

HEAVY TRAFFIC FACES

By W. E. Hill

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Curious. These people never mind being held up in a traffic jam, because the car alongside always interests them. They have a swell time giving the occupants' faces, clothes and bundles a thorough once over.

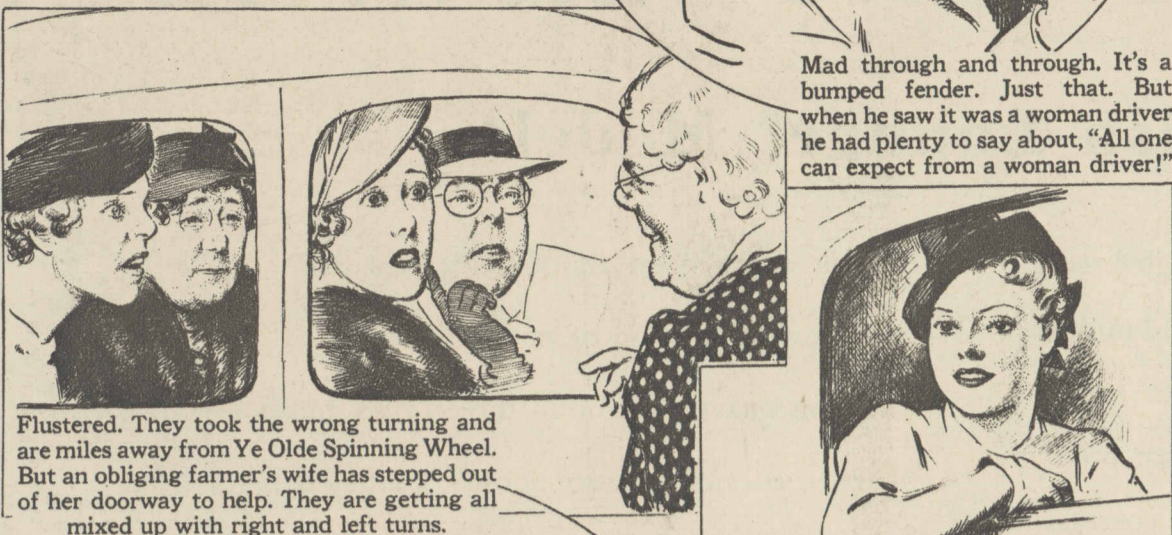
Show off. Some proud parent's darling little girl making very interesting faces at people in passing cars.

Repressed. The tough traffic cop called him a "dimwit," and he can think of plenty to say in return, and as good as was got, but he doesn't dare. Just curses to himself.

Solid comfort. Showing Alfred, the truckman's right hand man, enjoying a midday snooze en route.



Very bored. Rover has been waiting quite some time in the parked car. It gets pretty monotonous just waiting.



Flustered. They took the wrong turning and are miles away from Ye Olde Spinning Wheel. But an obliging farmer's wife has stepped out of her doorway to help. They are getting all mixed up with right and left turns.



Winning smile. Bestowed gratis on any one who will give her a push. Her battery has gone dead.

Discouraged. This is the fifth time this morning that Eleanor has had a terrible ordeal getting out of a parking space. Either she's at the wrong angle or the other cars are all at the wrong angles.

Placid. She drives calmly along in not quite the center of the road (about twenty miles per) and is never upset by the honking of cars trying to pass her.

THE CRIMSON WIZARD

Drama at Sea as Maida Is Caught in Red Circle Net

(Continued from page three.)

ater of the ship and its people swept all good resolutions from her mind. Suddenly Michael Raclov appeared at her side.

Raclov paused as strangers do when trying to make up their minds to speak. Then he said: "You are Maida Travers, of course? I am Michael Raclov. I hope you won't mind. I know Eric Lambert."

The excitement was great. Maida did not resent the frankness of the strange young man. Instead she smiled radiantly and said, as if it were the cheeriest coincidence: "There he is. He is on the pier, waving."

And so he was. Raclov waved. Lambert waved. Maida felt that these mutual exchanges reestablished an old friendship. As the Gigantic glided into midstream and turned for the bay Maida and Raclov were moving toward the main salon. Music and dancing had already started.

They paused to talk. Maida was in the high thrill of a thousand new experiences. She could not see enough of this interesting new world. Then suddenly all was changed. A weaving figure began to approach her. It was Petrovich, and he seemed intoxicated. The smirk he bore suddenly snatched Maida out of her happiness. She drew back.

"I should like to dance with you," said Petrovich. He moved even closer.

"Please go away," exclaimed Maida. Raclov thrust himself forward. "You are offensive," he said to Petrovich. "Go, before I call a steward."

Petrovich drew back his arm as if to strike. Raclov's hand came up. There was a pistol in it. Petrovich recoiled, but he was too late. Raclov fired. Petrovich turned and ran for the deck. The dancers and the passersby instantly began to cluster. Raclov drew Maida away. The crowd, being a crowd, stared in all directions, seeking the cause of their having clustered and the reason for their staring.

Maida and Raclov gained the deck. "The man is not hurt," Raclov was saying. "I saw that. But I could not endure his insulting manner to you. Let me take you to the afterdeck, where we shall have the best view of the harbor as we make the ocean."

"But the pistol?" Maida shuddered.

"I threw it under a divan," said Raclov.

V.

There was a violent new interest on the afterdeck. Pilots, mechanics, seamen, and passengers were intent upon an airplane perched there. The plane was on the runway of a catapult, and the catapult was being prepared to launch it. Homer Swift, the chief pilot, was having a few last words with one of the ship's officers.

"We've plenty of gas," he was saying. "I know we can make London. I think we could make Berlin if we had to. And there's plenty of food."

And the officer: "The company will be happy, Homer. We're trying to make this maiden trip of the Gigantic a great event in ocean history. There's a world-wide radio broadcast going on. And now you're taking off for Europe. From ship to Europe. That will be a great adventure."

Raclov turned to Maida. "Did you hear that? This airplane is taking off from the ship for Europe. How I should like to be the pilot!"

"You a pilot?" Maida's startling life in the last hour was throwing her into a succession of wonderments. And here was a man who shot people on the smallest pretext and who now proposed to fly an airplane. She was too bewildered to remain with him, too bewildered not to remain; in fact, too bewildered to speak.

"I was a pilot in Spain," Raclov was saying. "Don't be nervous. Nothing is going to happen. I couldn't help it if I protected you. Suppose you had been alone?"

Maida involuntarily moved a little closer to this strange person. She pondered a hundred things. What would Eric Lambert have done? Would there be a scandal?

VI.

There was no scandal. The flurry in the main salon had vanished as quickly as it began.



In the excitement Raclov and Maida entered the plane, and almost before Raclov could take his place at the controls Petrovich released the catapult mechanism.

Some one had heard the sound of a shot, but no victim had been found. The music had not faltered and the happiness of the maiden voyage was uninterrupted. In order to make sure of this Michael Raclov had excused himself from Maida, promising to return to her instantly. Raclov had only started for the salon when a small hand held him.

"I hoped to find you exactly at this moment," said a girl's voice.

"Sonya!" Raclov almost shouted the name. "You were to remain in hiding."

"Don't attract attention," Sonya walked with him to the ship's rail. "Do as I tell you and lose no time. There is no need of asking questions. I shall not answer. Go to my state-room. Here is the key. You will find a suitcase. It is rather heavy. Take it to the cabin to which this second key will admit you. Lock that door. That is all."

Raclov opened his lips questioning. Sonya stopped him. "Immediately," she said. "The Firefly did not earn that name for nothing."

Raclov went. In ten minutes he had rejoined Maida Travers on the afterdeck. This time he was flushed and irritated. Only Maida's mental confusion prevented her noticing it.

VII.

Sonya watched Raclov as he disappeared down the companionway. She moved slowly along the deck until she came to a shadowy space in the fore-deck. Here she paused and gazed out upon the bay.

"Good evening, Comrade Petrovich," she said, and continued to gaze at the water.

Petrovich moved slowly out of the shadow. "You are very unexpected in your movements, aren't you, Sonya?"

"As unexpected as you are expected. I expected you would be sailing on the same ship with Maida Travers. But you are not going to sail with Maida Travers."

"You are very foolish, Sonya. I am only following orders."

"Orders, my darling comrade? Did you have orders to carry out that absurd melodrama in the main salon? And was that done to impress Maida Travers with some excellent plan?"

Petrovich tried hard to maintain a serious front. "Absurd melodrama?" he said. "Is it absurd to be shot at?"

Sonya stopped him with an impatient gesture. "Yes," she retorted, "it is absurd to be shot at. Especially when one is shot at with a toy pistol."

Petrovich would have interrupted her, but she prevented him again. "I found this under a divan in the salon," she said, and gave him the toy. "Perhaps you may want to throw it over-

board. But you are not going to follow Miss Travers in this ship."

"If you will notice, Sonya, the ship is moving."

Sonya's smile was cool and sure. "Have you a watch?" she asked. "Will you look and see if the time is twenty-eight minutes after nine?"

"Exactly," said Petrovich, glancing at his wrist watch.

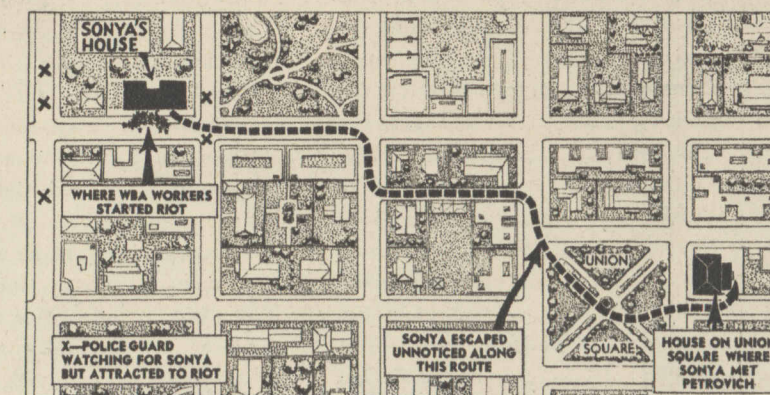
"Well, then," said the girl with a malicious twinkle, "in one minute you will know that you are not sailing. O, don't trouble to turn pale. I am not going to harm you. I love you too much. This is why I am telling you that in the cabin next the place containing the ship's electrical control apparatus I have just placed a suitcase filled with an excellent time explosive."

"You are insane, Sonya! Where is—"

"You will be too late, beloved."

VIII.

Petrovich was gone. But he did not descend to the cabin which contained the explosive. Instead, just as he turned the deck to the starboard, he was thrown flat by a terrific blast that rocked the liner. As he re-



Map of the area in which Sonya eluded police in order to reach Petrovich.

gained his feet he was conscious of many running feet and of shouts and screams of terror. Petrovich ran up the companionway to the afterdeck.

Raclov had anticipated him. The explosion had created its remote consternation in the group of spectators about the airplane. All ran aft and gained the descending stairs. The last to go was Homer Swift, the pilot. A compelling curiosity drew him from his post. The propeller blades were roaring. Raclov decided.

"The ship has exploded!" he cried to Maida. "We shall be killed in the crush if we attempt to go below. I have it! The airplane!"

Maida's bewilderment arose to a new high. The impulse of the moment and the impelling direction given by Raclov sent her forward before she knew it. They entered the cabin of the plane and Raclov ran to the controls. Then he turned in consternation. "The catapult!" he called. "I can't release it."

A shout came from below.

"Take off!" Almost before Raclov could resume his place at the controls the plane was in the air. Petrovich stood still holding the release lever of the catapult. He was waving a farewell.

IX.

"Within an hour's journey from New York lie the Jersey flats. These are vast low areas in which nothing lives save screeching birds. The vegetation is weedy. The soil is endless sand and swamp. The wind from the sea drones drearily through the reed growth."

A small automobile wound its way on a wretched path through this melancholy desert. When the driver had reached a place suitable to him the car stopped. A small man emerged. He was crouched and disfigured. One deformed leg was shorter than the other. He was hideously hunched. His head was much too large for his distorted frame. His face was a perpetual grimace—mingled hate, fear, and sadness. Peter Quill.

He laboriously removed some packages from the luggage compartment. His every action was one of painful effort. He took up one of the packages and carried it through the wild vegetation. When he had reached a point a quarter of a mile distant he paused. He buried the package in the sand with slow effort. All the afternoon he struggled.

One after another he carried his packages from his automobile, burying them, then retraced his steps to the automobile. When he had ended his task he had buried twenty packages in a radius of a quarter mile. His automobile stood at the center of the crescent of packages. Peter Quill sat down to rest.

When he had rested he turned to a curious cabinet fitted in the rear seat of his car. With infinite care he made a series of swift adjustments. When he had done this he clambered to the roof of his car. This required great effort. He stood there silhouetted against the gray and wind-blown sky and scanned the horizon with an eager eye. When he had verified his cautious study of the landscape he descended. Then he resumed his delicate attentions to the cabinet. He again passed his fingers over two score wires and tiny levers and radium tubes.

Now his look became alert and determined. His jaw was fixed and hard-set. He laid his hand on one of the shining little levers and looked intently in the direction of the package he had buried farthest to his right. He drew the lever. Instantly there was a slight shudder of the earth. Then came a volcanic burst of earthy sand and weeds. An explosion sent a gust of air

whistling past the little car. Peter Quill smiled—a hard, cruel smile of satisfaction.

He pressed another lever. Another shudder; another volcanic burst; another roar of explosive. Peter Quill smiled again. One after another he touched his levers. One after another the remaining eighteen explosions occurred with sinister precision. Peter Quill carefully closed his cabinet. He resumed his place at the wheel. With infinite effort he turned his car about and drove back along the tortuous path.

When he disappeared from view there was a movement in a heavy clump of weeds. A girl emerged from her hiding place. She was beautiful, with flashing, intelligent eyes. She was Sonya Danilo.

"Invisible lightning!" she said softly. "The little man is a devil."

("The Crimson Wizard" will continue on W-G-N next Friday at 8 p. m. and in next Sunday's Graphic Section.)