

# Stir Buggy

*A man is not an insect. But when Grig Orlanda staged his one-man jailbreak, he found that stir is not the only place where a man can go bugs.*



*By*  
**Hal G. Vermes**

**I**T was my day off guard duty at the prison, and I was at Doc Jansen's when the penitentiary siren signaled an escape with three long blasts, over and over again. We'd just had supper and I was all ready to settle down to a game of cribbage for matches. But Doc took me into his laboratory and insisted on showing me his collection—as if I hadn't seen it a

hundred times.

Jansen isn't a regular medico, you know. He is an entomologist, which means that he is bugs about bugs. He's tall and thin, and with wiry white eyebrows and magnifying spectacles, he looks like he is related to the insects he collects. He is sixty or maybe eighty, I don't know; but when he handles those glass specimen

cases in his laboratory, his long, bony fingers never drop anything.

"I am very busy these days, Tom," he said when I mentioned cribbage again, "for this is the breeding season for *Tinea pellionella*."

"Huh?" I said.

"Moths," he explained. "The common species that feed on fur and wool."

"I wish they'd lay off my bathing suit," I said. "I have to buy a new one every year."

Doc smiled, his pale blue eyes behind the magnifying glasses making him look more like a bug than ever.

"You won't have any trouble," he said, "if you wash it at the end of the season and then put it away in an airtight glass jar."

"Thanks, Doc," I said.

That was when the siren at the prison started wailing. Doc was bent over a butterfly case and didn't seem to hear it. But after I listened a second I grabbed the telephone on his desk and called the warden's office.

"Tom Bowen reporting," I said into the transmitter. "How many men in the break?"

"Only one." I got the barked answer from Captain Ramsell. "But that is plenty. It's Grig Orlanda and he killed a trusty and a guard. We're putting a ring of steel around the whole county. Report to state police barracks at Terryville pronto!"

"Right," I said and put down the phone.

"Well, Tom," Doc Jansen said, looking up from his mounted butterflies, "I'm all ready for that cribbage game."

"It's all off," I said. "The toughest con in the pen has broken out and he's already killed two men."

"My! my!" Doc said with mild surprise. "Now if he were an ant—the ants know what to do with criminals in their society."

"You're bugs," I said.

But Doc only laughed, the high, thin sound of a cricket. I snatched up my cap and started for the door.

"I haven't time for your jokes now," I said, a little sore. "I got to get going."

Then a rusty voice rasped from the darkness of the front hall. "You ain't going anywhere, Bowen," it said.

**T**HE BLUE BARREL of a gun came into the light of the living room. It was gripped in the knotted hand of a man in a gray prison suit. His eyes were red-veined, the pupils black pinpoints, and there was a fleck of saliva at the corners of his thick lips.

"Orlanda!" I shouted.

Doc Jansen stared curiously at the killer. "A very strange specimen," he said.

"Shut up!" the convict growled. "I want clothes," he said, "and food." His red-rimmed eyes circled the room.

That was my chance and I reached for my automatic. But my draw was too fast and though I fired first, I missed. Orlanda's gun exploded like an echo, right after mine. The slug bit my shooting arm and I dropped my automatic. Orlanda kicked it across the floor. Doc started to dive for it, but Orlanda knocked him back against the wall.

"Damn you!" he bellowed. "Another move and I'll blast you both!"

Doc's eyes were ogling and he looked very much surprised now. When Orlanda ordered us into chairs, he sat down without a murmur. I did, too.

Orlanda went through a pile of junk under the stairs and brought out a reel of fishing line. He ordered the doc to tie me in my chair with it. Doc tried to make the line loose enough so I could move, but Orlanda hit him on the jaw and pulled the fishing line tight. Then he tied up the doc in the other chair.

“You can’t get away with this, Orlanda,” I said.

“I murdered a man and got in the pen for life,” he rasped. “Now I killed two men and I’m out again. I’m free!”

“If men were insects,” Doc said with a half-smile, “they’d find you and bring you back.”

Orlanda looked at the Doc as if he thought he was crazy. Then he laughed, but it wasn’t a brave laugh. Making sure that our bonds were secure, he went into the kitchen. I could hear him rummaging around in the pantry. When he came back, he had an armful of food.

“Now for something to wear,” he said.

Orlanda searched until he found a big box filled with clothes.

“I would appreciate it a lot,” Doc softly said, “if you didn’t disturb those.”

Not paying any attention to him, Orlanda ripped off his gray prison uniform and put on a dark blue worsted suit. Then he packed one of Doc’s old straw suitcases with the food and more clothes.

The fishline was tightly wrapped around me and I couldn’t move a muscle; so I kept quiet and listened to the siren, which was still screaming through the night.

“I wish you wouldn’t take those clothes,” Doc protested again.

“I’m the one to kick,” Orlanda snapped. “This suit is full of moth holes.”

“So sorry,” Doc said, subsiding.

Orlanda picked up the suitcase and came over to me. His eyes burned as he waved the gun in my face.

“I’ve got a present for you,” he said. “Something to remember me by.”

Then he palmed the gun and whipped the butt down at me. All of a sudden I felt like an insect that has been stepped on.

When I came to, I thought that the prison siren was still going, but it was only the buzzing in my head. Doc had worked

out of his bonds and was wiping my face with a cold towel. He cut the fishline around my arms and legs and I got up groggily. Looking at my watch, I saw that it was nearly midnight.

“I got to beat it,” I said. “I’m going to get that Orlanda—if it’s the last thing I do.”

But Doc wouldn’t let me go until he had dressed the bullet crease in my arm. I felt better then.

“Come back in the morning,” he said, “and have breakfast with me.”

“If Orlanda left any food,” I reminded him.

“We’ll have hot coffee, anyway,” he said with a smile.

**M**EN HAD BEEN stationed on the roads leading out of the county, and a dragnet of a hundred special deputies searched all night for the escaped convict. With three thousand prisoners in the state penitentiary, the police were always prepared for a break, so Orlanda wouldn’t have gotten very far.

But the land in the valley is about ten miles square, and that means a hundred square miles of rough country where the killer could hide. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack; even worse, like hunting for one of Doc Jansen’s lost insects.

And we didn’t find Orlanda that night. We were sure that he wouldn’t dare try to get out of the county because, with his record, the deputies were ordered to fire on sight. So he was evidently holed up somewhere with the food he had taken from Doc’s house. But whether he was in one of the towns, or in a shack in the wooded foothills, nobody knew.

I was winded and tired when I showed up for breakfast with Doc. Orlanda had taken all the food, so all we had was coffee, and that made me sore. But the

Doc's pale blue eyes were shining; in his shabby brown suit and with his tight little smile, he looked like a philosophical beetle.

"The male moths in my breeding cages are very excited this morning," he chattered.

"So what?" I said with a yawn.

"That means that the females are coming out of their pupae."

"Most interesting, my dear doctor," I said, razzing him. "But all I care about is getting my hands on Orlanda."

"Do you mean that he is still at large?"

"And how!" I grunted with disgust.

"If we lived in an insect world, you would have him by now." The doc slid a bony forefinger along the side of his nose and thought aloud. "Ants could find him, butterflies, moths. . . ."

He stared at me through his thick-lensed glasses and suddenly pinched the end of his nose.

"Moths!" he exclaimed.

I used to just wonder about it before, but now I felt sure that he had a screw loose somewhere. He jumped up from his chair, overturning his cup of coffee, and dragged me into the laboratory. There he opened a wire cage and a cloud of white moths streamed out of it.

"The window!" he yelled at me, prancing up and down in his excitement. "Open the window!"

When I did, the moths went straight for it and flew out over the little back garden. The doc grabbed a big butterfly net and ran out of the door after them.

"Come on!" he shouted back at me.

"For the love of Pete," I yelled, chasing him. "All I want is to get forty winks and then go after Orlanda again."

"We must follow the moths," the doc cried. "This is their nuptial flight."

I guess that, with not having any sleep and worrying about Orlanda, I was as

buggy as the doc by then. He ran through the garden and I went after him, following those fluttering moths.

We crossed the highway and stumbled on into the fields beyond. A couple of deputies were coming up the road, and when they saw us their mouths flopped open. I wheezed after the doc, feeling like a fool for not having sense enough to stop.

The doc was long-legged and he kept ahead of me, right under the white cloud of moths. All the time he yelled in that thin, high voice of his. After a couple of miles through meadow and marsh, I got my second wind.

"By the Old Harry," I swore to myself, "I'm going to grab that butterfly net, yank it over Doc's head and rush him down to the hoosegow. He's the craziest bug I ever saw!"

**W**E splashed through a creek and climbed up over a hill. The sweat was pouring down my face, and I was breathing like a horse with the heaves. The moths were still going strong, right into the wind, with the doc dancing after them.

We started up another hill, went into a wood. And then just ahead I caught a glimpse of an unpainted shack deep in a grove of scrub pine. The doc suddenly stopped and waited for me.

"Watch the moths," he excitedly whispered.

The white cloud flew on through the woods straight for the shack. When it reached the single closed window, the insects settled all over the glass.

"They've found the female moths," the doc chirped.

I sat down on a stump and wiped my steaming face and neck with a handkerchief. The doc kept staring at the moths, his eyes gleaming.

"Isn't it marvelous?" he said. "When the female moth emerges from her pupa—"

even if it is in a closed room—the male moths ten and even twenty miles away get a message from her waving antennae and fly right straight to her!”

“Very interesting, no doubt,” I said. “But I don’t care a hoot about moths and their nuptial flights. All I want is to get my hands on Orlanda.”

“But,” the doc exclaimed, “you have got Orlanda!”

“You’re balmy,” I said.

“You are a Doubting Thomas.” The doc pointed a bony forefinger at the shanty. “Orlanda is hiding right there in the room behind that window.”

I looked up, saw the shining light in Doc’s pale blue eyes, and all of a sudden I knew that there was nothing crazy about him. Jumping to my feet, I drew my gun and started for the shack. When I was about twenty-five yards away, I stopped behind a tree and called.

“Orlanda!” I shouted. “Come out or I’ll shoot.”

The white moths were still clinging to the window pane, but there was no sound from the shanty. I aimed my automatic and squeezed the trigger tight, emptying the whole magazine. While I was reloading, the moths flew into the shack through the shattered glass.

Just as I was beginning to think that nobody was there, my fire was answered with a barrage of spitting lead that splintered the tree over my head. The doc, I saw out of the tail of my eye, was prancing out in the open space.

“Get down, you lug,” I snapped at him, “or you’ll be attending your own funeral.” Then I called out again.

“Orlanda!” I yelled. “I’ll get you dead or alive. You can choose.”

As he still didn’t show himself, I took careful aim and fired three times. After the last cartridge exploded, there was a scream of pain from the shanty.

“I’m coming out,” Orlanda shouted. “Don’t shoot!”

Then he was in the doorway, his hands high, and there was blood darkening his shirt at the shoulder. I went up to him and took his gun. Then I slipped handcuffs on his wrists. I glanced into the shack and saw that it was full of flying moths.

“Don’t disturb them!” the doc cried.

“Huh,” I snorted. “Nuptial flight!”

The doc’s light blue eyes beamed at me through his magnifying glasses. “Doubting Thomas,” he said again.

“I believe you, Doc,” I said, “about the male moths being able to find the females when they wave their antennae, even though they are miles away. After all, you’re an ento—a bugologist and you ought to know. But I’ll be damned if I can understand how you were so sure that Orlanda would be here, too.”

“I was using that box of old clothes at home as a breeding place for female *Tinea pellionella*. And you remember,” the doc explained with a twinkle, “Orlanda put on one of the moth-eaten suits and carried the others away with him.”

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Author’s Note: “A female moth emerges from her pupa in a breeding cage in a closed room of a house miles distant from woods or fields, and almost immediately the male moths begin to appear. How do they know that she is there? How do these males know that a female has come from her cocoon in a certain room in a certain dwelling in a certain town ten or twenty miles away? And how do they find their way unerringly from all directions, against strong winds, to the identical house and room where the newly arrived female is awaiting them? . . .

“This simple experiment proved to my satisfaction that they communicated by radio or vibratory waves, and it is a simple matter for anyone to carry out a similar test. But this is not necessary, for delicate radio receiving sets have been made which actually pick up and amplify the vibratory waves sent out by insects.”—From pages 98-101. *Strange Insects and Their Stories*, by A. Hyatt Verrill. L. C. Page and Company, Boston, 1937.