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Tangled Trails

—BY WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE

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CHAPTER XV.—(Cont'd.)

James Cunningham met Rose with a suave courtesy, but with reserve. Like his brother he knew of only one subject about which the sister of Esther McLean would want to talk with him. Did she intend to be reasonable? Would she accept a monetary settlement and avoid publicity that could only hurt her sister as well as the reputation of the name of Cunningham? Or did she mean to try to impose impossible conditions? How much did she know and how much guess? Until he discovered that he meant to play his cards close.

Characteristically, Rose came directly to the point after the first few words of introduction.

"You know my sister, Esther McLean, a stenographer of your uncle?" she asked.

The girl was standing. She had declined a chair. She stood straight-backed as an Indian, carrying her head with fine spirit. Her eyes attacked the oil broker, would not yield a thousandth part of an inch to his impassivity.

"I—I have met her," he answered. "You know . . . about her trouble?" "Yes. My cousin mentioned it. We—my brother and I—greatly regret it. Anything in reason that we can do we shall, of course, hold ourselves bound for."

He flashed a glance at Jack who murmured a hurried agreement. The younger man's eyes were busy examining a calendar on the wall.

"I didn't come to see you about that now," the young woman went on, cheeks flushed, but chin held high. "Nor would I care to express my opinion of the . . . the creature who could take advantage of such a girl's love. I intend to see justice is done my sister, as far as it can now be done. But not to-day. First, I'm here to ask you if you're friends of Kirby Lane. Do you believe he killed his uncle?"

"No," replied James promptly. "I am quite sure he didn't kill him. I am trying to get him out on bond. Any sum that is asked I'll sign for."

"Then I want to tell you something you don't know. The testimony showed that Kirby went to his uncle's apartment about 9.20 and left nearly an hour later. That isn't true."

"How do you know it isn't?" "Because I was there myself part of the time."

Jack stared at her in blank dismay. Astonishment looked at her, too, from the older brother's eyes.

"You were in my uncle's apartment—on the night of the murder?" James said at last.

"I was. I came to Denver to see him—to get justice for my sister. I didn't intend to let the villain escape scot free for what he had done."

"Pardon me," interrupted Jack, and the girl noticed his voice had a queer note of anxiety in it. "Did your sister ever tell you that my uncle was responsible for—?" He left the sentence in air.

"No, she won't talk yet. I don't know why. But I found a note signed with his initials. He's the man. I know that."

James looked at his brother. "I think we may take that for granted, Jack. We'll accept such responsibilities on us as it involves. Perhaps you'd better not interrupt Miss McLean till she has finished her story."

"I made an appointment with him after I had tried all day to get him on the phone or to see him. That was Thursday, the day I reached town."

"He was in Colorado Springs all that day," explained James.

"Yes, he told me so when I reached him finally at the City Club. He didn't want to see me, but I wouldn't let him off till he agreed. So he told me to come to the Paradox and he would give me ten minutes. He told me not to come till nearly ten, as he would be busy. I think he hoped that by putting it so late and at his rooms he would deter me from coming. But I intended to see him. He couldn't get away from me so easily as that. I went."

Jack moistened his dry lips. His debonair ease had quite vanished. "When did you go?"

"It was quite a little past a quarter to ten when I reached his rooms."

"Did you meet any one going up or coming down?" asked James.

"A man and a woman passed me on the stairs."

"A man and a woman," repeated

Jack, almost in a whisper. His attitude was tense. His eyes burned with excitement.

"Was it light enough to tell who they were?" James asked. His cold eyes did not lift from her until she answered.

"No. It was entirely dark. The woman was on the other side of the man. I wouldn't have been sure she was a woman except for the rustle of her skirts and the perfume."

"Sure it wasn't the perfume you use yourself that you smelled?"

"I don't use any." "You stick to it that you met a man and a woman, but couldn't possibly recognize either of them," James Cunningham said, still looking straight at her.

She hesitated an instant. Somehow she did not like the way he put this. "Yes," she said steadily.

"You didn't take the elevator up, then?"

"No. I'm not used to automatic elevators. I rang when I got to the door. Nobody answered, but the door was wide open. I rang again, then went in and switched on the light. There didn't seem to be anybody in. I didn't feel right about it. I wanted to go. But I wouldn't because I thought maybe he—your uncle—was trying to dodge me. I looked into the bedroom. He wasn't there. So after a little I went to a door into another room that was shut and knocked on it. I don't know why I opened it when no answer came. Something seemed to move my hand to the knob. I switched the light on there."

"Yes?" James asked, gently. The girl gulped. She made a weak, small gesture with her hand, as though to push from her mind the horrible sight her eyes had looked upon. "He was dead, in the chair, tied to it. I think I screamed. I'm not sure. But I switched off the light and shut the door. My knees were weak, and I felt awfully queer in the head. I was crazy to get away from the place, but I couldn't seem to have the power to move. I leaned against the door, weak and limp as a small puppy. Then I heard some one comin' up the stairs, and I knew I mustn't be caught there. I switched off the lights just as some one came to the landing outside."

"Who was it? Did he come in?" asked Jack.

"He rang and knocked two or three times. Then he came in. I was standing by the table with my hand on some kind of heavy metal paperweight. His hand was groping for the light switch. I could tell that. He must have heard me, for he called out, 'Who's there?' In the darkness there I was horribly frightened. He might be the murderer come back. If not, of course he'd think I had done it. So I tried to slip by him. He jumped at me and caught me by the hand. I pulled away from him and hit hard at his face. The paper-weight was still in my hand and he went down just as though a hammer had hit him. I ran out of the room, downstairs, and out into the street."

"Without meeting anybody?" "Yes."

"You don't know who it was you struck?" "Unless it was Kirby."

"Jove! That explains the bruise on his chin," Jack cried out. "Why didn't he tell us that?"

The color flushed the young woman's cheeks. "We're friends, he and I. If he guessed I was the one that struck him he wouldn't tell."

"How would he guess it?" asked James.

"He knew I meant to see your uncle—meant to make him do justice to Esther. I suppose I'd made wild threats. Besides, I left my glove there—on the table, I think. I'd taken it off with some notion of writing a note telling your uncle I had been there and that he had to see me next day."

"The police didn't find a woman's glove in the room, did they?" James asked his brother.

"Didn't hear of it if they did," Jack replied.

"That's it, you see," explained Rose. "Kirby would know my glove. It was a small riding-gauntlet with a rose embroidered on it. He probably took it with him when he left. He kept still about the whole thing because I was the woman and he was afraid of gettin' me into trouble."

"Sounds reasonable," agreed James.

"That's how it was. Kirbys a good friend. He'd never tell on me if they hanged him for it."

"They won't do that, Miss McLean," the older brother assured her. "We're going to find out who did this thing. Kirby and I have shaken hands on that. But about your story. I don't quite see how we're going to use it. We must protect your sister, too, as well as my cousin. If we go to the police with your evidence and ask them to release Kirby, they'll want to arrest you."

"I know," she nodded wisely, "and of course they'd find out about Esther then and the papers would get it and scatter the story everywhere."

"Exactly. We must protect her first. Kirby wouldn't want anything done that would hurt her. Suppose we put it up to him and see what he wants to do."

"But we can't have him kept in jail," she protested.

"I'll get him out on bond; if not to-day, to-morrow."

"Well," she agreed reluctantly. "If that's the best we can do."

Rose would have liked to have paid back Kirby's generosity in kind. If her sister had not been a factor of the equation she would have gone straight to the police with her story and suffered arrest gladly to help her friend. But the circumstances did not permit a heroic gesture. She had to take and not give.

(To be continued.)



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Up Against It. Mosquito—"Come on, fellows. There is the fellow in there that slapped my child last night!"

Knew His Business.

The elevator boy was green at the job. Two passengers, a man and a woman, got on at the street floor. "Ninth," said the latter, once they were fairly started. "Sixth," said the man. The car sped by the sixth floor and stopped at the ninth. On the way back the man said: "Why in thunder didn't you stop at the sixth floor? The sixth is lower than the ninth." "I know that," said the elevator boy, "but the lady said 'Ninth' first."

Our Complete Debt.

Teacher—"We borrowed our numerals from the Arabs, our calendar from the Romans, and our banking from the Italians. Can any one think of any other examples?" Willie Willis—"Our lawn-mower from the Smiths, our snow-shovel from the Joneses, and our baby-carriage from the Bumps."

Australia furnishes the bulk of the world's supply of pearls.

Minard's Liniment Heals Cuts.

ISSUE No. 43—23.

Changing Insects' Heads.

Marvels of surgery achieved in the animal and insect world are described by Mr. E. J. Boulenger, one of the curators of the London Zoo, who has been watching experiments at Vienna.

Experiments were made with two kinds of English water-beetle, the hydrophilus and the dytiscus, both of which are found in stagnant pools and slow-running streams.

The operation consisted of decapitating the insect and cementing another head on to its truncated body by the exuding fluid.

After the operation had been performed, dytiscus bodies were found swimming about the aquaria with hydrophilus heads, and vice versa.

Then followed a startling revelation in insect psychology—if such a thing exists. When a male head was put on a female body the beetle became male in instinct and made love to normal females. But when a female head was stuck on a male body the male stopped courting and became passive.

The experimenters also restored sight to a blind frog by grafting into the eye socket the living eye of another frog.



Didn't Know the Brand.

Old Sport (trying to ring in)—"I see this ozone is putting a fine tint on that pretty cheek of yours!"

Saleslady (at the shore)—"This ain't 'Ozone,' old dear—it's called the 'Bloom of Youth.'"

THOSE USEFUL CLOTHESPINS.

When it is desired to strain any hot liquid such as jolly, cottage cheese, soup or starch through a cloth, pin the cloth to the top of the receptacle which is to contain the liquid with ordinary clothespins. This will not only make the work easier, but will prove a safeguard against scalding.

Next to theology, the thing dearest to the heart of a Scotsman is money. —Sir Robert Horne.

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Fruit and Vegetable Growing—January 21st - February 2nd.

Floriculture and Landscape Gardening—Feb. 4th - Feb. 16th.

Dairy Courses:

Course for Factory Cheese and Buttermakers — January 2nd - March 14th.

Cow-Testing—Jan. 7th - Jan. 19th.

Farm Dairy—Jan. 21st - Feb. 2nd.

Factory Milk and Cream Testing, including Factory Management

and Accounts—Feb. 4 - Feb. 16.

Market Milk, including Mechanical Refrigeration—Feb. 18 - March 1.

Condensed and Powdered Milk—March 3rd - March 15th.

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These courses are planned to meet the requirements of farmers, farmers' sons, dairymen, poultrymen, bee-keepers and horticulturists who may be able to leave home for but a short period during the winter months.

All courses are free, with the exception of the dairy courses, for which a small registration fee is charged.

A charge from the home surroundings, meeting other people interested in the things in which you are interested, exchange of experience and the acquisition of knowledge, will do you good.

Plan to attend some course that appeals to you. Reduced rates on railways. Write for booklet describing the courses and ask for railway certificates.

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