

BLACKSHEEP!

By Meredith Nicholson

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INTRODUCTION

Isabel Perry recommends a life of crime, adventure, romance and excitement as a cure for Archibald Bennett's nerves. Archie goes to Bailey Harbor to investigate a house for his sister—and spends the night in the empty house. He is awakened by footsteps during the night; the intruder fires at him and misses. Archie fires in return. He doesn't know whether he has killed or only wounded the man, but fearing the publicity plans to make his escape. In his flight he meets "The Governor"—a master-mind criminal who mistakes him for a fellow criminal. Archie, afraid to tell the truth, falls in with "The Governor." A series of events lead him to believe he has shot Putney Congdon—the owner of the house. They proceeded to New York where they are visited by Julia, the Governor's sister. Archie promises her he will stick with the Governor through the strange phase she claims is passing through. While strolling in the park, Archie sees Mrs. Congdon with her two children, and is witness to the kidnapping of the little girl, Edith. He learns from the Governor that the father-in-law of Mrs. Congdon—a very wealthy man—is engaged in the circulation of counterfeit twenty-dollar gold pieces. They go to Rochester, where the Governor receives a letter from Ruth, the girl he loves, in which she tells him that he may be able to serve her.

At a dance at Ruth's home Archie meets Isabel and they are reconciled. Archie and the Governor promise to find Edith Congdon and whisk her away to Isabel's camp. They secure work on Eliphalet Congdon's farm, where Edith has been taken. They learn that Putney Congdon—the man Archie shot—is also there. While Archie is teaching Edith to ride the Governor kidnaps her.

At the same moment Edith jumped into the Governor's car, two men sprung out of the second car and rushed at Archie. One of them flung a carriage-rope over his head and twisted it around his throat—then gathered him up, head and heels, and tossed him over the fence. The two cars were enveloped in a cloud of dust when Archie, tearing the blanket from his head rose to confront the screaming woman. She berated him roughly for his stupidity while he attempted to explain.

"I had better run to the house and telephone to the Tiffin police," he suggested.

To his infinite surprise she declared in alarm that this must not be done; she would go herself and tell the child's father what had occurred and let him deal with the matter.

"Don't talk about this—do you understand? You're not to say a word about it! I'll fix the foreman; all you've got to do is to keep your mouth shut."

Three days in the harvest field brought Archie to a new respect for his daily bread. He found joy in the discovery that he had strength to throw into the scale against man's necessities. He was taking a holiday from life itself, and he was content to hide his time until the vacation ended. He was passing through an ordeal and if he emerged alive he would be a wiser and better man.

Gossip from the farmhouse reached him at the back door and he was alert for any sign that Putney Congdon meditated leaving. Eliphalet had not returned—this he got direct from Grubbs, who poured out confidences freely as they smoked together after twilight supper.

"I got it through the kitchen that the old man's son is going to clear out tonight. Orders were sent to have a machine ready to take him to town at eleven o'clock. Telegram phoned out this evening made 'im jump out o' bed, they say, and he's off for some-where tonight."

Archie cautiously changed the subject, but he was already planning his departure. The Governor had hidden him fellow Congdon and here were his marching orders. The only thing that recalled him to the unattractive task was the assurance that Congdon would set out at once for Hunt O' Dreams Camp, where Isabel presumably was now established. At the first opportunity he left Grubbs, and started for town.

Reaching town with an hour to spare, he got his bag from the station and bought a ticket. He spent half an hour at a hotel cleaning up and changing to the clothing he had discarded at Cleveland.

Grubbs carried Putney's luggage across the platform, passing Archie without a sign of recognition. He was followed by a tall man in a gray suit whose left arm was supported by a stick. Grubbs took hasty leave and the two travelers were left alone.

"A warm night," Congdon remarked. "No red caps here, I suppose."

"I fancy not," Archie replied. "I'll be glad to help you with your bags."

"Oh, thank you! I have a game shoulder, nearly well now, but it gives me a twinge occasionally."

A blast from the locomotive and a humming of the rails woke the station to life. Archie grabbed the larger of Congdon's bags and led the way toward a voice bawling, "Chicago sleeper." Congdon showing his ticket for lower three and climbed in.

"I've got the upper half of the section," said Archie, "but I promise not to be a nuisance to you."

The glint of pain in Congdon's eyes sent a wave of remorse through Archie's soul. Congdon bore his affliction manfully. As he played nervously with his watch chain, he inspected Archie with quick, furtive glances.

"I'm all banged up—nerves shot to pieces," he said abruptly, turning his gaze intently upon Archie.

"That's tough. Used to be troubled a good deal myself."

Congdon drew out his watch, said that he had been sleeping badly and hated to go to bed. He sat erect and tried to reach his coat pocket. His face twitched with the pain of the effort.

"I had a bottle of dope I'm supposed to take to help me sleep; must have left it in my bag. Will you poke the button, please?"

"Can't I get it for you?" Archie asked.

"You are very kind. It's the small satchel—a bottle about as long as your hand."

Opening the bag in Congdon's berth Archie's hand fell upon a photograph that lay on top. The face swam before his eyes and he pitched forward in his agitation, bumping his head viciously against the window. It was a photograph of Isabel Perry. He groped for the bottle and crept back to the smoking compartment.

Congdon, the custodian of a photograph of Isabel Perry, demanded a more careful inspection, and Archie studied him with renewed interest. Isabel was hardly a girl to bestow her photograph upon a married man. Congdon had no business with the photograph and Archie bitterly resented its presence in the man's luggage. He jumped when Congdon announced that he was ready to turn in, followed him to the berth, and helped him to undress.

"Whistle if you need anything in the night," said Archie, and allowed the porter to push him into the upper berth—the first he had ever occupied.

When they were aroused by the porter he helped Congdon into his clothes, chose a clean shirt for him and laughingly offered to shave him.

"You're a mighty good fellow! It's about time I was introducing myself. My name is Congdon. I live in New York; just taking a little trip for my health. Going up into the lakes."

"Comly's my name. No particular 'ans myself. Just knocking about a bit."

By the time Archie had made his toilet they were running into the Chicago station.

"Suppose we have breakfast in the station restaurant?" And see here, old man; I don't want to force myself on you, but if a poor neurasthenic won't bore you too much I wish you'd let me tag you till my train leaves tonight. I hate to be alone."

They not only breakfasted together, but after motoring through the parks they spent an hour at an art institute and then Archie acted as host to luncheon. By this time Archie was fully committed to the further journey into Michigan. On a bench in Grant Park Congdon avung himself into a confidential attitude.

"Life's the devil's own business," he said with a sigh. "I've got to a place where I don't care what happens—everything black anywhere I look. I was happily married; two beautiful children; none finer,—but I'll shorten up the story so you can see what a monkey fate has made of me. My father's a crank, a genius in his way, but decidedly eccentric. My mother died when I was a youngster, and father tried all sorts of schemes of educating me, whimsical notions, one after another. The result was I've never got a look in anywhere; wait for everything. After I married he still tried to hold the rein on me, wanted to put me into business; I hated and kept meddling with my domestic affairs. All this made me weak and irresolute."

"Well, sir, I was about to offer myself as exhibit A on a slab in the nearest morgue," Congdon continued, "when I met a young woman who seemed to understand me, and right there's where I made the greatest mistake of my life. She made a fool of me—that's the short of it. I took her in to dinner at the house of some friends right here in Chicago—and

she diagnosed my case with marvelous penetration. She said I faced life with the soul of a coward, and suggested that I go armed and shoot anyone who stepped on my toes. She recited a piece of verse to the effect that a man fears his fate too much if he won't put his life to the test."

"I was fool enough to believe it. I tried to follow her advice. It ended in my having a row with my father that beat all the other rows I ever had with him and he turned against my wife—said she was trying to estrange us. And when I ran away to escape from the nasty mess he sent her telegrams in my name threatening to kidnap the children and he did in fact kidnap my little daughter. Snatched her away from her mother and carried her out to one of his farms in Ohio. But my wife played a clever trick on the old gentleman and got the child back again and I'm damned glad of it. I got a message that the little girl is up in Michigan, so that's really where I'm headed for."

Archie had suffered a blow but he was meeting it bravely. Having believed that Isabel had given him this same advice quite spontaneously, it was with a shock that he realized that she had offered it in similar terms to Congdon. There was no question as to the identity of the girl—who had hidden Congdon plant his back to the wall and defy the world; no one but Isabel would ever have done that.

"About your child, up there in Michigan," said Archie, "it's wholly possible that your wife sent you the wire as an approach to a reconciliation."

"Oh, Lord, no! You don't know my wife, Comly. You see I got answers to the telegrams father sent her in my name and she hit right back at me! Don't think she's coaxing me to come back to her. And here's the message I got out there in Ohio that caused me to jump for the train."

He produced from his pocket a crumpled telegram which read: "Your daughter is in safe hands at Huddleston, Michigan. Proceed to that point with serenity and contemplate the stars with a tranquil spirit."

This was so clearly the Governor's work that Archie found it difficult to refrain from laughing.

"You may think it queer that I set off," Congdon remarked, "on the strength of a message like that. But ever since that girl told me I oughtn't to hesitate when I heard the bugle I can't resist the temptation to act on the spur of the moment. I'm a fool, I suppose. Tell me I'm a fool, Comly."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. There's always the chance that the girl had sized you up right and gave you sound advice. Don't answer if you don't want to, but have you really done anything you wouldn't have done if that girl hadn't told you to step on the world a little harder?"

Congdon's free hand worked convulsively; he bent closer to Archie and whispered:

"I've killed a man!"

"You murdered a man!" Archie gasped.

"Not a question about it, my dear fellow! It was up at my house on the Maine Shore. After father had driven my wife away I went there to look at the ruins of my home. I was mooning through the house when I ran into a burglar. The scoundrel had gone to bed in the guest room. I was scared to death when I opened the door and spotted him but I thought of that girl's advice and pulled my gun and shot him. As I ran down the stairway he took a shot at me; that's what's the matter with my shoulder."

"Well, I'd say you're out of it easy. Of course you didn't kill him or he wouldn't have been able to wound you."

"But you see he didn't die immediately, but crawled off and breathed his life out in some lonely place. It's horrible! The thing will hang over me till I die! If you say I ought to go to Maine and surrender myself I'll do it."

"Most certainly not!" cried Archie with mournful recollection of his own speculations on the same point in the hours when he believed that he himself was responsible for Hoky's death.

Congdon rose and suggested a walk to freshen them up before train time. "I thank God I fell in with you," he said with feeling. "Just talking to you has helped me a whole lot."

CHAPTER VIII
They breathed deep of the tonic air of the North as they left the train at Huddleston.

As they approached the hotel a man emerged and crossed the street. Archie identified him at once as Red Leary, to whom the Governor had delivered the stolen money at Walker's farm. Leary made no sign of ever having seen Archie before but picked

(Continued on page 6)

INFORMATION ABOUT EMPLOYING MINORS RESTRICTIONS ANNOUNCED

Bulletin Sets Forth Specifically How and When Children May Be Hired to Work in State

For better information of employers, Director George B. Arnold, Department of Labor, has issued a bulletin more specifically setting forth when a minor may be illegally employed in the state of Illinois.

This bulletin warns that most employment, outside of agriculture and domestic service, is forbidden to all children under 14 years of age, whether during the school term or the vacation period, and whether full time or after school hours.

Restrictions Announced
The statement of Director Arnold warns a child is illegally employed in the state of Illinois:

When he is under 14 years of age and is working in any of the employments covered by the Child Labor Law.

When he has passed his 14th birthday but is under 16 years of age and has not obtained an employment certificate as provided by law.

When he is under 16 years of age and if, even though he has obtained a certificate, he works more than eight hours in any one day, or more than six days in any one week, or more than forty-eight hours in any one week, or if he works before 7:00 a. m. or after 7:00 p. m.

When he is under 16 years of age and when, even though he has a certificate, he is permitted to work at occupations specified in Section 10 of the Child Labor law.

When he is under 16 years of age and is employed "in any capacity whatever in any employment that the Department of Labor finds to be dangerous to their (minors) lives or limbs or where their health may be injured or morals depraved."

If, when he is under 14 years of age, and, under the provisions of Section 1, is allowed to do voluntary work of a temporary or harmless character during school vacation, he works more than eight hours in any one day or more than six days in any one week, or before 7:00 a. m. or after 7:00 p. m. No certificate is required for this sort of work, but the employer to be safe, should never hire a child under 14 years of age without a ruling from the Factory Inspection division.

One thing that it generally pays to put off till tomorrow is a visit to the bootlegger.

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