Two Innocent Victims

BY BERTHA SNOW ADAMS.

PART II.

"Aha!" he exclaimed at length, "I see what's the matter! You're out of gas! Sure you've got gas,"

"Why, I ought to have," she said noncommittally.

"Maybe you ought to have but you haven't—not speck!" the young man stated very emphatically. He straightened up and stood regarding her with a puzzled air. "Thought you said you stocked up with gas and oil last night." Jeannette's lids fluttered under his steady gaze but she managed to get out evenly:

"It might have been the night before or maybe even the night before that." She didn't altogether relish the grin with which he accepted this explanation, it said so plainly, "Just like a woman!"

"Oh, it doesn't particularly matter," was his cheerful comment. "You've probably got some extra along, haven't you?"

"How should I have?" she replied, outwardly cool but inwardly trembling.

"How? Why in the place made for carrying it!"

She clutched the fender desperately. The young man was regarding her with suspicion creeping into his eyes. "You have driven this car four years and don't know there's a place for carrying extra gas and oil?" he challenged. A wave of color swept to the roots of her hair but she attempted some show of spirit.

"I didn't say I'd driven this car four years! I said I'd had it only about . . . I mean . . . I . . ." She could go no further for the young man had stepped nearer to her and was looking at her very keenly.

"Just what exactly, do you mean?" he demanded gravely. Jeannette swallowed hard. For no particular reason, she liked this big good-looking stranger and he was doubting her. She couldn't let him do that—she simply couldn't! The eyes she lifted to his were full of appeal.

"I'm going to tell you everything," she said earnestly. "And please do believe me. It may sound as if it couldn't be true but it is, really! First though, isn't there some place near here where I can get a cup of coffee? I didn't eat much breakfast and I feel a little faint." He seemed to hesitate and she added with a touch of hauteur: "You needn't be seen with me if you're afraid, though I give you my word I haven't done anything to be ashamed of!"

"Of course you haven't!" he promptly conceded. "I know a place two or three miles further on. We can make it in no time if we're lucky enough to have some extra gas and oil."

They were.

The engine soon resumed its satisfied hum and the stranger was cleaning his hands on a bit of waste before taking the wheel when Jeannette saw a big red automobile dash out of a cross-road some distance behind them and whirl away in the opposite direction. She was about to remark that she was not the only murderer of speed laws, when a man's head appeared at the rear window and the next instant a second head—also a man's—peered back. Both seemed to be much excited and intuitively, Jeannette felt that their excitement had to do with the mysterious car. Then the red automobile slowed to turn. The girl's heart missed a beat, then leaped to the thrill of the adventure.

"Hurry! Hurry! They're after me!" she cried, gesturing wildly toward the oncoming car. "Oh please! Please! There isn't a second to lose!"

The young man stood motionless and once more his eyes registered suspicion.

"I don't understand," he said coolly. "If you haven't done anything, then why . . ." In a frenzy, Jeannette caught his arm.

"Take me on faith! I'll explain later. Give you my word of honor I haven't done anything wrong! Won't you believe me?"

It would have taken a stern heart, indeed, to resist the appeal in tone and wide brown eyes.

"You bet I will—to the last ditch! Here! Quick!" Catching her up, he fairly tossed her into the car, sprang in beside her and the landscape whirled by.

It surely was an extraordinary situation! Jeannette had set forth with nothing more exciting in prospect than a drive all by herself, through the country. Then, while she picked flowers, her inexpensive car had been replaced by this aristocrat, in which, accompanied by an extremely handsome young man who was a perfect stranger to her, she was now careening at top speed along the public highway pursued—but maybe she had imagined that part. She contrived a backward glance. The red car acted like a pursuer and was gaining.

"Faster!" she cried as she managed a second look behind, then slumped down on the seat, her hand pressed to her heart. The next instant came a sharp report followed by another and yet another.

"Hind tires! Shot to pieces most likely!" shouted the man at the wheel. "If they keep that up, we're done for, but while we last we'll sure give 'em a run for their money!" His jaw set. Jeannette closed her eyes. Would they be dashed to pieces against one of the shade trees which fringed the boulevard? But they held to their course, her nerves steadied and she watched her unknown chauffeur with growing admiration. Once more she peered over her shoulder. The red automobile with its menacing occupants had vanished.

"We've beaten them! We've beaten them!" she shouted exultantly; "They're nowhere in sight! Can't we slow down somehow?"

"We'll have to. There's a sharp curve just ahead."

"I never knew anybody who could handle a car so splendidly!" The recipient of the tribute flashed her a keen look.

"Suppose you give me some idea of what all this is about," he suggested.

"I don't know," she said simply. The young man took his eyes off the road long enough to give her an incredulous stare.

"You don't know!" he echoed. "Oh come now, that's carrying things too ——"

"But I don't, really!" Jeannette protested. "I'm almost as much in the dark as you are! However," she went on soberly; "I'll begin at the beginning and tell you everything, just as it happened."

By this time they reached the curve and were slowly rounding it when—Jeannette gave a little scream and caught at the pit of her stomach. Her companion jammed on the brakes. Across the road, directly in their path, stood the red automobile and leaning against it, all broadly grinning, were three burley figures. The burliest of the three advanced.

"I'm the sheriff of this county," he announced. "Thought you'd give me the slip, didn't you?"

"I hoped so," the young man admitted calmly. "Nevertheless, it's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Sheriff! What can I do for you this glorious day?" The sheriff eyed him gravely.

"Huh! Well, first you can lay off them smart-aleck airs and second, you and the young lady there can change cars for the next station. The one the county is a' furnishin' aint' much of a looker but I guess you can make out with it for a while. Nichols!" turning to one of his deputies, "you take charge of that millionaire bus. Thompson, climb in behind and sort of chappyrone this here unsuspectin' young thing and her dashin' fortune-hunter. I'll do the drivin'.

"Not quite so fast, Sheriff! Not quite so fast!" the young man demurred. "Suppose we all get together and talk this matter over a bit. My name is . . . ."

"I know what your name is all right," the sheriff snapped. "Step lively, both of you! I'm a busy man and I ain't got no time for foolishness!" Springing from the roadster, Jeannette hurried forward.

"Please do listen to me a minute!" she begged. "This gentleman hasn't done anything—really he hasn't! He was only trying to . . ."

". . . elope with an heiress to millions," the sheriff finished.

"It's an awful mixup!" she wailed. "Oh, can't I make you understand?"

"Why try?" her escort said quietly. "Let's see it through. Are you game?"

Jeannette hesitated a second; then flung back her head with a catch of breath. "Yes I am!" she cried and, because they were both young and youth is ever eager for adventure, they looked into each other's eyes and laughed.

The machines came to a halt before an imposing house. The prisoners were conducted to the stately entrance, and a solemn-faced butler met them.

"Here they are!" the sheriff announced quite with an air of victory. "Tell your mistress I got 'em!"

"What is it, Hodgekins?" called a thin, high-pitched voice.

"The sheriff, ma'am! I've brought back your granddaughter and her feller."

"Oh, I'm so thankful!" sighed the thin voice. "Hodgekins, show the sheriff into the drawing room."

The rustle of silks caused all eyes to focus on a curtained archway at the far end of the room. The curtains parted, an old woman came toward them, then suddenly halted, surveying the occupants of the divan with wide eyes. She was a very old woman and there was something regal in her bearing.

"What does this mean?" she demanded angrily. "Who are these people? I never saw them before!"

Jeannette broke into an irrepressible lilt of laughter as she caught sight of the sheriff's face.

"Never saw them before?" he shouted. "They was drivin' the identical car you described—same license number; same color; same make. Soon's they saw us they got in a mighty big hurry and . . . ."

The old woman cut him short.

"You have bungled," she said in razor-edged tones. "I distinctly told you my granddaughter was a blonde and her companion a brunette."

Jeannette sprang to the old lady's side.

"He has bungled!" she said hotly. "We tried to explain but he wouldn't listen! Here! Read this!"

As the old lady read, the stern lines about her mouth grew even steeper. Hodgekins appeared at the door.

"Beg pardon, Madame. A telegram."

"Read it," was the curt command.

"'Dorothy Hurst and Willys Carleton married at noon to-day. Mr. and Mrs. Carleton left immediately on private yacht for year's tour through Orient.'"

For a space the old woman stood there in the middle of the big dusky room, so still that not even an eyelid fluttered and Jeannette saw all the hauteur and imperiousness go out of her. When she spoke, her voice was tired and husky.

"Show these people out, Hodgekins. Send Mary to help me to my room." Then she moved slowly toward the door by which she had entered.

"Well! If this ain't one peach of a mess!" growled the sheriff who knew the law touching a certain class of blunders. "Young feller," he added, most apologetically, "I'm afraid I've put you and your lady friend to a heap of inconvenience."

"That's all right, Sheriff!" the young man broke in. "I've had the time of my life! By the way," he turned to the butler who had forgotten to "send Mary" and stood transfixed. "How about the car we had—does it belong here?"

"Yes, sir. It's Miss Dorothy's, sir."

"Well. I shall have to telephone to the Lake Crescent club. They will send somebody over with my car. While we're waiting," he turned to Jeannette, "shall we go in quest of that cup of coffee you were wishing for? The Roadside Inn can't be far from here."

"About two miles, sir," put in the sheriff. "I'm a goin' right past it. I'll be glad to give you a lift."

In the golden light of late afternoon, Jeannette and the young man loitered beside the shady boulevard not far from the inn where they had dined.

"So you're the Bruce Clement who carried off the prize at the Fairmount races last summer! You were wonderful!"

"It's you who were wonderful, Miss Long! A man admires a girl who keeps her nerve no matter what happens!"

For some reason Jeannette was suddenly very happy then a cloud swept across her horizon and she dropped her head. The car was due any minute now. It would take her back to Bonnyview and—Lawyer Bingham.

"I don't believe I'll go home tonight!" she cried. "Would you mind driving me on to Springfield?"

"I wouldn't mind driving you to the ends of the earth!" he replied.

(The End.)

Our New Serial.

"The Sky Line of Spruce," by Edison Marshall, is a story crammed with thrills, action, adventure and romance in the wilds of the Caribou Range in British Columbia. Edison Marshall is a born story writer. He has gained the reputation among the critics as one of the greatest writers of outdoor adventures and has a wide following among lovers of adventure and romance in the great open air.

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Watch for the opening of "The Sky Line of Spruce."

York Minister's New Century.

The beginning of 1927 meant something more to York Minster than just the start of another year. For this "most august of temples," as Sir Walter Scott once called it, the occasion marked the commencement of a new century.

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The anniversary was kept with fitting ritual. Half an hour before midnight on the last day of 1926 the Dean and Chapter met for a solemn act of penitence at a temporary altar in the nave. Just before midnight a procession arrived at the west door of the Minster, and the Archbishop of York knocked thirteen times—once for each century—with his pastoral staff. As the sound of the last knock died away, the door was opened, and he entered to celebrate the long ages of Christian York.

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ISSUE No. 5—'27.

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LEGISLATIVE ADVICE

The Post, of Leeds, England, Opens a Subject Well Worth Consideration by Provincial and Federal Legislators.

There is a tendency for the ardent sentimental reformer to decide what people ought to have and to force through a humane Parliament measure to procure it without ascertaining whether the taxpayers can stand the new imposition of costs. This tendency must be checked, or we shall sacrifice the prosperity of our productive enterprises to the satisfaction of merely sentimental ideals. The passion for social services, which does so much credit to the hearts and imaginations of their inceptors, must lead to an increase in the already too heavy burdens upon the taxpayer and the ratepayer, and it is high time that their Legislature returned to the old and sane attitude that the first test of proposed social legislaion is not whether it will in theory ensure an ideal condition, but what approach to that ideal the nation can afford to make.

The Call of the Bells.

We hear them ringing so often, but do we think of them as more than a summons to church?

Our forefathers had many more uses for bells. In their superstitious way they believed that thunder and lightning could be driven from the parish by the ringing of the church bells.

The "Passing Bell" is still heard in some country parishes of England to bespeak the prayers of the faithful for some soul in extremis. The bell is rung or tolled nine strokes for a man, six strokes for a woman, and three strokes for a child. So do the villagers know for whom to pray.

It used to be quite usual in some parts of East Lancashire to ring the bells as noisily as possible after a funeral, the idea being that the loud noise would frighten away the evil spirits from the soul of the departed.

The "Dinner" or "Pudding Bell" is still rung in some country parishes. It is rung immediately the morning service is concluded, and the story goes that it is to let the people at home know that the good folks have finished their worship and are on their homeward way to "Dinner" or "Pudding."

To Protect the Bear.

State laws to protect the bear during the breeding season and make it a game animal are urged by the American Game Protective Association.

New Use for Seaweed.

Agar, used in making capsules, candy, paints and media for bacteriological research, is now obtained from seaweed along the coast of lower California.

Attempts are being made to grow the Douglas pine to its full height in England. In the Canadian Rockies and elsewhere this tree reaches 250 feet, more than twice as high as Britain's forest trees.

The Earth.

On her at night the full-orbed moon bestows
Iced pools where barberries find blurred reflection,
Gaunt shadowed symmetry of leaf and weed,
Frost arabesques of lace.
She wears the vast enchantment of the snows,
Rayed wheels and silver stars of brief perfection,
Bleached silken grasses, patterns wind-strewn seed
With all unconscious grace.

—Marie Emilie Gilchrist, in "Wide Pastures."

At the City Hall.

"Why is that councilman making such a row?"

"He's chairman of the antinoise committee, you know."

Reward.

One colliery in Ireland has awarded ten weeks' bonus to all of its workers who remained loyal during the strike in Great Britain.

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