

Today's Short Story

THE LAST CHANCE

By Edward Seymour



The other car was backing up. Its doors were closed now and the two men who had been running were in it. Streaks of flame were coming from its lowered windows.

Tom knocked open the far door of his own car and reached for the bracketed rifle above the windshield in one motion. He sprawled through and lay on the running board as far forward as he could get without raising his head. The engine would stop bullets.

Tom peered from the back of the car. Then, prone on the ground, he brought his rifle into action, firing directly at the flashes in the other car. The heavier roar of the rifle drowned the sharp crack of pistols. Their firing ceased. The car began moving. For the first time Tom took a careful sight and fired. The car went on and then slowly swerved, bumped softly against the curbing and stopped.

A man, pistol in hand, came running from the bank behind Tom, stooped beside him and said, "Are you hurt?" Without waiting for an answer he emptied his pistol into the stalled machine.

"They shot one of our tellers," he said when the roar died away.

Tom said, "I don't think they'll do any more shooting."

He was right. When, guns on the alert, they opened a shot-ridged door of the car they found two men dead and one dying. The bank guard drew the canvas sack from beneath one of the bodies.

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A GAIN Tom said, "Yes, sir," saluted and walked out. He got into the car and drove off on a regular tour of duty. Two troopers were usually assigned to each car, but an epidemic of sickness had forced single assignments in some cases.

Tom turned on the radio, which was set for the headquarters broadcasting station. The announcer's voice came in, calling numbers for a test. Tom groaned inwardly. He hated the sound of that voice. For months he had listened to it, calling the license numbers of stolen automobiles, describing men and women wanted for reasons seldom given and—the only times it was welcomed—calling for a quick dash to action.

But he had to listen to it. Later, maybe, he might be able to tinker a bit and tune in on station WHRN's hot jazz band for a while. Then he remembered. It was his last chance. He wished he knew more about radios, how they operated and how a man could tune them without breaking them. Other troopers did it. They knew how. He had just had tough luck.

"Shut up," he said aloud as the dispatcher's voice began counting again.

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THE car rolled along at a steady 30 miles an hour cruising speed. It went through small towns and villages, probed back roads, caused other cars suddenly to begin crawling along as their drivers sighted it and cause a young man with itching fingers to twist a dial.

The road sloped in a long descent into Ridgeville, took an abrupt turn and became the main street of the town.

The radio car came down the sloping road, took the turn and almost ran down a man running swiftly with a canvas bag dangling from one hand. Ahead of him ran another man, both of them toward a slowly-moving automobile whose doors were open.

A voice shouted and a third man skidded to a stop on the sidewalk in front of the Ridgeville Bank. The running men turned, the car stopped and for a brief moment it was like a tableau, all of them in arrested motion.

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THE first shot struck the windshield of Tom's car, flattened and dropped to the hood. Behind the bullet-proof glass his own actions were automatic. The muzzle of his pistol banged against the steering wheel as he threw his arm across his body and fired at the man on the bank steps.

Metal shrieked as bullets tore through the thin sheathing of the car. The man on the bank steps swayed and fell into a twitching huddle. Two more splotched scars appeared on the windshield and the sea shook as bullets pounded into the seat beside him. They were coming at an angle.

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IPS COMB laughed. "We'll have it fixed up," he said. "I don't care how many you break that way. Just forget what I said this morning."

"Yes, sir," answered Tom. He was glad to forget. And glad to have his commanding officer forget.

Because the radio had been broken before the bullet smashed it, broken by Tom's attempts to get station WHRN and a little relief from the dispatcher's voice.

THE END

Despite his resolution to kill the stranger, Orando's curiosity was intrigued. "What would you do if I should release you?" he inquired uncertainly. "You are a hunter," Tarzan answered: "so I should bring you near to the meat animals, and ward off the danger of savage beasts."

Tarzan's reply was carefully calculated. He knew the superstitions of the natives. He knew that each believed his fate controlled. Orando cried out in startled awe: "But that is what my 'muzimo' is supposed to do—protect me and help me hunt."

"I am your 'muzimo!'" Tarzan said quietly after a dramatic pause. Orando was speechless. Now he understood why the stranger was unafraid of death. He was immortal, invulnerable. The ape-man immediately followed up his advantage. "Release me!"

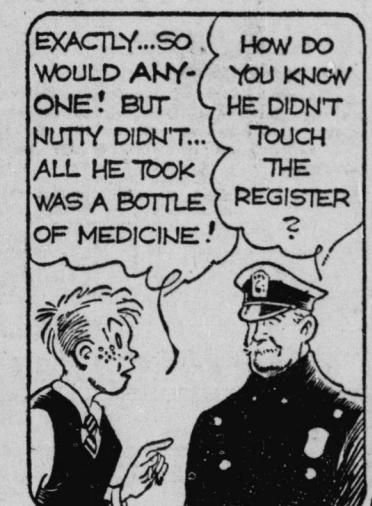
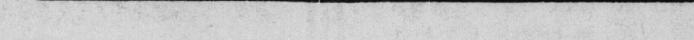
Orando hastened to comply. It was not difficult to raise the branch and release Tarzan. But the Jungle Lord was not yet free. He was now to face a perilous test of the powers he claimed as Orando's protector. High in a tree, a panther crouched to spring upon the black warrior!

OUR BOARDING HOUSE

With Major Hoople



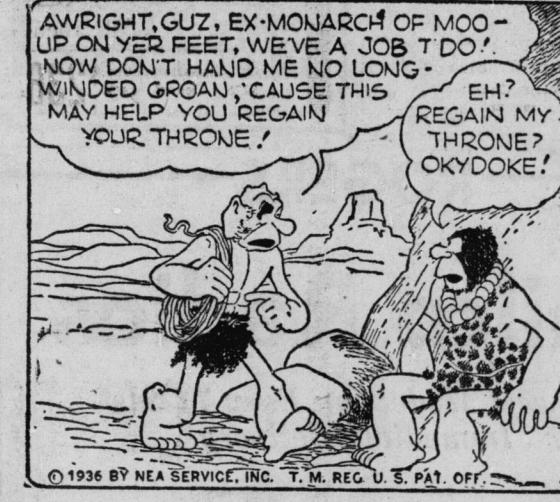
FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



WASHINGTON TUBBS II



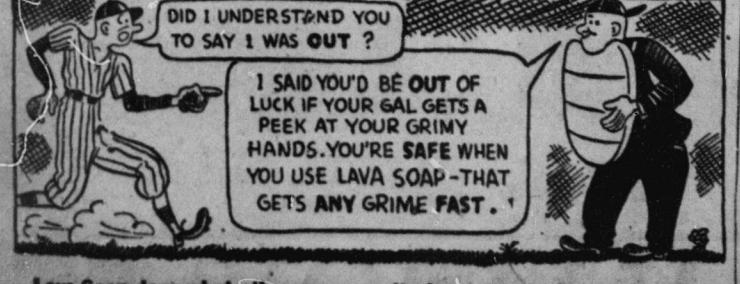
ALLEY OOP



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



TARZAN AND THE LEOPARD MEN



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