

Weird Tales

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Well, I'll Tell You, Ma

By W. McKEOWN

"TAKE it easy, kid; croak him if you have to," said 'Dago' Polsky. 'Dago' was my cell-mate, ma," I said. "But old Simpkins, our all-night guard, was sleepin', an' I had no trouble gettin' past him. There was a fast freight jus' goin' by, so I hopped it and was soon in Chicago. I flipped a truck in front of the station, ma, and here I am!"

"Well," said ma, "how did you happen to get in that hick-town jail, a hundred miles away from Chicago?"

"Well, I'll tell you, ma," I said, "it was like this: You know that I have been going to the Underground Inn for the last few nights, jus' like you told me not to, but I guess I got what you might call an adventurous spirit or somethin' in me that wants excitement. I got to talkin' with the leadin' lady of the chorus that's playin' there this week, an' I asts to take her home las' night and she consented.

"Well, I waits for her at the side entrance where they always come out, and pretty soon she comes out, an' we steps into a Yellow taxi, which I had arranged to be there—you know I wanted to make a big showin', ma, and so we stepped in an' I told the driver her address and we soon were there.

"Well, I'll tell you, ma, I didn't like the looks of the neighborhood but I says to myself, 'Oh, shucks, I wanted excitement,' and kinda let it go at that.

"She invites me up to her flat, an' I goes up. Right there is where I made my biggest mistake, ma. Well, she takes off her coat an' she still had on

the ballay dress that she had on at the Inn.

"She went over by the radiator and warmed her hands because it was pretty cold out las' night, ma. Then she says that she is going to change her dress and that I should excuse her for a few minutes.

"Oh, boy, when she came out she sure did look swell. She had on kind of a silvery dress, with beads and tassels on it. She went over and laid down on a davenport and I goes over and sits down on a chair and starts talkin' to her. She leans over without sayin' a word and puts her arm around my neck an' starts pullin' me toward her. Of course, ma, I didn't put up any struggle or nothin' an' before I knew I was kissin' her.

"Just then I heard kind of a low whistle an' I looks up to see a great big guy with a map on him that would of scared an angel. Well, of course, I jumps up and asts him what he wanted, but he didn't say nothin', but jus' kept walkin' slowly over to me an' lookin' me straight in the eyes. I looks to her for some kind of an explanation or somethin' but she seemed jus' as scared as I was.

"Well, I'll tell you, ma, when he was about half-way across the room, I sees an automatic layin' on a table within reach so I looks at it and then looks at her and she looks at me an' then looks at the gun, so I kinda thought that she wanted me to get the gun. So I grabs it and points it at him. But he jus' kept comin' towards me kinda slow-like. So I shoots over his head.

"Well, I'll tell you, ma, I didn't mean to hit him or nothin' like that, but I thought that I'd scare him a

little bit, you know. But I must have hit him because he fell to the floor right where he was. Gee, I didn't know what to do. I looks over at her and she was lookin' at him layin' on the floor. We heard somebody comin' up the stairs an' so I ran over and locked the door.

"Well, I'll tell you, ma, if I ever was in a predicament I sure was in one there. I came back and she says, 'Quick, the trap-door!' She pointed to a trap-door leading on to the dark roof. I pulled a stepladder from a corner and we went up on the roof. All she said when we got there was: 'Follow me,' which I did. We went through area-ways, down ropes, up alleys, across bad-smelling yards, an' climbed fences until we got out into a dim-lighted street. She called an old hack driver, and we were driven to an old wharf. In the semi-darkness we jumped into a freshly painted motor-boat, bearing the name 'Shatty.' We went along for about a half hour and finally alighted.

"**WE WALKED** along silently for about five minutes until we came to a big palatial residence all dark inside—you know, ma, one of those houses that rich millionaires live in. Then we sat down on a big piece of stone and she said to me: 'That man that we just shot was my brother. He is, although I am ashamed to say it, a burglar. Not just a common burglar, but one who plans his next coup with the utmost intelligence. The smallest detail does not escape his careful scrutiny. But this time I was in the next room sleeping, and I heard every bit of his plan. Do you see that house with the big flag out on the front lawn? That is the home of Henry Bilse, the great German theater man. His is the next to be burglarized by my brother. My brother is not present at the robbery any more. He stays behind and directs the proceedings. So his being

shot will have nothing to do with his confederates carrying out his wishes. Now the idea is this: You get in there as quietly as you can and warn the servants and then go into old Bilse's room and tell him about it. He has a night watchman on duty every night but there has been nothing doing for so long that he goes to sleep about three o'clock. It is now three forty-five, so he is snoring by this time. He keeps guard in the back so you go in the front way. But Monahan, the copper on this beat, is due about now so wait until he goes by. There he is now! See him over by that lamp-post?"

"Well, I'll tell you, ma, I says to her: 'But why should I do all this? What do I get out of it?' Then she says to me: 'What do you get out of it? You shot a man, didn't you? What excuse are you going to give when they catch you?'"

"Well, I'll tell you, ma, I was a little bit leery about going in that big house unannounced, but then there was some work to be done and I was the one to do it. To my complete surprise the front door was open! Could it be that the burglars were already there? But no; they would not come in by the front door, anyway, I reasoned. So I went ahead and the first thing I did was to stumble over a big rug they had as you come in. I thought sure that some one heard, and my heart was racing like a pump. But I guess they were all sound asleep. Gee, ma, compared to our little home, that house was like a great big castle like you read about in the olden times.

"Well, to tell the truth, ma, I didn't know which was the servants' rooms and which was the old man's rooms. So I goes and opens one of the doors. I sees an old man laying in the bed but I didn't know if it was a servant or Bilse himself. I gently closed the door and went to another room and peeped in. A swell jans

was sleepin' in there, so gee, I closed the door quick. Then I went upstairs and opened one of the doors and there in one of the beds lay a man with gray hair and with a knife stabbed in his stomach! Gee, there was blood all around him, ma, and some of it was drippin' on the floor.

"There were twin beds in the room, ma, an' I guess that the lady in the other bed was his wife. But she was sound sleeping away as if nothin' had happened. Gee, I wonder what she thought when she woke up in the morning! Anyway, I started to go out, and who was standin' in the doorway but two big dicks, with their guns coverin' me!

"I sure was in an awful predicament, ma, because, gosh, I didn't have no excuse for being there or nothin'. One of the detectives grabbed me by the arm and said to me: 'Thought you'd come back; they always do!' Gee, then I thought that I better not say anything or I'd get myself in a jam, so I was as tight as a clam from then on, ma.

"All the time that I was sitting in the paddy wagon, I was thinkin' of some way to get away from these guys. They didn't handcuff me, or anything, I guess because they thought that I was a kid or something. Finally I got up a desperate plan. I knew that the B. & O. would be along any minute and I could make one break for that. Still, I thought that they might shoot at me, or somethin'. Then again, on second thought, I was desperate enough to try it. I guess it was about five minutes before we came to the tracks. I was cold with sweat and fear. The beads of cold sweat were running down my forehead. As soon as I felt the wagon going up the incline that leads to the tracks, I jumped. I don't know how I got up enough nerve to do it, but I did. I hopped on a fast passenger that was just going by, and I hid in the observation car until I was discovered by a

porter, who told the rest of the trainmen, who questioned me as to how I happened to flip the train at this hour of the morning. I guess it was nearly five-thirty then, ma, 'cause it was just getting light. Well, I couldn't very well explain, so one of 'em said: 'We better hold him; maybe he's wanted in the city.' So the first town that we came to was the little hick town that I told you about. They called a fellow from the telegraph station and told him all about it and he went and got a gun and took me to the little jail that I escaped from after making friends with 'Dago' Polsky."

"And all this happened early this morning?" asked ma.

"Yeh, ma, an' buhlieve me, I'm tired, too. But let me ask you, ma, what are you up so late for? Where's pa? Has he gone to bed?"

"Yes; you know he's got to get up and go to work tomorrow. The only reason that I'm up is because you didn't come in at your regular time and so I thought that I'd wait up for you. I was just going to bed when you came in."

"Well, you just trot off to bed and get your rest, ma, and don't worry about me."

WHEN ma got into her room, pa was waiting there. Ma said: "Well, I'll tell you, pa, I guess he sure is cured of adventure and excitement, all right: I thought that he'd run right home after I had Bill Bibling go up and scare him and Mame."

"And who is Mame, maw?"

"Mame? Why, she is old Charley Stebbins' daughter that we got to work up there at the Underground Inn this week so she could help us cure Jimmy of his craving for excitement. They fixed up a dummy like it was murdered, and had some fake cops nab him. They sure scared him good."