

# The Prince of Escape

By CHARLES SAXBY

Illustrated by HARRY BURNE

*The inimitable Valdez  
at last finds something  
from which he can never  
escape*

## The Story Thus Far:

VALDEZ, otherwise Mike Byrne, born in Brooklyn, N. Y., finds himself in the midst of important happenings in London where he has been doing his escape and disappearing act at the Imperial Theatre.

He is engaged by the Cordato crowd to obtain from Brenda Hope the radio secrets which her father left with her, refusing to make them public because his belief in Deep Sleep, "the state of absolute knowledge," had been ridiculed. Brenda, against the wishes of Bernadot, her father's assistant, is giving public séances.

The Countess of Wallingford is managing these performances, hoping on behalf of Blazebroke, prime minister, to get the radio secrets out of Brenda during one of her séances.

Valdez disappears and starts out after the secrets but soon determines only to save Brenda from her exploiters. A reward is offered by the theatre management for his capture and all England begins to look for him.

He takes a cheap room, is robbed, falls behind in his rent and is warned by the housemaid, Quinta Pell, a musical comedy actress down on her luck, that the landlady will take his clothes unless he pays. Together they escape and, to earn a little money, go singing on the Thames.

They take refuge in a houseboat belonging to Bernadot, whom they find there ill with malaria. Quinta nurses him back and then both she and Bernadot discover Valdez's identity. They all decide to rescue Brenda.

The only other person who knows where Valdez is is Ann Wrex, an American newspaper reporter.

The three motor to Shaugh Prior, where the countess has taken Brenda—together with a mystic who hopes through some dark rites to influence Brenda. The three arrive in the dark just as a live pig—to be used in the ritual—is being delivered. Valdez looses the pig and the watch-dogs race after it as he drops quietly over the wall.

VALDEZ dropped into the darkness of the garden, feeling for a path among waist-high ferns. Tall foxgloves were like ghostly candles: wild vines flung from tree to tree. The house was near, its two stories of ancient granite crouching among the wind-warped cedars.

A subtle blight of age lay over the place. One could feel this upthrown waste of moorlands as a last standing ground of things immemorial.

It was exactly the spot for what that peach-and-steel countess wished done. Down at the gate men shouted and lashed whips amid a witches' broth of dogs and pig. He could tell the instant at which that slashed rope parted and the pig leaped for freedom, its squeals dying away in distance among the frenzies of pursuing hounds.

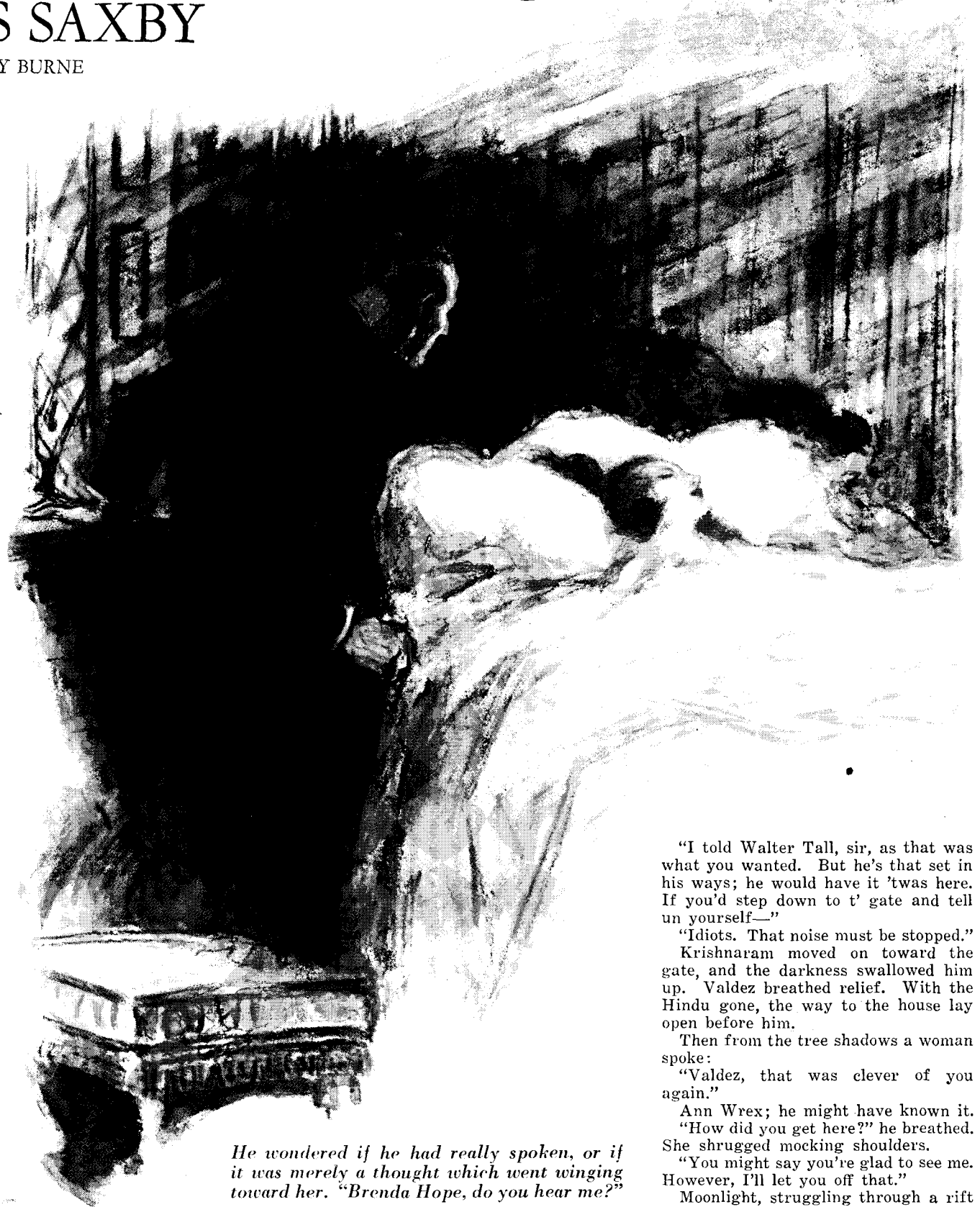
It would take hours to round those dogs up again, and there would be no hoodoo incantations over a piglet this night. Meanwhile Shaugh Prior lay open.

Then a man spoke from the obscurity, "Who is there?"

Those fluting tones could come only from Krishnaram. A grayish glimmer betrayed his robe, but his dark face faded into the dark under the trees with a horrid suggestion of his being headless. One wondered whence his voice came, as he spoke again, more sharply: "Who is there? Answer me at once."

Valdez' brain jerked into gear, and he found himself speaking:

"Tis one of t' Talls, from up t'



*He wondered if he had really spoken, or if it was merely a thought which went winging toward her. "Brenda Hope, do you hear me?"*

farm, sir. Us have brought you t' pig."

As Devon dialect it sounded good American, but it seemed to pass with the Hindu. He snapped, "Fool, why did you bring it here? I told you to take it to the wood."

Valdez searched his memory for more of that cart man's speech.

"Yes, sir; but t' cart turned over by t' gate and that pig's making a terrible noise."

Krishnaram turned to the house, his glance raking the upper story in anxious fashion. Valdez stamped that involuntary look upon his mind. It had betrayed to him where Brenda Hope lay, in that Deep Sleep from which the swami did not wish her awakened.

Krishnaram spat an order: "Go, tell them to take the thing to the wood at

once. If I am to call the elementaries tonight, I must catch the moon before Saturn leaves the Fifth House. Ten and five make fifteen, and that is their number—the number of the Beast."

THERE was something chilling in this casual mention of things forbidden and occult. To Valdez it brought a picture of that dressing-room at the Imperial Theatre, of a strange card depicting a human-bodied monster with an alligator's head. "Ye daies of ye crocodile—" And the number of that card was fifteen too.

He managed to produce more of that pseudo dialect.

"Yes, sir; be I to tell un all that?"

"Tell him," Krishnaram ordered, "to take the animal to the wood."

"I told Walter Tall, sir, as that was what you wanted. But he's that set in his ways; he would have it 'twas here. If you'd step down to t' gate and tell un yourself—"

"Idiots. That noise must be stopped."

Krishnaram moved on toward the gate, and the darkness swallowed him up. Valdez breathed relief. With the Hindu gone, the way to the house lay open before him.

Then from the tree shadows a woman spoke:

"Valdez, that was clever of you again."

Ann Wrex; he might have known it.

"How did you get here?" he breathed. She shrugged mocking shoulders.

"You might say you're glad to see me. However, I'll let you off that."

Moonlight, struggling through a rift in the mist, picked her out from the dimness. Her gown seemed new and expensive, with a glitter of crystal, an impression of subtle perfume. That was somehow disturbing, as if some encyclopedia had suddenly developed sex appeal. But her speech came in its familiar rapid fire:

"How did you get away from that houseboat this morning? Whenever we meet my first question seems to be how you escaped something. You carry your principality with you. But, remember, I warned you that you wouldn't be staying long on that boat."

A light shone back in Valdez' mind, kindled by the hidden triumph of her tone.

"So it was *you* who gave the information to those radio people?"

"And again," she said dryly, "we will wonder why I (Continued on page 38)



# An Old Charge By DON MARQUIS

Illustrated by GEORGE WRIGHT



"Hand me that money  
or I'll have you pinched"

*Who would have thought  
the bum was worth \$60,000  
in his stocking feet?*

MALKIN stared at the curio, and a tremor shook his meager frame. Chilled and wet and dirty he was, with the slush of a New York February day soaking through his broken shoes and its drizzle in his hair, a panhandler and a bum, and there, not a foot from him, with only the antique dealer's window between, was possible wealth in this old flintlock pistol, and nobody in all the world could know of it but himself. For an insane moment he fought with the impulse to dash his raw hands through the glass and risk everything in a snatch and a run.

But he conquered that instinct: that meant almost certain capture and a cell, and Malkin was afraid of prisons; he knew them; he had had enough of them. He turned to the pal who stood beside him, his heartstrings within him and his rags without fluttering with his feverish eagerness, and stammered:

"P-p-Peachy, how m-much you got left?"

Peachy, who was, if anything, colder and wetter and dirtier than Malkin himself, and more obviously under the influence of bad whisky, drew from a sodden pocket a little sodden wad of bills, together with some silver coins, and extended the money in his grimy hand.

"Six dollars and thirty-five cents," muttered Malkin, clawing it over, "and

I got four-sixty. That's ten-ninety-five we got." The men had worked for two days shoveling snow and had earned \$16 each; today they had been drinking it up. But this residue was enough. The tag tied to the pistol in the window announced its price as \$7.50.

There could be no doubt about the pistol itself; Malkin knew it. There was the broken trigger guard; there were the little rusty pockmarks at the muzzle end of the big steel barrel, and there were the dents, deep and irregular, in the softer brass which bound the heavy butt. He remembered when Nell had made those dents, using it to drive nails with the day she hung the pictures in their flat, and he chuckled at the thought of that queer half-domestic interlude in his irregular life, and at the thought of Nell, who had always had a craving to be respectable even while she loved to fling about the proceeds of his thievery.

BUT even Nell had never known what he had hidden in the barrel of that old weapon. There might be—how much? Forty thousand dollars? Fifty thousand, in diamonds and emeralds, and those three rubies? Sixty thousand? There yet—if no one had found out! There yet, embedded in the sealing wax which he had poured in, molten, along with them, the day after he had cracked that swell crib over in Westchester, ten years ago.

There yet—or, maybe, gone! He twitched and jerked with his excitement, and when he spoke to Peachy again he gibbered for a moment before he could school his tongue to articulation.

"Peachy," he said, "we're gonna buy that pistol. See? That pistol there."

Peachy giggled uncomprehendingly. He had never, at any time of his life, been able to comprehend much; he was a bum because he was a bum, and it had been years since he had tried to think out why or even wondered about it.

"Let's get a drink," he suggested.

"We're going to buy that pistol there," insisted Malkin. "Peachy, I know a man who'll give us fifty dollars for that pistol, and I'll give you half of it. Twenty-five dollars, Peachy—think of it, twenty-five dollars!"

"What we want with twenty-five dollars?" said Peachy. "I got money!" And he giggled again as he looked at the wet dollars in his dirty hand. "I ain't gonna buy any pistol; I want a drink."

Malkin, in his excitement, could have leaped upon the creature and strangled him, but again he controlled himself. As he looked upon him he forgot that he was a bedraggled bum himself; he remembered his clean and prosperous years, his days of fine clothing and agreeable amusements and good food and decent beds; the days when he had been spoken of by other crooks as the slickest member of a swell mob. And now he yearned with a longing that was agony for cleanliness and physical decency and ease again. He whispered something like a prayer. "Oh, God," he said, "I've been straight for years, and I'll keep straight." He even had a hazy picture of himself making money out of the proceeds of the jewels and living decently upon the money he made and restoring the worth of the jewels to the people from whom he had stolen them ten years before.

"Oh, God," he promised, "I'll go and hunt up my old man, and make things

easy for him." It was the first time he had so much as thought of his father in more than five years. "Oh, God," he said, "I never wanted to be a crook in the first place."

Which was, of course, a lie. Malkin had ceased to steal because his prison terms had broken his nerve, which was never very strong; he had, essentially, neither the stamina for steady virtue nor for successful crime; and since his last release from jail five years before he had shuddered away from all thoughts of contact with the law out of sheer cowardice. It was cowardice that had made him a bum, not his "reform," as he called it now.

SUDDENLY he turned on Peachy with an intensity that penetrated even that wavering nondescript armor of idiocy, and said: "Hand me that money, or I'll have you pinched!"

"S my money," said Peachy, but his hand relaxed, and Malkin took it. But once inside the curio dealer's shop, Peachy's vague sense of justice reasserted itself more resolutely. "S my money," he said sullenly, "and it's gonna be my pis'l too!"

Suppose the jewels were not there! But they must be. Malkin would not let himself even consider the alternative.

"How m-m-much," he said, stammering again with his emotions, "is that pistol there?"

The shopkeeper looked at the two bums coldly, dubiously pulling at his scraggly gray beard and frowning before he answered.

"The price is marked on it plainly enough," he said. "Seven dollars and fifty cents."