

BLACKSHEEP!

By Meredith Nicholson

Illustrations by Henry Jay Lee



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The Governor quickly recovered his spirits and with characteristic enthusiasm began putting the new launch through its paces. When he found that Putney was skilled in the handling of such craft he cheerfully turned the launch over to him.

"You take it and run up to Calderville, where you'd better get supper. Pick up the Heart O' Dreams' mail and bring it back to Huddleston, and meet us on the wharf at nightfall. We've got a heavy night's work ahead of us. Archie and I are going to board the tug to study your father's case carefully. You may rely upon us to extricate him from his embarrassments."

As they boarded the Arthur B. Grover, the Governor bade Archie follow him to the bow where Eliphalet was moodily gazing into the water.

"Mr. Congdon," the Governor began, "as a mere looker-on at the passing show I'm persuaded that you're not getting much out of life."

"What I do or do not do," cried the old man, "is none of your infernal business."

"An error of considerable magnitude. I am qualified to offer you excellent advice based on exact information as to your intimate domestic affairs. You're a meddlesome person, Mr. Congdon, with a slight element of cruelty in your makeup, and morally you are skidding. As a result of your miserly ways and your selfishness you've just about ruined your life. The penitentiary yawns for you. But in spite of your cowardly conduct I'm rather disposed to pull you out of the hole."

"I'll make you a proposition. I've heard that you make a habit of carrying your will around in that umbrella. Give me the thing!"

Eliphalet hesitated, but the Governor gently pried it from the old man's fingers. It was a heavy, bulgy, disreputable looking umbrella with a battered curved handle. The Governor opened it, shook out a number of manilla envelopes, all carefully sealed, and flung the umbrella from him. As it struck the water it spread open and the wind seized it and bore it gaily away. The Governor watched for a moment — then began opening the envelopes and scanning the contents.

"It's evident from the dates of these wills that you've been steadily cutting down the amount of your bequest to your son," the Governor was saying. "Watch me, Archie, so you can bear witness to the destruction of these things; they're all going to feed the fishes except this earliest one, which divides the property in generous lumps between Putney Congdon and his children, with a handsome personal recognition of Mrs. Congdon. That shall be preserved."

"Now, Mr. Congdon, if you will promise me never to make another will without consulting me, but will let this one stand, and if you agree not to interfere any further with your son's family or his wife or his children, I'll guarantee that in due season you'll leave this tug a free man."

"I promise," said the old man steadily, and his face expressed infinite relief. The pathos of the weakened little figure now stripped of its arrogance, and the assertion of a long-latent kindness in his countenance, encouraged the hope that happier times were in store for all the Congdons.

The Governor and Archie were waiting on the Huddleston wharf when Putney and Leary returned from Calderville, bringing two sacks of Heart o' Dreams mail.

"That's fine," said the Governor. "Archie, you and Leary, take the launch and carry the mail over to Heart o' Dreams. At twelve o'clock meet me about a quarter of a mile this side of Carey's barricade; Leary's got the place spotted so he can find it in the dark."

"I have a surprise for you," said Ruth, when Archie handed over the mail. "If you will step to the door, and bear left ten yards and stop by the bench under our tallest pine tree, some one you pretend to like rather particularly may appear."

"Isabel!" he exclaimed as she came toward him out of the shadows and paused by the bench.

"I haven't yet had the opportunity to say how happy I am that you are able to be up. I'm grateful for this glimpse of you. It's always just glimpses. But those glimpses do funny things to my heart."

"That heart of yours! How did it ever manage to survive the strain and excitement of last night?"

"Oh, it functioned splendidly. But it was at work in a good cause. I love you, Isabel, I love!" he said softly.

"You must never say that to me again," she said slowly and determinedly.

edly. "After my stupid, cruel thoughtlessness you must hate me. I've had time to do a good deal of thinking, and my opinion of myself isn't very high. Out of sheer contrariness that night in Washington I teased you into doing many things that led you into danger — and the danger is still about us. I'm sorry; with all my heart I'm sorry! If anything should happen to you it would be my fault — my very grievous sin! And may be there are other men that I may have said similar things to — oh, you were not the first!" she laughed forlornly. "They, too, may have plunged into the same pit I dug for you. Oh, how foolish I've been!"

"I want you to promise," she was saying, "that you won't in any way interfere with my cousin here. I can't have you taking further risks."

"You would have us run just as the game grows interesting. Of course we're not going to quit the field and leave that fellow here to annoy you! He's a dangerous character and we're going to get rid of him."

She was depressed, much as Ruth had been a few hours earlier, and his efforts to win her to a happier frame of mind were unavailing.

She jumped up quickly and hurried away, her head bowed. He watched her until she was swallowed up in the darkness.

Shortly before midnight Archie and Leary left the Arthur B. Grover and paddled cautiously toward the point fixed by the Governor for their rendezvous. They were fortified with a rifle, a shotgun, and several packets of rockets for signalling the tug. Leary, restless because he couldn't smoke, was silent. He managed his paddle so deftly that there was hardly a drip that could announce their proximity to anyone lying in wait on the bay. Several minutes before Archie caught the listless wash of calm waters on a beach. Leary heard it and paused, peering at the opaque curtain of the woodland beyond the lighter shadow of the shore.

"We struck it right," he announced, returning from an examination of the shore markings. They carried the canoe into the wood and lay down beside it, communicating in whispers.

An instant later the Governor threw himself on the ground beside them. He rested for a few moments — then jumped up.

"Well boys, everything's ready!" One by one his little army assembled, rising from the ground like spectres. Leary was already deploying the men. The Governor laid his hand on Archie's shoulder. In the contact something passed between them, such a communication as does not often pass from the heart of one man to another.

"If it comes to the worst for me, you and Isabel will look out for Ruth. I needn't ask you that. Use the tug quickly to clear things up here; there must be nothing left to tell the tale. See old man Congdon keeps his promise. That will of his is in my blue serge coat in the closet of my room. If I die, bury me on the spot, no foolishness about that. I died to the world seven years tonight, so a second departure will call for no flowers!"

When they reached the little stream that defined the boundary of Heart o' Dreams territory the Governor, Archie and Leary got in readiness for their dash across the bridge and over the barricade. The purr of water eager for its entrance in the bay struck upon Archie's ear with a spiteful insistence. There was not a sound from the further side of the stream. They crawled across the bridge and Archie ran his hand over the frame of logs against which stones had been heaped in a rough wall, as the Governor explained to him. Archie had determined to lead assault, but while he was seeking a footing in the crevices the Governor swung himself to the top. His foot struck a stone perched on the edge and it rolled down into the camp with a great clatter.

As though it had touched a trigger, a shotgun boomed upon the night, indicating that Carey had not been caught napping. Orders given in a shrill voice and the answering shouts proclaimed the marshalling of his forces. Archie and Leary reached the Governor he was crawling over the stones. Some one threw a shovelful of ashes upon a heap of wood that evidently had been soaked in inflammable oil, for the flames rose a roar.

It may have been that Carey had grown wary of murder as a means of gaining his end after the escape of the previous night, for the first move of his men was to attempt to drive out the invaders with rifles swung as clubs. Carey screamed at them hysterically, urging them to greater efforts.

The great bonfire kept the belligerents constantly in sight of each other sulking, dodging, engaging in individual encounters poorly calculated bring victory to either side. One of Carey's men lay near the barricade, insensible from a crack over the head from a rifle butt. His plight was causing uneasiness among his comrades, who began drawing back toward the shadows. Carey, seeing that their pluck was ebbing, cursed them.

"We ain't gettin' anywhere!" growled Leary at the end of a third inconclusive hand-to-hand struggle with only a few battered heads as the result.

"There's gold for all of you!" screamed Carey to his men, and urged them to another attack.

They advanced again, but Archie was quick to see that they came into the light reluctantly and precipitated themselves half-heartedly into the struggle. The Governor, too, was aware of their diminished spirit and got his men in line for a charge.

"We'll clean them up this time, boy!" he called encouragingly.

He took the lead, walking forward calmly, and in a low tone pointing out the individual that each should attack. The quiet orderliness of the movement, or perhaps it was a sense of impending defeat roused Carey to a greater fury than he had yet shown. As the invaders broke line for the assault, he leaped at the Governor and swung at him viciously with a rifle. The governor sprang side and the gun slipped from Carey's hand and clattered against the barricade.

Angered by his failure, and finding his men yielding, Carey abruptly changed his tactics. He ran back beyond the roaring fire and caught up another rifle. Leary began circling around the flame in the hope of grappling with him, but he was too late. Without taking time for aim, Carey leveled the weapon and fired through the flames.

Archie, struggling with a big woodsman, beat him down and turned as the shot rang out. The Governor was standing apart, oddly and strangely alone it seemed to Archie, and he was an eternity falling. He raised himself slightly, carrying his rifle high above his head, and his face was uplifted as though in that supreme moment he invoked the stars of dreams. Then he pitched forward and lay very still.

Carey's shot seemed to have broken the tacit truce against a resort to arms. There was a sharp fullscale as the belligerents sought cover. The men who had been left outside now leaped over the barricade. The appearance of reinforcements either frightened Carey or the success of his shot had awakened a new rage in his crazed mind, for he emptied his rifle, firing wildly as he danced with a fantastic step toward the prone figure of the Governor.

Carey now seemed oblivious to everything that was happening about him as he continued his dance of triumph. In the midst of this weird performance, suddenly widening the circumference of his operations, he

stumbled. As he reeled, Archie rushed in, gripping his throat and falling upon him.

The breath went out of the man as he struck the ground, and Archie jumped up and left him to Congdon and Leary.

Perky was beside the Governor tearing open his shirt which was already crimson from a fast-flowing wound.

"He's hurt bad; it's the end of him!" muttered the old man hopelessly.

"There nothing to be done here," said Archie. "We must cross to Huddleston as quickly as possible."

At Carey's downfall his men fled through the woods, pursued by the Governor's party. Perky seized the rockets and touched one after the other to the flames of the bonfire. The answering signal rose from the bay.

"The tug's moving up," said Perky.

A thousand and one things flitted through Archie's mind. The Governor had not opened his eyes; his breath came in gasps, at long painful intervals. To summon aid through the usual channels would be to invite a scrutiny of their operations that could only lead to complications with the law and a resulting publicity that was to be avoided at any hazard. It was hardly fair to call upon the young woman physician at Heart o' Dreams, and yet this was the only safe move. While Perky and Leary were fashioning a litter for the Gov-

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