

ANOTHER ACTION-PACKED "GRIFFON" MYSTERY

Lockheed Loot

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With his own eyes, Drury Lang had seen that secret 25 mm. aero gun stolen. And he could certainly believe his eyes. But he couldn't believe his ears when Kerry Keen, the young ballistics expert, said, "Don't arrest them. Let 'em get away!" No, that didn't make much sense. At least, it didn't until Kerry Keen sprung a mentally unbalanced Russian princess into the case. Then Lang found everything had become quite clear. Like mud!



Frantically, the pilot clawed at the cruel dagger imbedded in his wrist. But in that same instant the scarlet-masked figure before him swung—and a shell seemed to explode on his chin.

Death-and the dread "Golden Arrows" -were riding that Coastal Air Lines night plane. But Kerry Keen, the noted ballistics expert, and his man, Barney O'Dare, weren't aware of it. They were just two unassuming passengers aboard that north-bound transport. Thus far, their flight from Washington had been peaceful-and there was no reason to suspect that it wouldn't continue so. But now Barney O'Dare was shuffling uncomfortably in the unaccustomed luxury of the airliner's upholstered chair. "They call this flying, eh?" he muttered, his mouth twisted in a grotesque Celtic sneer. "Why. I'd sooner come back riding the rods."

"Why didn't you tell me that before we started?" cracked back Keen. "I could have saved a few dollars on you. Now stop grumbling. We'll be in Newark in a few minutes and you can hop trucks all the way home to Graylands if you must indulge your hobo background."

Kerry Keen then slouched back and mentally reviewed the events of the past few days. He'd been to Washington on a consultation trip. The Ordnance Department had invited him down for his valued opinion on a new air weapon-a beautiful 25 mm. shooter they'd been

experimenting with for more than two years.

"These airline guys are sissies," the Mick broke in. "And besides, they ain't got no whisky aboard."

"Next time I take you, I'll leave you home. Trying to lift models out of the Smithsonian Institution, too! Haven't you any scruples?"

"What're they, Boss?"

"Skip it-and stop making faces at that girl across the aisle. She'll report you to the steward."

"It ain't fair. If you can take up with that jane

Pebbles, why can't I-"

"Shut up and adjust your belly band. The landing signal's been given. We're going to set down."

The airline steward, a sleek fellow, was quietly explaining the orders for fastening the safety belts. There was the usual shuffling about in the seats and the strained, tense air of a cabin that is always felt when a plane is about to be brought in.

Below, the field was a bizarre jewel of red borders, streaked landing lights, and twinkling beacons. The runway stood out like a silver ribbon. Outside, the landing lights

beamed from the wings, forking ahead like giant tentacles from some massive winged insect. There was a rumble of mechanism as the wheels went down, the shudder of mass against the braking of the flaps, then the smooth easy glide preparatory to landing.

"Nice work, this-if you can get it," reminded Keen.

"These guys know more about safe flying than we'll ever know."

"Sure, but who wants that? I'd sooner tool a truck between Chicago and Cleveland. There might be a little interesting hijacking to fight off once in a while."

Keen was sitting studying the passengers now. He was interested in the reactions of men and women as they reached the termination of their trip. Then suddenly his eye caught the profile of a man farther up front. The face was somewhat classic in its moulding-a thin, sharp nose with an indentation between the bridge and the forehead . . . a small cleft chin, and olive eyes.

"Where the deuce have I seen that bird before?" Keen asked himself quietly. "Saw him yesterday somewhere. Oh, I've got it!

That's the young Navy Commander I met at the Navy Department-the guy who has charge of the new gun. He looks strange in civilian clothing."

The plane was skimming in over the meadows now. In twenty seconds it would drop its wheels on the concrete and they would be in.

And one man there had only a little more than twenty seconds to live-and he didn't how it!

Keen was watching the action of the flaps from his seat well down the cabin and he did not see two men just ahead exchange glances and shift nervously in their seats. Nor did he see one look out of the cabin windows, shielding his eyes from the light with his cupped ham-like hands.

But Barney did. And now he leaned toward Keen.

"Hey, Boss!" he whispered. "Get a load of this."

"What's up?"

"These two guys up ahead-the ginks with the green felt hats on. "They got a gag of some kind."

"Well, we're down now. What can they do?"

"They're up to something, I tell you. One of them seen something on the ground and gave the other guy the office."

"We'll watch and see. And keep your eye on that guy up front with the brown balmaccan coat on. He's a Navy officer in mufti. I saw him yesterday."

The plane was finishing its runway roll now, having already got the light from the tower. The

steward moved up and down the aisle telling the passengers they could unhook their belts. He was shaking hands with an old lady and smiling when the two men in green hats got up suddenly and moved toward the door.

"Just a minute, please," the youth said. "Keep your seats until the cabin door is opened."

"Nuts, brother," one growled. "We bin in the air before."

"Then you should know enough to keep your seat until the door is opened and the gangway wheeled up."

"Shut up, buttons! We're in a hurry."

The youth gave them a look of frosty disdain and shoved back past them to get to the door. Keen watched the by-play for a few seconds, then waited until the door was opened. There seemed to be something false about it all.

"Sit still and watch," he ordered to Barney.

The young Navy man got up, buttoned his coat about him, then drew a leather case from somewhere near the side of the cabin wall. He had been keeping it there throughout the flight. It was newish looking, about four feet long, and it might have been made for some musical instrument.

The man slid into the aisle, slipped the case under his arm,

and started to pack a pipe with tobacco. The passengers were now shuffling out, and the two men who had been in such a hurry to get to the door stood back and allowed three ladies to leave before them.

Keen and Lang still kept their seats and watched. The man with the leather case glanced at Keen and his face twitched in recognition, but he made no effort to renew his acquaintance. He stuffed the pipe between his teeth and moved on closer to the door.

Then it happened.

The two men suddenly shoved an old man to one side. There was a flash of metal, the crash of a gun, and the man in the brown coat stood with his mouth open. His pipe fell to the floor and he clutched his stomach. He didn't utter a word. He simply crumpled and rolled across a seat.

One of the men calmly took the fallen leather case, backed toward the door, and yelled something outside. Then together they disappeared through the oval doorway and darted down the steps of the gangway.

It all happened so quickly that neither Keen nor Barney could get past the crush of passengers in the aisle. A woman screamed and fainted. Two large men in heavy overcoats bellowed and struggled to get to the door. The steward now stood at the rear

of the cabin, the back of his hand across his mouth, and the manifest folder fluttering to his feet.

Keen twisted and peered out of the window. Two indistinct figures moved under the port wing and hurried toward another plane that was taxi-ing slowly up the field from a nearby hangar. It was a Lockheed military plane of the type being sold to Great Britain. It had British markings on the wings, a new-type gun turret in the nose, and a bulbous conical turret well aft of the wing.

"They're clearing in that Lockheed," said Barney.

"One of the British Lockheeds, too." answered Keen.

"We certainly were asleep on that play."

"I told you those guys had a gag," the Mick persisted.

They clambered over the backs of the chairs and got to the young Navy man. They dragged him clear of the seats and sat him in a chair. His face was a constricted mask of pain, anguish, and terror. He tried to speak but only got out-"The gun. They got the-"

Then he passed out.

"Lovely!" a voice behind them said. "Leave it to you, Keen, to be tied up in a thing like this. Was that your pal in that British job out there?"

Keen turned and stared into the leathery mug of Drury Lang.

His Secret Service nemesis and another Federal man had just come aboard.

"We sat here and watched it all happen," said Keen.

"What a couple of dopes we were."

"Sure!" cracked Lang. "And those guys got that gun. I suppose you don't know a thing about it, eh?"

"Don't be silly. I was in Washington on the same job. I didn't recognise this guy until a few minutes before we were about to land. They got him just as he was heading for the doorway. But what were you doing- letting those thugs get away?"

"We were waiting for Crane-that's this dead guy's name-to see him safely to a hotel until he could go on to Hartford later on. He had the only complete job on the gun and it was being taken to Hartford where they intend to turn them out by the hundreds."

"Didn't you hear the shots?"

"No, there was too much noise, That other plane opened up with a roar just about that time. We didn't suspect anything, even when those guys ran around the tail. The steward just came out and yelled at us."

"And the guys got away with the British Lockheed. Smart guys, you Secret Service men. So now what?" he asked.

But Lang didn't answer, He was too disgusted.

Several airport policemen in their new uniforms now came in, carried the body out of the plane, and placed it on a stretcher that glided from the rear of an ambulance. Meanwhile, the passengers were herded into the reception room where they were told to remain until a checkup could be made. It would be routine, of course. An examination of the manifest had already disclosed that the two men who had disappeared were both listed as from Miami, their names having been given as John R. Adams and Frederick Van Linder. Beyond that, nothing was known of them and it was obvious that the names might be fictitious.

Keen and Barney stayed with Lang. The investigation was now in the hands of the Newark police who arrived in fleets of screeching radio cars. Newspapermen were all over the place, camera flash bulbs blazed out, and the passengers sat about with expressions of resignation carved on their faces.

"What about that Lockheed?" asked Keen of an airport official.

"It was flown in here this afternoon from the west. It was supposed to have been dismantled and put aboard a freighter tomorrow. The crew

that brought it simply placed it in the transient hangar, checked it in the ordinary way, and, I believe, went into the city and stayed at a hotel."

"What hotel?"

"Either the Robert Treat or the Douglas, I guess."

Keen got their names and went into the phone booth. He came back with the information from one of the crew men that the plane had not been refuelled and had gasoline in her tanks for only a short flight.

"Get a news flash out on your teletype to all fields within one hundred miles to watch out for it," he ordered.

"They can't get far away without refuelling."

The Airport Manager gave the orders by phone.

"What are you up to?" demanded Lang coming out of a crowd of news hawks.

"Trying to get a line on that 'Hudson.' That's what the British call those Lockheeds, isn't it?"

"Say! I hope you can. We're in one hell of a jam, Keen. Got any bright ideas? That Griffon pal of yours is nowhere around is he?"

"Don't be silly. What makes you think I know the Griffon? Why, the last time you figured he was a girl, remember?"

"Oh, shut up and do something. Sure, you knew the guy. You say you know all

about the gun, too. Why don't you figure something out?"

"Let's go down to the Transient hangar and see what happened down there."

They took Barney along, went into the side door of the hangar, and found a small frightened mechanic sitting at a disorderly desk in the hangar office. He was just hanging up the receiver of his telephone.

"What's the game? Who were you talking to?" demanded Lang.

"No one. Just calling home to tell my wife what happened?" the little man answered.

"Where was that last call made on this phone," snapped Lang picking it up and getting the control office operator.

"All right, I'll wait."

The little man went white as Lang said: "Thanks! That's all I wanted to know."

Then he snapped at the mechanic again: "Who was you calling in Hartford?"

"Hartford?" gaged Keene.

"Sure. He had Hartford on the phone. What's the idea? Your wife live in Hartford?"

"No. I'll tell you the truth. I heard those guys who took the Lockheed say they could get in at Hartford and get gas. I heard 'em from behind the door. They had guns. I didn't know what to do."

"So you called Hartford. What for?"

"I got a pal up there. I was trying to tell him what had happened so that he could tip the cops off up there and pinch them."

"That sounds reasonable," said Keen. "You supposed to be on guard here?"

"Just on duty, mister. Not on guard. And them guys had guns. What could I do?"

Keen stood studying the man, his mind clicking like a teletype. But he was quite certain the fellow was telling the truth.



Inwardly, he was sore at himself for letting the Navy man die that way. The Mick had sensed something wrong, but that had to be put down to Celtic intuition. They could have "covered" Commander Crane until Lang and his men had appeared-if they'd only had more facts to go on.

Then a plan suddenly evolved in Keen's mind. It was a wild plan, mad in its general scheme. But it was the sort of

plan that might work. Certainly, it was no wilder than the one that had just been pulled.

"I can get that gun back," Keen said quietly. "Come over here a minute. You stay there, Jerry," he said to the mechanic. "We'll need you again."

"What's the idea?" growled Lang.

"Let those guys go through to Hartford. When they get there, let them be fuelled-if they set down there. Let them take off again, too."

"You're crazy! If we get our hands on them, we're not going to let them get away."

"Do you want more poor poor devils rubbed out? Those guys will shoot up the airport if it gets tough."

"We better get that gun back, ain't we?" argued Lang, chewing on a particularly foul cigar.

"You have no way of knowing whether they'll even have the gun when they get there. They may dump it somewhere on the way up. You don't even know whether that gun was taken aboard the Lockheed in the first place. It might have been passed to someone else between the time it was taken from Crane and their climbing into the Lockheed."

"Oh, you're gonner make this tougher, eh?" growled Lang as he tossed the cigar into a sand box.

"That Lockheed might be a gag just to put you off," persisted Keen. "Did you see the gun case in the hands of either of the men when they got into the plane?"

"No. I didn't even see *them* very clearly."

"It was pretty big, though, that gun case."

"It must have been. But why take the chance on swiping the Lockheed if it was only a stall?"

"That's the way I would have done it, and even you admit I'm a pretty smart crook," smiled Keen.

"Then you are the Griffon?" said Lang in a dramatic tone that might have been used to good effect in a horse opera.

"You can't tell. I might be, I suppose. Anyhow, I can get that gun back if you let those birds get clear at Hartford. If you don't, all you'll get is a couple of guys wanted for murder-and no gun. Even the Mick had to laugh at the perplexed Lang. The detective just stood there, his face a grey mask of ignorant wonder. In his mind, Lang was trying to absorb several matters at once, and that in itself was enough to strain several portions of his brain. Indeed, what success he had had as a detective could be laid to the fact that he had a one-track

mind. The loss of the air-cannon, the death of a valuable Navy man, and the possibility that Keen might be the Griffon were too many all at once for Drury. It was like throwing three juicy T-bone steaks to a famished tiger. In a mental contortion, Lang was snaffling at three distinct ideas without knowing which one to bite into.

"Hey, wait a minute!" Lang babbled. "That gal really ain't the Griffon, is she?"

"I wouldn't speak about Miss Colony like that. Besides, what do you care who the Griffon is? All you have to worry about is getting the gun back."

"Yeah, and what are you going to worry about?"

"I only hope they swiped it for a big enough sock of dough."

Lang let that one simmer through his grey matter for nearly a minute before he got it, then he snarled: "You playing tricks, eh? You get the gun, hijack the dough they're supposed to get, and then pull some fast one bringing the gun back-and get all the glory!"

"You don't want the dough, too, do you?" laughed Keen.

"No. But if you don't get that gun back, I'm gonner find out who the Griffon really is, this time," the Secret Service man threatened.

"Suppose you do. Suppose you prove that-er-Miss Colony

is the Griffon? What will that get you?"

"They's a lot of screwy things happened with that black plane," charged Lang. "You know the aeroplane I mean." Then he soothed down a trifle and whined "Then that girl is the Griffon, eh? I had an idea it was a jane pulling all that stuff."

"Oh, forget it. You got enough troubles now-these gun crooks. Have Hartford leave 'em alone. Meanwhile I'll blow out of here and start working from another angle. Anyhow, let them get clear. Then when they leave have Hartford call me and let me knew where they signed out for."

"And you'll call the Griffon and chase after them?" asked Lang.

"No. Personally, I don't care if I never see that Lockheed again. I'll just go home-and think. You wouldn't understand that, Lang. Besides, I have a few points to check up by myself."

"So you want me to take the heat off that ship?"

"I feel sure that gun is not aboard. I have an idea where it is, but I'm not certain. And besides, I don't want to grab it too soon. That would make it look too easy and then you wouldn't give me any credit."

Lang, mad as a hornet, picked up the phone and called the control office. Then he got through to the Airport Manager

and gave the orders that were to be sent out over the line teletype.

"That's right. If it lands at Hartford, it is to be held there as long as possible without creating suspicion, refuelled if necessary, and every possible means carried out to find out where it is heading for. Is that clear? Then when they've left, you are to call this number and tell where it is supposed to be headed."

He gave Keen's Long Island phone number and hung up. When he turned around, neither Keen nor Barney were anywhere to be seen. They had both darted back through the darkness and were mingling with the other passengers and crew of the airliner who were still being questioned by the Newark police officials.

Then, ignoring all orders, Keen and his man slipped out through the main entrance, hailed a taxi, and had themselves driven into Manhattan. There, Keen took out his Packard roadster from a private garage near his 55th Street apartment and headed it for the Queensborough Bridge.

"What silly business are we up to this time?" asked Barney who had been quiet for nearly an hour. The Mick had been perfectly content to stand around and let Keen do all the talking and thinking when Lang was on the horizon. Actual thinking was not one of the Mick's best bets. He

concentrated on secretly admiring Keen's ability to juggle facts and figures in his mind and come to some definite conclusion.

What accomplishments the Mick had were all in his hands, so he had an undeniable respect for anyone who could rattle the intellect and get results.

"You'll find some cigarettes in the pocket there," said Keen sensing that Barney's nerves were suffering from not knowing what it was all about. "And the 'silly business,' as you put it, may not be so silly."

The Mick found the smokes, tugged one out and applied it to his mouth.

"And never mind trying to smoke it all in one drag," Keen said as he gave the accelerator another quarter of an inch.

There was a distinct "Plok!" as the Mick exhaled a fragrant blast from his mouth. He wheezed a trifle, blew out again, and fogged the windshield. Then he let out a deep sigh of bleary satisfaction.

"What you gonner do, Boss?" he asked with more easy simplicity.

"We're going to try to stop payment on that gun first. Then we're going to get it back and make Drury Lang weep in his beer. There's some jack in this for us, and we might as well stuff the coffers while the stuffing is good, eh?"

"What'd you say about coffee, Boss?"

"Skip it. I want to think."

"Go ahead. I won't bother you," said the Mick raising another cigarette to the place where it would perform its natural function.

The rest of the speedy ride to Graylands was spent in absolute silence.

They arrived about 11:30 P.M. and Keen snapped out a series of crisp orders as he ran the car into the garage. Barney ducked inside and disappeared down the cellar stairs to prepare the Black Bullet for a possible flight.

Keen hurried into his den, made for the cabinet on which his telephone stood, and opened the door below it. Here, he raised the tone arm of a phonograph device, glanced at the record below it, and smiled. He moved the tone arm back to the edge of the record and snapped the switch.

From somewhere inside, the recording spoke:

"This is the Hartford Airport of the Coastal Air Lines," a voice said clearly.

There was a halt of a few seconds during which time the other half of the strange mechanism had answered, as Keen had planned that it should. Then the record went on-

"The British-type Lockheed bomber arrived here et 9:45.

Only one person got out, a man who signed the Transient book as Wilbur Black. They ordered the Service Manager to fill all tanks. We delayed them as long as humanly possible and then asked the man Black to sign out and report his destination. He asked if any inquiries had been made concerning the Lockheed and we reported that none had. He then said that the ship was being flown to Halifax, Nova Scotia, for shipment aboard a Furness Line vessel for Liverpool. They left here at approximately 10:15."

There followed a series of dull scratches, whereupon Keen replaced the record on the turntable and re-set the answering mechanism.

He pressed a button on the wall that would warn Barney below.

"That might be right, at that. The Furness Line does run cargo vessels out of Halifax at this time of the year."

He glanced at his wrist watch, looked up at a large scale map on his wall, and made a quick mental calculation. The Lockheed could still be anywhere within 300 miles of Hartford in that time. He took a pair of dividers, set them to the scale, and swung them around from a pivot set on Hartford. The circle covered Bangor, Montreal, Ottawa, Rochester, Baltimore, and went all the way down to the lower end of Delaware.

"That seems pretty hopeless," he said ruefully.

But then he studied the map closer and asked himself a lot of mental questions. He had to put himself in the position of the gang. He had to attempt to assume their mental processes. It was a "Set a fox to catch a fox" sort of thing.

"They must feel pretty confident, now they have gotten away with the refuelling gag. They might feel that since no effort has been made to stop them, they can take further chances. They might feel that the disappearance of the Lockheed has not been connected with the loss of the gun or the killing of the Navy guy. They might even believe that something has slipped up that they didn't get the right gun after all."

He sat down and rubbed his chin on that one.

"Sure. They might think something slipped up, since they were in no way bothered. They might-"

But then he got up, stared at the map again, and jotted down several names of small towns in New Jersey. Finally he went to the clothes closet and took out his black flying kit. He climbed into it, took Barney's over his arm, and snapped off the light.

"Get into these quick?" he said when he reached the hidden hangar below.

"I'll start her."

The big Avia motor was opened up while Barney pulled on the black coveralls and chute. Then the lights were switched off, the door mechanism put into operation, and Keen ran the Black Bullet out into the darkness. In three minutes the sleek plane had her wings folded out, the doors were lowered, and they were rolling down toward the waters of Long Island Sound.

"Where to now?" asked the Mick, adjusting his helmet and goggles.

"Back to Newark."

"Why -er-what for, Boss?"

"Just a hunch."

Barney gave up. It all required a certain amount of thinking and he was not quite up to it.

"I figure they didn't take the gun with them," said Keen to himself, "because they were not sure they could get out of the country with the amount of fuel they knew the Lockheed would have in her tanks after the cross-country flight. They must have juggled that gun somewhere between killing Crane and getting into the Lockheed. Now that they feel they are not under suspicion, and having full tanks, they might try to pick it up-or they might feel that something has slipped.

"Put that radio set on 3.3 megs. Plug my earphones in

and be ready for anything," Keen ordered over his shoulder.

The Mick reached over, twirled the wave-length lever, and plugged in the jack of Keen's earphones.

The Black Bullet rolled off the sands and into the water, and Keen pulled the lever that set the floats for a water take-off. Then, with the Skoda mufflers still in, he took her off, climbing hard into the darkness. At 1,500 feet he drew the pontoons up into their wells and turned back for the shore again at top speed.

They sped over Long Island, headed for the glare of Manhattan and cut across the North River. Now they could see the lights of the Newark Airport. Keen climbed her high and circled several times, but there was no unusual activity below. Then he swung Northwest, headed for the Caldwell field of the Curtiss-Wright organisation, and stared down for lights. There were none there, so he turned due south, headed for Westfield and Sommerset, and checked the two fields there. They were both in darkness. Finally, he swung back again for Newark, a frown on his face.

But then he suddenly caught the faint speech of a radio set somewhere. He leaned back and re-adjusted the wavelength lever until he brought it in clearer. The voice was plain now and making inquiries;

"over Caldwell-Curtiss now. Can you make contact there?"

Keen instinctively swung west again and headed for Caldwell. Then less distinctly came an answer;

"Can be there in ten minutes. Use south-east to north-west runway. Practically no wind now. Taking big risk, though. Can make contact sure tomorrow as planned."

"Coming into Caldwell. Must see you at once. Signing off," came the reply.

"Warn you that they have man named Keen working on case. Possible he is the Griffon. See you in ten minutes," was the answer.

Then there came an audible click as a switch snapped and the carrier wave died out.

Keen frowned and muttered to himself: "Where the deuce have I heard that voice before? He knows of me being on the case. He must have been there in the Administration building after the flight. It might have been one of the passengers, but they would not be familiar with the names of the passengers. It could have been some newspaperman, of course. But I'm certain I recognised that voice."

"What's up?" asked Barney, who sensed that Keen had caught something.

"Be set for anything, Get those persuaders of yours out and be ready for trouble. She's

going to be over Caldwell in a few minutes-just as I figured. The Lockheed, I mean."

They were cruising at 7,000 now and Keen had the mufflers back in and all riding lights off. "Come on!" he now spoke up. "Take over. I'm going-over the side."

The Mick looked startled, but obeyed. And Keen moved back, pulling a long flashlight from a prong mid setting it in one of his voluminous thigh pockets.

"Stay nearby and don't come down until I signal you-the usual signal, understand? And don't go fighting that guy the minute you spot him. Let him land."

The Mick nodded and piloted the plane to a position above the airport.

"If I don't signal you in a few minutes after the Lockheed leaves, you buzz off back home and sit on the phone."

Keen climbed out of the pit as the Black Bullet circled quietly. Then from the wing root he flipped a salute, dived away, and disappeared. The lights of a car were forking along the West Caldwell road at high speed as Keen, now masked and acting his role of the Griffon, felt the oscillations of the parachute slow up. He took the landing with his knees bent and found himself not seventy yards from the corner of the

main hangar. In two minutes he has his chute rolled up, unsnapped from his body harness, and piled in a small heap near the corner of the deserted hangar.

He waited, fingering his gun, and saw the car swerve in from the road, roll up the hangar driveway, and swing around hard near the trees at the extreme edge of the field. Then the lights were snapped off.

Keen moved across the drome like a cat and was unseen in his black coverall. He circled, then crawled the last thirty yards on his hands and knees.

Above, there now came the roar of two 820 Cyclones, and in less time than one would believe possible the compact Lockheed bomber was turning in slowly and coming down with her landing lights, her flaps down. Someone in the car turned the auto headlights full on and the beams swept out and made a fairly clear picture of the open field.

The Lockheed touched, bounced slightly. But It was a good landing considering that it had been made under difficult circumstances.

"That guy's good," said Keen under his breath as he hugged the back of the big black sedan and waited. The plane had now taxied up nearby.

Two men got out of the ear. They waited until the door of the

Lockheed was opened, then they moved up and greeted a man who came out into the glare of the headlights,

"What happened?" the man on the step of the Lockheed said at once.

"What do you mean, what happened?" the first man from the car replied. "And what did you want to take this crazy chance for?"

"We don't like that Hartford business. Why did they let us get away like that?" the man in the oval doorway of the Lockheed said, glaring down from his position above the others. "There's something screwy going on."

"You don't need to worry. I got it stowed okay. You could've dumped this boiler up there in Hartford and reached Washington in time. We don't go out until 9:15."

"Listen, Shale," the man in the Lockheed doorway said with a menacing gesture. "We don't like something about this and you'd better play safe. There was no heat put on the Lockheed. They let us run in there with no trouble. But we could tell they were watching us the way they handled that servicing."

"Why did you stick around, then?"

"We could have shot our way out at that time of night. It would have been easy. We pulled up to the outside fuel

pump and could have cleared before any of the cops could have got past the hangar. But it's screwy, I tell you. What's the game?"

"All we know," said the second man from the car, "is that they have this guy Keen on it with the Federal guys who were on hand. He blew early and headed for New York. I think he's the Griffon-or that he's connected with the Griffon in some way."

"Yeah? Keen, eh? Say a guy by that name was on the plane all the way up. How does that add?"

"Sure. He was in on the investigation right away. That's why we told you it was risky. You should have dumped the Lockheed up there in Hartford and picked us up tomorrow."

"Yeah. That's a swell idea," came the sarcastic reply. "We swipe the Lockheed to get away after we bumped off Crane so that you can get the gun. Then you want us to scam out at Hartford and get nailed between the airport and a hotel. How the hell do you think we're gonna get it away tomorrow?"

"You can lay low on it for a few days and then skip."

"That ain't in the deal. They want it so that they can get it on the Conte de Savoia tomorrow night."

Keen frowned at that. The Conte de Savoia was due to sail at noon the next day. That

apparently meant someone was to contact her at sea ten or twelve hours later.

Then through his mind flashed several possibilities. He figured they were going to contact the Italian Line steamer out at sea for more than one reason. All this planning was not simply to transfer a stolen air cannon. There were other angles.

There was some muffled talking now and Keen could not hear every word. But he heard enough to satisfy himself that many of his suspicions were justified.

He was fidgety now and wanted to get away. There was nothing more he could do here. The gun had been "stowed" somewhere and it was quite obvious that there was no money to change hands in this group. The cash would be aboard the *Conte de Savoia*-or about to be brought aboard.

He could nail the lot here and now, but that would not get the gun or the reward. He would have to wait until he could work it where the gun, the reward, and the men involved would be in some suitable juxtaposition. He had learned more than he had expected, and he wished they would make some sort of a move.

They did!

Keen had been resting against the back of the sedan

listening intently. He sensed somehow that suddenly the muffled talking had stopped. He rose to his toes, then crouched to peer around the car just above the line of the rear fender.

But as he bent over something was rammed hard into the small of his back! There was no questioning what that something was. It was hard-and Keen knew it was bored to fire a heavy bullet.

"Okay, Griffon!" a voice said bluntly. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"Enjoying the evening. I usually take a walk across the fields at night. I enjoy the scents of late spring."

"Get around there into the light," a man ordered. "Let's see you in your real get-up. Caught you pretty, eh?"

Keen was shoved forward and the rest of them crowded about him.

"Where'd you find him, Carl?" the big man asked of the man with the gun.

"I'm sitting up there in the cockpit," the man called Carl explained, "when I suddenly spot this guy banging around the back of the car. I slid out quietly, grabbed a Betsy, and just come around behind him."

The four of them stared half-frightened at their strange, black-costumed captive. Keen stood as straight as a ram-rod and they could see his piercing

eyes through the slits of his scarlet mask. The man named Carl still covered him with his heavy gun, uncertain and plainly awed in spite of his successful capture.

Keen sensed this and turned his head slowly while watching the others.

"Where's his ship?" one asked. "How did he get here?"

"Yes, where's your ship, Griffon?" the small slight man demanded.

Keen had no intention of answering their questions, he was looking for an opening. So far there was only one man with a raised gun in the group—a man who seemed none too sure of himself.

"He must have heard us talking. I told you it was dangerous to come here. Now what do we do with him?"

"We ain't taking him with us and you can't take him in the car. We gotter get him out of the way."

"He's got a chute harness on. He must have jumped in. That's the way this guy works. He must have stepped outa a plane."

"Well, make up your minds," spoke Keen, his arms still aloft under the persuasion of the pilot's gun. He had been twitching on his feet, and he had been trying to support his upraised arms by gripping his wrists. At Least that was what it appeared he had been doing.

Actually, his fingers of his right hand had been fumbling inside the cuff of his coverall for something hard, short, and deadly.

"You could take him upstairs with you and shove him out of the door," suggested one of the men from the car.

But Keen's nerves were now tense. He had the short sharp instrument by the point now, and he only awaited the right second to act.

The man with the gun was plainly uncertain what to do next. He stared at the others, then back at Keen. He relaxed his vigilance for just a second—and then Keen struck.

The short razor-keen dagger was held between Keen's first and second fingers.

He let his arms draw slightly apart and then with a quick flip of his wrist he sent the weapon across the short distance with the speed of a blow-dart.

Carl fell back apace as Keen's hands flashed above his head. Then he let out a scream that would have done justice to a pig under a gate. He stared at the small ivory-handled dagger that had been embedded in his right wrist. He made a frantic move to tug at it—but then a shell seemed to explode on his chin and he knew no more.

Keen had stepped forward, pivoted sharply, and let his left fist smash full where it would have the most effect. He

grabbed up the gun as the man went to his knees.

"That's all, gentlemen. You may go now," Keen said, walking around and frisking them one by one for possible weapons. "You, Shale, and your pal had better get back in your boiler and tootle back to town. You can take this other biological specimen with the crockery chin and stick him back behind that Lockheed's wheel where he seems more at home than behind a gun. He's a good pilot and it's too damned bad he's mixed up with such a scummy crew. Now get out of here before I wake up the Town Marshal and have you all put in the jug for disturbing the peace."

They all stared at him with unbelieving eyes. The man named Carl now got to his knees snuffing and rubbing his hand across his bloody mouth.

The other Lockheed man helped him to his feet, dragged him inside the plane's cabin, and slammed the door. The man named Shale, without thought of his comrade, clambered back behind his wheel, slammed the door behind him, and stepped on the starter. He, particularly, had good reason to regret this tangle with the Griffon. Yet maybe he hadn't been recognised, in that bad light. But not knowing, for sure, he'd have to play the game.

"Wait for the other hero," taunted Keen. "You'll have him

walking into a prop else. Good night, gentlemen!"

And with that Keen backed away and disappeared toward the hangars.

The Lockheed rolled away and made a wobbly cross-wind take-off, while the car went lurching and bumping around in a wide circle and found its way back to the road again. Then—and then only—did Keen take out his flashlight, swing the beam upward, and signal the Black Bullet down.

"Brave lads, those," he smiled. "Just a bunch of mugs working for the brain-guy who sails on the Conte de Savoia tomorrow."

He waited several minutes, then caught the tell-tale whine of the Bullet's prop. She came in beautifully from out of the darkness, her landing lights flashing on for just a few seconds before she dabbed her wheels down on the turf. Keen was at her side, his bundled parachute in his arms, before she had stopped rolling.

Barney swung her around and Keen was under the hatch in a few seconds. Then quickly they dashed away into the air again.

"What happened?" the Mick asked when they had gained 2,000 feet. "You were down there long enough."

"Had quite a talk with the guys in the Lockheed. We're in

for some fun tomorrow, my good man."

"We're in for some right now," the Mick abruptly yelled.

From somewhere above, as they were just swerving into a climbing turn, three sparkling lines of fire beat down on them. The Lockheed had spotted the Black Bullet-had returned to finish it.

"Stay up front. I'll take care of them," Keen ordered from the rear pit.

Barney, in his full glory now, swung the Black Bullet out of the line of fire. Keen took the rear Browning guns and waited. He slammed one short burst at the Lockheed's Plexiglas nose where the spitting fire came from, he knew he had scored, but he wanted to make certain. The Black Bullet went up the sky lane full out now, the mufflers open and every ounce of power pounding through her eighteen cylinders.

The Lockheed banked around hard again, and from its rear turret came another flailing blast of fire. Lead spanged all about the Bullet and jangled through the dural.

But Keen got a new bead and the Brownings spat again. This time a long burst stitched deep into the Lockheed's fuselage, ran a devil's seam along the body, and finished up with a slug pattern on the turret. The guns were silenced.

The bomber now swerved hard and Barney ripped the Bullet around again, just in time to evade a heavy fire from the nose turret.

"How about letting me have a shot?" the Mick yelled.

"No. You don't play nice. I don't want them shot down. We'll need them tomorrow."

Keen then simply slammed another short burst at the front of the Lockheed and yelled "Now beat it!"

The last splash of lead poured hard into the nose turret of the bomber and she swerved hard and curled away. Barney then climbed the Bullet for several minutes and finally cut over and headed for the glare of light that was Newark. Then he cut across the bay, darted Manhattan, and headed into the clear for home. Keen curled up in the back, after he had stowed the guns, and contemplated all he had seen and heard. He knew he had a heavy day on for the morrow, and he let it go at that.

The Mick took the Bullet the whole way home, finally setting his flaps and landing gear for the water as he cleared the Long Island coastline. Meantime, Keen was so absorbed in his reflections that he did not realise they were in until Barney touched him on the shoulder as they ran up from the water to the shadow of the boathouse.

"Hey?" he whispered. "What do we do now, turn around?"

"What's up?" asked Keen rousing himself. "What do you mean, turn around?"

Then he saw what had startled the Mick. There were lights on in the house-lights that had not been left on when they left.

"Stay here," he ordered, climbing out. "I'll go up and look around. If you have to bolt, lam up to that cave you found on the shore and lay low."

Keen made a circuitous trip around the boathouse, through the grape arbour, and past the shadows of the house until he could get behind a bush and peer inside. Then he took one glance into his study-and laughed.

He drew out his flashlight, snapped a signal beam back toward Barney, then went around to the front steps, taking off his mask and helmet as he went.

He rang the bell, awaited the occupant of his study to answer, and bowed when the door was opened.

"I'm the man about the gas, Ma'm. Do you suffer from nyctophobia?"

The girl who opened the door wan none other than Miss Barbara Colony, better known to the Graylanders as "Pebbles." She was stunning, and that was all there was to it. She wore a cream flannel

ensemble smocked in blue. Her legs were sheathed in gossamer hose, and her feet were encased in bright blue suede shoes that simply twinkled.

"And what is nyctophobia, may I ask?" she answered, placing her arms akimbo. "Besides, we do not allow peddlers here."

"Nycto-whatchamacallit is something to do with being afraid of the dark, Ma'm. You see, you have enough lights on here to attract every vessel on the Atlantic. But may I come in?"

"Pray do," the girl mimicked. "And do you have a helper with you, gas-man?"

"He'll be here any minute," said Keen. Then his voice changed as he said: "Say, what's your little game tonight?"

"I was getting lonesome and a bit bored. Then I read the news article about the business at Newark. I saw your name and I sensed that you were mixed up in this matter so I came to get 'the straight' on it."

"We're very busy, you know," Keen said, climbing out of his coveralls. "You'll be in the way, and besides-"

"I smile too much," she broke in. "And I'm likely to cause distraction, is that it? Well, I'll change at once. Boo! I'm nasty, I throw tantrums, and I'm violently in love with a policeman who has beer stains

on his whiskers. May I stay now?"

"Horrors!" cried Keen putting his hands over his eyes. "Take the spell off. You can play along,"

The girl sat down before the open fire, crossed her knees, and smiled as the wide-eyed Barney came into the room looking like some monster out of a Buck Rogers film.

"Mr. Pulski, as I live and breathe!" the girl cried with a grin.

"Is she here again, Boss? I still think we should have dunked her that night"

But then the girl gave Barney a radiant smile that all but melted him.

"You were saying something about dunking Miss Colony, Barney?" queried Keen.

"Ferget it, Boss. I guess I should get some coffee, eh?"

He backed out of the room, clambered awkwardly out of his flying kit, and a few minutes later returned with an electric percolator and some cakes. Soon they were all comfortable before the fire, especially Barney who was holding the neck of a bottle of O'Doul's Dew, a purblind beam of satisfaction on his homely mug. Keen was too taken up with their visitor to note that his man had steered clear of the coffee.

"And where have you two worthies been this evening?" the girl finally asked.

"Just mooching about... looking for trouble," said Keen.

"Yeah, an' we got it. There are about fifty slug holes in th' Bullet to plug up before tomorrow," the Mick added.

"Oh, then this calls for some shooting as well as mooching, eh?" the girl asked. "Well, where do I come in?"

Keen was staring into the fire. Suddenly he twisted in the settee and stared into her blue eyes.

"You come in, sure! You're just the pal for us. It may be a bit risky-but who are you to bask in the foamy billows of luxury without taking any of the risk. If I had your looks and your.....your....."

"Figure," supplied the girl. "I know. I've got to vamp someone. Who is it?"

"I don't know yet. Wait a minute."

He reached over for the telephone and called a number in New York City. In a moment he got an answer. He had Lang the phone.

"Hi, Drury," he greeted. "What's new?"

"Nothing much, except that that Lockheed turned up again in Hartford. Boy, it gets me!"

"Swell! Leave 'em there and let 'em alone. They're playing into our hands in great fashion.

Now listen. Get me the complete First Class passenger list of the Conte de Savoia, will you? I've got to have it early in the morning. Get it to my place in 55th street."

"What's the idea?"

"Nothing you'd understand. But I think the Griffon is sailing on it. So don't you gum up the works. Is that clear?"

"Not very, but just as you say. There's a hell of a stink about that gun."

"Gun? If you don't watch out those guys will steal the Battery from right under your nose,

You'd better call Grover Whalen, too, and make sure they're not towing the World's Fair off the bay."

"I'll get you that list, but it sounds screwy to me."

Lang hung up with a low mutter, and Keen laughed. "Lots of work tomorrow. So off to bed, boys and girls," he ordered.. "You'll stay on, Pebbles?"

"Right. I wouldn't go back at this time of night. Besides, I want to know what this is all about and who I'm to vamp."

They paused, however, for another cup of coffee. And Keen explained what had happened thus far. He gave out some details on the adventure at the Caldwell airport and what he figured had happened.

"As I see it now," he said, "they are going to try to turn the

gun over to someone sailing on the Italian liner. How, I'm not quite sure as yet. But if I get the passenger list I may have some idea. It is obvious that the money will not be paid over until the gun, at least, is delivered. But I have an idea they are going further than that."

"How can they?"

"Well, in the first place I happen to know that this new Lockheed has several new British ideas aboard. She is very fast and has something special in automatic gun turrets. That silly-looking dome on the back is only a cover for something real. Anyhow, I believe they are going to deliver the gun-and the Lockheed, too, somehow."

"Oh, how I'll hate to get up in the morning," sang the Mick beautifully off key.

"You'd better be up early. We have to get away fast, and then-

"-You'll have to go mooching," Miss Colony added with a smile. "Let's get to bed. I must look my prettiest for the mysterious stranger aboard the *Conte de savoia*."

Keen and Pebbles were in his 55th street apartment early next morning after a speedy ride into the city in the girl's car.

The doorman met them with a beaming smile and a long white envelope, which Keen

slipped into his pocket as they went up in the elevator.

"So this is the other lair of the Griffon?" the girl said. "Where does one get a pass key for this place. It might come in handy, some time."

Keen smiled and said: "I'll bet you're on my trail for sure, or do you just want to dust the furniture in here? But no matter. Let's look this list over and see if there's anyone aboard that ship who matters."

He opened the envelope and took out a printed sheet. It was a galley proof of the passengers list which would later be printed in the liner's first-night menu.

Keen frowned. "Wow! This is queer. They only have a few passengers on this run. Less than sixty. That is, in First Class. I suppose the rest are in Tourist going back to sign up in Mussolini's army, or something."

He ran his finger down the list and stopped at a name.

"Know him?" the girl asked.

'Professor Arrigo Lessona, I believe," muttered Keen, "is a leading figure in that undercover outfit known as the Golden Arrows."

The girl gave him an inquiring glance.

"That's a special and particularly cut-throat spy gang which nevertheless has some cultured and well-known bigshots in its membership,"

explained Keen. "I believe the Professor was over here to visit the World's Fair and make some kind of a speech on engineering. He's a world figure in that line, you know. But my guess is that that angle of his visit was only a 'cover.'"

"How authoritative you sound in your 55th street apartment," the girl said. "I like you much better at Graylands."

She considered further as Keen studied the list: "But I suppose you really are a dual personality and that I must expect to have to put up with two different people. Still, that should be fun."

Keen was in a sort of a blue fog. He now had no ears for her at all. He fingered the Metropolitan telephone book, wondering where to try first to get a line on the scientist.

"Well, I'm going to buzz the Embassy," he finally decided. "Wait a minute."

Keen picked up his telephone, called the number, and asked if Professor Arrigo Lessona had left for the Italian Line pier yet.

He got an answer, thanked the party on the other end, then hung up.

"He's at the Waldorf. Now Pebbles, you go there at once and page him. Give him the 'stall' story I told you last night.

Keep him down in the cocktail bar as long as possible on any pretext. Talk about the

Fair until you've won his confidence. Then tell him your father was an engineer at the Ordnance Department in Washington and you can get him the blue prints of the YB-8 bomb sight. You were tipped off about him through an Embassy secretary in London, after you had failed to get a bid for the blueprint from the British. Got it all straight?"

"I'm word perfect. The beautiful lady spy will work on the Golden Arrows."

"I'll bet you come out of it with one encrusted with diamonds. That's an idea, too. I'll buy you one to stick in that saucy hat-if we click."

They moved fast now. The girl quickly left, while Keen stayed behind, and selected some particularly necessary tools. He secreted the equipment about his person, then went downstairs and got the taxi right behind the one Pebbles had taken.

A short time later, he sauntered into the Park Avenue entrance of the Waldorf, calmly went to the newspaper stand, and bought a paper. Then he wandered from one section of the hotel to another until he found the cocktail bar where Pebbles had already snared her man. He saw them over in one corner. The man had his back to him.

That was enough for Keen. He went across to the desk, asked for the room number of

Professor Arrigo Lessona, then said: "Never mind. He hasn't checked out yet so I'll leave him a note. Will you put it in his box?"

The busy clerk took the envelope and placed it in the box corresponding to Lessona's room.

Keen took an elevator to the tenth floor, moved about cautiously. And then making sure the coast was clear, he turned back to room 1068 and inserted a small something in the lock. Three quiet twists and he had the door open and let himself into the room. He paused quietly in the foyer, slipped on a red mask-just in case-and went into the sitting room. A number of new leather bags lay there strapped and locked.

In ten minutes he had checked through the lot, replacing everything except one manila paper envelope that contained a thick wad of crisp British bank notes. These notes he shuffled carefully. And he whistled a low note at the amount.

Putting this envelope in his pocket, he then slipped off his mask, and went downstairs by another elevator.

He glanced up at the clock and noted that it wanted but about forty minutes to noontime. The Conte de Savoia sailed at noon. Then with a jaunty stride he went back to

the cocktail bar, walked in, glanced around anxiously, then went directly to the table where Miss Colony was still sitting with the Professor.

"Miss Pebbles!" he cried with feigned anxiety. "I have been looking for you everywhere. How did you get here!"

At this, the little spade-bearded man opposite rose to his feet, and he showed his confusion. "Miss Pebbles?" he said in wonderment. "But I thought your name-" Then he smiled and gave the girl a knowing glance. No doubt she was only using an alias.

But there was more to come.

"I'm sorry, Sir," explained Keen in quiet confidence. "I am Dr. Ginsberg. Miss Pebbles is in my charge," and his voice came down to a whisper. "You no doubt have sensed that she is a mental case. She has hallucinations and imagines she is a mysterious Russian princess. Sometimes she becomes violent and demands large sums of money or expensive jewelry. There are times when she believes herself to be a noted international spy. I do hope she has not embarrassed you. You will excuse us, of course. I must get her back to the nursing home. It is getting on toward twelve and she must be in for treatment by noon. You will excuse us?"

"But but I don't understand. She is such a charming young lady. You say she is..... er...."

"Yes, mentally unbalanced. An airplane accident, you know. Come, Miss Pebbles, and I'll get you that diamond encrusted arrow you wanted for your new hat."

Then he winked at the little Professor and in a low voice went on: "It's amusing, the things one can get at Woolworth's. Come, Miss Pebbles!"

The Professor was extremely perturbed.

"You said it is nearly noon. Good heavens! I must catch the Conte de savoia at noon."

"You'd better rush it then," said the phoney Dr. Ginsberg.

The girl now got up with a hysterical giggle, picked up her cocktail glass- and calmly poured the contents into Professor Arrigo Lessona's breast pocket.

Keen frowned, grabbed her arm, and dragged her away as she laughed wildly.

"Don't overdo it, you little mug," Keen whispered as he steered her out.

He shoved her into a taxi outside and gave the driver his home address. But there was a questioning look in the girl's eyes, "Wait a minute!" she said. "How did you make out?"

Keen patted his breast pocket with a gleam.

"Never mind 55th Street, driver," Pebbles quickly yipped with a smile. "If I'm crazy, I might as well go the full distance. Take us to Tiffany's on Fifth Avenue. I saw some lovely diamond encrusted arrows there the other day."

Keen let out a low whine, dropped back in the seat, and said: "Okay, driver. It's Tiffany's then. And I hope they'll take British bank notes."

"They'll take Chinese yen, If you have enough, Mister," the driver answered over his shoulder.

"That Waldorf thing was a dirty trick," she said quietly when they were under way.

"What, on the Prof?"

"No, on me. For a minute, I was not certain whether I was crazy or not, the way you told it. I was getting along swell, too."

"He wanted the bomb-sight blueprint?"

"Rather! I could have sailed with him on the Conte de Savoia at noon, had I wished."

"You can be glad you didn't-for there'll be some fun aboard when he unpacks his bags and finds that he has been fleeced of a wad of the British best. He'd have tossed you to the sharks. Yes, you'd have got that dunking Barney prescribed."

"Lovely! Instead, however, I have to stay home tonight while you two have all the fun."

"Listen, gal. It won't be fun. There'll be some swell shooting."

"All right. I'll stay up and have the coffee ready. What a war!"

There was a delightful half hour at Tiffany's and an even more delightful hour for lunch at the Ritz. Then they went back to 55th Street.

Here Keen called Lang and learned that the British Lockheed was still at Hartford and that the two men aboard had registered at a nearby hotel.

"Fine! Let them alone and they'll step into something hot tonight. I have a line on the gun, I think. And we may be able to snatch it later on in the evening. You sit quiet and make sure that those guys at Hartford are not molested in any way. I've still got to check on one point."

"Yeah? And what were you doing in Tiffany's today?" argued Lang over the wire. "You didn't pick up a bundle somewhere, did you?"

"Sure-Miss Colony. The gal you think is the Griffon. We went buying arrows to shoot at Lockheeds. There's one for you to scratch your thatch on."

"Arrows at Tiffany's?"

"Yes. At fifteen hundred smackers a shot. This Griffon game comes expensive, you

know. Platinum arrows tipped with diamonds."

"Now I know you're screwy. I hope they had the safe locked while you were in there."

"Listen. Stop having me shadowed. If you really want to do something worth while, get Miss Colony a seat on the Coastal Air Line plane. The 9:15 P.M. ship, to be exact. See that the same crew is aboard, too. Pilot, co-pilot, and steward. Same plane as last night. Is that clear?"

"It's clear what you say, but it don't make sense, You don't suppose those same guys will be aboard, do you?" demanded Lang.

"No!"

"Then why all this business?"

"Just a gag. I've got to find some excuse to get rid of this girl. She gets into my hair. Besides, between you and me, Lang, I think she's crazy."

"Well, she's in good company if she hangs around with you. What's her symptoms?"

"She just likes to ride on airplanes. Anyhow get that reservation fixed up in the name of Miss Bobbie Pebbles. They'll think she's a burlesque queen."

Lang grunted and hung up.

"So there you are, Miss Pebbles," said Keen. "Now all you have to do-after the Coastal plane lands at Washington- is

have a quiet evening at the Mayflower Hotel. And no vamping the diplomats, either. The rest of this business will be played by Messrs. Ginsberg and Pulski. Do you mind?"

"It's the woman who pays," Miss Pebbles mooned with a theatrical gesture. "So I guess I'd better get to packing my spare rompers, eh?"

They left the apartment about four after Pebbles had been drilled for her new part to be played aboard the Coastal Air Liner transport. Keen knew much depended on her now, and he wanted to make sure nothing slipped up between 9 o'clock and midnight.

She took a taxi to her home farther uptown and Keen kept her car and drove back to Graylands. The Mick had an early dinner ready and a good report on the condition of the Black Bullet.

"Right. Get some rest now," Keen ordered. "We've picked up a packet of dough that should hold us for a few weeks, at least." And he showed Barney the wad of British bank notes, generous in size and denomination, crisp and satisfactory in the counting.

"Why Limey money?" the Mick asked.

"I suppose they were to be paid off in England somewhere. I have an idea one of the guys who helped swipe the Lockheed

is an ex-British flying officer who has been cashiered out of the service. Very nice money, just the same-and quite a lot of it, too. Even after buying an arrow." And Keen tucked it away in a hidden wall safe.

They rested for a time after dinner, then they went over a few items, checked the plane, and particularly tested the pontoons. Finally both went upstairs and took turns staring at the clock and listening for the telephone.

The hands of the clock reached 9:15, and Keen figured he should now get a call within 40 minutes. Yes; exactly at 9:57 the phone jangled and he half-screamed at Barney. "Get down there and get the Bullet started. This call is from Pebbles."

Then he picked up the phone, keeping his eyes on the wall map nearby.

"Hello!"

"Pebbles," the girl's voice came over the phone clearly. "It was just as you said. Yes, the Steward Shale carried on just as you said he would."

"He had the gun and the case?" asked Keen.

"Yes. He had it hidden somewhere in the lower portion of the galley. He passed it to a tall Englishman listed as H.J.B. Branker and received a package-a small brown paper package-it return."

"But the Lockheed?" persisted Keen.

"It landed right after we did, and Branker darted out with the case, and ran to the Lockheed, and got aboard without it actually stopping. It was all neatly done. Can you make it?"

"Of course!"

"Now, you'd better get going. I'm having supper and cocktails with a handsome airline pilot."

"Remind me to have him grounded for taking unnecessary interest in his passengers. Well, toodle-oo!"

He hung up and glanced at the map again, his mind's eye drawing a course from Washington to a point 350 miles out on the southern transAtlantic route where the Conte de Savoia would be at midnight. It was somewhere along that imaginary line that the Lockheed would have to be intercepted!

He hesitated a minute, then called Lang.

"I think you had better make arrangements to have Shale-The Steward on that 9:15 plane-arrested and questioned," he said in a lazy voice. "I think he knows something about that gun. Nail him in Washington. You see, crazy though she is, Miss Pebbles seems to have some ideas. Anyhow, I'll see you in the morning. And don't bother me any more tonight. I'm very tired. Good night, Lang, old lad,"

And with that he hung up, confident that that much would keep the flatfoot busy for an hour or so, at any rate. Then he climbed into his black coverall, pulled on a short kapok jacket, then his ebon parachute. He packed a gun in a hip holster and smiled at his strange reflection in the mirror.

"Good work, Pebbles!" he muttered quietly.

The Mick had the Bullet purring when he reached the hidden hangar below. They ran her out, opened the wings, and closed the massive doors. Keen took the controls, glanced back at Barney, and nodded. The Bullet was eased down the turf, rolled across the packed damp sands, and let down into the water. The long steel lever was drawn back over the ratchet, and the floats were set for a water take-off.

She streaked away into the sooty blackness. Two streams of foamy white marked her wake. These broke up and made a series of dots like a set of gigantic code letters as the Bullet bounced off the rollers and then skimmed into the air.

Keen had the Skodas in, thus she had left the water with only the guttural suction of the pontoons breaking the smooth hum of the Avis and the low whine of the steel prop. She was now climbing in a tight curl toward the swinging beam of Montauk Light.

Then Keen swung her around, fastened a chart on the board and drew a line on it with a pencil. They were heading out to sea now at 250 m.p.h.

"Suppose that Professor guy finds out you pinched his packet" the Mick said as they huddled down for the long trip.

"So what? He won't be fool enough to tell them not to come, will he?"

"I don't know. I'm only asking."

"They plan to put the Lockheed down somewhere near the Conte de Savoia," explained Keen. "She probably has some sort of flotation gear or a couple of empty tanks to support her long enough, and then she'll be pulled aboard by a derrick. Then they'd have the plane by right of salvage, they'd have the gun- and the guys could wait for their money. What does Lessona care?"

"An' we gotter stop them, eh, Boss? How?"

"You'll see"

"Yeah. I'll bet I will. I bet I'm gonner get a ducking again, too."

"One way or another," agreed Keen. "I don't get it," came back the Mick. "You will-if you don't shoot those guys down before they shoot us."

Barney beamed, "Is that all there is to it?"

"That's all"

"Yeah, but I bet I get a ducking, just the same."

"Shut up. I'm thinking."

"Yeah, about Pebbles, I bet. That gal's gonner get us in trouble one of these days. We shoulda du-"

"Shut up! And remind me to have you dunked a little later," said Keen.

"I get it. I guess I blow up my water wings, huh?"

But Keen was staring ahead now. He had caught the lights of a plane well out to sea, heading north-east and flying at high speed.

"There she is, Barney. Set out your iron slingers. We'll have plenty of fun any minute now."

Keen made a new adjustment on the prop. cut out the mufflers, and gave the Bullet her head. They raced after the green and red lights for several minutes before they were close enough to identify her silhouette.

"They'll start firing any minute," said Keen. "Be ready to go to work. They have real guns on that baby."

Keen had hardly spoken when there were distinct flashes from the general direction of the Lockheed. One-pounder hornets buzzed over the top of the plane and exploded with a crash behind.

"Wow!" gasped the Mick. "They got somethin' there."

Keen jazzed the plane into a tight bank to put them off, then headed for the red and green lights again from another angle.

He gained a little altitude on the Lockheed, then went down at it into an inferno of shellfire. His front Darns and Chatelleraults blazed from their orifices, spewed high calibre stuff at the bomber. Then as they almost cut off the dual-fine tail of the Lockheed with their prop, he hoiked the Bullet hard and let the Mick take a smack at them with his twin Brownings.

"Just the engines, if possible," Keen yelled.

"Engines hell!" the Mick roared back. "They're shooting at everything on us. Take that lot, ye Spalpeens!"

A gun opened up at them from the Bomber's rear turret now, and Barney had to smother it with a long wailing burst from his own guns, while Keen swung the Bullet and went back for another dive position.

After again gaining the necessary altitude Keen suddenly whipped the Bullet over, set his sights again, and let her thunder at the Lockheed. His guns fanged out with flame and sparks. A torrent of lead smacked full into the starboard engine of the bomber, and she swerved hard as the power-plant left its bearers.

He roared over again with inches to spare, hoiked hard, and let Barney finish her off with

a long sweeping burst from the Browning. The tail fluttered and she went into a flat spin. Keen zinged over hard and blasted a final burst at the nose of the doomed ship.

Yet bullets still zipped and crashed all about them! Someone aboard was certainly putting up a game stand. But the Mick ended it, as the Bullet turned again, by pouring a withering flood of .50 calibre stuff into the grim turret.

She went down still in the flat spin, and Keen prayed that she would stay that way all the way to the water. His mind's eyes saw a dead man at the controls, his limbs tense in the final muscular reaction that had set the ailerons and rudder for the final flight.

They followed her down to the rolling blackness below. She hit with a curling swish and for a minute tried to stand on her nose. Then Keen put the Bullet down close by and watched with relief as the tail fell back and she settled quietly in a swirl of foam and greasy oil.

"I'll look into it," said Keen calmly. "You cover me with a gun."

He moved the Black Bullet up close to the floundering Lockheed and threw a line across her from the wing root.

Then he eased the Bullet up still nearer, dropped down on the pontoon, and then clambered on top of the cabin.

He wormed his way along, dropped to the wing root of the Lockheed, and wrenched open the door.

Inside, he saw the twisted bodies of three men sprawled across the catwalks between the bomb chambers. And on top of the bomb chamber on the left hand side lay the brown leather case.

Keen reached for it, snapped the clasps up, unbuckled the straps, and raised the top. Yes, there lay the most beautiful piece of lead-throwing mechanism he had ever seen-the new Ordnance Department air cannon!

He snapped the lid shut, put the case under his arm, and climbed back out.

He had checked the Lockheed's fuel tank; and he realised that with any sort of weather, she would float for some time. He knew that an emergency radio call to the Coast Guard would have the plane and its cargo taken in tow within an hour. She would certainly last that long. He stopped a minute before he left, and took a card from an inside pocket. It was the same as he had left in the envelope for Prof. Arrigo Lessona at the Waldorf. All it said on it was- "The Griffon."

He placed it in one of the dead men's grimy hands. Then he clambered out, climbed back into the Bullet, and handed the gun case over to the Mick.

"We'll give that to Pebbles in the morning. She can tell Lang she found it in her room at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington and thought that it might be of some value."

"I can hear her saying it," the Mick grumbled. "And she'll make that guy believe it, too."

"I think that's the general idea of the game," Keen admitted with a sly grin. "And now-Home, James!"

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