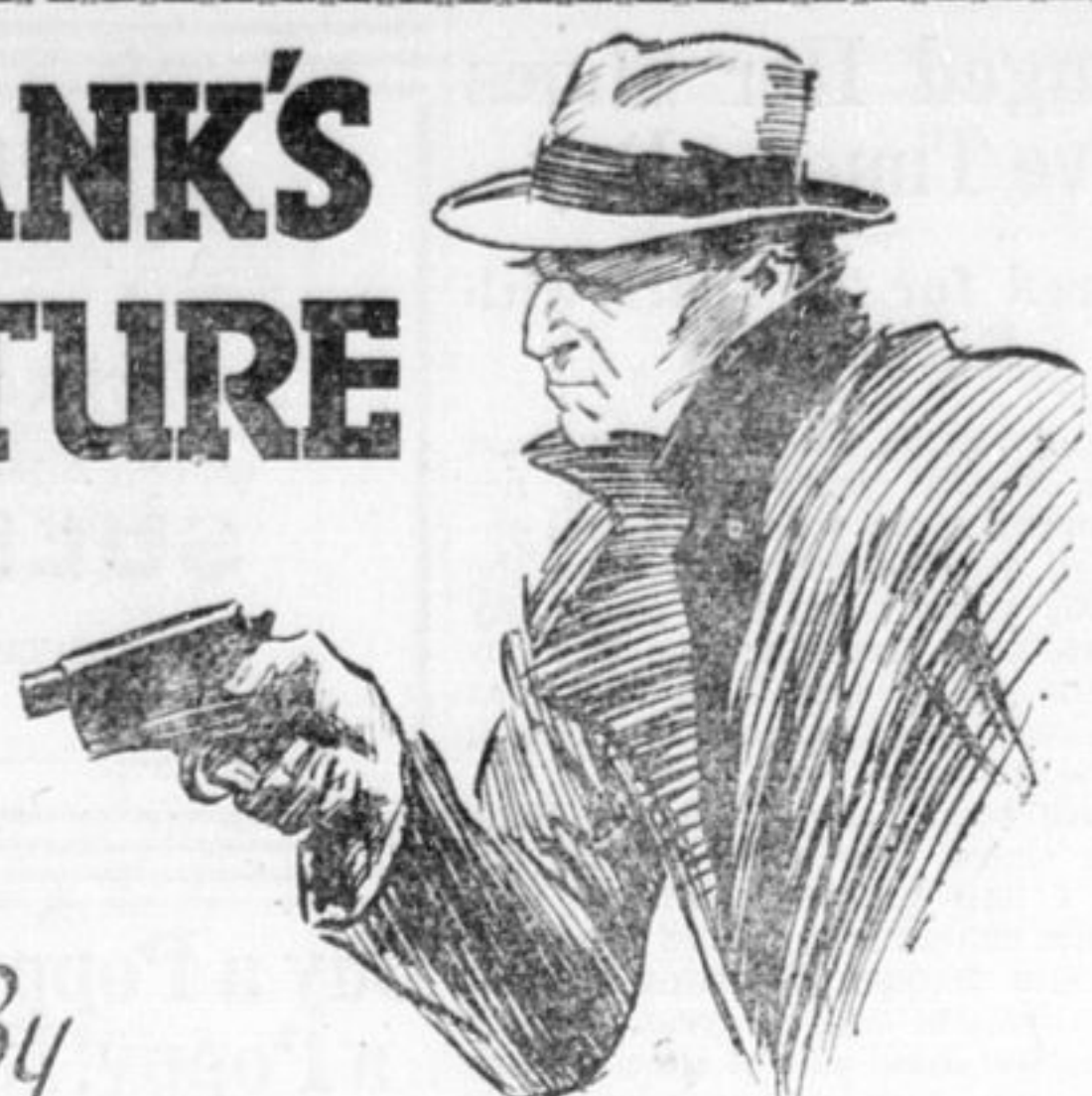


BROCKLEBANK'S ADVENTURE



By **R. A. J. WALLING**
AUTHOR OF "THE MAN WITH THE SQUEAKY VOICE," ETC.
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Start the Story Here

Only a couple of instalments of this gripping serial have been published. You can read the following complete summary of what has gone before and start the story now without missing anything.

SYNOPSIS

BILL BROCKLEBANK, a young athletic Englishman, saved a stranger, **GEORGE HARRISON**, from being murdered in New York.

Harrison takes Brocklebank to his apartment, where he shows a desire to do something to reward the young man. Discovering that Brocklebank is a dependable person of excellent education, who speaks French fluently, he asks him if he would care to undertake an errand to Europe, for which he is prepared to pay 2,000 dollars. Brocklebank who is in America getting business experience, but has lost his job, is attracted by the offer.

The task is to meet Harrison's niece, **PAMELA**, at Marseilles, where she is arriving from the Near East, and to conduct her to London, where Harrison will be awaiting her at the Pelton Hotel.

Harrison explains that his niece will have in her possession something of great value which certain individuals are intensely anxious to get. In this connection Harrison explains that he is engaged in what he calls a "private war" with certain money interests. He shows Brocklebank a photograph of a middle-aged man with a grey moustache and narrow eyes, and warns Brocklebank against him.

When the story opens, Brocklebank is on his way from Paris to Marseilles by train. When he goes to the restaurant car for dinner, he sees in a far corner a man closely resembling the photograph which Harrison showed in New York.

And at the next halt he sends a wire to a friend, **GUICHARD**, at Marseilles. Towards the end of the journey the narrow-eyed person whom Brocklebank nicknames **YELLOW DOG** ap-

pears at the entrance of Brocklebank's compartment and asks if he may smoke a cigar, since his own compartment is a non-smoker. Brocklebank agrees and Yellow Dog brings a companion whom Brocklebank recognizes as **SIR ARTHUR ACKERTON**, an old friend of his father.

Although the conversation so far has been in French, Ackerton suspects Brocklebank of being English, but Brocklebank skilfully maintains the fiction that he is French, and that he does not understand English. Even so, Ackerton is not convinced, and tells Yellow Dog he believes the man to be English, and named Brocklebank.

When Ackerton has finished his cigar and left the compartment, Yellow Dog takes the earliest opportunity of asking Brocklebank what his game is. In reply, Brocklebank, still speaking in French, produces his pistol. Ultimately the man makes off to another part of the train.

(Now Read On)

CHAPTER II

"NARROW-EYES" IS SCARED

During the next two minutes, while the infernal racket of the train in the tunnel continued, Brocklebank had a curious sensation as they glared into each other's eyes.

He knew that if the man's hand reached round his hip, or even if he made a movement of any sort, that gun would go off and Narrow-eyes might be dead in a few seconds.

But Brocklebank's curious sensation was an instinctive knowledge that Narrow-eyes would not move. Without knowing it, Brocklebank had established a superiority complex. He had hypnotized this man. It was not the gun that he looked with so fixed a stare of fear, but at Brocklebank's eyes.

The end of the tunnel at last. A blessed relief to the ears. The clatter of the wheels was almost silence.

"Id!" commanded Brocklebank, from his corner.

Narrow-eyes was like a bird paralysed by a cat. He had no will of his own. Never withdrawing his eyes from Brocklebank's, he took the two steps. Brocklebank's left hand spun him round, ran over his clothes, extracted a revolver from his hip pocket, dropped it on the seat, spun him back.

"Allez-vous-en!" said Brocklebank, raised his hand to the bell-push. "Comprenez-vous?"

Whether he understood the words or not, he knew the meaning of the gesture. Backing away, he reached the door, pulled it open, banged it fast, ran down the corridor.

Brocklebank picked up the gun from the seat, threw it into his suit-case, pocketed his own, with a sort of finality in all his movements. Both Narrow-eyes and he were in a private war, and he need fear no publicity for this skirmish.

But Ackerton! the fatality of it! . . . Ackerton in the society of Narrow-eyes . . . Ackerton giving him away. Not that Ackerton could have known anything about the risky business which was to take his companion down to the docks in Marseilles. It was plain that they had met casually on the train. To Ackerton the only queer thing in the episode must have been that Young Brocklebank was masquerading as a Frenchman, pretending not to know him, though he must have recognized him immediately both by name and appearance; middle-aged men do not alter their looks much in five years.

And men like Ackerton did not approve of masquerading. In their minds a man who played a part was up to no good. Brocklebank knew the man and he knew the type.

Well, there it was. Through the accident of Ackerton's presence, Narrow-eyes had become aware of him. A mean and timid creature, Harrison had suggested as much. But thenceforth he would be on his guard . . .

Brocklebank looked out upon fifty thousand twinkling lights. Presently the train was passing through the suburban stations of Marseilles and slowing down for the terminus. He stood ready with his suit-case in hand in the lobby of the coach. He was first off the train; almost first at the exit. As he went through a slim youth in a blue suit detached himself from the crowd and rushed at him.

"Allo, Bill!"

"Hello, Raoul! But—you've shaved off your beard!"

"Quite English, am I not? But what wind brings you south, Bill? And why haven't you written?"

"Hi—steady!" said Brocklebank. "Business is business, eh? I wish to stand here a few moments without talking, my friend, and watch the exit."

"You're waiting for someone? I am de trop, perhaps?"

"Never, Raoul. On the contrary, very necessary to me," said Brocklebank, putting a hand on his shoulder. "I'm going to point a man. Remember him like the very devil. Photograph him inside that black head of yours so that you'd recognize him anywhere."

"O! O!—a mystery? But certainly I remember faces well. You speak of the gentleman not too cordially—"

"I'll tell you later. Get back here—stand in front of me, Raoul. He must not see me. I want to know where he goes. Now—attention!"

The stream of passengers through the platform gate swelled and diminished and had almost ceased before the man with the narrow eyes came through looking furtively right and left. He carried a light suit-case.

"That one," said Brocklebank, crouching behind Guichard at the corner of the news stand.

"That one? Dirty type, I believe! You want him watched? Leave it to me. And you—?"

Brocklebank glanced up at the big clock.

"Eleven," he said. "I've got to see a man at the hotel right here. I'll be down at La Joliette by midnight, Raoul."

"Right! You see I've not forgotten my English. Au revoir."

From the shelter of his corner Brocklebank saw Narrow-eyes surrounded by eager porters, waving them off, looking desperately at the entrance gate beyond which a sea of taxis and trucks, passengers and touts, rolled and roared. He saw Guichard go up and shoulder the porters aside, raise his hat and speak to Narrow-eyes. Evidently he spoke in English, for Narrow-eyes turned to him in manifest relief. Now they were talking fast. Guichard was pointing. Guichard was taking the suit case. They were going off together. The rolling outside swallowed them up.

In a few seconds Brocklebank followed, got clear of the jamb, and looked about the station yard.

He caught sight of them crossing the road from the angle of the station buildings and slowly walked that way. Guichard hailed a taxi returning empty by the ramp from the western side of the station. They both got in. It drove away.

Brocklebank turned back. Good—whatever Narrow-eyes did and wherever he went, Raoul would know his every movement. For the present there was Ackerton.

He passed the station wall into the garden of the Hotel Terminus . . . A bedroom on the second floor. The porter who had brought him up knocked and entered. Brocklebank heard him make a sad mess of his name, and Ackerton's voice in reply, "Qu'il entre!" The porter stood aside. Brocklebank passed through a narrow dressing room into the bedroom. Ackerton stood by the table with Brocklebank's card in his hand.

"Good evening, Bill," he said. "Whatever brings you to Marseilles? Thought you were in America. How d'you know

I was here? Sit down. Have a drink?"

He stepped to the wall and touched a bell-push.

"You're very good, Sir Arthur," Brocklebank stammered. "I'm in Marseilles—for a day or two—on business. Heard you were here. Thought I'd—"

Ackerton's eyes twinkled so merrily that Brocklebank pulled up short.

"Ah, well, of course, Bill. Dam' nice of you to come and see me. How's your mother? When d'you see her? How's business in New York? Half a moment—"

as the door opened. "What'll you have? A spot? Right. . . . Deux whisky-soda, garcon. . . . Hope you're making a fortune, Bill? More than I am."

If Ackerton's cue was to ignore what had passed in the train, it was not for Brocklebank to raise the topic. For the moment, anyhow. He talked of his mother in Gloucestershire, of his ill-luck in New York. Ackerton listened. The drinks arrived. They said "Here's how!"

"Where are you staying, Bill?" Ackerton asked.

"Down at La Joliette with a friend."

"La Joliette? What a place!"

"A friend of my father's," said "Ah, that's different. Well, Bill, good luck, and may you get back without a knife in your ribs. By jingo—I must tell you a story! Just listen, Smoke a cigar. If people interrupt, it puts me off."

Brocklebank accepted the cigar and sat back in his chair, looking a little dubious.

"Do you know, Bill," said Ackerton. "I had a sort of illusion that I'd already seen you this evening?"

"An illusion!" Brocklebank exclaimed.

"Don't interrupt. Yes, an illusion—one of those funny ideas that one gets out of resemblances. A fellow the way of spirit of you, dressed exactly the same way. In the train, coming down from Paris. No—don't interrupt. Have another spot and keep quiet. You can, you know, if you're anything like your father. I'm going to tell you about it."

"Yesterday afternoon, I took a ticket in London for Algiers. I'm supposed to be crossing by the Navigation-Mixte boat to-morrow. From Paris to-day I had a seat in a compartment with two old ladies—regular d'ears, only they objected to smoking. So I had my cigar after dinner in the restaurant car. When I'd got back to my corner and settled down a man I know walked along the corridor and was surprised to see me. He came in, suggested we should go and find a smoker and have a chat. We did find a smoker in the next coach, with only one man in it. He answered me in French when I asked him a polite question; but I could have sworn he was an Englishman—and what's more, Bill, I could have sworn he was you!"

Brocklebank stirred.

"Now, don't barge into my yarn. It's curious—worth listening to. As a matter of fact, Bill, I did swear that. I went so far as to tell him that if he wasn't Brocklebank I'd eat my boots. A mere figure of speech, of course."

Ackerton twinkled as Brocklebank looked at his feet. "Now, why do you think I was so insistent?"

"Can't tell," said Brocklebank.

"Because the fellow with me was under the impression that the man was a Frenchman and couldn't understand anything he said, and he was just about to blow off on a subject which in my opinion should be kept secret."

"Ah!" said Brocklebank, looking Ackerton straight in the eye. They held each other so.

"Ah," said Brocklebank again. "But you said he was about to blow off. I suppose he didn't—"

"No—I never gave him a chance. I threw away my cigar and left."

"Indeed? Then you must have known beforehand what the secret was."

"Dam' clever of you to see that, Bill. One might almost think you were really there yourself instead of your double. Well, I won't say I knew, though I could give a pretty good guess. But you're stopping the yarn. It's what comes after that matters. I get back to my seat. In three or four minutes my friend comes along and calls me into the corridor. Has regular wind up,

Says that Frenchman I felt him with either a madman or a dangerous criminal—held him up with a gun, chased him out of the compartment. I say such desperate people ought to be put under lock and key and what's he going to do about it? He says, Nothing; doesn't want to be mucked about with police and magistrates in Marseilles, because his business is urgent. Now, what d'you make of that?"

Brocklebank shook his head. "What do you make of it yourself, Sir Arthur?"

"Naturally you'd ask me that. But put yourself in the place of that Frenchman. What d'you think could have made him threaten my friend with a gun?"

"Not knowing your friend, I can't say. Perhaps he didn't approve of his face. But of course it's possible that your friend threatened him first."

SIR ARTHUR ADVISES

Ackerton brought down his fat hand with a slap on his knee.

"The very thing that occurred to me, Bill. My word!—you're a wonder. But if he did the Frenchman must have been mighty slick to get a bead on him. And there's no doubt he did, for the fellow was scared stiff. Why should the Frenchman be ready with a gun like that?"

"I can only suppose," said Brocklebank, "that he was prepared for emergencies."

"Ye-es, I see. Knew my friend by sight, or knew something of his secret business—eh?"

"Of course there's always a possibility," Brocklebank replied, sententiously.

"Well, Bill—if that young Frenchman came to me now and asked for my advice, d'you know what I'd say to him?"

"No, but I'm sure you'd give him excellent advice, Sir Arthur."

Ackerton got up, squirted some soda into his glass, took a drink, and stood in front of Brocklebank, wagging an admonitory finger.

"I should say, 'Look here, monsieur. I don't know how you got into this or why you're in it. But you're up against a gang of crooks, and one of the crookedest of all the crooks is that fellow who went into your compartment to smoke a cigar. He's a yellow dog, and in that respect, monsieur, no doubt you have his measure. But yellow dogs have teeth, and they bite when you're not looking. So just beware of him, that's all!'"

Ackerton sat down again.

"Have another spot, Bill? No?—well, just as you like. You'd think that was good advice, wouldn't you? And if you were the Frenchman, what would you say?"

Brocklebank considered for a few seconds the form of his oblique answer to this oblique question.

"I should say, 'Merci, monsieur. I have already perceived that Yellow Dog is a crook. In fact, as soon as he got out of the train he was put under surveillance—'"

"He's under surveillance now, and will be till he leaves Marseilles. Nevertheless, monsieur, I'm obliged to you for the warning. That's what I should say if I were the Frenchman," said Brocklebank. "But, Sir Arthur, I should probably ask you a question. 'Do you think, monsieur, that Yellow Dog has made up his mind whether I'm really myself or Mr. Brocklebank?'"

"Oh, as to that," answered Ackerton. "I should tell him he'd got Yellow Dog guessing. On the whole Yellow Dog thinks he's a mad Frenchman."

"And you wouldn't be inclined to give him a bit more information, Sir Arthur?"

"As how, Bill?"

"Oh, for example—the nature of the secret business, or your own interest in it."

"No. Anyhow, not unless he became exceptionally matey with me and told me all about his own interest in it."

"Ah," Brocklebank sat thinking, frowning. "Not even whether he was likely to come across you again in connexion with the business?"

"How could he, Bill, when I'm off to Algeria to-morrow?"



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"Supposed to be off to Algeria, wasn't it?" Brocklebank suggested.

"Bill," said Ackerton, "your Frenchman's unnaturally cute. No!—unless he gave me his full confidence I should tell him nothing."

"Of course," Brocklebank pleaded, "he might be pledged to disclose nothing—"

"In that case it would be a pity, but I should have to say as the Spaniards do, Go with God, boy. And now, Bill, when we get back to London, what about coming down to Woldingham for a week-end?"

So ended this queer exercise in obliquity. Brocklebank left the hotel deeply puzzled by Ackerton's attitude, but still more deeply by the circumstances that had brought him and Yellow Dog into convergence upon Marseilles at this special time.

He called up a taxi in the station yard. A quarter to twelve. He was driven past the Porte d'Aix into a narrow street, where he drew up at the door of the Cafe du Rat. The familiar door swung open. He stepped into a cave of blue cigarette smoke, murmuring voices, and faintly heard music.

"Salut!" said Brocklebank to the half-dozen longshoremen who sat round a table playing cards and looked up as he passed in.

"Salut, le bourgeois," they answered. "Bon jour, Madame Guichard," he said to the lady who sat behind a zinc counter.

"Monsieur—" she said to him, and then, "Mon dieu! can it be you, Bill!"

And in the room behind, where Raoul awaited him and behind a haze of caporal smoke Guichard pere was winding a gramophone and a dozen couples were waiting to dance. "Sapristi!—but, is it you, Bill?" Brocklebank pere, who had dragged Guichard pere to safety that terrible day in March 20 years ago—would you have thought him anything but a Tommy doing a good turn to a poliu? But certainly not. Or when he and Brocklebank fils stepped off an old schooner in the Bassin de la Joliette six years ago and found their way to the Cafe du Rat, and spent some summer weeks idling about with boats by day and smoking and spinning yarn in the bar at night; would you have thought them rich bourgeois? Anyway, Brocklebank fils was now rich, for all the drinks he had bought for the customers of the Rat that night cost him every sou of fifty francs, which was sheer waste.

That extravagance was at the same moment the theme of Raoul's discourse in the room under the tiles which Brocklebank shared with him. Bill must have made a million in America to throw money about like that. Whereupon Brocklebank said, "Listen, Raoul," and Guichard listened for an exciting half hour to the tale of events which had brought Brocklebank to Marseilles.

(TO BE CONTINUED)



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