

SPORTSMAN FLIES HIGH

By Lawrence A. Keating

Synopsis: Detective Dan Colwell of the Graber-Vael private detective agency is assigned the job of shadowing McDonald, whose wife fears gangster enemies are plotting to murder him. McDonald is killed in spite of Colwell's watchfulness. Now, with McDonald dead the smuggling ring which he led has become disorganized. Colwell risks his life to gather evidence by playing one against another.

SEVENTH INSTALLMENT

"Had a little fracas, nothing much. What do you hear from Otto—is he still hunting?"

Vael nodded. "Saw in the paper yesterday a note that Otto shot a buck." A lynx-eyed chap with quiet manners and the air of a family man and home-lover, Vael tried a smoke ring. "Guess you're still on that case for Mrs. McDonald, eh? Funny they haven't got the two mugs that killed him. Prominent lawyer and all. One of them was found in an alley, you know."

As Colwell merely shrugged the visitor launched forward. "Say, what did you want me here for, Dan? You have something up your sleeve. I haven't much time, so spring it."

There was a short silence. "All right, I'll put in plainly for you. McDonald, you know, was the boss of a snow smuggling ring."

"No, Arthur McDonald?" Vael whistled. "What do you think of that?"

"And Otto Graber was—is mixed up in this ring. You too, Vael. Don't lie!" he charged as the man started to protest. "Don't let's waste words, I've got something to help you, so there's no use getting tough! You're in it, Vael—you're one of the smaller fry. Graber treats you like dirt, always has, always will."

The greying complexion of Vael's face was ample proof that he knew it to be true.

"I've seen it and filed it away for reference. Now, you aren't such a bad sort. I like you a heap better than Graber. He's— Dan raised a hand to his head and ruefully rubbed a spot there still tender. "You're all right, Vael, but they're making a sucker out of you. Had it planned before McDonald kicked the ghost. Now they are making new plans and leaving you out just like before. And more than that: they'll likely make you the goat if anything goes wrong. You must have suspected this, Vael," he appealed with a gesture. "Shucks, I'm not telling you anything, am I?"

The visitor struggled with conflicting emotions. "How do you know? You're not in the deal!"

Colwell admitted this with a shake of his head. "Happened on to it from working for the agency you and Otto run. From this McDonald case. Anyhow, I know it. And I like, you Vael. Enough to ask you here so I can give you the low-down and a warning. So you can protect yourself."

Vael considered carefully. The ash on his cigarette grew very long and finally tumbled to the carpet unheeded. "It's true," he said with a sigh. "With McDonald gone, nobody trusts anybody else. It's dog eat dog. What are you after, Dan?"

He smiled. "A sale. Told you to bring a thousand cash, and I hope you brought it. Look here: I'm not peddling snow. Gosh, I wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole! But they're out to rook you and each other, if they can. Now, I don't know what yarn they told you, how the stuff was coming in. But I've got it straight. For five hundred I'll hand it over. The half grand looks good to me, Vael, for you fellows don't pay me much."

The grey haired, hook nosed man kept a paker face. "I'll pay, provided your information doesn't coincide with mine. I'm not paying for something I may know already."

"Of course not. Put your money on the table."

There was some hesitancy about this. But at length the visitor roused himself, stood up, and produced five crisp one hundred dollar bills. He placed them on a small table which was an equal distance from the chair of each Vael sat down again. "Well?"

"It's coming in by truck. They're going to lift a packing case off the truck."

"I know all that," Vael snapped impatiently.

"Did you know it was in a case of toys from Czechoslovakia?"

Vael jumped to his feet. "Toys? That straight?" He burst into a string of oaths, his hands working convulsively. "Why, the low rats told me it was brushes from Holland! I'll be— He cursed again, and began to stride up and down. "That was Mac's original scheme, I'd swear by it! Unless Mac and Graber figured—"

He halted and shot a keen look at Colwell. "What else? Which way's the truck coming?"

"Through the Anawanda valley along the Indian highway."

Vael's fury redoubled. "What!" he ejaculated. "Why, those dirty carps claimed it's over the Telegraph road! Of all the double-crossers, the yellow livered double-crossers! And they think they can shake me out like that, eh? But listen, what about the truck license number? Mac had that and

... You haven't it, have you, Dan?" he wheeled.

Colwell grinned and nodded. "For five hundred."

Without hesitation Vael placed the sum on the table, making a cool thousand.

"Now feel under the table and take out those thumb tacks. It's there. Here, I will." He rose and stepped to it. His hand went under the table.

A gun prodded his back. "Stick 'em up, you fathead!"

He stiffened, growling. Vael's laugh was bitter and taunting. "You sap! Pull me here with a fairy story, will you?" He snatched the crisp hundred dollar bills and stuffed them into a pocket. "Now back off. Careful! I want that license number, Colwell, and the boys are waiting downstairs for it. Hell, they're such dubs they couldn't get it off you! Let you go on a fake 'phone call from Harry Deane, eh? I'll take that license number, Colwell... and then polish you off like Otto should've a couple days ago!"

While he talked he fumbled under the table and with his other hand held a deadly bead on his victim. But Vael's triumph turned slowly to suspicion. He fumbled harder, more anxiously, seemingly unable to find what he sought.

"Drop that gun!"

It was a feminine voice from the kitchenette. At first Vael paid little heed. Dan watched hawk-like for an opening, a chance to spring on him.

With a muffled oath Vael started to crook his trigger finger. "I'll kill—"

Wham!

The small apartment rocked with the explosion. There was a yell of pain, the metallic clink of a gun striking the hard composition floor that helped make the place sound-proof.

Vael huddled with his wrist between his knees and blood trickled down his forearm where the ripped sleeve exposed it.

Dan had out his own gun in a flash. The wielder of the weapon that had been fired did not appear. The slender, white arm withdrew into the kitchenette. Colwell backed to Vael's gun. Getting it, he kept his own leveled, while he got the cartridges out of it, and tossed it to Vael.

"Get out! And if you're wise you'll get way out! Keep away from those buzzards waiting for you, Vael: take a train tonight, and never, never come back. Don't play with snow again, ever—that's my best advice. Change your life man!"

Astonished that he was being permitted to leave, the visitor hurried whining with pain to the door. Dan opened it and with an upraised foot gave impetus to Vael's flight. He closed and locked it again, quickly, then turned.

"Good work, Irita! Saved my bacon, that's all. Come up here to kill me. Sure of himself, too. We've got to get out quick and over to the other place. They'll be up here in ten minutes and break down the door."

"You know," he muttered reflectively, "I think Vael told the truth about it being brushes from Holland. Anyhow, I'm sure going to find out if there are any brushes coming in from Holland and if so we'll have the whole story, time, place and all!"

Colwell sat beside the driver of the black coupe admiring her profile dimly seen. He smiled as he reflected Irita was a good sport, plucky and daring. She had to be for the game they were in. She was the kind who could hold her own in a drawing room, a hotel, or in a dangerous gamble like this—though Dan thought he preferred having her in a drawing room.

It was dark all around them, the sky a murky mass of ominous clouds, the heavy trees an efficient camouflage for the car drawn off the road with its radiator pointed to the highway. Colwell held his palm over the glowing stub of his cigar. Irita beside him seemed listening and watching intently.

"I hope they're coming." She changed posture. "I'm tired of waiting. And how do we know there's all the money in it you think? Just a guess, Dan. I almost wish I had a soft job selling hosiery over a counter, or laundry soap or something. Twenty a week might be better than trying to collect thirty-five or forty grand apiece from two men who maybe haven't that much anyhow."

Colwell grinned in the darkness and squeezed her hand on the wheel.

"They've got it, all right. They didn't set up in this game just yesterday; they've made plenty. Um!" he exclaimed at a sudden twinge in his shoulder. "It takes more than three days to forget how Graber and Quillen can play!"

She turned her oval face to study him. "I'm sorry it still hurts. I'm surprised you're still alive. You're so ambitious, Dan, that it leads you from one scrape to another, doesn't it? Oh!" she broke off. "There goes a truck!"

"Not the one." He watched the big canvas covered vehicle rattle out of sight around a turn in the road, its red tail light disappearing as though wiped out by an invisible hand.

They waited. Ten minutes passed.

The rumble of another heavily-laden truck reached their ears and presently its white headlights swept the concrete highway. Irita looked intently at Colwell but again he shook his head.

Another, and a fourth truck passed. Suddenly, through his side window, Dan saw a flash of light straight up into the black sky. It was a half-mile away. Colwell leaned to the girl. "Coming now!"

She turned a switch and pressed the starter. The motor buzzed softly. Irita looked at Colwell, then back to the road. They both were tense as they listened and watched.

Again a heavy rumble came, deepening and growing louder. The white paths of its headlights grew vivid. The truck came abreast and passed them. When it was gone a half-mile Colwell patted the girl's arm. She slipped into first speed and eased the black coupe through a shallow ditch into the road. She twisted the wheel and headed after the truck.

As the roadster's lights picked it up Dan read the license number. He saw packing boxes lashed on the extended tail gate. Irita kept the little car trailing until they rounded another curve. Then she speeded alongside the big van.

Irita began to sing happily, loudly, and to weave the car from side to side. Dan crouched out of sight on the floor. She brought the coupe abreast the cab of the truck and leaning out, gave a careless wave of her arm.

"H'ya, boys! Whish way Washonville?"

The coupe swerved dangerously close to the front of the truck. "Hey!" the man beside the driver yelled. "Look out, there!"

Irita laughed recklessly. "Wanna play?" She swerved the car back and forth. It darted within an inch or the truck's front wheels, then corkscrewed away—only to come back again. Irita drove with one hand, continuing to wave her other out the window.

"C'mon — issa game! Whish way Washonville? Hoo-pee!" she cried. "C'mon, less' race!"

"Look out! Hey!" The truck driver careened his vehicle nearer the edge of the road at another mad lunge of her car. "Keep away! Get that thing away from here!"

The second man leaned out. "Go on, honey—we don't want an accident," he begged. "Listen, this thing would bust your car to kindling. You too!"

He all but pitched at the coupe as it veered at him and his comrade jerked the truck aside. The man shrank back inside the cab.

"—drunk and crazy as—" Colwell heard.

Irita went into a new series of corkscrew lunges and a new series of gestures and calls. The coupe kept edging the big truck nearer and nearer the edge of the road. The driver was increasingly nervous; his companion tensely awaited the crash.

It came.

A final reckless swoop brought a hard scrape of fenders. The truck lurched away to avoid a bad smash-up. It double rear wheels mired in the soft shoulder of the road and the driver abruptly was bereft of strength to get it back. There was a prolonged sucking sound, a series of yells and warnings from both occupants of the truck—then a crash.

One headlamp shattered against a tree. A fender scraped its tire. The big five-ton truck with Acme Carriers, Inc., U. S. Customs Bonded, Permit 229, painted on her side, came to a dead halt. Irita also stopped. Colwell slipped unseen out the far door, a long, keen edged knife in his hand. He hurried to the rear of the truck.

Irita climbed out with the air of a woman scorned and about to do something important. She carried a heavy wrench in one hand. "What d'you mean, nunnin' into me?" she demanded shrilly as she went to meet the pair.

"What you talkin' about? Lookit that busted light!" the driver moaned, pointing. "Who's going to pay for that, huh? Damn all drunken drivers! A woman, too. Why—"

"Who says I'm a woman? Who says it? I'm a lady. Thasswhat I am!" She straightened proudly. "I'm a lady. What you mean bending my fender? Have you arrested. Terrible driving. Want to kill me? Cantcha see where you're going?"

She carried it out with zest, as if she enjoyed it. But it was hard, hateful work. Irita declaimed, complained and berated them. She had the men perspiring. They began to think she was right and that they were wholly wrong. Until at length she seemed to lose interest, and turned back to her coupe.

With that she banged the door on her side, started up the motor, and backed gingerly from contact with the truck fender. Colwell, crouched low beside her, waited until they were a mile away from the truck. Then he straightened with a sigh.

"That was a rotten job to ask you to do. But Irita, you did it nobly. And we've got 'em in the rear deck—brushes from Holland. It was right on

the edge of the tailgate waiting to be taken!"

They wheeled at a fast pace down the concrete road. "Two hundred and fifty thousand in snow! Irita, that'll put us—"

"Dan!"

Her exclamation was followed by a leap of the coupe that threw his head back. At the same instant she swerved aside. A sedan shot at them through the dark. It bore no light, and Irita, at sight of the thing lunging from nowhere, had to act with split-second precision.

The cars seemed doomed to meet headon; but at the last possible instant the driver of the sedan twisted aside and Irita's twist gave them a foot between.

Glass tinkled. There was a thin spray on the girl's arm. Again it tinkled as the second orange stab of flame came from the other car. Its tires shrieked on the concrete. The car plunged like a piston to back and turn. The spray of the rear window stung Colwell's cheek.

"Irita—step on it—they're turning! I'll give 'em something to chew on, but git! It's Graber and Quillen and Vael!"

Colwell sat reading a newspaper in his office on the eleventh floor of the Lawyers and Doctors building, in the suite formerly occupied by that well-known defender of criminals, Arthur McDonald. The opaque glass corridor door had been replaced by one of metal finished in imitation of walnut which bore the simple inscription: The Federalist. Transoms were of metal and immovable. Such glass as the suite still boasted was bullet-proof.

Dan had treated himself to a box of fifty cent cigars of the brand Otto Graber smoked, one of which he puffed luxuriously as with his feet on the desk and powerful body tilted back in his chair, he absorbed the day's news. He took the cigar from his mouth, flicked ashes on the floor, and replaced it. Sighing, he turned a page of his paper to read the Around Town column.

"Word reached us today," he read, "that Otto Graber, partner with Horace Vael in a local detective agency, suffered a hunting accident four days ago. Graber and a party of friends were starting from their camp near Ewing, Pennsylvania, early one morning when one of their guns accidentally discharged. Graber suffered a shoulder wound which local doctors pronounced not serious. Otto, well known as an aviation enthusiast, expects to fly his Monogram plane back to be at his desk in the sleuth agency next Monday morning."

Dan puffed interestedly on his cigar as he re-read the item. His eyes squinted at the window. Graber had a neat alibi worked up. Very good. Even to the "accidental" discharge of a gun. But as a matter of fact the "accident" had occurred out on the Telegraph road when Graber just barely missed getting that two hundred fifty thousand dollars worth of snow which Colwell now was offering to sell him for forty thousand.

He tossed the newspaper on his desk. Yawned and stretched. It was tiresome waiting. Colwell wished the boys would meet his price and get the thing over. Forty thousand from Graber, forty also from Quillen. Each side acting independently, the same Boston bag of snow sold both parties—if it could be so worked—would net Colwell a sweet eighty grand.

His telephone tinkled. "Graber or Quillen?" Dan asked without a moment's hesitation. "Oh, Lefty! I'm here till I get my price or rot. By the way, it goes up five thousand a day from now on. You fellows have to pay me for all the time I'm wasting. You think I enjoy putting off my little vacation?"

About to replace the ear piece, he listened. A grin overspread his blunt face at the torrent of heated curses. Dan felt gingerly of the adhesive tape crisscross on his head. "Certainly I'll sell to Graber! First come, first served. So you boys fell out again? Yes, yes, I know, Otto is ambitious that way. So it's every man for himself now—and that goes for me too."

He listened a moment. "Never mind threats—ring me up when you're bringing in the cash. Where can you make a buy like this? Sure, I know. But that two hundred and fifty G's wasn't all your money. What about McDonald and Graber and Vael? Probably Catterby too."

"No, I'm sitting tight." Of a sudden his eyes kindled as the voice at the other end changed. "What, okay? This afternoon at three? Well, I tell you, Lefty, as a special favor, see, I will hold the stuff for you. It's a deal. But not a minute after three! Remember, when you come, come alone. Else you don't get in!"

He hung up. The grin deepened on his face and Dan laughed aloud. So Quillen had given in: he would buy! But he could not raise forty thousand in cash until afternoon, he said. Colwell rubbed his hands with exuberance. One signed up—that was great! Now to hook Graber.

Forty-five minutes passed. Dan stirred at the summons of the buzzer. He swung his feet from the desk, felt for the gun in his shoulder holster, and moved for the door. But without touching its knob he stealthily opened a wire wall screen panel. The person outside could not see in, nor would any tiny pinpoints of light suddenly show through yellow kalsomine. But Colwell could see out, and he raised one eyebrow as he recognized Helen Fane.

He thought a moment. Then he unlocked and unbolted the door. "Hello! Come in—if you're alone."

She smiled. As more than once be-

fore he was struck by her regal grace and the simple, yet effective costume she wore. The little maroon hat tilted archly over her hazel eyes matched the rabbit-hair maroon wool dress that showed through her open mink coat. It was chilly out today with the crisp tang of winter. Colwell smiled appreciatively.

He closed and locked the door with care. "Well," he said, "you've tapped my wire and probably have a dictaphone planted, so I'll have to be polite, won't I? Have a chair. The inner office please. Cigarette? I hope you brought a fat wad of Graber's money. Hear you and he are thick again."

She smiled up at him, shrugging. They both were aware that every word said could be heard clearly by Otto. Under a fake name he had rented the next suite south. Helen leaned to the match he cupped, then sat back in her chair and blew a little wriggling smoke ring.

"Why not be reasonable?"

Colwell feigned surprise. "As if I'm not!"

Helen Fane took a tiny memo pad from her purse, and a patented pencil. As she talked she wrote a few words, slowly and carefully. "You're not a very good insurance risk these last few days. After all, fifteen thousand is more than a private detective earns a month. Or a year. It's a lot of money. Hard to come by. And you could have it so easily!" Helen purred.

"Fifteen is chicken feed. Look here," she told her earnestly. "I'm boosting the price five thousand a day. Tomorrow, forty-five thousand. Next day, fifty. Take it or leave it. Maybe I'll use the stuff myself." Dan grinned. "Why not? There's enough to last till I'm eighty."

"You'll never live to be eighty." Finishing her writing, she handed the slip to Colwell. He read it, raised his eyes to hers, and tucked the paper away. "How much did you bring?"

"Twenty-five," she said.

"Nothing doing. Waste of time. Just out of cussedness. I want forty. You tell Graber I'm not coming down and he can send you back with forty or not at all."

He spoke with impatience but it seemed not to register on the girl. She smoked her cigarette in silence. The telephone rang. "No," Dan said into it directly, "you can't come in, Otto. Your little messenger here is enough for now. Anyhow, I want to get better acquainted."

"What's that?" His face changed as he listened. "Oh, Sommers! Sorry, I expected someone else. What is it?"

"Now, Mr. Colwell, you gave strict orders not to be disturbed," the building superintendent went on. "But I'm afraid I need to get a man in your office for about half an hour. Steamfitter. Oh, he's dependable! The suite next yours burst a radiator and they are all connected, and he must get in your place to shut it off. Built for one suite, you see, but when Mr. McDonald took separate space—"

Colwell considered, frowning. He could rely on Sommers, of course; he had paid the man enough. "Well," he said in some reluctance, "all right, then. Provided you bring him up. I want to see you with him so there's no mistake, but of course you don't need to come in."

(Continued Next Issue.)

State Solons To Fill Vacancies

Election of Speaker, Commissioners and Judges Face Members At Start of Session.

Columbia, Jan. 4.—Legislators at the session opening here next Tuesday will elect four judges, five public service commissioners, the chief game warden, four medical college trustees and one Winthrop college trustee.

The four circuit judges up for reelection this year are: G. Duncan Bellinger of Columbia, judge of the fifth judicial circuit; Thomas S. Sease of Spartanburg, seventh circuit; W. H. Grimbail of Charleston, ninth circuit, and G. B. Greene of Anderson, tenth circuit.

It has long been the custom to reelect judges to their benches without opposition unless there is reason for a change. Legislative observers have expressed the opinion that reelection of the four judges would be perfunctory.

The fate of five public service commissioners who come up for re-election is a great deal more uncertain. Their jobs are considered fair political game for all comers and all five are apt to have opposition when the balloting starts.

Chief interest is centering in the election of the house speaker, the post held last year by Claude A. Taylor of Spartanburg, who did not offer for re-election. Two candidates, Representative Solomon Blatt of Barnwell, speaker pro tem last year, and Representative L. C. Wannamaker of Cheraw, apparently have the field to themselves.

Modern Women

We are told by Miss Josephine Schain, who has just returned from the peace conference in Brussels, Belgium, that attending the women's commission, over which she presided and which was one of 14 commissions, were delegates representing 45 million women all over the world. It was the largest representation of women ever brought together and the peace conference was the most significant meeting in the interest of peace ever held. Of the 5,000 delegates one-third were women. Miss Schain went as the representative of the National Committee on the Cause and Cure of War, of which she is chairman.

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