

The Great Laroche



Sudney Howler

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CHAPTER XX THE AGENT WHO DIED

In the meanwhile, Sir Harker Bellamy had his own worries. The report which Peter Renton had brought back to him had ruffled the old man's feelings to an almost ungovernable extent. Not that he blamed his young agent; as he told Renton, he believed that Peter had done everything possible. "It's not your fault, my boy, if this swine has as many bolt-holes as the human rat he is."

Renton drummed with his knuckles on the table. "Nevertheless, sir, if I can't bring Laroche in I shall resign from the service," he said.

"Nonsense. I won't hear you say another word. The trouble is," Sir Harker continued, "that the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and Hathaway, of the War Office, are all shouting together."

"What are they shouting for, sir?" The older man frowned.

"Apparently they appear to have got it firmly fixed in their minds that Herr Kuhnreich—either with or without the instrumentality of friend Laroche intends to bring off some kind of coup."

"But how can he—the man Marve is all right, I take it?"

Bellamy nodded.

"Yes—he's still in the nursing home. The place is heavily guarded of course, but on the offchance that Laroche and his

gang may attempt something. Not that the poor devil would be of any use to them even if they could kidnap him; the latest medical report is that he cannot last another 12 hours."

"Then—?" put in Renton.

"Before Bellamy could reply, the door opened to admit his principal secretary. The latter held in his right hand a sheaf of telegrams.

"It's taken me some time to decode these, Sir Harker," the secretary stated, "but—"

"Are they important? That's the only thing I want to know," snapped the director of G.I.

The subordinate smiled.

"I'm rather inclined to think so, sir," he returned.

"All right, I'll ring if I want you," said Bellamy, and the man withdrew.

Peter waited until he saw Bellamy's eyes light up with excitement.

"Anything new, sir?" he inquired.

"Listen to this," was the answer; "it's from Peters in Menke." At the mention of the second most important town in the whole of Ronstadt, Peter moved forward in his chair.

"Carry on, sir," he said.

Sir Harker Bellamy commenced to read: "The situation here is extremely grave. I have just heard that within 24 hours Kuhnreich intends to break off the present series of talks with the Caronian Government. This is certain to be followed by a military

action of some sort. The greatest excitement and enthusiasm prevails here. I now send you details of reports covering the various points mentioned in your last telegram. Signed Peters."

"Good lord," ejaculated Renton; "I can understand now why Stevens said it was important. Why, it may mean war!"

"It may, indeed," supported Bellamy. "You know, Peter," he went on, "I can't help thinking that our friends the enemy may have been using this Marve fellow as a sort of blind."

"A sort of blind, sir?"

"Yes. In other words, I shouldn't be at all surprised if they had been using him merely as a cloak for something much bigger."

Peter considered the matter for a few moments and then nodded.

"We know for a fact that the whole country is over-run with their agents, sir."

"That's true. Well, if there's any satisfaction in the statement, I believe that very shortly now we shall see them showing their hands. In the meantime, I am expecting some visitors."

"You want me to stay?" Renton asked.

"You can if you like—you've met some of them before."

"Who are they, sir?"

"The Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and Hathaway of the War Office. I told you just now that they were all shouting for action—I had a telephone message five minutes ago to the effect that they intended to do a little of that shouting in his room."

"I think I'll stay, sir—if I may."

"Just as you like."

The two did not have long to wait. Only a few seconds after the words had left Renton's lips, the telephone rang. Bellamy, taking off the receiver, listened for a few seconds, and then said curtly: "Show them up."

He looked over at his young agent.

"Here they are," he stated; "now for the fireworks."

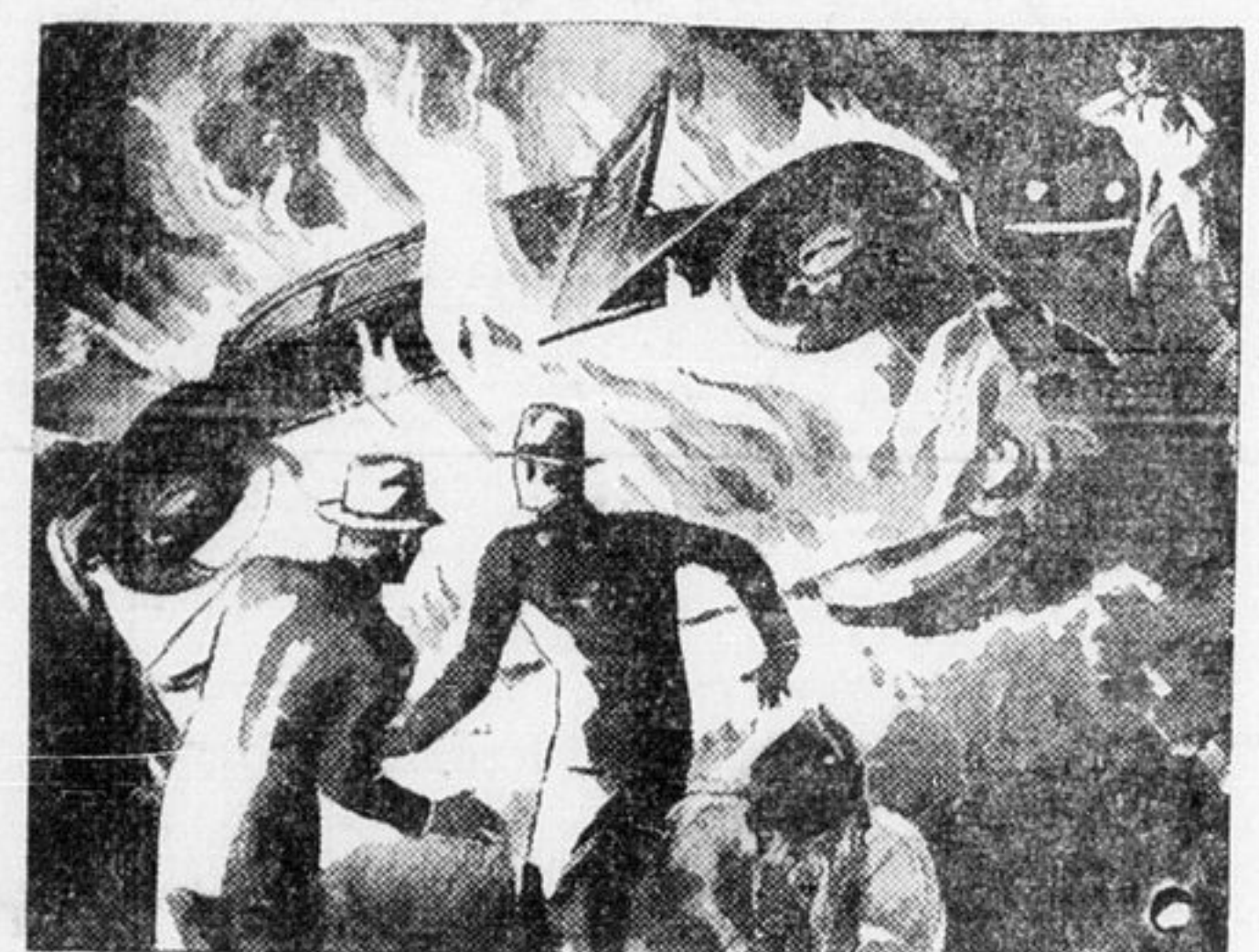
When the three Cabinet Ministers were ushered into the room, they all looked as though they were bearers of bad news.

"Well, gentlemen?" started Bellamy. It was the Prime Minister who answered him.

"We have come to see you, Sir Harker," he said, "on a matter of the very highest importance. No, I do not refer now to the man Marve," he went on quickly; "it is something far more serious than that."

Bellamy, who had survived a thousand crises, and whose nerve in the face of the "enemy" could not be broken, waved his visitors to the chairs that had been placed for them.

"Nothing can be gained, gentlemen," he returned, "by losing our heads. Also, we might as well make ourselves comfortable." Without waiting for the others to follow, he re-seated himself in his padded leather chair.



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With a sigh the Premier accepted his advice. Then he turned to the Foreign Secretary.

"You had better tell him," he said.

The Cabinet Minister who, during his three years of office had not exactly covered himself with glory regarding his conduct of international policy, coughed and looked apprehensively at Bellamy.

"What I have to say, Sir Harker, can be put in a few words," he started. "Half an hour ago I received the Ronstadtian Ambassador. Although he tried to hide his feelings, it was very obvious to me that he was labouring under a sense of great excitement. He put to me a question—it was a grave and alarming question. It was this: 'In the event of hostilities breaking out between Caronia and his country—that is Ronstadt, of course—he had been instructed by his Government to ask His Majesty's Government what attitudes they would take up.'

Bellamy looked across at Peter Renton. It was a look of great significance.

"And what did you tell him?" Sir Harker said, turning his attention again to the Foreign Secretary.

"What did I tell him?" repeated the other; "I told him that this was a matter of such grave importance that I could not be expected to give him an immediate answer. The question would have to be raised and discussed by the whole Cabinet before we could even think of framing any sort of reply."

"Did he want a verbal answer?"

The Foreign Secretary coughed again.

"It would appear so, but I soon disillusioned him on that point."

The Prime Minister cut in.

"The crux of the whole thing would appear to be: does the Ronstadtian government think that it can compel us to do what it requires? It is a fact, isn't it" turning to the Foreign Secretary, "that the Ambassador gave us to understand that it would be in our best interests to keep out if hostilities should occur between Ronstadt and Caronia?"

"That is so, sir. As a matter of fact, when I told him that the whole matter would have to be put before the Cabinet, he said that he could only give us 24 hours in which to make up our minds."

"It is a preposterous position," stated the War Minister; "anyone would think they felt convinced they could dictate what policy we should pursue."

"Perhaps this will throw some light on the situation, sir," remarked Sir Harker Bellamy, passing over the decoded telegram which he had been reading a few minutes before.

CHAPTER XXI BELLAMY SPEAKS HIS MIND

The three Cabinet Ministers looked exceedingly grave after they had all read the document.

"There seems very little doubt about it," Kuhnreich intends to force his hand," said the Prime Minister.

"And ours, apparently," supported Bellamy.

The Foreign Secretary took up the conversation.

"It is a fact, I believe, Bellamy, that Ronstadt has a large number of agents in this country?"

"There's no doubt about it, sir. Many of the refugees who have been pouring into England—thanks to our lax system, I am sorry to say—are nothing more nor less than carefully-disguised secret agents. I was remarking to Mr. Renton here only a few minutes before you arrived, gentlemen, that it is my considered opinion that they have used the Marve business as a cloak to disguise some gigantic coup which they may launch now at any moment."

"In this country?" inquired the Prime Minister.

"In this country, sir."

"You had better explain yourself, Sir Harker."

"I will gladly do so, sir. Within 24 hours, according to Peters, Herr Kuhnreich will inform the rest of Europe to mind its own business while he gets on with his self-appointed task of enabling Ronstadt to fulfil what he declares to be its destiny—namely, the conquering of the rest of Western Europe. After Caronia, it will be our turn."

"Even if we remain neutral?" proffered the War Minister.

"Even if we remain neutral. Although I have not been able to obtain any reliable information on the subject, I have no doubt in my own mind that a gigantic organization of Ronstadt agents has been built up in this country during the past 12 months—and this organization, gentlemen, I believe would be used as an influencing factor in case of hostilities with Caronia. That would appear to be at the back of the Ambassador's statement that Ronstadt will only allow this country 24 hours in which to make up its mind."

The Prime Minister put a hand through his thinning hair.

"But if there is such an organization, Bellamy, it is your duty not only to discover it but to smash it."

Bellamy nodded.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Your Plumber May Be Able to Help Prevent Fires

Furnaces were almost unheard of in the early days of the Porcupine when the wood-burning camp style stove provided heat for almost all types of buildings. To-day it's a different story. The proportion of houses with "central heating," as the English prefer to call it, is constantly increasing.

Furnaces need an inspection once every few years at least—just a check up by an expert to see whether everything is as it should be in regard to flues and so on. Timmins plumbers will do this service gladly. Make a date with your plumber this Fire Prevention Week.

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Average Fire Loss Here Less Than \$2 per Capita

Loss for Years 1930 to End of 1935 was \$38,700. Average Number of Calls in Those Years, 190 a year. This Year's Loss to be Higher on Account of Fire at St. Anthony's Church. So far This Year Firemen have had 284 Calls.

The average fire loss in Timmins for the years 1930 to the end of 1935 was \$38,700, or less than \$2.00 per capita, recently compiled figures reveal. During those same years the firemen were called out an average of 190 times during the year.

"This year's figures will be higher, because of the St. Anthony's church fire in which the loss was eventually set at \$140,000. So far this year the loss has been \$150,000 and there have been 284 calls answered."

Fighting fires is just a part of a fireman's duty in Timmins. The greater part of his time is spent in trying to prevent fires. This year so far members of the regular staff have made more than two thousand inspections of business places to advise how the fire hazard may be cut.

First Aid Given To

Every regular fireman has a certificate from the St. John Ambulance brigade and this training has already proven invaluable. Knowledge of respiration and the use of oxygen inhalators kept on hand at the fire station, has saved the life of more than one person in Timmins, whose body has been brought from the bottom of the river by drags, also used by firemen.

Those who want instruction in the business of fire prevention and fire fighting find a welcome at the fire hall. Troops of Boy Scouts sometimes go there, are shown the uses of all equipment and are told how they may help at fires wherever they may be. Educational work of this sort is spreading all

Carelessness With Hot Ashes is Costly

Keeping Refuse Clear of Ash Heap is One Way to Prevent Fire.

Fifth on the list of causes of fires in Canada in 1935 is the careless handling of hot ashes and coals. Almost two thousand fires entailing a quarter of a million dollars of loss were directly traced to this cause.

Ashes thrown out in the streets, alleys and back yards, or put in open or wooden receptacles, are dangerous, and are a nuisance. Of course, persons who throw them out thinking there is no fire left in them, may find there is just enough to start the flame when fanned by the wind. Wood ashes contain a great number of little pieces of charcoal, which do not burn because there is not enough air given to the fire. The carbon in these little pieces, uniting with the oxygen of the air, causes spontaneous combustion in the ash pile, which easily becomes overheated when moist. The moisture gathered from the ground or from rain is necessary to spontaneous igniting of these particles in the mass.


Do not allow waste paper, rags or rubbish to be thrown in with ashes, for when the ashes become damp and overheated, causing spontaneous combustion, this waste material is there ready to take fire. It may also take fire when a lot of hot ashes is emptied on the ash pile.

What Hot Ashes Do

Many buildings are burned each year by ashes from stoves or grates being close to boards or against fences or sheds. Ashes that are not hot enough to set fire to wood will char it, and when the hot coals strike this charred surface the charcoal on it will take fire; and if a layer of charcoal on this surface gets any fat or grease against it, it will take fire and burn the box or house of which the board is a part. A wooden ash box is very dangerous unless placed in the open away from buildings and fences.

Ashes stored in the cellar should be kept clean and free of other refuse. In the house they should be kept only in a metal can with a tight cover. Hot ashes do not have to be very hot to ignite the waste in an ash pile.

Examine your premises to-day. Check up on your own method of disposal of ashes. Play safe.



Fire Prevention WEEK

This week is set aside by Royal Proclamation to consider means of reducing Canada's great fire toll. Pause for a few moments and consider your own duty in this regard. There are two vital points to decide. Ask yourself these questions!

- 1 Are all my personal belongings and Property Insured**
If my home or business should be damaged by fire have I enough insurance to cover the loss? Can I afford to stand the loss myself? —Then I must call A. Wilson Lang and see about more insurance protection!
- 2 Am I doing all I can to Prevent Fires?**
Is my furnace and chimney in good order? Is my home free of inflammable rubbish? Am I careful of cigarette butts, matches, etc.? Do I handle gasoline with care?— Then I must attend to these things at once! Care can prevent fires, I'll do my part.

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