

The Free Press Short Story

ENTANGLING EVIDENCE

By B. M. FISHER

I AM to start a man hunt to-morrow morning. The leather features of Corporal Austin Overton were impressive as he addressed his daughter, a blue-eyed girl of twenty; but Grace knew that behind that grim mask there was suppressed excitement, perhaps pity.

"A murderer?" she questioned. Grace had asked that some day she might accompany her father into the far North on one of his frequent excursions. The idea came to her that this might be her opportunity, for she had no duties in the little Canadian village of Erdale besides keeping house for her only living parent.

"It's a strange case," declared her father, seating himself. "The case in which there is only circumstantial evidence to convict a man, and very little of that. An old trapper, Andrew Corbin, was the supposed victim. He lived alone in his cabin about two miles from the nearest neighbor. Four years ago he had a boy with him, his sister's lad. The old fellow was said to be mentally unbalanced and those who knew him admit that he treated the lad brutally. Finally, the youth, then a lad of seventeen, ran away, taking with him three hundred dollars of the old man's money.

"For a year old Corbin had the police on his trail. Finally he was caught and sentenced to a year in a reformatory. The money was never returned. Since then the trapper has lived in a sort of insane fear that the boy would come back some day to kill him. It seems to have been almost an obsession with him, that he was to die at the hands of the lad he had maltreated.

"A week ago the boy, now a young man of twenty-one, was seen in the vicinity of Kelsey, the village nearest to the old trapper's home. A few nights later old Corbin's neighbors heard three shots from the direction of the cabin, but thinking the trapper was perhaps shooting at wolves, they were not alarmed until late that night they saw a blaze. They hurried to the scene and discovered the cabin wrapped in flames and nobody near. The building burned to the ground and no trace was found of Corbin. Unfortunately it is known heavily that night, obliterating any tracks that might have been about. Now the police have been ordered out to search for the young man who is suspected of taking revenge on the trapper.

"What is the young fellow's name?" inquired Grace. "Jim Owen." The girl smothered a little cry. "Why," she exclaimed, "I knew him in Montreal. He had quite a trusted position with a firm of importers. I thought him to be a fine chap. We were only slightly acquainted, but he always seemed so clean and manly. Surely he is innocent."

Her father nodded. "Persons who know him say the same thing, but the finger of suspicion points very definitely toward him. And I am one of those selected to hunt him down."

Grace then broached the subject of accompanying her father. "I had thought of taking you with me, Grace," he said. "I believe you would be safe and you have spent enough winters in the North to be acquainted with the ways of the wilderness. I expect to make my headquarters at Springfield's cabin for the first week at least. That is not a great distance from Kelsey. You could do all the snowshoeing and hiking you wished while I was away. I would feel you were as safe there as alone here."

"So it came about that Grace went with her father into the northern wastes where the snow lay thick on the ground and the clear sky and the cold, crisp air seemed to breathe and beat in plenty. Springfield's cabin was a two-room affair, built of logs which had been notched and fitted together. For a day Grace found no difficulty in fitting in the time by setting the place to right and making as comfortable a home of it as was possible.

The next day she decided to go on a hike. Picking a lunch from the provisions which she and her father had brought with them, she set out on her snowshoes. Her father had told her to return to the village of Kelsey, twenty miles away, before her provisions ran out, and under no circumstances to worry if he did not return in a day or so. He had no idea how far into the North the trail might lead.

For the next of the morning Grace tramped steadily onward, always making sure of her direction so as to have no difficulty in returning when she wished. About noon she stopped to boil coffee and to eat her lunch; then picking up her knapsack she started out on the return journey. Long before she had reached the cabin she began to wish she had not gone so far. When she at last came in sight of the wooden structure, the afternoon had worn itself well away.

A quarter of a mile from the cabin she came to an abrupt halt. Smoke was still curling from the chimney. Her father must have returned. Did he have James Owen—the James Owen she had known—with him, or was he alone? Probably it would not be the same young

man with whom she was acquainted, she told herself. It could not be, for that youth had always appeared so fine and honest.

Another question then entered her mind. What if the present occupant of the building were not her father at all? Who then? Some wandering trapper? One of the searchers just starting out? Perhaps even the murderer himself? She went forward more cautiously, her eyes fixed upon the small window, keeping sharp watch for some sign of whom ever was within. She could detect no movement, however.

She paused before the cabin door uncertainly. Probably, she told herself, she was allowing herself to become alarmed unnecessarily. Likely her father was the only person inside; yet she gripped the shining butt of the revolver which she had taken with her as a protection against wild animals.

Inch by inch she pushed the cabin door open, waiting to hear her father's cheery word of greeting. It did not come. Primarily she threw the door wide and stepped boldly within. At the same moment she detected a dark huddled bulk on the floor a couple of feet in front of her.

She caught her breath and stepped back. There she stood waiting until she could see better. Little by little she made out the figure of a man, lying face downward, motionless. Slowly she approached and pushed him gently with the toe of her boot.

She was rewarded by hearing a wheezing cough and a low moan. The man was alive, then. Apparently however, he was either wounded or sick. Grace realized that she should not be standing there conjecturing as to his identity when the man might be suffering. Dropping on her knees she rolled him over so that he was face upward.

A low cry came from her lips as she recognized the set features, the closed eyelids. "Jim Owen!" she breathed. "The Jim Owen I knew in Montreal." The man opened his eyes, dazed blood-shot eyes. For a full minute he stared at her without recognition; then his brows took on a puzzled frown. "Grace," he murmured vaguely. "Grace—Grace Overton." He coughed violently and the girl bending over him saw blood on his lips.

"I must get you onto the bed," she said. "You're wounded."

The man shook his head. "No. Prosted lung, I think. Went bad on me two nights ago."

Laboriously the girl dragged him across the floor. After considerable effort she hoisted him onto the bed which her father had occupied. A search in the medicine kit revealed plasters already prepared, and in a few moments she had bared the man's broad chest and had applied one of them.

She then sat down near the round black stove while the sufferer gradually dozed into a needed sleep. For a long time the girl sat there, staring ahead unseeing. She had caught or, at least held in her power, the man for whom the Mounted Police were scouring the country. Could he be the murderer of the old trapper who had raised him? She was revolted at the idea.

The most vital question right now, however, was what she was to do with the man. He could not be moved in his present condition that was certain. When he grew better she would be duty bound to turn him over to the police; yet would he submit once he had regained his strength? Would not she be in danger herself?

She made up her mind to take every precaution. If she was armed and he had no weapons, she ought to be able to do what she pleased with him. At any rate, she made up her mind to relieve the fellow of any arms he might possess.

With deft, sure movements she searched his clothes while he still slept, discovering and appropriating a hunting knife and a small revolver. His rifle she had already found standing against the wall where he had placed it. Indications showed that he had evidently built the fire and moved about before collapsing on the floor where she had found him. She now turned to his pack. One by one she removed the articles it contained—a sleeping bag, some tins of provisions, a box of matches, extra pairs of socks, a shirt. All at once, then, she found herself holding a book, worn, old-looking book bound in black leather.

With fingers that almost trembled she opened it. On the flyleaf, inscribed in very faded ink, she made out the words: "To James Owen on his ninth birthday, with love, from Mother."

Grace did not know how long she stood staring at it. Slowly her fingers turned the thin, in some places smudged pages. The edges of the leaves were torn, the printing faded. For years he had been carrying that book with him, apparently. Now men were hunting him down like hounds, because they believed he was a murderer.

She turned to look at the strong features, now hot and flushed, slowly her lips twisted in a strange smile. Could a man who always carried his Bible in his pack, who had read it as much as this apparently had been read, at the same time be a murderer? No.

Unconsciously her lips formed the word. Whatever the circumstantial evidence, she felt certain that James Owen had not killed old Andrew Corbin, the mad trapper. In some way fate had entangled him in a mesh of misunderstanding. Grace made up her mind to stand by him until the end.

For two days she tended him, and still her father did not put in his appearance. On the third day the sick man showed a decided change for the better. At the end of a week he was sitting up.

Grace was faced with a new problem. Her provisions were almost gone. She and Owen would either be obliged to quit the cabin or to face starvation. She told him of the situation. "In a couple more days I'll be able to go with you," he said. "If you can spin what there is along that far everything will be all right."

"But you can't—" She stopped abruptly. Owen looked at her queerly for a moment. "I'm going to give myself up," he said. "It's no use running." He paused for a moment, then asked pointedly. "Do you think I killed old Corbin, Grace?"

She shook her head. "I don't see how you could have. But unless you have an explanation, I'm afraid the courts—" "My explanation wouldn't stand fire in the courts. Nobody would believe that I came North to pay the old man the three hundred dollars I took from him when I ran away. And they wouldn't believe that the shots that were heard were those he fired at me when I drove me away without giving me time to explain. If my cabin came to burn and where he disappeared is a mystery I cannot explain."

He gazed at the floor for a moment in silence. "I guess the only thing for me to do now is to face the music." Grace agreed to wait until Owen could go with her. Somehow she made the food that was left suffice until the ninth day. Her father was still absent. Strapping on their snowshoes the two young people set out together.

Little was said by either. Somehow Grace felt guilty in accompanying this man, whom she believed to be innocent, to what would in all probability culminate in his death. As the town grew nearer her pace became involuntarily slower.

They entered the rambling street of the village and headed toward police headquarters. A few moments later they found themselves facing the stern chief. "I am Jim Owen, accused of murdering Andy Corbin." The speaker's words were curt.

The man behind the desk eyed young Owen keenly. "Well," he observed, "we have been looking for you." He continued his scrutiny for a moment; then he barked, "Owen, will you and the Miss be seated? I have something to tell you that may be of importance. The charge against you has been withdrawn. Old Corbin was discovered by Corporal Overton hiding in a deserted mine. He was brought in this morning and has confessed that he burned his own cabin after driving you away. He seemed to think you wanted to kill him, and he has determined to get you captured and hung on circumstantial evidence so as to have you out of the way. Of course the man is insane and will be given over to an institution for the care of such people."

"The young lady, I judge, is Corporal Overton's daughter. The corporal was greatly worried when he learned you had not returned, but was so exhausted he could not go after you at once." Grace Overton suddenly found herself shaking hands very solemnly with Jas. Owen. Before her mind was the picture of a well-worn Bible.

For the House and Stable.—There is a good deal of similarity, physically speaking, between human beings and the lower animals. Both are subject to many ailments arising from inflammation and to all manner of cuts and bruises.—Dr. Thomas' Electric Oil is an entirely reliable remedy for such ailments and the misdeeds in both human beings and the lower orders of animals.

PAID CONSCIENCE MONEY FOR HAT-CHECK ERROR

A peculiar mix-up in hat checks on a passenger train some 15 years ago came to light recently when H. C. Bourlier, General Passenger Agent, Canadian National Railways, received an express order for \$3, conscience money from an unidentified person. According to the letter, the writer was travelling between London and Toronto, but his return portion of the ticket was only purchased to Hamilton. The conductor, in collecting the tickets, punched the hat-check of a fellow traveller for Toronto, but inadvertently the check was put in another man's hat. When the new conductor took over the train, the owner of the Toronto ticket moved out of the smoker; but he was able to show the return portion of his ticket from Toronto to London, so the other passenger rode between Hamilton and Toronto, free of charge. As he wrote, "So they passed me to Toronto, wondering how the mistake was made, and only recently did I find out that the error was mine." The \$3 has been credited to the "Conscience Account" of the railways. Apparently the writer has computed his own scale of compound interest on the sum owing, for the present rate one-way between Hamilton and Toronto, is \$1.35.

Goldfish Revert to Type

Goldfish which were freely introduced into Madagascar years ago with the expectation of beautifying the native waterways, have reverted to the drab gray-green livery of their ancestors. Soon after their arrival they flourished so well that they monopolized the lakes, ponds and rivers, to the extinction of the only edible fresh water fish which the islands originally contained.

Elephants Have Cushion-Fest!

A full-grown elephant weighs anything up to six tons, yet it can be as light on its feet as a dancer. When it "goes to a drinking-hole a passenger goes silently along to see if it is clear. Danger is at once signalled by a loud trumpeting. The reason why elephants are so soft-moving is because each foot ends in what is really a big cushion—a large pad consisting of a mass of fat and fibers.—Pearson's Weekly.

Dog "Smugglers" Executed

Outside of Lille, France, there is a dog cemetery filled with the ridged bodies of loyal little animals whose crime consisted of obedience to their masters, a gang of smugglers. Those dogs had to be shot, sometimes as many as 60 a month, as they incessantly tried to dash over the French-Belgian border, each with a 50-pound package of tobacco strapped to his back.—Collier's Weekly.

Franklin's Stove Among Early Similar Devices

Benjamin Franklin invented a stove in 1745. Previous to that time there had been stoves in Holland and Germany. Franklin's, however, was a great improvement over all which had preceded it. In 1771 he invented several other stoves, one for burning bituminous coal, which would consume its own smoke and had a downward draft; and another, intended for the same purpose, having a basket grate or cage, with movable bars at the top and bottom, supported by pivots at the center, and which, after being filled and kindled at the top, could be inverted and so made to burn at the base.

The next important inventor of stoves, ovens and heating and cooking apparatus was the American-born but Europeanized adventurer and scientist, Count Rumford, who between 1785 and 1795 devised several improvements intended to economize fuel and heat. Rumford's stoves for cooking purposes were lined with firebrick or soapstone and had a ventilating oven. They were introduced into America from Germany about 1798, and soon extended in popularity. Domestic products appeared in competition with them, and so the American stove industry was established.—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Cyclone, Tornado Differ; Hurricane, Typhoon, Same

A cyclone, explains a writer in the Indianapolis News, is a storm or system of winds, often violent in the tropics and moderate elsewhere, with abundant precipitation and usually a diameter of 50 to 100 miles. It moves with a velocity of 20 to 30 miles an hour and is characterized by winds rotating, often at the rate of 60 to 120 miles an hour clockwise in the southern hemisphere, counter-clockwise in the northern, about a calm center of low atmospheric pressure. It is also called hurricane in the West Indies and typhoon or baguio in the Philippine Islands and the China sea. A tornado is a whirling wind accompanied by a funnel-shaped cloud, very violent and destructive and advancing in a narrow path often for many miles over the land. It occurs in many parts of the world, but most frequently in the central Mississippi valley. The wind is too violent to be measured, and the barometric pressure falls so rapidly (though rarely more than one-tenth of its normal value) that wooden structures are often lifted and burst open by the air confined within them.

Out of Fighting Class

The American Kennel club book declares that the Kerry Blue terrier is no longer bred to be a fighting dog. The breed is listed as useful for herding sheep, exterminating vermin and retrieving game, in addition to being trusted guards and companions. The standard for the breed accents the color of the coat, a pigeon blue being preferable, and the soft, plentiful fringes which make the dog outstanding in appearance. His head is strong and well balanced, showing plenty of hair, nose black, and ears not too large and well carried. The eyes are dark or hazel, medium in size, not too full, well placed. A deep brislet, straight legs, medium length back, well placed, gaily carried tail are other points to look for. The dog stands 18 inches or so at the shoulders and weighs 33 to 37 pounds.

Cannot Talk in the Dark

Language for the present-day savage, as for his distant predecessor, consists of many gestures, grimaces and a few elementary word sounds. Even today, the African bushman utilizes sign language to such an extent that he is practically unintelligible in the dark to his fellow tribesmen. The Hubed of the Island of Fernando Po are unable to speak to one another after twilight. The Fans of West Africa utilize an expression which says, "Let us go to the fire to talk it over," when darkness appears.—Jacob H. Conn in the Forum and Century.

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CHINESE MAKE SHOES FROM OLD AUTO TIRES

Many a Chinese farmer and coolie walks around in shoes the soles of which have covered many miles before they were worn by him. Old automobile tires that have been discarded are imported from Los Angeles and San Francisco, and, on arrival in China, coolie labor makes a very cheap type of shoe sole from the walls of the tires. Heavy truck and bus tires are not suitable for this trade. And now inquiries have been made as to possible sources of supply of old worn-out automobile tires from Canada, a firm in Shanghai being desirous of obtaining supplies from Canada, according to the Industrial Department of the Canadian National Railways.

THE INDICATOR

Moos—That bell at the end of your typewriter, Miss Jones. Miss Jones—Yes, sir. Moos—Well, it isn't there to remind you to powder your nose.

Excellent for Croupy Children.—When a child is suffering with croup, it is a good plan to use Dr. Thomas' Electric Oil. It reduces the inflammation and loosens the phlegm giving speedy relief to the little sufferer. It is equally reliable for sore throat and chest, carache, rheumatic pains, cuts, bruises and sprains. Dr. Thomas' Electric Oil is regarded by many thousands as an indispensable of the family medicine chest.

GREATER HEIGHTS

Probably it is not too much to say that the commonplace village would be an Athens if all its capacities which now lie fallow had been rightly directed. At least it may be said that there are people in every village who might rise to greater heights of intellectual power and moral character if they developed in the right direction those capacities which God has given them. They might not be able to equal Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle, in mental attainments, but they might make an attempt to pick out a worthy goal and work toward it. Beyond a doubt we fall to rise to the spiritual heights more because of lack of direction than because of lack of energy.

HIS WISH

Critic—The trouble with the churches to-day is they have too much Liberalism in them. Church Deacon—I wish it was shown more in our collections.

IT-EM-ME

A western bookseller wrote a Chicago firm asking for a dozen copies of Canon Farrar's "Soaker After God." He received this reply by wire: "No soakers after God in Chicago or New York. Try Philadelphia."

What is not even when placed on ice? Mustard.

AHEM!

The professor and a student were discussing peculiarities of English speech. Said the former: "Now, sugar is the only word beginning with an s which has the sound of h between the s and u." "Are you sure?" returned the student.

What has an eye, but yet cannot see? A needle.

Careless WITH COLDS YOU CAN'T BE Careless WITH COLDS A cold is an insidious infection. Common sense dictates you treat it as such. There is nothing better you can take than Groves' Bromo Quinine. Groves' does the four necessary things: Opens the bowels, combats cold germs and fever, relieves headache and "gritty" feeling, tones up the system. Buy Groves' at your nearest druggist. They're in a white box. 57

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