boche," he muttered thickly, lurching toward Hugh. "Hold him the arms of, and I will the throat tear out."

It all happened so quickly. At one moment Hugh was apparently intent upon selecting a cigarette, the next instant the case had fallen to the floor; there was a dull, heavy thud, and the Boche crashed back, overturned a chair, and fell like a log to the floor, his head hitting the wall with a vicious crack. The bloodshot being rumbled his seat a little limply. Hugh resumed his search for a cigarette.

"After which breezy interlude," remarked Peterson, "let us to business."

Hugh paused in the act of striking a match, and for the first time a genuine smile spread over his face.

"There are moments, Peterson," he

murmured, "when you really appeal to me."

Peterson took the empty chair next to Lakington.

"Sit down," he said shortly. "I can only hope that I shall appeal to you still more before we kill you."

Hugh bowed and sat down.

"Consideration," he murmured, "was always your strong point. May I ask how long I have to live?"

Peterson smiled genially.

"At the earnest request of Mr. Lakington you are to be spared until tomorrow. At least, that is our present intention. Of course, there might be

an accident in the night; in a house like this one never can tell. Or—"

he carefully cut the end off a cigar—"you might go mad, in which case we shouldn't bother to kill you. In fact, if you go mad, we shall not be displeased."

Once again he smiled genially.

"As I said before, in a house like this, you can never tell."

The intimidated rabbit, breathing heavily, was staring at Hugh fascinated; and after a moment Hugh turned to him with a courteous bow.

"Laddie," he remarked, "you've been eating onions. Do you mind deflecting the blast in the opposite direction?"

His calm imperturbability seemed to madden Lakington.

"You wait," he snarled thickly; "you wait till I've finished with you. You won't be so d—d humorous then."

Hugh regarded the speaker languidly.

"Your supposition is more than probable," he remarked, in a bored voice. "I shall be too intent on getting into a Turkish bath to remove the contamination to think of laughing."

Slowly Lakington sank back in his chair, a hard, merciless smile on his lips; and for a moment or two there was silence in the room. It was broken by the unkempt man on the sofa, who, without warning, exploded unexpectedly.

"A truce to all this fooling," he burst forth in a deep rumble; "I confess I do not understand it. Are we assembled here tonight, comrades, to listen to private quarrels and stupid talk?"

A murmur of approval came from the others, and the speaker stood up waving his arms.

"I know not what this young man has done; I care less. In Russia such trifles matter not. He has the appearance of a bourgeois, therefore he must die. Did we not kill thousands—aye, tens of thousands of his kindred, before we obtained the great freedom? Are we not going to do the same in this accursed country? Kill him now—"

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dated rabbit, with the light of battle in his watery eye, was declaiming on the glories of workmen's councils; a bullet-headed man was shouting an inspiring battle cry about no starvation wages and work for all.

"Can it be possible," thought Hugh, grimly, "that such as these have the power to control big destinies?" And then, because he had some experience of what one unbalanced brain, whose owner could talk, was capable of achieving; because he knew something about mob psychology, his half contemptuous amusement changed to a bitter foreboding.

"You fool!" he cried suddenly to the Russian; and everyone ceased talking. "You poor d—d boob! You—and your new earth! In Petrograd today bread is two pounds four shillings a pound; tea, fifteen pounds a pound. Do you call that freedom?" He gave a contemptuous laugh.

Too surprised to speak, the Russian sat staring at him; and it was Peterson who broke the silence with his suave voice.

"Your distress, I am glad to say, is not likely to be one of long duration," he remarked. "In fact, the time has come for you to retire for the night, my young friend."

He stood up smiling; then he walked over to the bell behind Hugh and rang it.

"Dead or mad—I wonder which," he threw the end of his cigar into the grate as Hugh rose. "While we

deliberate down here on various matters of importance we shall be thinking of you upstairs—that is to say, if you get there. I see that Lakington is even now beginning to gloat in pleasant anticipation."

Not a muscle on the soldier's face twitched; not by the hint of a look did he show the keenly watching audience that he realized his danger. Lakington's face was merciless, with its fiendish look of anticipation, and Hugh stared at him with level eyes for a while before he turned toward the door.

"Then I will say 'Good night,'" he remarked casually. "Is it the same room that I had last time?"

"No," said Peterson. "A different one—specially prepared for you. If you get to the top of the stairs a man will show you where it is." He opened the door and stood there smiling. And at that moment all the lights went out.

TWO.

The darkness could be felt, as real darkness inside a house always can be felt. Not the faintest glimmer even of greyness showed anywhere, and Hugh remained motionless, wondering what the next move was going to be. Now that the night's ordeal had commenced, all his nerve had returned to him. He felt ice-cold; and as his powerful hands clenched and unclenched by his sides, he grinned faintly to himself. Then very cautiously he commenced to feel his way toward the door.

At that moment someone brushed past him. Like a flash Hugh's hand shot out and gripped him by the arm. The man wriggled and twisted, but he was powerless as a child, and with another short laugh Hugh found his throat with his other hand. And again silence settled on the room.

Still holding the unknown man in front of him, he reached the foot of the stairs, and there he paused. He had suddenly remembered the mysterious thing which had whizzed past his head that other night, and then clanged suddenly into the wall beside him. He had gone up five stairs when it had happened, and now with his foot on the first, he started to do some rapid thinking.

If, as Peterson had kindly assured him, they proposed to try and send him mad, it was unlikely that they would kill him on the stairs. At the same time it was obviously an implement capable of accurate adjustment, and therefore it was more than likely that they would use it to frighten him. And if they did—if they did...

The unknown man wriggled feebly in his hands, and a sudden unholy look came on to Hugh's face.

"It's the only possible chance," he said to himself, "and if it's you or me, laddie, I guess it's got to be you."

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With a quick heave he jerked the man off his feet, and lifted him up till his head was above the level of his own. Then clutching him tight, he commenced to climb. His own head was bent down, somewhere in the region of the man's back, and he took no notice of the feebly kicking legs.

Then at last he reached the fourth step, and gave a final adjustment to his semi-conscious burden. He pressed his head even lower in the man's back, and lifted him up another three inches.

"How awfully jolly!" he murmured. "I hope the result will please you."

"I'd stand quite still if I were you," said Peterson suavely. "Just listen."

As Hugh had gambled on, the performance was designed to frighten. Instead of that, something hit the neck of the man he was holding with such force that it wrenched him clean out of his arms. Then came the clang beside him, and with a series of ominous thuds a body rolled down the stairs into the hall below.

"You fool!" He heard Lakington's voice, shrill with anger. "You've killed him. Switch on the light..."

But before the order could be carried out Hugh had disappeared, like a great cat, into the darkness of the passage above. As luck would have it the first room he darted into was empty, and he flung up the window and peered out.

A faint, watery moon showed him a twenty-foot drop onto the grass, and without hesitation he flung his legs over the sill. And at that moment something prompted him to look upward.

It was a dormer window, and to an active man access to the roof was easy. Without an instant's hesitation he abandoned all thoughts of retreat; and when two excited men rushed into the room he was firmly ensconced, with his legs astride of the ridge of the window, not a yard from their heads.

Securely hidden in the shadow, he watched the subsequent proceedings with genial toleration. A raucous fellow from the two men announced that they had discovered his line of escape; and, in half a minute the garden was full of hurrying figures. One, calm and impassive, his identity betrayed only by the inevitable cigar, stood by the garden door, apparently taking no part in the game; Lakington, blind with fury, was running round in small circles, cursing everyone impartially.

"The car is still there." A man came up to Peterson, and Hugh heard the words distinctly.

"Then he's probably over at Benton's house. I will go and see."

Hugh watched the thick-set, massive figure stroll down toward the wicket gate, and he laughed gently to himself. Then he grew serious again, and with a slight frown he pulled out his watch and peered at it. Half-past one... two more hours before dawn. And in those two hours he wanted to explore the house from top; especially he wanted to have a look at the mysterious central room of which Phyllis had spoken to him—the room where Lakington kept his



He Opened the Door and Stood There Smiling.

"Kill Him Now—Throw Him in a Corner and Let Us Proceed."

throw him in a corner and let us proceed."

He sat down, amidst a murmur of approval, in which Hugh joined heartily.

"Splendid," he murmured. "A magnificent peroration. Am I right, sir, in assuming that you are what is vulgarly known as a Bolshevik?"

The man turned his sunken eyes, glowing with the burning fires of fanaticism, on Drummond.

"I am one of those who are fighting for the freedom of the world," he cried harshly, "for the right to live of the proletariat." He flung out his arms wildly. "It is freedom; it is the dawn of the new age."

Hugh looked at him with genuine curiosity; it was the first time he had actually met one of these wild visionaries in the flesh. And then the curiosity was succeeded by a very definite amazement: what had Peterson to do with such as he?

For the moment his own deadly risk was forgotten: a growing excitement filled his mind. Could it be possible that here, at last, was the real object of the gang; could it be possible that Peterson was organizing a deliberate plot to try and Bolshevize England? He looked up to find Peterson regarding him with a faint smile.

"It is a little difficult to understand, isn't it, Captain Drummond?" he said, carefully flicking the ash off his cigar. "I told you you'd find yourself in deep water." Then he resumed the contemplation of the papers in front of him.

Hugh half closed his eyes, while a general buzz of conversation broke out round the table.

Fragments of conversation struck his ears from time to time. The intim-

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