

BLACKSHEEP!

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INTRODUCTION

Archibald Bennett, wealthy bachelor, travels constantly in the interest of his health. He meets Isabel Perry, who recommends a life of crime, adventure, romance and excitement as a cure for his nerves. Archie goes to Bailey Harbor to investigate a summer house for his sister. A heavy storm forces him to spend the night there. During the night he is awakened by footsteps, and in an encounter with the intruder, who sees Archie's figure reflected in the mirror and shoots. Archie fires in return, wounding the intruder, who makes his escape. Archie plans flight to evade publicity. He starts cross-country afoot in the night. At dawn he is stopped on a lonely country road by "The Governor," master-mind criminal who mistakes him for a fellow criminal. Archie, fleeing, is afraid to tell the truth—falls in with "The Governor," is whisked across country in a stolen car. Sees story in newspaper of killing at Bailey Harbor and, frightened, he decides to say nothing but stick with his strange friend and await developments. At Cornford, N. H., Archie comes upon Isabel Perry at the hotel desk but she refuses to recognize him. The Governor, by a clever plan, switches stolen money for good money. Archie used as decoy—making love to niece of agent sent to meet eccentric Congdon here next day. Archie and the Governor drive away without creating suspicion and speed across state to deliver the \$80,000 to train-robber Leary at Walker's farm, where Archie gets new insight into workings of the crime world. At the first opportunity Walker's daughter appeals to Archie to help her elope with a young farmer. He decides to assist, cutting away from the Governor and taking the couple across state in a wild night ride. Seeing Sally onto the train—he is rewarded with a fond farewell kiss—and returns to find Isabel had witnessed the whole scene. Isabel is not pleased at meeting Archie again and accuses him of spying on her. She tells him that if he really shot Putney Congdon as he claims, he has ruined everything. Archie returns to the hotel greatly mystified. Next morning the Governor arrives—explains to Archie that he has aided Sallie to marry a notorious diamond thief—and that Sallie had deceived him concerning the whole affair.

They proceed to New York to the Governor's home, where they are visited by the Governor's sister, Julia explains to Archie that her brother is passing through a strange phase—caused by a cruel shock some time before. Now read on:

CHAPTER V.

When the Governor reappeared Julia and Archie were seemingly in the midst of a leisurely discussion of the drama. Later, when they were again alone for a few moments, she slipped a sealed envelope in to his hands.

"If anything should happen to him I should like to know. It was understood between us when he called me by telephone this morning that I was not to hint in any way as to his identity, or mine, for that matter, and I shall not break faith with him. I trust you completely. I shall be at that address until the first of October. You can wire me in any emergency."

Shortly after, she took her leave. Archie learned from Baring, who brought up his breakfast, that the Governor had left the house, and would hardly return before six.

Later he chose a stick with care from a rack at the front door, walked to the Avenue and turned determinedly cityward, walking jauntily. He grinned as he saw seated in the upper window of the most conservative club one of his several prosperous uncles, and having sufficiently exposed himself to the eyes of the world he determined to eat luncheon in the park restaurant. He watched idly a young woman with two children who occupied a table directly in his line of vision. Children always interested him, and the boy was a handsome little fellow, but it was the girl who held Archie's attention, with a perplexed sense that he has seen her before. The fine oval face, the eyes dancing with merriment, sent his thoughts flying to Bailey Harbor.

He continued to inspect them with a deepening conviction that the woman was Mrs. Congdon. It was a dispiriting thought that there under his eyes, so close that the babble of the children occasionally reached him across the intervening tables, was the family of the man he had shot.

The Congdons had eaten their meal hurriedly and were already paying their check. He watched them move away toward the interior of the park,

marked their direction and chose a parallel course with a view to keeping them in sight.

Then a piercing scream, the shrill cry of a child in terror. "Help! help! Oh! Edith! Edith!" The cries sent him at a run toward the place in which he left the Congdons.

Rounding a curve in the path he saw a man rushing down the road with Edith in his arms.

Archie redoubled his pace, passed Mrs. Congdon and gained the car as the man with the child in his arms, jumped into it. The car was moving rapidly and a man's voice bade the driver hurry. Within the child's screams were suddenly stifled, the door swung open for an instant, and a blow, delivered full in the face, sent Archie reeling into the road.

When he gained his feet, Mrs. Congdon stood beside him moaning and wringing her hand. A mounted policeman rode upon the scene, listened for an instant to Archie's explanations, and, sounding his whistle, set off after the car at a gallop.

Mrs. Congdon had fainted. Archie's nose bled from the rap in the face and his back ached where he had struck the earth. The sergeant plied him with questions which he answered carefully. When his name was asked he answered promptly.

"John B. Wright, Boston; stopping at the Hotel Ganymede."
"Business?"
"Broker, Nanonet building, Boston."

Mrs. Congdon had recovered sufficiently to tell her story, and to Archie's relief corroborated his own version in a manner to dispose of any question as to his innocence. Her composure struck Archie as remarkable and her replies to the officer's questions were brief and exact. To Archie's surprise, she gave her name as:

"Mrs. George W. Kendall, 117 East Corning street, Brooklyn."

It was incredible that any one could lie with so convincing an air. He was satisfied that she was Mrs. Congdon, and that the child she had called Edith was the original of the photograph he had seen at Bailey Harbor. When the owners of several machines had offered to take her home, she glanced about uncertainly and her eyes falling upon him seemed to invite his assistance.

"Pardon me, but if I can serve you in any way—"

"Thank you," she said with relief. "I must get away from this; it's unbearable."

He put her and the boy into a taxi, and instructed the driver, to go to Brooklyn.

For a few minutes she was busy comforting the child, and Archie, deep in thought, turned to meet the searching gaze of her gray eyes.

"You are a gentleman; I am sure of that; and I feel that I can trust you. I am in a strange predicament, and I'm forced to ask your help. The name and address I gave the police are fictitious. I know it has a queer look; but I had to do it. I know perfectly well who carried away my little girl. The man and woman you saw in the car were servants employed by my father-in-law who cordially dislikes me."

"Of course, I'm not going to Brooklyn. Please tell the man to drive to the Altmere, ladies' entrance. I'll walk through the main door and take another taxi. I'm only sorry your name had to be brought into it."

"You needn't bother about that at all," Archie replied with a reassuring smile. "The name and address I gave were both false."

He looked at her covertly and they laughed with the mirth of children planning mischief in secret.

"You are not apprehensive about her?"

"The little girl," he ventured, "Not in the slightest. My father-in-law is most disagreeably eccentric, but he is very fond of my children. It was quite like him to attempt to carry off the little girl, always a particular pet of his. I was shocked of course, when it happened. But I am not worried. I meant to put the children quite out of my husband's way. It's rather odd, as I think of it, that my husband didn't personally try to take the child from me."

This, uttered musingly, gave Archie a perturbed moment. But the car had reached the Altmere, and he lifted out the boy and accompanied them to the door.

"Thank you, very much," she said, in a tone that dismissed him.

CHAPTER VI

Refreshed by a nap and a shower, Archie was dressed and waiting for the Governor at seven, who arrived a few minutes later.

"Here's an extra I picked up downtown. The scream of the evening is

a kidnapping—most deplorable line of business."

While Archie waited for the Governor to dress, he carefully read the account of the kidnapping in the park. The police had not yet learned that the two most important witnesses had given fictitious names.

In spite of the Governor's frequent assertion that he wished to know nothing about him, Archie felt strongly impelled to make a clean breast of the Bailey Harbor affair, the two encounters with Isabel, and his meeting with Mrs. Congdon. His resolution strengthened when the Governor appeared, dressed with his usual care and exhilarated by his day's adventures. Baring retired after the dinner had been served, and the Governor, in cozy accord with his cigar, remarked suddenly:

"Odd, you might almost say singular! I've crossed old man Congdon's trail again! You recall him—the old boy we left to the tender mercies of Seebrook and Walters? Well, I met today one of the most remarkable of all the men I know who camp outside the pale. Perky is his name—a jeweler by trade,—he fell from his high estate and went on the road as a yegg—then entered into the game of boring neat holes in the rim of twenty dollar gold pieces, leaving only the outer shell and filling 'em up with a composition he invented that made the coin ring like a marriage bell. While he was still experimenting he ran into old Eliphalet sitting with his famous umbrella on a bench in Boston Common. Perky thought Eliphalet was a stool pigeon for a con outfit, but explanations followed and it was a case of infatuation on both sides. The old man was as tickled with the scheme as a boy with a new dog. He now assists Perky to circulate the spurious medium of exchange. Perky says he's a wonderful ally, endowed with all the qualities of a first class crook."

"You'll appreciate that better," said Archie, "when you hear what I know about the Congdon family. You've been mighty decent in not pressing me for any account of myself, but you've got to hear my story now. We'll probably both be more comfortable if I don't tell you my name, but you shall have that, too, if you care for it. So many things have happened since I left Bailey Harbor that you don't know about, things that I haven't dared tell you, that I'm going to spout it all now and here. If you want to chuck me when you've heard it, well enough; but I don't mind saying that to part with you would hurt me terribly. I never felt so dependent on any man as I do on you; and I've grown mighty fond of you, old man."

"Thank you, lad," said the Governor.

He listened patiently, nodding occasionally or throwing in a question. When Archie finished he rose and clapped him on the shoulder.

"By Jove, you've tossed my stars around like so many dice! I've got to consult the oracles immediately."

He darted from the room, and when Archie reached his study the Governor was poring over a map of the heavens.

"Your Isabel's all tangled up in our affairs!" declared the Governor with mock resentment. She will dawn upon your gaze again very soon—I feel it coming. Our next move is outlined—we must go to Rochester."

"Would you mind telling me just what Rochester has to do with all this?" demanded Archie testily.

"My dear boy, Rochester is one of the suburbs of Paradise. You may recall that I told you of a certain tile in a summer house where my adored promised to leave a message for me if her heart softened or she needed me. Well, the secret post office is at Rochester; there the incomparable visits her aunt and about this time of year she's likely to be there. And if you knew the way of the stars and could understand my calculations you'd see that your Isabel is likely to have some business in that neighborhood just now."

"Rubbish! I happen to know that her business was all to be in northern Michigan this summer. Your stars have certainly made a monkey of you, this time! You talk like a nonsense book! How much luggage are we taking?"

The Governor rang for Timmons to do their packing and fell upon a time table.

They wrote themselves down on the hotel register at Rochester as Sausbury and Comly and were quickly in the rooms the Governor had engaged by wire. A short time later Archie found himself whisked away to a handsome residential area where the Governor dismissed the

driver at a corner and continued afoot for several blocks.

The Governor ran his stick along the top of a wall that grimly guarded the rest of the premises. He caught the edge and was quickly on top. When Archie hung back the Governor grasped him by the arms and swung him up and dropped him into a dark corner of the garden. Then he left him with the injunction to remain where he was.

"Archie! Oh Archie!" the Governor whispered excitedly, brushing an envelope across the bewildered Archie's face. "Strike a match before I perish."

He tore open the envelope and his fingers trembled as he held the note to the light. He read the two sheets to himself eagerly; then demanded a second match and read aloud:

"If this reaches you, remain near at hand until I can see you. Please understand that I promise nothing,

but it is very possible that you may be able to serve me. My aunt is giving a party for me Thursday night. I must leave it to you as to how best to arrange for a short interview the day following. A very dear friend needs help. The matter is urgent."

The match curled and fell upon Archie's fingers. A tense silence lay upon the garden. The Governor clasped Archie's hand tightly.

"It has come as I always knew it would come! And something tells me I am near the end. Even with all my faith, boy, it's staggering. And this is the very night of the dance."

"It's about time for us to clear out," Archie remarked.

"What! Leave this sacred soil when she's here? Not on your life, Archie! I shall not leave till I've had speech with her. The festal occasion offers an ideal opportunity

for the meeting! It's going to be a big affair and we can merge with the happy throng and trust to our wits to get us out alive."

He urged Archie, still resisting, through the grounds to the front entrance, where they were admitted with several other guests who arrived at the moment. The stately old lady in the drawing room lifted a lorgnette as they approached, smiled affably and gave the Governor her hand.

"Mr. Lindsay, my friend, Mr. Comly. He arrived unexpectedly an hour ago and I thought you wouldn't mind my bringing him along."

"I should have been displeased if you had hesitated a moment—any friend of yours, you know!"

Other arrivals facilitated their escape, and they stepped into the conservatory the music ceased and there was a flutter as the dancers sought Continued on page 6

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