

**Bull-Dog Drummond**

The Adventures of a Demobilized Officer Who Found Peace Dull

by **CYRIL McNEILE**  
"SAFFER"

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And Once Again the American Laughed Softly at the Look on His Face.

Lakington first. Oh! yes—most undoubtedly—Henry first!

And once again the American laughed softly at the look on his face.

**CHAPTER XI**  
In Which Lakington Plays His Last "Coup."

**ONE**

"Toby, I've got a sort of horrid feeling that the hunt is nearly over."

With a regretful sigh Hugh swung the cart out of the sleeping town of Godalming in the direction of Laidley Towers. Mile after mile dropped smoothly behind the powerful two-seater, and still Drummond's eyes wore a look of resigned sadness.

"Very nearly over," he remarked again. "And then once more the tedium of respectability positively stares us in the face."

"You'll be getting married, old bean," murmured Toby Sinclair hopefully.

"True, O King," he answered. "It will ease the situation somewhat; at least, I suppose so. But think of it, Toby: no Lakington, no Peterson—nothing at all to play about with and keep one amused."

"You're very certain, Hugh." With a feeling almost of wonder Sinclair glanced at the square-jawed, ugly profile beside him. "There's many a slip . . ."

"My dear old man," interrupted Drummond, "there's only one cure for the proverb-quoting disease—a dose of salts in the morning." For a while they raced on through the warm summer's night in silence, and it was not till they were within a mile of their destination that Sinclair spoke again.

"What are you going to do with them, Hugh?"

"Who—our Carl and little Henry?" Drummond grinned gently. "Why, I think that Carl and I will part amicably—unless, of course, he gives me any trouble. And as for Lakington—we'll have to see about Lakington." The grin faded from his face as he spoke. "We'll have to see about our little Henry," he repeated softly.

"And I can't help feeling, Toby, that between us we shall find a method of ridding the earth of such a thoroughly unpleasing fellow."

"You mean to kill him?" grunted the other non-committally.

"Just that, and no more," responded Hugh. "Tomorrow morning as ever is. But he's going to get the shock of his young life before it happens."

He pulled the car up silently in the deep shadows of some trees, and the two men got out.

"Now, old boy, you take her back to The Elms."

"But confound it all," spluttered Toby Sinclair. "Don't you want me to help you?"

"I do: by taking the buzz-box back. This little show is my shout."

For a moment or two Hugh stood watching the car as it disappeared down the road along which they had just come, while his thoughts turned to the girl now safely asleep in his flat in London. Another week—perhaps a fortnight—but no more. Not a day more. . . . And so delightful was the train of thought thus conjured up, that for a while Peterson and Lakington were forgotten. The roseate dreams of the young about to wed have been known to act similarly before.

Wherefore to the soldier's instinctive second nature, trained in the war and sharpened by his grim duel with the gang, must be given the credit of preventing the ringing of the wedding bells being postponed for good. The sudden snap of a twig close by, the sharp hiss of a compressed-air rifle, seemed simultaneous with Hugh hurling himself flat on his face behind a sheltering bush. In reality there was that fraction of a second between the actions which allowed the bullet to pass harmlessly over his body instead of finishing his career there and then. He heard it go zipping through the undergrowth as he lay motionless on the ground; then very cautiously he turned his head and peered about.

A shrub was shaking a few yards away, and on it Hugh fixed his half-closed eyes. If he lay quite still the man, whoever he was, would probably

assume the shot had taken effect, and come and investigate. Then things would be easier, as two or three Boches had discovered to their cost in days gone by.

For two minutes he saw no one; then very slowly the branches parted and the white face of a man peered through. It was the chauffeur who usually drove the Rolls Royce, and he seemed unduly anxious to satisfy himself that all was well before coming nearer. The fame of Hugh Drummond had spread abroad amongst the satellites of Peterson.

At last he seemed to make up his mind, and came out into the open. Step by step he advanced toward the motionless figure, his weapon held in readiness to shoot at the faintest movement. But the soldier lay sprawling and inert, and by the time the chauffeur had reached him there was no doubt in that worthy's mind that, at last, this wretched meddler with things that concerned him not had been laid by the heels, which was as unfortunate for the chauffeur as it had been for unwary Huns in the past.

Contemptuously he rolled Drummond over; then, noting the relaxed muscles and inert limbs, he laid his gun on the ground preparatory to running through his victim's pockets. And the fact that such an action was a little more foolish than offering a man-eating tiger a peppermint lozenge did not trouble the chauffeur. In fact, nothing troubled him again.

He got out one gasping cry of terror as he realized his mistake; then he had a blurred consciousness of the world—upside down, and everything was over. It was Olaki's most dangerous throw, carried out by gripping the victim's wrists and hurling his body over by a heave of the legs. And nine times out of ten the result was a broken neck. This was one of the nine.

For a while the soldier stared at the body, frowning thoughtfully. To have killed the chauffeur was inconvenient, but since it had happened it necessitated a little rearrangement of his plans. The moon was setting and the night would become darker, so there was a good chance that Lakington would not recognize that the driver of his car had changed. And if he did—well, it would be necessary to forego the somewhat theatrical entertainment he had staged for his benefit at The Elms. Bending over the dead man, he removed his long grey driving-coat and cap; then, without a sound, he threaded his way through the bushes in search of the car.

He found it about a hundred yards nearer the house, so well hidden in a small space on the road that he was almost on top of it before he realized the fact. To his relief it was empty, and placing his own cap in a pocket under the seat he put on the driving-coat of his predecessor. Then, with a quick glance round to ensure that everything was in readiness for the immediate and rapid departure such as he imagined Lakington would desire, he turned and crept stealthily toward the house.

**TWO**

Laidley Towers was en fete. The duchess, determined that every conceivable stunt should be carried out which would make for the entertainment of her guests, had spared no pains to make the evening a success. The duke, bored to extinction, had been five times routed out of his study by his indefatigable spouse, and was now, at the moment Hugh first came in sight of the house, engaged in shaking hands with a tall, aristocratic-looking Indian. . . .

"How d'y do," he murmured vacantly. "What did you say the dam' fellow's name was, my dear?" he whispered in a hoarse undertone to the duchess, who stood beside him welcoming the distinguished foreigner.

"We're so glad you could come, Mr. Ram Dar," remarked the duchess affably. "Everyone is so looking forward to your wonderful entertainment." Round her neck were the historic pearls, and as the Indian bowed low over her outstretched hand, his eyes gleamed for a second.

It had been the marquis of Laidley himself, who had suggested getting hold of this most celebrated performer, who had apparently never been in England before. And since the marquis of Laidley's coming-of-age was the cause of the whole evening's entertainment, his suggestion had been hailed with acclamation. How he had heard about the Indian, and from whom, were points about which he was very vague; but since he was a very vague young man, the fact elicited no comment. The main thing was that here, in the flesh, was a dark, mysterious performer of the occult, and what more could a house party require? And in the general excitement Hugh Drummond crept closer to the open window. Suddenly his jaw tightened; Irma Peterson had entered the room with young Laidley.

"Do you want anything done, Mr. Ram Dar?" asked the duchess—"the lights down or the window shut?"

"No, I thank you," returned the Indian. "I am ready. Who first will learn of the things that are written on the scroll of Fate?"

And it was at that moment that the intent watcher outside the window began to shake with silent mirth. For the face was the face of the Indian, Ram Dar, but the voice was the voice of Lakington. It struck him that the next ten minutes or so might be well worth while. The problem of removing the pearls from the duchess' neck before such an assembly seemed to present a certain amount of difficulty even to such an expert as Henry.

And Hugh crept a little nearer the window, so as to miss nothing. Evidently the scene was now set—the necessary props were in position—and Hugh waited with growing impatience for the principal event. But the principal performer seemed in no hurry. In fact, in his dry way Lakington was thoroughly enjoying himself. An intimate inside knowledge of the skeletons that rattled their bones in the cupboards of most of those present enabled the gods to speak with disconcerting accuracy; and as each victim insisted on somebody new facing the sands that came from beyond the mountains, the performance seemed likely to last indefinitely.

At last a sudden delighted burst of applause came from the group, announcing the discomfiture of yet another guest, and with it Lakington seemed to tire of the amusement. Enraged though he was in the anticipation of the main item which was still to be staged, Drummond could not but admire the extraordinary accuracy of the character study. Not a detail had been overlooked; not a single flaw in Lakington's acting could he notice. It was an Indian who stood there, and when a few days later Hugh returned her pearls to the duchess, for a long time neither she nor her husband would believe that Ram Dar had been an Englishman disguised. . . . And this was what happened as seen by the fascinated onlooker crouching near the window outside.

Superbly disdainful, the Indian after a short, meaningless patter, to hold the attention of the audience, stalked to the open window. With arms outstretched he stared into the darkness, seeming to gather strength from the gods whom he served.

"De your ears not hear the whisperings of the night?" he demanded. "Life rustling in the leaves; death moaning through the grasses." And suddenly he threw back his head and laughed, a fierce, mocking laugh; then he swung round and faced the room. For a while he stood motionless, and Hugh, from the shelter of the bushes, wondered whether the two quick flashes that had come from his robe as he spoke—flashes such as a small electric torch will give, and which were unseen by anyone else—were a sign to the defunct, chauffeur.

Then a peculiar look came over the Indian's face, as his eyes fell on a Chinese cabinet.

"Where did the Protector of the Poor obtain the sacred cabinet of the Chow Kings?" He peered at it reverently, and the duke coughed.

"One of my ancestors picked it up somewhere," he answered apologetically.

"Fashioned with the blood of men, guarded with their lives, and one of your ancestors picked it up!" The duke withered completely under the biting scorn of the words, and seemed about to say something, but the Indian

had turned away, and his long, delicate fingers were hovering over the box. With gleaming eyes he stared in front of him, and a woman shuddered audibly.

"What is it supposed to do?" she ventured timidly.

"For centuries that box contained the jewels—precious beyond words—of the reigning queens of the Chow dynasty. They were wrapped in silver and gold tissue—of which this is a feeble, modern substitute."

From a cummerbund under his robe he drew a piece of shining material, the appearance of which was greeted with cries of feminine delight.

"You would not ask me to commit sacrilege?" Quietly he replaced the material in his belt and turned away,

and Hugh's eyes glistened at the cleverness with which the man was acting. Whether they believed it or not, there was not a soul in the room by this time who was not consumed with eagerness to put the Chinese cabinet to the test.

"Supposing you took my pearls, Mr. Ram Dar," said the duchess diffidently. "I know that compared to such historic jewels they are poor, but perhaps it would not be sacrilege."

Not a muscle on Lakington's face twitched, though it was the thing he had been playing for. Instead he

seemed to be sunk in thought, while the duchess continued pleading, and the rest of the party added their entreaties. Then, as if he had decided suddenly, he swung round.

"I will try," he announced briefly, and the duchess headed the chorus of delight. "Will the Presences stand back, and you, your Grace, take that?" He handed her the piece of material. "No hand but yours must touch the pearls. Wrap them up inside the silver and gold." Aloofly he watched the process. "Now advance alone, and open the box. Place the pearls inside. Now shut and lock it." Obediently the duchess did as she was bid; then she stood waiting for further instructions.

But apparently by this time the Great Brooding Spirit was beginning to take effect. Singing a monotonous, harsh chant, the Indian knelt on the floor, and poured some powder into a little brazier. He was still close to the open window, and finally he sat down with his elbows on his knees, and his head rocking to and fro in his hands.

"Less light—less light!" The words seemed to come from a great distance—ventriloquism in a mild way was one of Lakington's accomplishments; and as the lights went out a greenish, spluttering flame rose from the brazier. A heavy, odorous smoke filled the room, but framed and motionless in the eerie light sat the Indian, staring fixedly in front of him. After a time the chant began again; it grew and swelled in volume till the singer grew frenzied and beat his head with his hands. Then abruptly it stopped.

"Place the box upon the floor," he ordered. "In the light of the Sacred Fire." Hugh saw the duchess kneel down on the opposite side of the brazier, and place the box on the floor, while the faces of the guests—strange and ghostly in the great light—peered like specters out of the heavy smoke. This was undoubtedly a show worth watching.

"Open the box!" Harshly the words rang through the silent room, and with fingers that trembled a little the duchess turned the key and threw back the lid.

"Why, it's empty!" she cried in amazement, and the guests craned forward to look.

"Put not your hand inside," cried the Indian in sudden warning, "or perchance it will remain empty."

The duchess rapidly withdrew her hand, and stared incredulously through the smoke at his impassive face.

"Did I not say that there was power in the box?" he said dreamily. "The power to render invisible—the power to render visible. Thus came protection to the jewels of the Chow queens."

"That's all right, Mr. Ram Dar," said the duchess a little apprehensively. "There may be power in the box, but my pearls don't seem to be."

"The Indian laughed.

"None but you has touched the cabinet, your Grace; none but you must touch it till the pearls return. They are there now; but not for mortal eyes to see."

Which, incidentally, was no more than the truth.

"Look, oh! sahhs, look; but do not touch. See that to your vision the box is empty. . . ." He waited motionless, while the guests thronged round, with expressions of amazement; and Hugh, safe from view in the thick, sweet-smelling smoke, came even nearer in his excitement.

"It is enough," cried the Indian suddenly. "Shut the box, your grace, and lock it as before. Now place it on the table whence it came. Is it there?"

"Yes." The duchess' voice came out of the green fog.

"Go not too near," he continued warningly. "The gods must have space—the gods must have space."

Again the harsh chant began, at times swelling to a shout, at times dying away to a whisper. And it was during one of these latter periods that a low laugh, instantly checked, disturbed the room. It was plainly audible, and someone irritably said, "Be quiet!" It was not repeated, which afforded Hugh, at any rate, no surprise. For it had been Irma Peterson who had laughed, and it might have been hilarity, or it might have been a signal.

"Bring the box, your grace," he cried harshly, and once more the duchess knelt in the circle of light, with a row of dimly seen faces above her.

"Open; but as you value your pearls—touch them not." Excitedly she threw back the lid, and a chorus of cries greeted the appearance of the gold and silver tissue at the bottom of the box.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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"Tomorrow, too, sir, as far as I know," answered the man.

"And what's he doing?" demanded Drummond.

"On this level, gunner, I can't tell yer. Strite, I can't."

At that moment Darrell's voice came up from the hall.

"The whole bunch are stowed away, Hugh. What's the next item?"

Hugh walked to the top of the stairs. A grin spread over his face as he saw half a dozen familiar faces in the hall, and he hailed them cheerily.

"Like old times, boys," he laughed. "Where's the driver of the torry?"

"That's me, sir." One of them stepped forward.

"Good," said Hugh. "Take your bus ten miles from here; then drop that crowd one by one on the road as you go along. You can take it from me that none of 'em will say anything about it, even when they wake up. Then take her back to your garage; I'll see you later."

"Now," went on Hugh, as they heard the sound of the departing lorry.

"We've got to set the scene for tomorrow morning." He glanced at his watch. "Just eleven. How long will it take me to get the old buzz-box to Laidley Towers?"

"Laidley Towers," echoed Darrell. "What the devil are you going there for?"

"I just can't bear to be parted from Henry for one moment longer than necessary," said Hugh quietly. "And Henry is there, in a praiseworthy endeavor to lift the duchess' pearls. Dear Henry!" His two fists clenched, and the American, looking at his face, laughed softly.

But it was only for a moment that Drummond indulged in the pleasures of anticipation; all that could come after. And just now there were other things to be done—many others, if events next morning were to go as they should.

"Take those two into the center room," he cried. "Incidentally there's a dead Boche on the floor, but he'll come in very handy in my little scheme."

"A dead Boche!" The intimidated rabbit gave a frightened squeak. "Good heavens! you ruffian, this is beyond a joke."

Hugh looked at him coldly.

"You'll find it beyond a joke, you miserable little rat," he said quietly. "If you speak to me like that." He laughed as the other shrank past him.

"Three of you boys in there," he ordered briskly, "and if either of them gives the slightest trouble clip him over the head. Now let's have the rest of the crowd in here, Peter."

They came filing in, and Hugh waved a cheery hand in greeting.

"How goes it, you fellows," he cried with his infectious grin. "Like a company pow-wow before popping the parapet. What! And it's a bigger show this time, boys, than any you've had over the water. Gather round, and listen to me."

For five minutes he spoke, and his audience nodded delightedly. Apart from their love for Drummond—and three out of every four of them knew him personally—it was a scheme which tickled them to death. And he was careful to tell them just enough of the sinister design of the master-criminal to make them realize the bigness of the issue.

"That's all clear, then," said Drummond, rising. "Now I'm off, Toby. I want you to come, too. We ought to be there by midnight."

"There's only one point, captain," remarked the American, as the group began to disperse. "That safe—and the ledger." He fumbled in his pocket, and produced a small India-rubber bottle. "I've got the soup here—gelignite," he explained, as he saw the mystified look on the other's face. "I reckoned it might come in handy. Also a fuse and detonator."

"Splendid!" said Hugh. "splendid! You're an acquisition, Mr. Green, to any gathering. But I think—I think—"

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