

THE DEVIL'S DERELICT



By LESTER DENT

Pilot Bellow Brill was spoiling for trouble. And he found it. His plane slapped the open sea with a backwash that swamped a gangland ship—and rinsed its decks in red.

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WO thousand feet under the droning amphibian a thread of sparks climbed above the fog layers smeared close to the sea. Another followed. Another. A procession into the night sky. The threads became suddenly attached to balls of lurid fire. Rockets. Distress signals.

A hand the size and color of a cured ham flicked the control wheel of the amphibian. The craft sagged on one wing. Throaty bellowing from the bayonet stacks of the two motors dropped to a mutter.

Back in the plane's cabin was spasmodic motion. A man jammed wildly into the pilot's compartment. A beefy man with a sagging paunch, jowls that hid his ears, hard eyes.

"What the hell!" he yelled.

The reply he received sounded mild, but it rumbled out, drowned the two motors. Like a fog horn opening up.

"There's a boat down there asking help."

The fat man snarled in the reflected glow from the instrument panel.

"Let the coast guard get them!" he railed. "We've got no business out in the damn' Atlantic after dark. A pilot with guts would have gone through that storm instead of flying two hundred miles out of his way to get around it. We're past due in New York now. Get back on your course!"

"Bellow" Brill shifted two hundred and thirty pounds of grizzly hulk in the pilot's seat. His mild voice drowned out the rumble of the motors again.

"Coast guard won't see the rockets," he pointed out. "The fog sticks to the water like a blanket. We're fifty miles out from the Maine shore. Code of the sea demands we go down."

The hand of the other went into the pocket of his blue serge coat.

"Back on your course! That's an order, see!"

Bellow Brill eyed the bulge in the pocket, larger than the fellow's hand.

"Probably wasting time to argue," he

agreed. His oversize right hand left the rim of the control wheel, jerked at the instrument panel in sudden alarm.

"The gasoline—look at the gauge!" he gasped.

The fat man looked. Bellow Brill's fist whipped up, connected with a brittle crack. The fellow lifted, hung quivering and collapsed. His head hit an exposed hull brace with a hollow thump.

Lapects of the blue serge coat sagged, uncovered the detective's badge he wore.

BELLOW BRILL hauled lustily at the control wheel. The big plane was on her nose, boring at the fog draped sea. With a scream the mahogany snout came up. The limp body of the detective rolled as the craft went into a vertical bank.

Using one hand, Bellow Brill extracted a .38 Police Special from the unconscious man's coat pocket, transferring it to his own belt. There was pulse in the fat wrists. Saliva drooled from the flabby lips, bursting in bubbles as the fellow breathed.

Straightening, the big pilot glanced back in the cabin at his passengers.

The four men had made no effort to leave the wicker seats. Their vicious faces mirrored little concern for what might happen.

"Sit tight!" he roared at them. "And hang on when we hit the water!"

A rocket climbed up, broke under the left wingtip. The amphibian whistled down a tight spiral, headed for fog piled in irregular masses, tipped with silver moon glow. Like cotton, very clean in some spots and very dirty in others. The plane cut streamers of the vapor. Globules of water filmed the glass windows.

Bellow Brill went through contortions with rudder and control wheel, leveling the heavy craft. He stabbed at the light switches. Shafts of glaring incandescence licked from wingtips and blunt bow.

Another rocket stitched a trail of sparks in the heavens. The flash where it was fired was a sickly glow off to port. It revealed nothing. The fog was thick soup.

Bellow Brill plunged a hand into a netting side pocket, brought out a signal gun. He jerked open a sliding window, fired it.

The plane was banking. It nearly caught the flare projectile before it burst in a plume of sparks that painted the yellow wing surface sickly vermilion.

Below was black nothingness. No trace of the boat sending up the rockets.

Bellow Brill leveled the huge passenger plane. The sparks from his own rocket had drifted, given him wind direction, besides notifying those below, if they could see it. They would know he intended to land, could certainly hear the roar of the motors.

The blanket of fog was thinner than he had estimated. The plane was too close the surface to be healthy. No chance of seeing what was wrong down there below.

The amphibian howled downwind, motors dragging her to safety. Fully two minutes he held the compass dial absolutely stationary. Three miles. The frame squawked protest as he whipped the craft about.

He lined the compass, retraced the down course, motors throttled. The needle of the altimeter went sluggish, started a slow retreat.

Back in the cabin the four passengers were uneasy, but made no effort to leave their seats.

BELLOW BRILL thrust his head through the open window. His colorless hair stood out like piano wire as it moistened. Fog damp smeared his goggles. He tugged them off. The wind plucked at his eyeballs, screamed in his flattened ears.

The rockets had stopped coming. The plane was bucking the teeth of the breeze, dropping slowly.

The craft was flying in ink. The light

beams were glittering bars of metal, diffusing not at all, filled with streamers of vapor that writhed like leviathans in torment.

Bellow Brill suddenly hugged the wheel of his chest. The moonglow had blotted out. Gullies and crags of dirty green, spume tipped, clutched at the plump hull, then receded.

The pilot nursed the buzzing monster down again. He felt misgivings for the first time. The sea was running higher than he expected.

He spat disgustedly at the altimeter, off adjustment until it registered three hundred feet when there was not fifty below, stalled the craft slightly.

A mountain of water leaped up, smashed the plane high into the air. Ensued a frenzied battle with the controls. Another smash. A wrenching, convulsive series of them, and they were down. Spray sheeted through the windows, beat against the two propellers like barrage fire.

The slack body of the detective pitched grotesquely, worming back into the cabin.

White faced, wedged in the wicker seats, the four passengers rolled their eyes and hung on. One had started cursing uneasily.

The plane bounced like a feather. Bellow Brill sawed the knobbed throttle levers like inverted pendulums. The plane held sway, gunned into the whistling blow. The propellers howled a crescendo.

A white smear, irregular in shape, suddenly took form at the tips of the three rods of light slicing into the fog. It bulked closer, rapidly assumed definiteness, shape.

The stern of a yacht. Adrift, bows into the wind.

Bellow Brill wedged his head through the window, filled his lungs, and hailed.

There was no answer. The stern of the craft rushed up, paint and brass gleaming moistly. A clammy ghost ship of marble and glittering threads of gold.

The big flyer raked the throttles shut until the motors barely turned over. The plane lost speed as if it had run into mud. None too soon. The hull nosed the stern of the yacht with a crash.

Bellow Brill untangled from the control wheel and splintered instrument dials with amazing speed, lunged back into the cabin, scooped up a hank of line from a netting locker, and fought with the hatch.

Outside, he ran forward on the arched back of the hull. The rail of the yacht was in reach. He leaped, caught it, hung with one hand, made the end of the line fast, and chinmed himself.

Another hail returned silence. The fog wrapped deck was liveless. She might have been a derelict for all the signs of movement. There was no illumination, not even riding lights.

A long minute Bellow Brill hesitated. It would have taken no effort at all to swing over the rail. He did not do it.

Instead, he dropped back on the hull of the plane, snubbed the free end of the line to a streamlined mooring cleat. Then he scuttled for the hatch, on all fours to prevent being pitched overboard.

Inside, he headed for the control compartment and clicked off the ignition switches. The amphibian dropped back swiftly, started worrying at the line like a playful bull pup.

The body of the detective wallowed in sympathy with the plane's antics. Saliva bubbles still burst regularly on the protrudent lips.

Bellow Brill slapped the serge suit until he found a leather container loaded with keys.

That in his hand, he glared disgustedly at the four men crouched in the wicker seats. His passengers.

"I'll have to take the bracelets off," he rumbled at them. "You've got to go aboard with me!"

Handcuff links tinkled as the four shifted uneasily.

CHAPTER II

MURDER'S BACKWASH

BELLOW BRILL paused, eyes on the shackled quartet, measuring them, something he had not troubled to do before.

He had no idea what they were charged with. Their presence was urgently desired in New York; so urgently that the owners of the big amphibian had taken it off a passenger run and sent it to get the four and their captor from the little town on the north Maine coast where they were held.

A vicious, hard lot. Stocky, moon faced, eyes like swine, swarthy skins that looked oily enough to ooze.

One thing he did know. In the group was a flyer. The detective had divulged that before the start. Which one of the four it was, he had no way of telling.

The wicker seat rests that anchored the handcuffs would not hold a man who wanted to get loose. They lacked solidity. That left but one thing to do—take the quartet along.

These thoughts had already rattled through Bellow Brill's head as he hung on the taffrail. The inspection ended. He unlocked the first of the prisoners, yanked him to his feet and pitched him into the rear of the cabin with an ease that made the fellow goggle eyed.

He did the same for the others. Two handcuffs had been used on each. He released one end of each piece of jewelry, let the other dangle from the swarthy wrists.

The three swallowed where he pitched them, frightened, sick, but dangerous. The fourth came to his feet like a cat. He who had done the cursing.

Bellow Brill crashed a big fist between the fellow's eyes, knocked him sprawling in the wreckage of wicker seats. He landed dazed and blinking.

The flyer charged. He ignored the revolver in his belt. The men were gangsters, familiar with the menace of

guns. Bellow Brill had sailed before the mast, sweated in stoke hells, earning his masters ticket. He had handled crews of just such vicious south Europeans as this collection. He knew what they feared. Fists.

He yanked each of the four erect, smashed them down again, pulling his blows, for he did not want them out.

"Now you damn grease balls, do what I say!" he roared as they cringed and ceased to fight back after a few first futile strugglers. "And do it hell fired quick!"

He backed quickly, vaulted through the hatch.

"Outside!"

They came, crawling, bleeding like rats. He had hit them on their noses purposefully.

Bellow Brill herded them forward on the arched top if the amphibian's cabin. Then he grasped the mooring line. His huge muscles corded. Slowly, the plane drew up under the stern of the yacht. A bound put him over the rail.

He gave the line a turn about a bit. The snout of the plane instantly started goring the steel plates like an enraged bull.

"Upsy-wupsy!" he roared, crowding insult on injury.

The battered four scrambled aboard, huddled together. The big flyer let the plane drop back to the end of her tether.

Then he hailed for the third time and got no reply.

"Walk ahead!" he boomed at his captives. "We'll look into the cabins first. Jump, blast you!"

They found the first body in the cabin companion.

THE floodlights on the wingtips of the amphibian were high enough to illuminate the deck and diffuse a sickly glow down the companion.

The dead man was short in stature, wore a white uniform. One of the yacht's crew.

Bellow Brill looked at the features of the corpse and felt nausea. The face

had been obliterated by a torrent of lead.

On a level with the big flyer's chest, about where the head of the dead man would have come, the neat paintwork was spattered with stuff that looked like chopped liver.

The interior of the cabin was fog filled darkness. Bellow Brill palmed the revolver, slid lightly down the companion, avoiding the body. He found the light switch at once, got a blinding glare.

"Come in here, ye scuts!" he roared at his prisoners.

His voice had acquired a brogue after what he saw as he peered about the lounge.

The place was a shambles. It had seen a terrific gun fight. Chairs, card tables, and smoking stands were overturned. Glass in picture frames, mirrors, and wall paneling were bullet riddled.

Four dead men sprawled in various postures. One, who lay apart, wore greasy khaki coveralls and a cap; the others immaculate white uniforms. They had dropped fighting. A submachine gun and several automatics littered the thick carpet where they had fallen when their operators went down.

The prisoners crowded inside, handcuff links beating a metallic clangor.

The flyer stirred a body with his toe. *Rigor mortis* had not set in. Blood in the nap of the carpet had not even turned black.

The door in the bow bulkhead was open, the passage beyond brilliantly lighted.

Bellow Brill glanced at it out of the corner of one mild blue eye. At the same instant almost, he launched his bulk sidewise with a leisurely smoothness.

His fist cracked again. One of the swarthy gangsters piled forcibly into an overstuffed armchair.

"Sneak for one of them guns, will ye!" he roared. "Fer that, I'll handcuff ye together."

He proceeded to do that, making a

living chain of the four, then yanked them across the lounge. The passage was lined on either side by stateroom doors. There was another dead man on the narrow carpet, and all the doors but one were open.

Fulfilling the big flyer's suspicions, the staterooms were empty and revealed nothing of interest. He halted in front of the closed door.

It was a net of splintered wood. Bullets had riddled the hardwood panels like a sieve. Not all the splinters turned out, so part of the shooting had come from the corridor. It was locked —on the inside.

"Open up!" the flyer boomed.

Thirty seconds he waited for the answer that didn't come. Then he crashed a huge leather flying boot against the lock.

The barrier exploded inward. Fishing around the jamb with one hand, he kept his body carefully shielded until he found the light switch.

BY his elaborate yachtman's attire, the man on the floor was the owner.

A pasty facèd, dandified fellow with patent leathered hair. Unquestionably dead.

The flyer wasted only a cursory glance on the body. The stateroom, larger than the rest, held much else of interest.

A woman was stretched under the curtained port. Bellow Brill walked over and looked down at her. His lips pursed, emitted a whistle, and he peered more intently.

She was young, with the kind of voluptuous beauty found in movie and stage stars. The evening dress she wore could not have weighed more than a few ounces.

Her mouth and neck were a smear of crimson. The fluid had pooled between her breasts, soaked the upper part of her dress, and colored the carpet.

"Hell, Tony—look!"

"Damn the luck!" rumbled Bellow Brill. "Ye scuts! Get outa here! Stop

outside the door where I can see ye!"

One of the prisoners had spoken. The eyes of the four protruded as they focused on the safe which stood against the aft bulkhead.

The door of the strong box was open. The contents spilled out on the floor.

Rubber band wrapped bundles of green paper, some soiled, some crisp with newness. More than a bushel of it. Money.

The flyer picked up one of the bundles and pitched it savagely back into the safe. He read the denominations of the top note. The others saw it too, as they crowded sullenly into the passage. A thousand dollar bill.

Rapidly, he stuffed the rest into the steel box. His four prisoners looked chagrined. He banged the safe door, whirled the combination, and stood up.

There were two submachine guns on the floor, circular magazines nearly full. Bellow Brill took them both, as well as two automatics, and inspected the state-room for more weapons.

Near the woman was a small derringer with pearl handles and ornate gold inlay.

Bellow Brill eyed the crimson spattered feminine form for a long minute, ran his eyes over his surroundings again.

"We won't do anything here—yet," he said; his words loud, even for his crashing tones.

He left the derringer where it lay, strode into the passage, closing the splintered door firmly behind him. With the muzzle of the rapid firer, he prodded the four gangsters sternward through the passage and the death lounge.

He handcuffed them to the taffrail.

CHAPTER III

GUN-POWDER FISTS

HE had two good reasons for doing that. Sight of the safe's contents had produced the same effect in the

prisoners as a shot from a hypodermic needle. It had given them back the courage he had gone to such pains to batter out with his fists. They would make trouble.

Besides, they were in his way. In case a fight started, they would automatically add four to the enemy.

"Listen, fellow," one of the gangsters whined. "You're passing up something!"

"Shut up!" Bellow Brill suggested.

He tested the handcuff linked to the rail. Then he went forward. He ran, not because of what he expected to find, but because his big body had tasted excitement, and excitement acted on Bellow Brill like an intoxicant.

He did not enter the superstructure this time. Half way to the bows he pitched the submachine gun that was the nearest empty over the rail.

Huddled in the bows was the man who had sent up the rockets, shot through the lungs. The flyer thought he had bled to death until he turned the body and saw another bullet hole between the eyes.

He was a Chinaman, the cook.

Evidence was written on the deck. He had been shot somewhere aft, inside the superstructure, and dragged himself into the bows to shoot off his rockets and die with the roar of the amphibian's motor in his ears.

Bellow Brill went over the remainder of the craft rapidly. The captain was dead on the toy-like bridge, shot like the rest. Galley, forecastle, and engine room were empty. He picked up weapons as he went, until he bristled like a perambulating armory.

In the dining salon he found what was left of two more men clad in greasy khaki coveralls, and one of the crew. There was no need of examining the bodies for life.

The table was arrayed for dinner, with most of the dishes shot off on the floor. At one end a polished brass service bell stood undisturbed in a litter of shattered glassware.

He finished the search without finding anything else and ended up in front of the stateroom door they had found closed and bullet riddled.

The yacht was a shambles. A derelict of death.

Bellow Brill listened, cursed under his breath. The four prisoners, handcuffed to the after rail, were making no sounds. The tugging of the moored plane in the blow was audible. He shoved open the splintered door.

The stateroom looked as he had left it, except that the derringer had vanished.

He slammed the door. Then he strode to the side of the woman, prodded her with his toe.

"Ye're foolin' nobody," he told her. "Get up!"

She came to her feet like a cat, hissing.

Bellow Brill grinned into the black colon which was the maw of the derringer. The weapon had been under her body.

"The bottle the red ink came out of," he boomed. "Ye should have pitched it out of the port, instead of into a corner."

The woman stopped hissing to spit saliva dyed with red ink.

"I didn't know who you were," she said in a voice that sounded like a million.

"Ye don't know yet," rumbled Bellow Brill. "Gorra—damn!"

The last as a shot crashed from the direction of the stern.

IN midair, on a leap that carried him all the way to the door, Bellow Brill shot a suggestion.

"Best play dead again! The scuts must have sneaked a gun when I wasn't looking."

He charged down the passage and through the lounge, hurdling overstuffed chairs. A card table went to pieces under his feet with a ripping of wood and fibre.

Three figures hugged the rail instead

of four; black gargoyles wrapped in fog against the glare of the plane's lights.

There was a wad of handkerchiefs on the deck. They had been used to keep off lead splinters and powder burn while the handcuff links were being shot off.

Bellow Brill waggled his helmet up the companion on the muzzle of the submachine gun.

"Look out Tony, here he is!" one of the three screeched warning.

Bellow Brill came out of the companion like a garagantuan jumping jack. The rapid fire clattered on the deck. His fist popped on the jaw of the gangster shackled nearest the rail. The falling body jerked the other two off balance.

The flyer picked up all three, pitched them overside. There was a concentrated howl of agony, but the handcuffs held.

With the man next the rail unconscious, they would hang some time.

Back in the shelter of the superstructure, the big flyer made plans.

A shot shattered the quiet. The light on the plane's port wingtip went out in a puff of glass and blue sparks.

Bellow Brill slid across the deck like a base runner, shoulder brushing the superstructure.

Another shot, and the light on the starboard wingtip disappeared.

On his belly, Bellow Brill fired at the flash of the gun and missed. As he had guessed, the marksman had scuttled to starboard for the next shot.

THE flyer ducked a cloud of splinters and crawfished to shelter. He sat up, lifted the revolver, and deliberately shot out the plane's remaining light, the one on the hull. If fighting in the dark was wanted, he was agreeable.

He stood erect, jumped for the top of the cabin, and drew himself up. It was risky, but it developed the fellow in the bows had not thought of the same thing.

A red glow like foxfire located two skylights, covered with writhing tendrils of vapor. One of the trio dangling over the stern started screaming as steel chewed into his wrists and grated against the bone.

Covered by that, and the whistle of the wind, Bellow Brill scuttled forward. He reached the diminutive bridge, stopped there, balked. Lights had been switched off on the fore deck.

Below was a black void. In it the gangster undoubtedly lurked.

Quietly, Bellow Brill fished a silver dime out of his pocket and pitched it into the bows.

He grinned when the ruse didn't work.

Holding the revolver under his armpit to deaden the click, he cocked it. Then, with his left hand, he threw it, hard, and into the bows.

The automatic was ready in his right hand.

The revolver struck. The shock released the hammer. It exploded.

Instantly lead spewed at the flash. The dancing plume of flame disclosed a swarthy face with the beady eyes of a pig, not six feet distant. The man had faced the sound made by the dime when he heard it.

Bellow Brill slipped the safety catch on his automatic, hurled it, and followed with two hundred and thirty pounds of gristle and bone, all in one movement.

They hit the deck in a heap. Two swings the big flyer landed were superfluous. The gangster was already unconscious.

Limping on a shin that had cracked the deck, Bellow Brill dragged his victim toward the stern by an oily wrist.

The chain of gangsters were very willing to be hauled back aboard. The man nearest the rail was just regaining his senses.

The flyer looked overside. Then, swiftly he jerked down a huge square of awning, ripping it from the fastenings. The yacht had fallen into the

trough of the sea. In a moment the amphibian would be pounding to pieces against the steel hull.

IN the light from the lounge companion, Bellow Brill cut four lengths from a line attached to a life preserver. Rapidly he rigged a sea anchor by bending the lines to the corners of the canvas and fastening the ends together in the center.

The job done, he snapped the unconscious gangster on the end of the living links for the second time. Then he went below, moving swiftly, with a definite purpose.

The young woman sidetracked him in the passage. She beckoned him inside the stateroom with the dead man and the safe, closed the bullet shattered door.

"Where were you going?" she asked.

Bellow Brill looked at her features. It was not an innocent face.

"Why?" he parried.

"You intend to get the coast guard?"

He nodded. "With the radio." The brogue had gone.

"The four men with you, your prisoners—they made a break after they saw the money. They'd like to get it."

"I expect they would, Miss—Miss—!"

"Maida La Forge."

The young woman favored him with a smile as cold as diamond chips.

"Leave them aboard," she suggested. "I heard you land. You have a plane. I want you to take me to Canada."

"The safe is locked," pointed out Bellow Brill.

"I know the combination."

"The devil!" grunted the flyer.

"There's two hundred and fifty grand."

Bellow Brill looked at her intently.

"Just what happened here before we came along?" he asked.

"We going to get together?"

"No."

"Fifty-fifty?"

"No."

"Then go to hell and find out what happened, you ugly ape!"

She did not stop at that. Bellow Brill's ears reddened, began to burn as if they had been slapped. He was something of a connoisseur on profanity himself. He felt lost. She left the bounds of decency and brought up things that made him sick at the stomach.

"I'd empty this owl head into your guts!" she finished. "Only I need you to keep those grease balls off me. They'd cut the throat of their own mother."

Bellow Brill backed into the passage.

"Better stay in this stateroom," he grunted dryly.

CHAPTER IV

HI-JACKER STRIKES BACK

THE flyer took up his previous mission where he had been sidetracked. He ran forward to the dining salon, and got the brass service bell which reposed on the end of the table in the shattered chinaware. At headlong speed, he made for the stern with the bell.

The amphibian was butting playfully at the steel hull, preliminary to the real damage that would follow.

Bellow Brill dropped overside with a line's end. Working rapidly, he tied the bell to a motor rocker arm, where it would ring steadily as the plane bucked on the swell.

He glanced into the cabin. The fat detective still wallowed in blissful unconsciousness, blowing slimy bubbles.

He let him lay, clambered back aboard the derelict, loosened the line from the rail, made it fast to the improvised sea anchor, and dropped it overside.

The four gangsters watched the procedure with glares that were far from cheerful.

The sea anchor filled perfectly. The amphibian stood off. It would drift a

little faster than the yacht, but not much.

The tinkle of the bell trickled away in a wall of sepia, escorting the aircraft out of sight.

Three boats dangled in the davits. A launch, a dinghy, and one lifeboat. Bellow Brill did something with the launch's motor, lowered the slim shell, trailed the painter back, and made it fast to the taffrail. Then he cut the dinghy and lifeboat loose. They fell into the sea and swirled away in the fog.

Incidentally, he noted the yacht was equipped to carry no other small craft. A suspicion gathering in the back of his mind gained impetus.

Playing crack-the-whip with his four sullen captives, he snapped them below, sent them stumbling along the passage. The woman met them with relief, which she quickly turned into disdain.

The shackled gangsters headed automatically into the stateroom which held the safe and the dead man. Bellow Brill caught the last one and hauled them out again like a bird with a worm.

"The wireless room, blast it!" he roared. "The wireless room."

Outside the cubicle which contained the radio apparatus, Maida La Forge plucked at his sleeve. She still carried the pearl mounted derringer.

She had cleaned the ink off her face and the look she favored him with was calculated to do things to a wooden man.

"About to change your mind?" she quizzed.

"I hadn't even thought about it," Bellow Brill told her cheerfully.

"That straight?"

"Sure."

The woman's lips were hard, her eyes feline. She shrugged.

"I lose, you win, man-mountain," she conceded. "But the coast guard is out!"

"Why?"

"Know the stiff in there on the stateroom floor?"

"No."

"That's Sir James Lanshire."

BECAUSE the name meant nothing to him, Bellow Brill kept quiet.

"The big shot rum runner of them all," Maida La Forge told him impatiently. She had dropped into the underworld argot freely.

"We had collected for several shipments this afternoon. We were hijacked. It was a small timer in the racket, Spongy Mastro, and his torpedoes. I was asleep and didn't hear them get aboard. A bunch of Tommies and heaters being turned loose was the first I knew. Your plane scared them off a minute after they burned Sir James down and I doctored myself with the ink to play dead."

Bellow Brill wondered idly how the safe door happened to be open.

The woman stepped closer. Her words grew suggestive.

"Listen to reason," she murmured so low the four gangsters crowding into the radio room could not hear. "You haven't got a chance. Mastro will be back. He's standing by in the fog with his torpedoes to see if anyone else turns up."

A splintering crash came from the radio room. Glass cascaded against metal and wood.

Bellow Brill plunged through the door, sniffing the odor of burned ozone. The prisoners retreated sullenly to a corner.

"Ignorant scuts!" the big flyer roared at them. "Lucky you didn't have the sense to tell the receivin' set from the sendin'."

Maida La Forge followed him inside, fingered the ornate derringer thoughtfully, then moved to the port-hole.

"Keep away from my friends, there," Bellow Brill warned.

BRILL worked with the radio. The receiver was a smashed heap of wire, broken tubes, and shattered bakelite. One of the gangsters had whirled a chair down upon it. The short-circuited wiring had burned a master fuse.

The flyer replaced the fuse, lit the transmitter tubes, and hammered the key with painful care. He was rusty on the Continental.

The jerking, hesitant message was interrupted.

"Look!" suddenly called Maida La Forge. Bellow Brill pasted a mild blue eye to the port.

"What did I tell you—Mastro!" said the woman.

"Sure enough," the big flyer agreed grimly.

He picked at the key for nearly thirty seconds longer. Then he jerked one of the automatics out of his belt, thrust it into the shapely hands of the woman.

"Watch these four!" he ordered.

He rushed into the corridor, snapping off the lock on the Thompson submachine gun. He had seen a collapsible raft through the port, outlined in the glow from the fore deck. A queer, round and unwieldy thing that looked like a doughnut. There were three men crouched in it, wielding short paddles. They would be on board quickly.

Then they were aboard. Violent scarlet lashed from a corner of the superstructure. Air fanned his face.

Bellow Brill fell loosely, killing the gunman with a burst from the submachine gun as he went down.

Lead lashed across the deck like a sandstorm. The floodlights went out in quick succession. Splinters that ranged in size up to small canes showered on his back.

The instant the inferno was in darkness, he rolled for shelter, unscathed. Coming erect, he leaped, and hauled himself to the vantage of the top of the superstructure. The clamor died.

Sounding surprisingly near, came the tinkle of the bell tied to the drifting amphibian.

BELLOW BRILL inched quietly to the opposite side of the arched roof and peered over. Nothing was discernible in the darkness. He withdrew his head and listened.

Then he repeated his trick with the dime and the thrown revolver. It resulted in nearly shooting himself. The bullet from the gun ripped under his armpit.

Startled, he did little but betray his position in the bedlam that followed. They were forward, in the bows. They drove him back in a shower of lead, to the shelter of the squat funnel used for the exhaust from the Diesels.

There was more quiet, then a burst of reports from inside the superstructure, and a retreating rush upon the foredeck.

Bellow Brill shifted uncomfortably at the volume of shooting from inside. The sounds were unmistakable. The four prisoners had joined the fracas.

He dared not move. They had him ranged on either side of the funnel, which was barely thick enough to turn the small calibre submachine gun missiles. With rifles, his position would have been serious.

A feminine voice followed the repulsed gangsters.

"You'll get yours this time, Mastro! You can't whip the United States coast guard, you dirty rat!"

"Good girl!" Bellow Brill grunted doubtfully. "Maybe."

Her words brought a muffled volley of whispers from forward.

The big flyer scuttled into the open, sent a long burst of lead sweeping the deck, and lunged back to shelter.

He got a death scream and a howl of agony mixed with curses that dripped vitrol. Bullets poured about him. Then the shooting died in spasmodic popping. Silence again.

It took fully ten minutes for it to dawn on him that something unexpected had happened.

The attackers had beat a retreat.

Then the distant tinkle of the bell tied to the amphibian suddenly died.

A moment later the acrid smell of burning wood reached his nostrils. The yacht was afire.

CHAPTER V

THE GANGSTER'S HOLE CARD

BELLOW BRILL shoved the muzzle of the submachine gun around the funnel, sent a stream of slugs spraying into the night. They drew no reply.

Heedless of noise, he dropped off the superstructure and lunged down a companion. There was a new dead man in the passage, clad in greasy khaki coveralls, and also a leather aviator's helmet.

The radio room was empty.

The stateroom which held the body of Sir James Lanshire, erstwhile rum runner king, came next. It was also empty.

The door of the safe gaped wide open, rifled.

Cursing, Bellow Brill raced for the stern. The passage was filling with smoke.

At the taffrail he discarded shirt, boots, and all the weapons but a single revolver. With that in his teeth, he went over the side.

The fact that the launch had vanished confirmed his suspicions. They had paddled it, because he had essential parts of the ignition wiring in his pocket. Maida La Forge had enlisted the aid of the four prisoners to make off with the quarter of a million in currency. One of them was a flyer.

Scared away by the clever coast guard bugaboo, Mastro and his gangsters had set fire to the yacht. Or perhaps the woman had done it. Bellow Brill had a hearty belief that she would do anything.

He had the dying tinkle of the belled amphibian fixed in his mind. He could find it in the fog, given a little time. That he had hopes of getting. The motor, saturated with salt spray, would be slow in starting.

He got his bearings quickly and set out with an almost splashless crawl that sent his big body volleying along like a

torpedo. The revolver was still in his teeth.

Back of him the burning yacht glowed like the Aurora Borealis. The waves were young mountains of tar-black, the fog a thick smudge.

A cavalcade of sobbing explosions came out of the welter. One motor starting.

Bellow Brill corrected his course, put on more speed. The warming motor was at full throttle. Furiously, he spat salt brine and profanity at whoever was handling the amphibian's controls.

The plane loomed. Lighted cabin windows glowed like diamond facets in the tumbling cotton of the fog. The roaring port motor had pulled her broadside to the swell.

One wingtip leaped upward. The wind got under it, lifted.

For an eternity Bellow Brill held his breath. But the craft did not capsize. Slowly she righted, and he dived to escape the sword slash of the descending wing.

He crashed into the hull, came up, fingernails grating the smooth veneer. The starter was grinding at the dead motor, jerking it over fitfully.

Then the pilot inside the cabin came to his senses and closed the throttle of the running motor until it idled. The nose of the plane pointed into the wind again.

Gauging himself, Bellow Brill rode the pedestal of a wave upward, locked an arm about one of the streamlined struts that held the spidery tail and elevator assembly. The next instant he was hanging in midair.

The second motor started then. At the same time, the group in the plane discovered him.

THE four gangsters were still shackled in a living chain. The man on the end, Tony, was the flyer. He was at the controls.

The woman, Maida La Forge, saw Bellow Brill first and screamed warning. There was a wild mêlée as the four

fought each other getting out of the pilot's compartment.

It lasted long enough for Bellow Brill to come crashing through the hatch. He landed on all fours, launched forward like a football tackle.

The revolver snapped. The water should not have ruined the modern, smokeless, grease protected cartridges. But it had.

His feet tangled the wallowing form of the unconscious detective and he ploughed down on his stomach between the wicker seats.

Lead burned through the spot he had vacated. Two shots. The hollow, fire-cracker-in-a-barrel *pow* of the derringer.

Nose gushing crimson where it had smashed a seat brace, Bellow Brill jerked erect.

Maida La Forge and the swarthy Tony were fighting for possession of an automatic. The woman had it, was trying to keep it.

Bellow Brill reached her, twisted the gun upward, and saved the checkered life of the gangster-pilot as it went off.

"Thanks!" he boomed at the woman, and set his fists to work once more on the four prisoners.

He drove them back in the cabin. Cursing, bleeding, howling like animals. Two of them he knocked unconscious to anchor the rest.

They piled in a squirming heap over a soaking wet leather traveling bag. He left them there, leaped for the controls.

THROTTLES came open to the last notch. Wheel back to keep the nose out. The swell smashed, pitched the plane about.

The plane went down and up again like a Coney Island roller coaster. Water sheeted through the windows, rattled on the wings, roared against the propellers.

Worried like a cork, the amphibian gained headway reluctantly. They missed the burning yacht, a devil's derelict of licking scarlet, by inches,

bellowed on into an inferno of water and wind.

It took three miles of that. Water broke windows, sloshed in the cabin. Then a mound of ugly green pitched the plane up and it hung in the air, roaring like a gigantic wasp.

Bellow Brill held the bow up until the craft nosed above the blanket of fog. Then he jerked the sluggish craft in a quick bank, stalled and spilled hundreds of pounds of water through the shattered windows. The six in the cabin rattled like pebbles in a tin can, tangled with cushions and parachutes that tumbled out of the overhead racks.

Maida La Forge squealed, scrambled over the seats, and grabbed the traveling bag.

Bellow Brill leveled out, glanced about in the brilliant moonlight, reflected from the vapor carpet as from a mirror. He started, vented a disgusted oath.

A COUPLE of miles off the tail assembly, a seaplane was hauling up on them.

Bellow Brill whipped the amphibian about. The compass was out of commission. He set a course by the stars, heading for the mainland. Then he looked back, and nodded grimly.

The other plane was following them. It was a tri-motored monoplane that glittered like silver in the moonglow. Behind and below it was a red smear in the fog where the yacht burned furiously and would soon sink, pulled under by the steel hull and machinery.

Bellow Brill held the amphibian straight ahead, gathering altitude, watching the rear. Doubt quickly dispelled.

The silver plane was speedier. It lifted with them, and gained. At last it pulled alongside, a foul silver buzzard of steel and fabric.

A man leaned through one of the windows. A stocky man who wore goggles and made significant gestures with a submachine gun.

"Mastro!" Maida La Forge screamed over the moan of the engines.

Bellow Brill gave a grim nod. He was sure now. Hi-jackers had boarded the yacht from the plane. It had stood by, invisible in the fog. He had suspected as much when he saw the canvas raft through the port. It was of the type usually carried aboard seaplanes.

The yacht was afire, burning evidence of what had happened. With the amphibian gone, all aboard dead, there would be no witnesses. It looked bad.

The pantomime from the silver ship became more insistent. Directions to descend. The submachine gun came up.

CHAPTER VI

ROCKETING DEATH

THEY wanted the money in the traveling bag of course. They had probably guessed it was aboard. There was the reason for the order to descend.

Bellow Brill kicked the rudder. The glass at his side puffed inward. Lead rattled on the steel tubing framework of the amphibian's hull.

The pilot of the silver plane knew his stuff. He banked swiftly, kept the amphibian out of his blind spot. The man leaning out the window gestured again, furiously.

Bellow Brill grinned, went forward with the control wheel. The amphibian's snout dug for the fog.

It didn't work. The silver craft was overhead an instant later. The man in the window was not pointing below now, but ahead. They were taking no chance of losing him in the vapor.

Bellow Brill held the nose down for a while longer. Then, reluctantly, he pulled up in a storm of lead.

They flew level for a time. Over the Maine mainland now. The silver plane higher, and a little behind. With another submachine gun at its windows.

Bellow Brill was thinking. Cold with

rage. His battering tactics wouldn't work here.

But something else might. He came back with the wheel. The nose climbed. The heavy craft hung like a kite, stalled.

As the silver plane flashed overhead, stalling likewise to avoid a crash, Bellow Brill emptied the automatic into a wing tank.

It was doubtful if those in the silver plane knew they had been shot at.

BELLOW BRILL dropped back again as if nothing had happened. The other craft slid into position over them. The faces of the two men with the rapid firers twisted as they cursed.

Over their heads, liquid fanned from the trailing edge of the wing, gleaming in the moonlight.

Simultaneously, the pair looked upward. The machine guns whipped level with the certainty of death.

Bellow Brill moved with leisurely smoothness. One big hand dug into the netting pocket beside him, brought out the rocket gun with which he had answered the distress signal earlier in the night.

Under his breath, he gave thanks for the whim that had prompted him to reload it.

He pulled the control wheel back slowly, thrust an arm out the window, and fired.

The result was all he hoped for. The projectile struck the wing with a shower of sparks.

A pool of red sprang into being

against the breast of the silver man-buzzard. It grew. Tongues licked from the rear of the blot, enveloping.

The seaplane bobbed, went down, a screaming comet of fire and fumes.

The flaming ball sank into the fog layer, faded almost away, then resolved into a salmon-tinted blotch that spread abruptly to immense proportions, and just as abruptly vanished.

A feminine voice penetrated shrilly over the roar of the amphibian's motors.

"Thanks, big boy, for the buggy ride!"

THE woman was half through the hatch, groping for the rip cord of the parachute she had strapped to her back.

Fastened to her free hand by its own straps was the traveling bag.

Bellow Brill grunted explosively, deserted the controls. The unconscious detective stirred, got under his feet, and tripped him. Maida La Forge shoved off.

A hundred feet down she cracked the chute. The silk mushroom clouded out. The white face of the woman turned upward. She waved, made an insulting gesture with her fingers, and vanished into the fog.

The detective sat up. Bellow Brill had stepped on his stomach. He swore weakly, pointed at his badge.

"Damn it!" he yelled. "You're not going to land! That's an order!"

"You've been asleep!" Bellow Brill told him cheerfully. "But I wasn't thinking of landing!"

THE END



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