

# The ADVENTURES OF MR. PETER RUFF, PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

BY E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

## V---MR. VINCENT CAWDOR, COMMISSION AGENT

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Peter Ruff whistled to himself for several moments.

"Seen anything of our neighbor in the flat above?" he asked, with apparent irrelevance.

His secretary looked across at him with upraised eyebrows and said:

"I have been in the elevator with him twice," she answered.

"Fancy his appearance?" Ruff asked, usually.

"Not in the least!" Miss Brown answered. "I thought him a vulgar, offensive person."

Peter Ruff chuckled.

"Mr. Vincent Cawdor he calls himself, I believe," he remarked. "His name is on a small copper plate just over the letter-box. Rather neat idea, by-the-by. He calls himself a commission agent, I believe."

Violet was suddenly interested. She realized, after all, that Mr. Vincent Cawdor might be a person of some importance.

"What is a commission agent?" she asked.

Peter Ruff shook his head.

"It might mean anything," he declared. "Never trust anyone who is not a little more explicit as to his profession. I am afraid that Mr. Vincent Cawdor, for instance, is a bad lot."

"I am sure he is," Miss Brown declared.

"Looks after a pretty girl, coughs in the elevator—all that sort of thing, eh?" Peter Ruff asked.

"Disgusting!" she exclaimed, with emphasis.

Peter Ruff sighed, and glanced at the clock.

"It is nearly 1 o'clock," he said. "Where do you usually lunch, Violet?"

"I depends upon my appetite," she answered, carelessly.

"Today," Peter Ruff said, "you will be extravagant—at my expense. You will leave at once and go to the French Cafe at the Milan. Get a table facing the courtyard, and towards the hotel side of the room. Keep your eyes open and tell me exactly what you see."

"Whom am I to watch?" she asked.

"Any one who looks interesting," Peter Ruff answered. "For instance, if this person Vincent Cawdor should be about."

"He would recognize me!" she declared.

Peter Ruff shrugged his shoulders.

"One must hold the candle," he remarked.

"I decline to flirt with him," she declared.

"He will be too busy to attempt anything of the sort," Peter Ruff declared. "Of course, he may not be there. It may be the merest fancy on my part. At any rate, you may rely upon it that he will not make any overtures in a public place like the Milan. Mr. Vincent Cawdor may be a curious sort of person, but I do not fancy that he is a fool."

"Very well," Miss Brown said, "I will go."

"Be back soon after 3," Peter Ruff said. "Don't hurry back, though. I shall not expect you till 5.30."

will find interesting. At the next table to me there was a man—alone. Can you guess who he was?"

"John Dory," Ruff said, calmly.

"The girl was disappointed."

"You knew?" she exclaimed.

"My dear Violet," he said, "I did not send you there on a fool's errand."

"There is something doing, then?" she exclaimed.

"There is likely," he answered, grimly. "To be a great deal doing!"

The two men who stood upon the hill and Peter Ruff who lay upon his stomach behind a huge boulder, looked upon a new thing.

Far down in the valley from out of a black shed—the only sign of man's handiwork for many miles—it came something gray at first, moving slowly as though being pushed down a slight incline, then darted in the air, gathering speed—and a great prehistoric insect. Now and then it described strange circles, but mostly it came towards them as swift and as true as an arrow shot from a bow. The two men looked at one another—the shorter gave vent to a hoarse exclamation.

"He's done it!" he growled.

Over their heads the thing wheeled and seemed to stand still in the air. The beating of the engine was so faint that Peter Ruff, from behind the boulder, could hear all that was said. A man leaped out from his seat—a man with black cheeks but blazing eyes.

"Listen," he said. "Take your glasses. There—due north—can you see a steep?"

The men turned their field-glasses in the direction towards which the other pointed.

"Yes!" they answered.

"It is sixteen miles, as the crow flies, to Barnham Church—thirty-two miles there and back. Wait!"

He swung around, dived till he seemed about to touch the hillside, then soared upwards and straight away. Peter Ruff looked out his watch. The air in his eyes gazed with fascinated eyes after the disappearing speck.

He was back again before their eyes were weary of watching. Peter Ruff, from behind the boulder, closed his watch. Thirty-two miles in less than half an hour! The youth leaned from his seat.

"Is it enough?" he asked, hoarsely.

"It is enough!" the two men answered together. "We will come down."

The youth touched a lever and the machine glided down towards the valley, falling all the while with the effortless grace of a parachute. The shed from which his machine had issued was midway down a slope, with a short length of rails which ran, apparently, through it. The machine seemed to hover for several moments above the building, and then slowly on to the rails and disappeared in the shed. The two men were already halfway down the hill. Peter Ruff rose from a sense of immense relief and a poppy-like haze that descended upon him. He simply changed his hiding place for a spot which enabled him to command a view of the fulfil of cottages at the back of the hill.

The youth, meanwhile, was drinking deep of the poisonous cup. He walked between the two men—his cheeks were flushed, his eyes on fire.

"If all the world today had seen what we have seen," the older man was saying, "there would be no more talk of Wilbur Wright or of Parachute. Those men are babies, playing with their toys."

"Mine is the ideal principle," the youth declared. "No one else has thought of it, and no one else has made use of it. Yet all the time I am afraid—it is so simple. Sell quick, then," the fair-haired man advised. "By tomorrow night I can promise you fifty thousand pounds."

The youth stopped. He drew a deep breath.

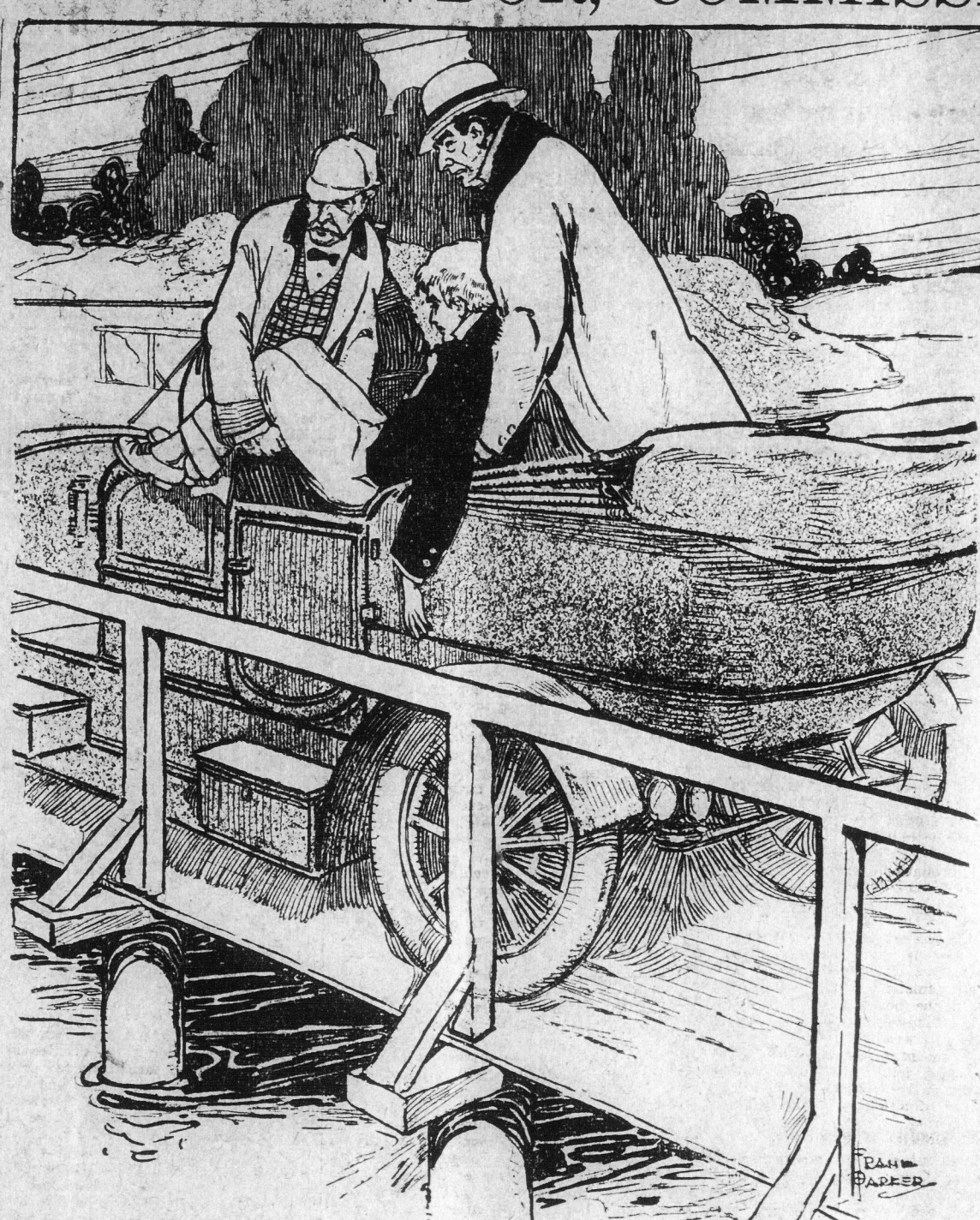
"I shall sell," he declared. "I need money. I want to live. Fifty thousand pounds is enough. Eleven very months he has slept and toiled there in the shed."

"It is finished," the older man declared. "Tonight you shall come with us to London. Tomorrow night your pockets shall be full of gold. It will be a change for you."

The youth laughed hysterically. They entered the tiny inn and drank home-made wine—the best they could get. Then a great car drew up outside, and they went out to it.

"There is one thing yet to be done," the youth said. "Wait here for me."

They waited while he climbed up toward the shed. The two men watched him. Then there was a little shout. From above their heads came the sound of a great explosion—red flames were leaping



"QUICK! OVER WITH HIM!" THEY LIFTED THE BODY OF THE BOY AND THREW HIM INTO THE WATER.

up from that black barn to the sky. The two men looked at one another. They rushed to the hill and met the youth descending.

"What the—?"

"I dared not leave it here," he explained. "It would have been madness. I am perfectly certain that I have been watched even during the last few days. I can build another in a week. I have the plans in my pocket for every part."

The older man wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"You are sure—that you have the plans?" he asked.

"The youth struck himself on the chest. "They are here," he answered, "every inch of them. I have them all."

They climbed into the car, and in a few minutes were rushing away southwards.

"Tomorrow night—tomorrow night it all begins," the youth continued. "I'll get the best I can, eat the best I can, drink wine, go to the music-halls. Tomorrow night—"

His speech ended in a wall—a strange half-titled cry which rang out with a chill, ghostly sound upon the black sky. His face was covered with a wet, lovelike, ghastly odor was in his nostrils. He lay back among the cushions, senseless. The car slowed down.

"Get the papers, quick!" the older man muttered, opening the youth's coat. "Here they are! Catch hold, Dick! My God! What's that?"

He shook from head to foot. The little fair man looked at him with contempt.

"A sheep leep on the moor," he said. "Are you sure you have everything?"

"Yes!" the other muttered.

They both stood up and raised the prostrate form between them. Below them were the black waters of the lake.

"Over with him!" the younger said. "Quick!"

Once more his companion shrank away.

"Listen!" he muttered, hoarsely. They both held their breaths. From somewhere along the road behind came a faint sound like the beating of an engine.

"It's a car!" the older man exclaimed. "Quick! Over with him!"

They lifted the body of the boy, and threw him into the water. With a great splash he disappeared. A little car floated away from the place where he had sunk. They jumped back to their seats. They crept away down the hill, smoothly and noiselessly. Behind them, the faint, throbbing grew less and less distinct. Soon they heard it no more. They drove into the dawn and through the long day.

Side by side on one of the big leather couches in the small smoking-room of the Milan Hotel, Mr. James P. Rouncey and his friend, Mr. Richard Marstam, sat whispering together. It was nearly 2 o'clock, and they were alone in the room. It was obvious that they were waiting for someone.

Three o'clock struck by the little time-piece on the mantel shelf. A little exclamation of a profane nature broke from Rouncey's lips.

"Say," he muttered, in a rather thick undertone, "how about this fellow Vincent Cawdor. You haven't any doubts about him, I suppose?"

Marstam wet his lips nervously.

"Cawdor's all right," he said. "I had it direct from headquarters at Paris. What are you uneasy about, eh?"

Rouncey pointed towards the clock.

"Do you see the time?" he asked.

"He said he'd be late," Marstam answered.

They relaxed once more into silence. A storm of rain beat upon the window. Rouncey glanced up. It was as black out there as were the waters of that silent stream. The man shivered as the thought struck him. Marstam, who had no nerves, twisted his gold mustache and watched his companion with wonder. Suddenly he stiffened into attention.

this, Marstam," Mr. J. Rouncey muttered.

Mr. Marstam was thinking.

"Do you remember that sound through the darkness?" he said, "the heating of an engine way back on the road?"

"What of it?" Rouncey demanded.

"It was a motor bicycle," Marstam said quietly. "I thought so at the time."

"Supposing some one followed us and pulled him out," Rouncey said, hoarsely. "Why are we treated like this? I tell you we've been made fools of. We've been treated like children—not even to be punished! We'll have the truth somehow out of that devil Cawdor! Come!"

"They made their way to the courtyard and found a taxicab."

"No 27 Southampton Row!" they ordered.

They reached their destination some time before Dory, whose horse fell down in the Strand and who had to walk. They ascended to the north floor of the building and rang the bell of Vincent Cawdor's room—no answer. They tried the knocker—no result.

The door of a flat across the passage was quietly opened. Mr. Peter Ruff, in a neat black smoking suit and slippers, and holding a pipe in his hand, looked out.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, "but I do not think that Mr. Cawdor is in. He went out early this evening, and I have not heard him return."

"The two men turned away.

"We are much obliged to you, sir," Mr. Marstam said.

John Dory was nearly a quarter of an hour late. After his third useless summons, Mr. Peter Ruff presented himself again.

"I am afraid," he said, "you will not find my neighbor at home. There have been several people inquiring for him to-night, without any result."

John Dory came slowly across the landing.

"Good evening, Mr. Ruff," he said.

"Why, it's Mr. Dory!" Peter Ruff declared. "Come in, do and have a drink."

John Dory accepted the invitation.

"Nothing wrong with my friend opposite, I hope?" Peter Ruff asked, jerking his head across the landing.

"I hope not, Mr. Ruff," John Dory said. "No doubt in the morning he will be able to explain everything. I must say: I should like to see him tonight, though."

"He may turn up yet," Peter Ruff remarked, cheerfully. "He's like a snail, a late bird."

marked, cheerfully. "He's like a snail, a late bird."

Miss Brown arrived early the following morning.

"I should like to know," she said, "what has become of Mr. Vincent Cawdor?"

Peter Ruff took her upstairs, showing her the room of ashes in the grate. She nodded.

"I imagined that," she said. "The only thing you sent me out to watch was 'My dear Violet.' Peter Ruff seems to be a man in the habit of guising himself. At the same time, I wanted to know whether I could send my study of Mr. Vincent Cawdor to a safe one. I took those rooms, I think that it occurred even to my mind that John Dory to connect us in his study. Very well," she went on, "what, please, what took you up to the morning?"

"I followed Rouncey and Marstam abroad, studying crime—and I know they hired a big motor car and a special crook to drive it that was not showing pointers. I saw the trial of the young Franklyn. I followed on the motor bicycle. I fished him out of the sea where they left him for dead some time ago."

"What about the body which was found in the Longhorn Tarn?" she asked.

"I had that telegram sent to me. She looked at him severely.

"You went out of your way to save a fool of John Dory?" she said, frowning.

"That I admit," he answered, "that it seems to me," he continued, "that after all, has been the object of the whole affair. I do not see the profit in it."

Peter Ruff chuckled.

"We've got a fourth share in the Flying Machine," he answered, "I'm hanged if I'd sell it for a hundred pounds."

"You've taken advantage of that man's gratitude," she declared.

Peter Ruff shook his head.

"I earned the money," he answered.

### A TIMOROUS NATIONAL SPIRIT

(Montreal Herald.)

It can hardly fail to strike the ordinary Canadian as just a little odd that the Toronto organization formed to combat the reciprocal trade agreement with the United States should call themselves the Canadian National League. If their argument means anything, it is that Canada is not morally free to make the best use of her natural resources, if doing so would be the means of promoting friendly intercourse between Canada and the United States, and that, if we were free, we are not good enough Canadians to trust ourselves in such an adventure. That is not an unfair, nor even a harsh, way to state the position. If there is such a thing as Canadian national spirit at all, it is strong enough to be worth appealing to, it must resist the assumption that there are limits beyond which the right of Canadians to the natural expression of their free purpose must not be carried; and it must also reject the idea that the fibre of Canadianism so weak as not to bear the strain imposed by a little more prosperity.

One could understand an appeal to the Canadian national spirit to test its strength a little beyond their strength. That is what we have been always doing in point of fact, since Canada has been, Canal building, railway building, all of them, and a little too big for us at the time they were attempted, but we are not really coddle people and we have grown hardy in the process. So there is something almost grotesque about the idea of asking the Prince Edward Island farmer, in the name of national spirit, not to trust himself in a reader market for his potatoes, or the Northwest farmer in a reader market for his wheat.

The distribution of economic opportunities on this continent has been such that, even during the recent period of intensified commercial movement between the prairies and the sea board, all the Maritime Provinces have been losing population, because their potatoes, fruit and fish were refused a market. And now these gentlemen in Toronto issue, in the name of Canadian nationality, a protest against the arrangement under which the potatoes, fruit and fish would go to New England and the mainland of the Maritime Provinces stay at home to send them.

If Toronto mistrusts the spirit of the men of the Maritime Provinces, one would be curious to know what estimate it places upon its own. It is quite within the limits of possibility that under the new arrangement Lake Ontario might become the scene of an active and prosperous shipping trade, with Toronto harbor getting the lion's share. Do Toronto people really think that such a test is beyond their endurance? One wouldn't like to think so. The very people in that city who are declaiming against diversion of trade are people who have deliberately, for the sake of a few dollars, given the St. Lawrence route to go by and imported their goods from Europe by way of Boston, New York, Philadelphia and America. It is to be hoped they can do that, and still remain in their devotion to Canada, they might as well others credit for equal endurance.

The fact is that Canadians who glory in the title and the manhood of national spirit, as unimpaired by the talk of how that spirit is to be undermined by a little more prosperity. Confident of themselves, they are very much unafraid.

## Amatite ROOFING

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The Little Paint Man.

## SHERWIN-WILLIAMS PAINTS & VARNISHES

Sherwin-Williams Paint, Prepared (SWP) is made from pure white lead, pure zinc, pure linseed oil, and the necessary coloring pigments and driers.

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GENERAL GIRL WANTED—of two. Apply to Mrs. C. Miller, Rothney.

WANTED—A general maid of two. Apply by letter to Mrs. R. E. Puddington, Rothney.

WANTED—Girl for general work in small family. Address Mrs. Roy O. Skins, 107 St. John St.

WANTED—A household maid. Apply to Mrs. W. J. St. John.

WANTED—A cook and general work in family. Apply by letter, with references, to Mrs. Daniel R. Robertson, N. B.

WANTED—Thoroughly capable general work in family in California. Good salary and passage paid. Apply Mrs. J. Mason, 11 Crown Street.

WANTED—By first of name and general work in family. Address Mrs. Brook, Rothney, 121-34 St.

WANTED—A second order teacher to commence at District No. 1, Johnstone, settlement, N. B.

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"Did you ever," said one, "stand at the door and listen to what is being passed out?"

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Have a slip of unbleached heavy board.