

HOOK MCGUIRE GIVES A BOWLING LESSON

George Allan Moffat

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The door to the small frame house was open. It swung lazily back and forth in the night breeze. There were no lights in the front of the house, but a small window at the rear was lighted.

Detective Hook McGuire walked up on the porch and stared at the open door. His face was worried as he walked through the door and into the dark living room. He managed to find his way to a rear hall and to the one room that was lighted.

When he entered this room, a small laboratory, an old man was working at an experiment on a long table. The old man didn't look up; he was too intent on his work. He didn't seem to hear the detective enter.

"I'll see that you have some kind of a police guard, professor," Hook McGuire said. "You leave all your doors open, yet don't hear a man when he enters."

Professor George Minton swerved at Hook's voice, but smiled with relief when he saw who his visitor was.

"Hello, Hook!" he said affably. "I'm just completing my last experiment with your new resin. It is going to revolutionize the bowling game."

"Let's forget about my resin," Hook said. "You are working on an experiment of gunpowder that will revolutionize war. There are a lot of foreigners in this country that don't want war revolutionized by the United States. You can't live—"

"Tut, tut, Hook," the old professor laughed. "I am safe here, and let's talk about your resin. I find that by mixing a solution of purgatic acid with it, it will cause a change in the resin and improve its power to grip anything by fifty percent. I'll have my experiment finished tomorrow."

Hook McGuire looked at his watch. He was late now, and he had to report to headquarters.

"I'm sending some cops up here to watch your place," he said, turning to walk out of the door. "I'll drop in tomorrow night to see the final result of our new resin."

Hook McGuire walked out of the house. He jumped in his police car and drove away. He was looking back at the white frame house, when he came to the turn in the street.

Professor George Minton was one of the famous chemists of the country, a strange and eccentric character, who preferred to work alone and unsung in his little home at the edge of the city.

For years, he had been a close friend of Detective Hook McGuire, the famous bowling detective and the city's bowling champion.

It was the professor's intense interest in Hook and his bowling hobby, a hobby that wasn't received with enthusiasm by hard-boiled Chief of Police Ryan, that caused the professor to try to develop a new type of resin.

But Hook wasn't thinking about bowling or the new resin the professor was perfecting. He wasn't thinking of the ribbing he would get from Chief Ryan for wasting his time on anything pertaining to bowling. Hook was thinking about the unprotected old professor and the experiment he was making that might change all warfare.

While Hook's car was racing for police headquarters, and Hook was worrying about the old professor, a stealthy shadow appeared somewhere out of the darkness outside the professor's modest little home. It moved across the yard and up on the porch.

The figure went through the open door silently, slipped into the dark living room. He tiptoed down the rear hall and into the laboratory where Professor Minton was working on a test with his new bowling resin.

The old professor was grinning to himself as he prepared these tests. He had a sense of humor, and with his testing resin he had written out the name, "Hook McGuire," across a board that was standing upright against a solid base on the edge of the table.

He was going to call the resin "Hook McGuire Resin."

The man that had entered the laboratory stopped behind the professor. "The man was tall, with a thin and brutal face.

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"A very good joke, professor," the man said in harsh, guttural tones. "A very good joke for your dear friend, Hook McGuire."

Professor Minton turned around slowly. He looked at the brutal and thin face, marked by a scar down the right cheek. But the professor wasn't looking at that scar. He was staring at the automatic in the right hand of the man.

"Professor Hendrick!" the old man gasped. "You have a gun in your hand!"

Professor Hendrick laughed in a deep tone. "You are observing. Professor Minton," he said. "Yes, I have a gun in my hand, and in a moment I shall use it!"

He brought the gun up slowly. Professor Minton rubbed a sleeve across his forehead. He stared at Hendrick, convinced that the man had suddenly gone mad. He knew Hendrick, who had come to the city a year before as a professor of chemistry in the State college.

Hendrick had become a close acquaintance of Minton, though the old professor had never liked the man. Nobody seemed to know where he came from.

"We shall not play like children any more," Hendrick said. "I am not a refugee professor, as I have wanted all to believe. I have come here for a purpose, and that is either to learn the facts of your new experiments with gunpowder, or to see that you never complete that experiment!"

Professor Minton relaxed, as if this information had suddenly cleared his mind. Professor Hendrick was what Minton had sometimes suspected: a member of a deadly espionage system.

"It is regrettable. Minton," Hendrick continued. "You and I have had many pleasant meetings. I have come rather to admire you, but I cannot let my feelings murder millions of my countrymen. You will be dead and the world will never know of your experiments. It will be easy, and no one will ever suspect Professor Hendrick, the poor refugee professor. Not even your friend Hook McGuire."

Professor Minton's face remained expressionless, but his mind was working clearly and rapidly. He looked out the laboratory door. Only darkness came from the corridor; and an odd silence from outside.

Hendrick's finger would squeeze the trigger of the automatic. There would be a roaring explosion, but nobody would hear it. Hendrick would escape, and nobody would suspect the refugee professor as a cold-blooded, ruthless killer, a member of the espionage ring that was choking America into helplessness.

They wouldn't, unless—

Professor Minton's eyes darted toward the test tubes back of Hendrick. In these were blinding acids. In that split-second, the old professor moved. It was a futile, almost hopeless, last gesture. His knee came up, caught Hendrick in the stomach, and then, with every ounce of strength left in his aging body, Professor Minton sent his fists out to drive the killer backward.

The will was there, but not the strength. Hendrick took the blow to the stomach with a grunt, whirled around, escaping the fists of the old professor. The professor went head-long himself toward the acid vials, but he didn't reach them.

The gun in Hendrick's hand roared. A bullet cut through Minton's back. He went down, blood was gushing from his mouth. He struggled to his knees, and then drove his dying body forward. He hit Hendrick just above the knees, sending him backward again.

A bellow of rage came from Hendrick's thin lips. He bounded back from the table, and his gun roared twice. Professor Minton went to the floor, groaned once, and then his body went limp.

Hendrick reached down, touched the limp head. There was no life left in it. He smiled coldly, slipped the gun into his coat packet, and darted out of the laboratory.

Twenty minutes later, a police car with patrolmen to guard the home of Professor Minton, drove up to the house. Two cops knocked, and, getting no answer, entered the home and found the lifeless body of Professor Minton crumpled on the floor of his laboratory.

Hook McGuire and Chief of Police Ryan entered the laboratory five minutes later.

Hook's face was tense, and as he looked down at his dead friend, he wet his lips and said: "I warned Professor Minton, but he wouldn't heed it. We should have sent our men out here before."

"You can't send cops to a man that refuses to have them around," Chief Ryan growled. "The government should have had men out here. But crying over spilled milk won't help. Who killed him?"

Hook had knelt down beside the body of the professor. There was a broken vial near the dead man's head. McGuire picked up the pieces and laid them in his handkerchief.

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"If you hadn't been so interested in bowling," Chief Ryan continued, "you might have stayed here a little longer tonight."

"I wouldn't have been here at all, if it hadn't been for the professor's interest in bowling," Hook shot, back. "This is one crime you can't charge to bowling, chief."

"And this is one crime" the chief grunted, "that bowling isn't going to help solve."

"The professor put up a fight," Hooks said. "The broken vial shows that. He was standing with his back to the door when the killer entered. He whirled, lunged at the killer, but missed. The position of the body shows that he turned around and made a second lunge."

"Interesting, but not very helpful," Ryan grunted.

Hook McGuire didn't answer. He saw something red on the floor. He reached down and picked it up. It was the stub of a ticket to the State college auditorium.

"What did you find?" Chief Ryan demanded.

"A State college auditorium ticket stub," Hook answered. "Maybe the killer dropped it, and maybe he didn't."

"Likely some lecture on science that Professor Minton attended," Ryan replied. "It won't help much."

Hook walked back to the table, looked at the glass vial, then his eyes shifted a little. Suddenly he kneeled down, turned the body of the dead professor over and examined his back.

The examination over, he turned to Ryan and said:

"You said that bowling wasn't going to help in this case. You'd be surprised to know bowling is going to help. A great game like bowling always helps chief. You should know that by now."

Ryan reddened, and he grunted: "What are you talking about?"

"I think I can explain better in several hours," Hook McGuire answered. "I'm going over to the State college auditorium."

He walked out of the laboratory, jumped into the car in which he and the chief had ridden out to the house, and drove away.

It was a little after nine when Hook arrived at the college auditorium. An entertainment was about to start there. The manager of the auditorium was in his office.

Hook McGuire stalked in, tossed the stub of the ticket on his desk, and said: "Tell me what kind of entertainment took place here last night."

"Last night?" the manager said. "Why, there was a lecture on the relation of science to the industrial development of the country. Not a very interesting lecture for the public, but most of the faculty attended.

"Did Professor Minton attend?" Hook demanded.

The manager hesitated, and then said. "I am sure he wasn't here. If he were, I am certain that I would have remembered. It would have been a great honor."

"Let me talk to your ushers," Hook said.

"The ushers can't give much information about who sat in any specific seat," the manager replied, "but I'll call them."

Hook spent twenty minutes in questioning five ushers. He didn't get much specific information from them, but when he dismissed them, he had three names written down on a piece of paper.

"What do you know about these three men whose names I have?" Hook asked the manager. "All three of them are professors, and all three sat somewhere near the seat number of that stub."

The manager looked at the first two names, and said: "Those men are well known and well liked members of the faculty."

"And this third name?" Hook McGuire questioned.

"Professor Hendrick," the manager said. "He's a newcomer, a refugee. Rather a strange chap, and not very well liked because he is always mysterious. Seemed to like Professor Minton, because he was often with him and at his home."

"Thanks," Hook said, and walked out of the office.

The silky darkness behind the bungalow occupied by Professor Hendrick covered Hook McGuire's body like a blanket of black, as he approached the rear of the small structure.

There was a light in a side room. The shade was down, but a man's shadow was silhouetted against it. It moved back and forth in grotesque shape.

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Hook approached the window, stopped within several yards of it. The man in the room continued to move back and forth behind the shade, as if he were pacing the floor nervously. A second form appeared for a moment on the shade, and then disappeared.

Hook circled the rear of the house, came to a back door. He tried it, but it was locked. He went to a window alongside it, raised it silently and slipped inside a dark kitchen.

He crawled across the floor on his hands and knees, his right hand reaching out in front of him. His fingers touched the wall and then the door. The door opened with a little pressure, and Hook got to his feet and walked down a narrow corridor.

He stopped in front of the door of the lighted room. The sound of a man's footsteps inside the room could be heard. Hook tried the door. It wasn't locked, and it opened with a dismal squeak.

Professor Hendrick, pacing the floor, stopped abruptly, turned on Hook McGuire with a snarling expression of hate on his thin face. This expression left in a flash and Professor Hendrick was again the poor refugee that he always appeared.

"Sorry to break in like this, professor," Hook McGuire said easily, his eyes taking in every part of the room, "but you lost the stub to your ticket to the lecture of the other night, and I wanted to bring it to you."

Hook noticed every detail of the room as he talked. It was rather poorly furnished, with a desk at one end and several chairs and a ragged carpet on the floor.

Professor Hendrick's eyes narrowed and the scar on his right cheek got whiter. Hook tossed the ticket stub on the professor's desk, and added:

"I found this in Professor Minton's laboratory. You know, Professor Minton was murdered this evening, about an hour ago."

"Murdered!" Professor Hendrick gasped, playing his part with amazing skill. "I don't understand! You say you found this stub in his laboratory, and he was murdered ... my good friend, murdered—" There was a cold smile on Hook McGuire's face, as he looked at the professor. Casually, Hook walked past the professor to look at a picture on the wall. He passed within inches of the professor as he did.

"Interesting picture," Hook said.

"Yes, very interesting," the professor murmured. "But tell me more about my poor friend, Professor Minton. I can't..."

The smile was still on Hook McGuire's lips. He said: "You understand plenty, Professor Hendrick, and suppose we stop playing at acting. You murdered Professor Minton. You covered all your tracks but one; a very interesting one!"

The slim body of Professor Hendrick stiffened. The muscles in his face tightened. The look of an abused refugee left his face. It was hard and cold and ruthless.

His right hand was in his coat pocket, fingers gripping his automatic. Hook sauntered over to a chair, sat down easily, his eyes on the professor's coat pocket.

"I wouldn't use that gun in your coat pocket," Hook said, "because before you could turn that gun on me, you'd be drilled three times!"

Professor Hendrick's hand came out of his coat pocket. "Perhaps," he admitted, with amazing coolness, "you could do just that. I am interested, however, Detective McGuire, in finding out why you think I killed Professor Minton. I am quite sure that stub wasn't mine, and I am very sure that it would make you look foolish in any court."

"Fortunately, in this country we have just courts," Hook McGuire stated, "and that ticket stub wouldn't be much evidence. However, I have something else; something far more important. Professor Hendrick. Something I saw just a moment ago, when I looked at the picture on the wall."

Professor Hendrick's little finger moved. It was a vague and indistinct signal, but Hook saw it. And his ears heard a strange grinding sound under the floor.

Hook left the chair in a bounding leap that carried him well clear of it. As he left the chair, it started to move, and then suddenly there was a gaping hole in the floor and the chair disappeared.

His leap carried Hook to within a few feet of the professor. He came up from the floor like a bouncing ball.

Professor Hendrick had yanked the automatic from his pocket. He brought it up with a snap. It roared. The

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bullet cut the air over Hook's head, and as it did, Hook's arms closed around the legs of the professor and the two crashed against the table.

Then, suddenly, two other men were in the room, big, heavy-set men, with expressionless faces. Hook saw them out of the corner of his eye. He raised the body of the screaming professor high in the air, brought the body around like a club, and then let it fly at the two men.

The body hit one of them, and Hook dove for the other. This second man had no time to use his revolver. Hook's head was buried in his stomach. The man grunted, and stumbled backward.

Hook's right went out in a swift, paralyzing blow that caught him on the tip of the chin and sent the man down like a sack of bricks. Hook whirled. Professor Hendrick had struggled to his feet. His gun had fallen from his hand. He swayed a second, and then a hundred and eighty pounds of American fury in the form of Hook McGuire hit him. The professor didn't even groan. He went down, limp and unconscious.

Crouching near the table was the man first bowled down by the professor's body. He had a gun in his hand. The gun roared, but Hook had performed a side step and the bullet crashed in the wall.

Then Hook's right lashed out in a blow that sent the crouching man to the floor, quivering and jerking as consciousness left him.

Police whistles sounded outside. Then a police siren shrieked, and a minute later the room was filled with cops.

"Take those two round-faced boys to headquarters," Hook McGuire said to the cops, pointing to Hendrick's helpers. "I'm taking Hendrick back to the Minton home, to show Chief Ryan the killer of Professor Minton."

Ryan was still at the dead professor's home when Hook McGuire shoved a furious and nervous Professor Hendrick through the laboratory door. The body of Professor Minton had been removed, but the floor was still covered with bloodstains.

"O. K., chief," Hook announced. "Here is the murderer of Professor Minton—and bowling found him for me."

Ryan stared at Hook's prisoner, then exclaimed: "This is Professor Hendrick, the refugee professor who—"

"You are mistaken, chief," Hook interrupted. "This man, whatever his real name, is a member of an espionage ring in this country. He was sent here to watch Professor Minton in his work on the new explosive. He murdered Minton so that explosive would never be known."

"This is absurd—utterly absurd!" Hendrick said. "I was a friend of Professor Minton. I am not a spy."

"You'll have to change that story pretty quick when the police get through searching your house," Hook McGuire cut in. "A refugee professor doesn't have floors that disappear and a couple of men around to do the dirty work."

"We'll have to have more proof than that, to hold him for murder," Chief Ryan said. "And that ticket stub won't be much help."

"That ticket stub was a great help," Hook said. "It enabled me to spot the man I wanted. I learned that Professor Hendrick and several other professors sat in the section of the ticket stub. The other professors couldn't have been classed as suspects, but Professor Hendrick was. I went over to his home, looked at a picture on the wall and knew he was the man I wanted."

Professor Hendrick regained his cold self-confidence. He sat in a chair and said: "Most interesting, McGuire. You look at a picture on the wall and know that you have the murderer. Perhaps an American jury will believe that!"

"They will believe what I saw when I was near that picture," Hook retorted. "I didn't care about the picture, but I did want to see the back of your coat."

Hook walked over to the professor, yanked him to his feet, and peeled his coat off with a speed that astounded the murderer.

"You don't know much about bowling, do you, Professor Hendrick?" Hook said with a laugh, "If you had, you might not have made the mistake you did."

Hook lay the coat on the table. "Professor Minton was a great student of bowling," he continued. "He was so interested in the game that he was working to perfect a resin that would give the bowlers a better grip on the ball and their feet.

"Resin, as you know, is a vegetable substance, the sap of certain trees. In order to increase the gripping power of the powder, Professor Minton experimented with mixing purgatic acid with it. You know the power of this acid

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on vegetable substance, and you know what it should do."

Hook McGuire walked to the table where Professor Minton had set up the board to test the sticking power of his new resin and where he had written out the name of Hook McGuire, knowing that if the resin stuck to the board over a period of time, his experiment was a success.

"Apparently, the professor's experiment with resin was a success," Hook said. "I noticed, when we found the body, that he had written out my name on this board to see if the resin would stick. My name is faint, very faint, but you can see it."

Chief Ryan stared at the board. So did Professor Hendrick, and the professor's face paled. He remembered something that he had thought nothing of at the time: In his final death rush, Professor Minton had lunged at him and had sent him backward against the board.

"Since my name is so faint," Hook continued, "I figure that either the professor or his killer had backed up against that board. I examined the back of the professor's coat, but did not see any resin. But when I looked at that picture on your wall, Professor Hendrick, it was a phony move. I just wanted an opportunity to view the back of your coat. I saw traces of resin on it, and they are still there."

Chief of Police Ryan's face fell. "Just a trace of resin," he said hoarsely, "isn't going to prove anything. "

"But a trace of my name will prove a lot." Hook answered. "The purgatic acid in the resin had a great penetrating power. It will eat into cloth as fast as you put it on. And there is something else interesting about this acid. Vinegar will cause it to turn blue and bring out any traces of it."

Hook McGuire grabbed a vial of vinegar, wet a handkerchief with it, and pressed it on Professor Hendrick's coat.

When he removed the handkerchief, the name "Hook McGuire," written out with the forefinger of the professor on the board, came out on Professor Hendrick's coat in a dull blue color.

Chief Ryan gasped and looked at Professor Hendrick. Hendrick sat stiffly in his chair, his pale face expressionless.

"You are correct. Detective McGuire," he said coldly. "Bowling must be a great game, if it makes detectives that smart. But it does not matter now. That explosive Professor Minton was perfecting will never be used to kill my countrymen."

"Don't be too sure of that," Hook retorted. "Professor Minton made daily reports to Washington, and his tests were further advanced than even you were able to find out."

Chief Ryan was still staring at the name, "Hook McGuire," on the coat of Professor Hendrick.

He finally grunted "It looks like bowling has won again, Hook."

"It does, doesn't it," Hook said, with a laugh.