



DEAD MAN'S FEAST

by Leslie McFarlane



CHAPTER I The House of Silence

The wet road sloped steeply before me as the car lurched over the rise.

Rain streamed out of the roaring darkness into the radiance of the headlights, drummed on the top of the roadster, splashed and gurgled in the ditches and muddy pools. The known world had resolved itself into a jouncing area of light which presented no more tangible goal than a strip of yellow mud with gleaming black ruts beyond a drenching screen.

Down the hill went the car, swerving and skidding in the greasy mud. The road was narrow and dipped sheer to the right into a black void; even in dry weather it would have been ticklish going, but now it was perilous.

My hands were stiff from clutching the wheel. My foot pressed on the brake. The car tobogganed almost to a stop and then, as the rear began to swing dangerously toward the embankment, slipping on the treacherous surface, it leaped forward and muddy water showered high in the air.

The roadster skidded crazily on the descent in spite of all my efforts to keep it to a straight course. The hood swung about and a wet green mass of trees leaped into the glare of the headlights. I bore down on the wheel, righted the car, and it went sliding and swaying down the slope again. It was a light roadster, there were no chains, and traction was wretched. I could only trust to luck and my own skill to bring it out of those breath-taking swerves toward the black embankment.

Again the gleaming treetops leaped into the glare. I gripped the wheel tensely. The car seemed quite uncontrollable on that greasy hill. The hood came slow-

ly around but the rear wheels slipped as though they were in lard. The ruts seemed to slant away. I jammed on the emergency brake, the roadster canted alarmingly over to one side, groaned and came to rest.

Just then I was about as close to eternity as one ever cares to be. A few inches more and the car would have tipped and gone hurtling down the embankment.

When I found that the roadster was settling comfortably into the mud, with the left wheels in a rut that would prevent an upset, I permitted myself my first deep breath in five minutes, turned off the engine and consoled myself with a cigarette.

Rain drummed a triumphant tattoo on the top of the car. It streaked in the light like a host of dancing spears. And there I was at ten o'clock of a drenching night, stranded on a dreary country road leading to some obscure country village of which I had quite forgotten the name.

"This," I said, wrathfully, "serves me right."

A gypsy motor tour, with no particular destination in view and no plan save that of exploring any highways and byways that might look interesting, had seemed all very well when I was in Toronto. There, the countless restrictions had lent glamor to such a holiday. It wasn't so glamorous now, with rain pouring down and the car up to its hubs in mud.

I didn't know just what to do. I had no inclination to get out and walk; the village might be several miles away. Yet, on the other hand, the prospect of spending the night in the cramped confines of the roadster was not appealing. It appeared as though I must choose one of these two evils, and it was difficult to decide which was the lesser.

I was reflecting on the advisability of settling the matter by the toss of a coin when I saw a

yellow gleam of light, through the swaying trees far ahead, to the left of the road. It shone for a moment, vanished, then re-appeared.

A fresh gust of wind swept the rain roaring down the road and the light was again obliterated as the intervening trees bowed and shifted to the gale. In the next instant, to leave no further doubt in my mind, a wild glare of lightning wrenched the whole countryside into momentary view and beyond the tossing branches I saw the slanted roof, the high chimneys and the angled gables of a house.

For a moment, it was silhouetted against the livid sky, with its foreground of wildly waving branches, and then the night blotted it out once more and even the yellow gleam was hidden.

But the fleeting glimpse had been sufficient. I switched out the lights, stepped out of the car into the soggy mud, and splashed off through the downpour.

One accustomed to city life has little conception of the absolute blackness of night beneath a wet and cloudy sky; out here on this lonely road the darkness knew no degree, it was simply and utterly black. The night was full of the roaring of wind and rain, the earth and the trees and the sky became a profoundly unfathomable unity and I floundered along the road like a blind man. More than once, I wandered into the ditch, the pelting rain quickly drenched my clothes until the garments stuck clammy to my body. Worst of all, I could catch no further glimpse of the light that had gleamed to beckon me from the shelter of my stranded car.

After about five minutes of this I had just about decided to give up in disgust and make my way back to the roadster, which at least offered a dry refuge, when a violent flash of lightning abruptly revealed two huge stone

pillars at either side of a wide driveway at right angles to the road.

Clearly, the storm gods were not altogether against me. I made my way between the pillars and went up the drive, grateful for the firm gravel underfoot.

The walking was easier now. Soon I saw a light shining beyond the trees. At first I took it for the light I had seen before, but then I saw that it was moving, and in another moment the bushes flanking the drive sprang into a vivid radiance and two mammoth eyes glared suddenly from the rainswept gloom. An automobile sped toward me, with a swift crunching of gravel.

The car was travelling at a high rate of speed and as it bore down on me without slackening pace I scrambled into the undergrowth. The occupants of the car must have seen me, but the automobile did not stop; on the contrary, it seemed to leap ahead.

It was a heavy sedan, and as it swept past I had a glimpse of a dark figure crouched over the wheel. In the rear seat, someone pressed forward against the window. In the faint glow of lights on the instrument board I saw that the face was almost completely hidden by a black mask.

This astonishing circumstance had barely time to register on my mind and then the car was gone, plunging down the driveway in the rain. Its crimson tail light bobbed up and down; the beam of the head lamps illuminated the wet green trees and the white road. The car swept between the stone pillars, turned to the left and disappeared.

I felt an odd little tingling at my spine.

It seemed absurd; I told myself that I must have been mistaken, but I was certain that I had seen aright, fleeting though my glimpse of that masked head had been.

For a full minute I stood there, gazing into the blank darkness of teeming rain that had swallowed up the sinister car. There was only the howling of the wind, the threshing of the trees, the drumming of the storm. It was almost as if nothing had happened.

Puzzled and disturbed, I finally turned and went on up the drive. It wound about among

the trees and in a few minutes I came within sight of the house itself. It was a huge stone building of the type popularly described as "rambling" and, although it may have possessed a certain quaintness in daylight, just now in the pouring rain with thunder rumbling and growling overhead it was ponderous and gloomy, as forbidding as a prison. The upper floors were in darkness but a few scattered rectangles of light from the downstairs windows indicated that the occupants had not yet retired for the night.

A dim and solitary glow illuminated the front door and I ascended the steps into a small porch. The shaded lamp revealed a massive door; a brass wolf's head grinned at me from an old-fashioned knocker. I seized it and struck sharply, twice.

Silently the door swung open. But the shadowy hallway beyond the threshold was utterly deserted.

The episode of the mysterious automobile, the masked man who had peered at me in his swift passing, the generally sombre aspect of this lonely mansion and the dreariness of the dark and gusty night had combined to tighten my nerves and I admit that I gave a convulsive start when the door fell open before me before the brazen echoes of my knock had died away. And when I confronted nothing but an empty hallway, a most unpleasant shiver went over me.

However, common sense quickly asserted itself. The door had simply been left ajar and had opened before the impact. That was all.

I waited. No one came. I listened. The house was in absolute silence. Not a voice, not a footfall, not a sound of any kind.

Outside the porch, the rain streamed relentlessly.

After an interval I stepped forward, seizing the grinning wolf's head, and knocked again.

Still there was no response.

I was certain the house was occupied, else why were the lights turned on and the door unlocked? I stepped into the hall and shouted:

"Anyone home?"

No answer save the echo. I seized the knocker and raised a clamor that would have awakened a mummy. Then I called out again, and listened expectantly for some sound of movement in the depths of the house, but the silence was profound. It was more than profound—it was uncanny. There was a mysterious brooding quality to that dead stillness that plucked at my nerves. I sensed a human presence in that house and this instinctive feeling rendered the silence all the more bewildering.

Uncertainly, I waited in the gloomy hall and at last decided to stand on ceremony no longer. There was a door immediately to my right. I rapped vigorously, then opened it and entered the room beyond.

(To be continued)

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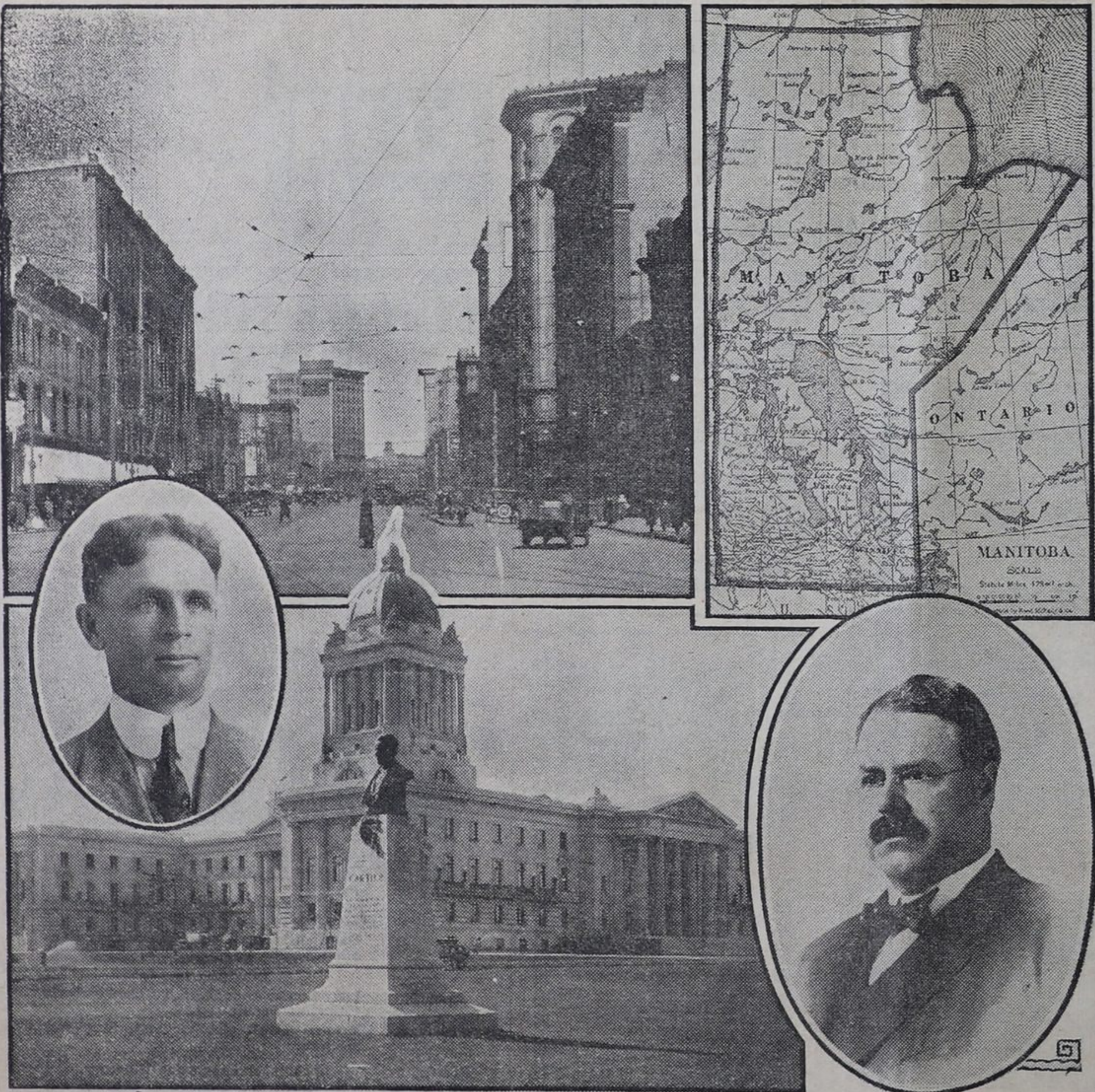
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Manitoba Celebrated Diamond Jubilee on Tuesday



The Province of Manitoba celebrated its diamond jubilee as a province of Canada on Tuesday, July 15th. Manitoba (which is derived from a Cree word meaning "The God that Speaks") was created a Province in 1870, when it consisted of only a comparatively small section of land on both sides of the Red River and had a population of about 25,000. Today Manitoba covers an area of 251,832 square miles and has a population of 638,000. Winnipeg, the capital of the province, had a population of 241 when the official census was taken in 1871. Now it is one of the most modern cities in the world with a population of over 200,000. Above (top, left), is a picture of Main Street, Winnipeg, one of the main thoroughfares of the city, while (right) is a map of the province itself as it is today. Lower, left, is a picture of Manitoba Parliament Buildings, and inset, left and right, are Hon. John Bracken, Premier of Manitoba, and His Honor J. D. McGregor, Lieutenant-Governor of the Province.

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