

A SCHOOL FOR MOVIE VILLAINS

By Pelham Grenville

THE school which I propose to found for the benefit of a small but deserving section of the community will have as its object the education of moving-picture villains in the difficult art of killing moving-picture heroines. The scheme deserves, and will doubtless command, public sympathy and support, for we all want moving-picture heroines killed. Is there one amongst us who would not have screamed with joy if Pauline had perished in the second reel or the Clutching Hand had massacred that princess of bores, Elaine? But these pests carried a charmed life simply because the villain, with the best intentions, did not know the proper way to go about the job.

You and I, gentle reader, when circumstances or some whim compel us to slay a female acquaintance, just borrow a revolver and a few cartridges and do the thing in some odd five minutes of the day when we are not at the office or watching a ball-game. We don't worry about art and technique and scientific methods; we just go and do it. But the villain suffers from a fatal ingenuity. Somewhere back in the past the old folks at home must have told him that he was clever, and it has absolutely spoiled him for effective work.

Ingenuity is a good thing in its way, but he overdoes it.

He is a human Goldberg cartoon. A hundred times he maneuvers his victim into a position where one good dig with a knife or a carefully directed revolver shot would eliminate her forever, to the great contentment of all, and then, the chump, he goes and spoils it all by being too ingenious. It never occurs to him to point the pistol at the girl and pull the trigger. The only way he can imagine of doing the thing is to tie the girl to a chair, erect a tripod, place the revolver on it, point it at her, tie a string to the trigger, pass the string round the walls of the room till it rests on a hook, attach another string to it, pass this over a hook, tie a brick to the end of the second string, and light a candle under it. He has got the whole thing reasoned out. The candle will burn the string, the brick will fall, the weight will

tighten the first string, thus pulling the trigger, and there you are. Of course somebody comes along and blows the candle out.

THE key-note of the curriculum in my proposed school will be a rigid attention to simplicity and directness. The pupil will start at the beginning by learning how to swat flies. From this he will work up through the animal kingdom in easy stages till he arrives at movie heroines; and by the time he graduates, the Elaines and Paulines will be climbing trees and pulling them up after them to avoid the man, for by then he will be really dangerous.

The great difficulty will be to exorcise that infernal ingenuity of his. His natural impulse, when called upon to kill a fly, would, of course, be to saw away the supports of the floor till a touch would break it down, tie a string across the doorway, and send the fly an anonymous letter urging him to come to the room at once in order to hear of something to his advantage—the idea being that the fly, hurrying to the room, would trip over the string, fall on the floor, and tumble with it into the depths, breaking his neck. That, to the villain's mind, is not merely the simplest—it is the only way of killing flies, and the hardest task facing the instructors at the school will be to persuade him that excellent results may be achieved with a rolled-up newspaper.

Once, however, he had grasped it, his progress ought to be rapid. Should he by chance succeed in slaying Pauline or Elaine or Genevieve or Gladys, he knows the gratitude which will pour out towards him from a million hearts which are aching to have the infernal serial finished and get on to the Charley Chaplin stuff.

But we must not be too optimistic. Success, however desirable, is at present far away, and can only be reached with patience. A villain with those ideas will not learn in a day that the quickest method of killing a heroine is to decoy the girl down a dark alley and lean a couple of feet of gas-pipe against her Irene Castle bang: but he may come to learn it in time, and it is with that hope that I am founding my school.