

Satan Sanderson

By HALLIE ERMINIE RIVES, Author of "Hearts Courageous," Etc. COPYRIGHT 1928, THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

The ghost was gone now before fire and human presence, and Hugh, with a loud laugh of tipsy incredulity, stood staring at the man before him. "Harry Sanderson!" he cried. His shifty eyes surveyed the other's figure—the corduroys, the high laced boots, the soft blue flannel shirt. "Not exactly in purple and fine linen," he said. The impudent swagger of intoxication had slipped over him again, and his boisterous laugh broke with a hic-cough. "I thought the gospel game was about played out that night in



"You were something of a howling swell as a parson."

action he was faint, and a mist was before his eyes. The die was cast. Hugh could easily escape. Until he himself spoke he would not even be hunted. He, Harry Sanderson, was the scapegoat, left to play his part. How long he sat there he did not know. He sprang up at a muffled sound. He had still a work to do before they came—for Hugh! He saw in an instant, however, that it was Jessica, leading her horse by the bridle. "I could not wait," she breathed. "You did not come, and I was afraid!" Mounting, he leaned from the saddle and took both her hands in his. Still he did not kiss her. "Jessica, you believe I am innocent?" he asked anxiously. "Yes—yes!" "Will you believe what I am doing is for the best?" "Always, always!" she whispered, her voice vibrating. "Only go!" He released her hands and rode quickly up the grassy path. As she stood looking after him a dog's whine came from the cabin. She ran and released the spaniel and took him up in her arms. As she did so a sparkle caught her eye. It came from the tiny gold cross lying where Hugh had flung it near the lighted doorway. She picked it up, looked at it a moment abstractedly and thrust it into her pocket scarce consciously, for her heart was keeping time to the silenced hoof beat that was bearing the man she loved from danger.

Where the way opened into the gloomy cut of Funeral Hollow, Harry dismounted and went forward slowly afoot, leading the horse, till a figure stepped from a clump of bushes to meet him with an exclamation of relief. Hugh had waited at the rendezvous in shivering apprehension and dismal suspicion of Harry's intentions and had not approached till he had convinced himself that the other came alone. He wrung Harry's hand as he said: "If I get out of this, I'll do better the rest of my life, I will, upon my soul, Harry!" "You may not be able to get into the chapel," said Harry; "my rooms"—he felt his cheek burn as he spoke—"may be occupied. On the chance that you fall, take this." He took off the ruby ring, whose interlaced initials had once fortified him in his error of identity. "The stone is worth a good deal. It should be enough to take you anywhere." Hugh nodded, slipped the ring on and turned to go. "To be continued."

Chapter 25
WHILE the man whom the town knew as Hugh Stires listened to the tale of the street preacher, another, unlike yet curiously like him in feature, had slowly climbed the hillside from the north by the sanitarium road. He walked with a jaunty swagger bred of too frequent applications to a flask in his pocket. As he walked unsteadily along Hugh drank more than once from the flask to deaden the superstitious dread of the place which was stealing over him. On the crest of the ridge he skirted the sanitarium grounds and at length gained the road that twisted down toward the lights of the town. In the dubious moonlight he mistook the narrow trail to the Knob for the lower path to the cabin. As he turned into the report of a rifle came faintly from the gulch below. He quickened his steps and stumbled all at once into the little clearing that held the new made grave and Jessica's statue. The sight terrified his intoxicated imagination. His hair rose. The name on the headstone was Stires, and there was himself—no, a ghost of himself—sitting near! He turned and broke into a run down the steep slope. In his fear—for he imagined the white figure was pursuing him—he tripped and fell, regained his feet, rushed across the level space, threw his weight against the cabin door and burst into the room. A dog sprang up with a growl, and in the light of the fire that burned on the hearth a man sitting at the rough hewn table lifted a haggard face from his arms, and each recognized the other.



He wrung Harry's hand.

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dered now that, pressed a certain way, it would open, and engraved inside were his name and the date of his ordination.
He might shut the cabin door, but he could not forbid the torturer that came with him across the threshold. He might throw himself upon his knees and bury his face in the rough skin of the couch, but he could not shut out words that blent in golden lettered flashes across his throbbing eyeballs. "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife."
So he crouched, a man under whose feet life had crashed, leaving him pinned beneath the wreck to watch the fire that must creep nearer and nearer.

Curiosity held Jessica until the evangelist closed his melodeon preparatory to a descent upon the dance hall. Then, thinking of the growing dark with some trepidation, she started toward the mountain.
Ahead of her a muffled puff-puff sounded, and the dark bulk of an automobile was moving slowly in the same direction, and she quickened her pace, glad of this quasi company.
A little way up the ascent a cumbersome shadow startled her. She saw in a moment that it was the automobile, halted at the side of the road. Her footsteps made no sound, and she was close upon it when she saw the three men it had carried standing near by. She made to pass them and had crossed the half the intervening space, when some instinct sent her to the shade of the trees. They had stopped opposite the hydraulic concession, where a side path left the main road. It was the same path by which she and August

Prendergast had taken their unconscious burden on a night long ago, leading along the hillside, overlooking the snake-like flume and forming a steeper short cut to the cabin above. They were conversing in low tones, and as they talked they pointed, she thought, toward it.
Jessica had never in her life been an eavesdropper, but her excited senses



"It was Stires killed him."

made her anxious. Moreover, she was in a way committed, for she could not now emerge without being seen. As she waited a man came from the path and joined the others. The sky had been overcast and gloomy, but the moon drew out just then, and she saw that the newcomer, evidently a patrol, carried a rifle in the hollow of his arm. She also saw that one of the first three was the automobile's owner.
For some minutes they conversed in undertones, whose very secrecy inflamed her imagination. It seemed to her that they made some reference to the flume. Had there been another robbery of the sluice boxes and could they still suspect Hugh?
Dread and indignation made her bold. When they turned into the path she followed, treading noiselessly, till she was close behind them. They had stopped again and were looking intently at a shadowy gray something that moved in the bottom below.
She heard the man who carried the rifle say, with a smothered laugh: "It's only Barney McGinn's old white horse taking a drink out of the sluice box. He often does that."
Then the sheriff's voice said: "McGinn's horse is in town tonight, with Barney on her back. Horse or no horse, I'm going to"—The rest was lost in the swift action with which he snatched the firearm from the first speaker, sighted and fired.
In the still night the concussion seemed to rock the ground and roused a hundred echoes. It startled and shocked the listening girl, but not so much as the sound that followed it—a cry that had nothing animal-like and that sent the men running down the

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which sniffed at the heels of the circus bystanders as if to inquire casual-ly of salvation.
Numbers were swelling now, and the street preacher, shaking back his long hair, drew a premonitory, wavering chord from his melodeon and struck up a gospel song. The song ended, he mounted his camp stool to propound his usual fiery text.
The watcher by the steps was gazing with a strange, alert intentness. Some-thing had passed abruptly from exhortation to song, from prayer to fulminations, and he embellished his harangue with anecdotes drawn from his lifelong campaigns against the arch enemy of humanity. Of what he had said the solitary observer had been quite uncon-scious. It was the ensemble—the repetition of something experienced some-where before—that appealed to him. Suddenly, however, a chance phrase appealed to his understanding.
Another moment and he was leaning forward, his eyes fixed, his breath coming at his breast. For each word of the speaker now was knocking a wedge hammer blow upon the blank wall in his brain. Hallelujah Jones had launched into the recital of a story which, though the stern charge of a bishop had kept him silent as to name and locality, yet, possessing the vividness of an actual experience, had lost little in the telling. It was the tale of an evening when he had peered through the tilted window of a chapel and seen the dissolute rector gambling on the table of the Lord.
The words shrieked themselves through Harry's brain. Harry Sanderson, not Hugh Stires! Not an outcast! Not criminal, thief and forger! The curtain was rent. The dead wall in his brain was down, and the real past swept over him in an ungovernable flood. Hallelujah Jones had furnished the clew to the maze. His story was the last great wave, which had crum-pled all at once the cliff of oblivion that the nor-thern process of the recovered mind had been stealthily undermining. Harry Sanderson at last knew his past and of puzzlement and distress that it had held.
Making in every limb and feeling all the courthouse wall like a drunk-man, he made his way to the fur-ber deserted street. A passerby would be struck at sight of his face and burning eyes.
For these months he, the Rev. Henry Sanderson, disgraced, had suffered and had been sunk out of sight and hearing like a stone in a sea.
For these months—through an accidental facial resemblance and a curious concurrence of circum-stances—he had owned the name and name of Hugh Stires. And Jes-sica had received no less than he, dat-terious error from that mis-erable moment when she had torn the page from her eyes on her wedding day. She had never seen the real Hugh Stires. She must learn truth. Yet how to tell her? How to tell her all?
Any hour yesterday, hard as the night must have been, he could have told her. Last night the hour passed, could he tell her now? Yet she could tell Hugh's wife by law and he himself could not marry her. He would but turn back the uni-verse and give him yesterday!
Feet dragging as though from the clamber the mountain road he took from his pocket little gold cross, and his fingers, with misery, tied it to his thong around his neck. It had been only a bauble, a pocket piece acquired he knew when or how. Now he knew it for the badge of his calling. He remem-bered that, pressed a certain way, it would open, and engraved inside were his name and the date of his ordination.
He might shut the cabin door, but he could not forbid the torturer that came with him across the threshold. He might throw himself upon his knees and bury his face in the rough skin of the couch, but he could not shut out words that blent in golden lettered flashes across his throbbing eyeballs. "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife."
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