

The Robbers of Markham Swamp

The following story is founded on fact and as the author aptly said "everyone in this part of the country who is not deaf has heard of the gang at Markham Swamp." The story was first published in 1886. It will run as a continued story in The Liberal.

SYNOPSIS

The story starts about eighty years ago in a small village near the town of Little York. Mr. Roland Gray is fleeing for his life as the result of having shot Mr. Ham in a duel caused by the affection each has for Miss Astor who lives with her father. Gray is captured by the chief of the robbers of Markham Swamp. While held captive he learns of the evil doings of each member of the gang. In the previous chapter he hears how one under the assumed name of Rev. Mr. Jonas preaches every Sunday in a nearby church as well as performing a minister's duties during the week. While doing this he steals, commits murder or carries off to the swamp any one he may choose. Nancy also begins to tell Gray her life history before being taken captive.

beautiful eye, and that dare-devil step and bearing. Many times again we met; frequently in the meadows when the gloaming came; and often in my father's orchard.

"He declared in burning words his love for me and asked me if I would become his wife. I consented. Then I bade him ask my father's sanction; but this he wouldn't listen to. He said that our wedding would have to be kept a profound secret; and asked if I knew any clergyman upon whom I might rely to perform the ceremony. I knew that it would be useless to apply to the Episcopalian minister who preached once a month in the district church, for he and my father were the closest friends. But Mr. Wyman, a Baptist missionary with whose family I was very intimate, contrary to my father's commands, I felt sure would not refuse. I had an interview and he consented to wed me to my darling.

"In a little while it was accomplished; and writing a letter wherein I stated what had happened, and telling how I loved my husband, I laid it upon my father's desk and went away.

My husband took me into another county and provided for my comforts at a little rustic hotel. I should have been supremely happy but that he was obliged to be the greater portion of the time absent upon business, concerning which he would not give me the faintest clue. I noticed, too, that he always came at night and went away before dawn; and that he always seemed afraid of something and of everybody. Sometimes it ran through my mind that my husband's reason was not sound; a suspicion that some act of good judgment on clever reasoning would soon dispel. But his long and frequent periods of absence soon became intolerable and I told him that to take me with him he must; that I was prepared to share labor, and travel and storm with him.

"If you do not take me with you," I said one day, after he had been absent for a fortnight, "I shall go home again and never permit you to see me more!" I knew he understood that I would keep my word. He was very much agitated and he said to me:

"Since you desire it I will take you with me. When I take you there you shall see more of me than you have since we were wedded. But hearken to what I say; I would as lief carry you to the churchyard as to the abode which is mostly mine."

"I was wayward and declared that I cared for nothing provided that I were with him. One evening he came and bade me to make ready. He had a pair of horses outside, and across the back of his own steed my clothes, which he stowed in sacks were put. For hours and hours through the night we rode and when the faintest tinge of silver showed in the east we were on the edge of this hateful swamp. From that day to this I have never left it."

"And what became of your husband?"

"Later on you shall hear. When I discovered who my husband's associates were, what he himself was, shame and despair entered my heart. I uttered no complaint but tearlessly resigned myself to my doom. The revelation, of course, instantly crushed the love out of my heart for the man who had betrayed me. Six months later he was shot by a farmer while committing a burglary. I shed no tears when I heard the tidings; nor have I enquired where they buried him."

"Whence came your husband?"

"He was a gentleman and possessed many accomplishments. At the gameable he squandered a handsome fortune; and he then committed forgery. He fled from justice and fell in with the gang of Markham Swamp."

"And how has your lot been since then?" A flush came into her cheeks.

"Not indeed as you surmise. Oh, no; fallen though I am by mating myself with murderers, I have in one respect naught that can bring reproach. Shortly after the death of my husband, the robber chief offered to wed me. His offer I refused; and it has never since been made. To shield myself from advances of the rest I have permitted the odious ruffian Murrey to pay court to me. He is my constant persecutor; and he is persistently urging that I marry him, that vile man Jud Sykes to perform the ceremony. I promised, at the last, to wed him in May of the coming spring; but I shudder to think of his violence now that you have come amongst us."

"Why should that make any difference?"

"Oh he is deadly jealous of you; because he thinks I prefer you to himself. I fear him on your account as well as upon my own. Be assured that he will never forgive you for last evening. But," she exclaimed, start-

ing up, "we had better try of some fish, or grandmother will suspect that I have been blabbing."

"Why should we not go to the pond? The captain says that there are plenty of fishes there."

"Do not speak of it," she said with a shudder. "Ah, those dark waters have many secrets. I am afraid to tell you; the very bushes about us seem to have ears."

CHAPTER VII

Robbers At Home And Abroad

"Do not be afraid," Roland replied. "I am certain that there is nobody within earshot."

"Ah! well, those dark waters have closed over many an unhappy head, even since my entry into this hell of crime."

"The Lifter told me of the minister's fate."

"I am thinking now of a young girl who was once like myself. She was the daughter of a wealthy farmer, beautiful and gifted. The horrible chief saw her one day riding past the swamp, and the sight of her filled him with a hideous desire. When she next rode that way he sprang out of the bush and seized her and then dragged her almost lifeless to his lair. Ah, my God, how my heart went out in pity for that sweet young creature, but what could I do. The villain had his way; and all night long his victim wailed in a way to melt a heart of stone. They became alarmed at her constant crying; and one dreary night the old woman and Silent Poll dragged her to the edge of the pond. Tying a stone to her neck they threw her in. She lies there, pointing to a steep part of the bank; and the water is three fathoms deep."

"But she is not the only victim. At a class-leader's house Jud Sykes made the acquaintance of a beautiful girl of eighteen. On a certain Saturday afternoon Marguerite, for that was the girl's name, set out, on foot from her own house, to pass the Sunday with her aunt. The Rev. Mr. Jonas, who had spent the preceding night at her father's house, was aware of the visit; and he was posted in the bush close to the road-side as the girl

came along. "Good afternoon, Miss Marguerite," he exclaimed; "I was gathering these beautiful wild flowers, and heard a step. Guess my surprise, my pleasant surprise, at seeing you my dear. How bountiful God is to give us all these beautiful wild sprays of beauty! Do you know my dear that I think I get half my inspiration from the flowers; not so much from those which we pamper in our gardens, as from those which grow wild, sweet places with only his hand to tend them."

"How beautiful your ideas always are," the poor girl said, as she looked admiringly at her gifted and pious friend.

"Ah, my child I am but a very unworthy instrument in God's hand. But come with me into this sombre wood—you have a full hour to spare—and we shall find a bouquet for your good aunt. Give her my blessing when you see her. This way, my dear Marguerite; this way. If we could reach a beautiful lake which lies about a mile distant through this wood I think that I could find some lilies there—some, sisters for you. When first I saw you, my dear Marguerite, you reminded me of a lily."

"The poor girl blushed deeply" deeply at these compliments; and she thought that it was so good of this gifted man to bestow them upon a poor simple girl like herself.

(To Be Continued)

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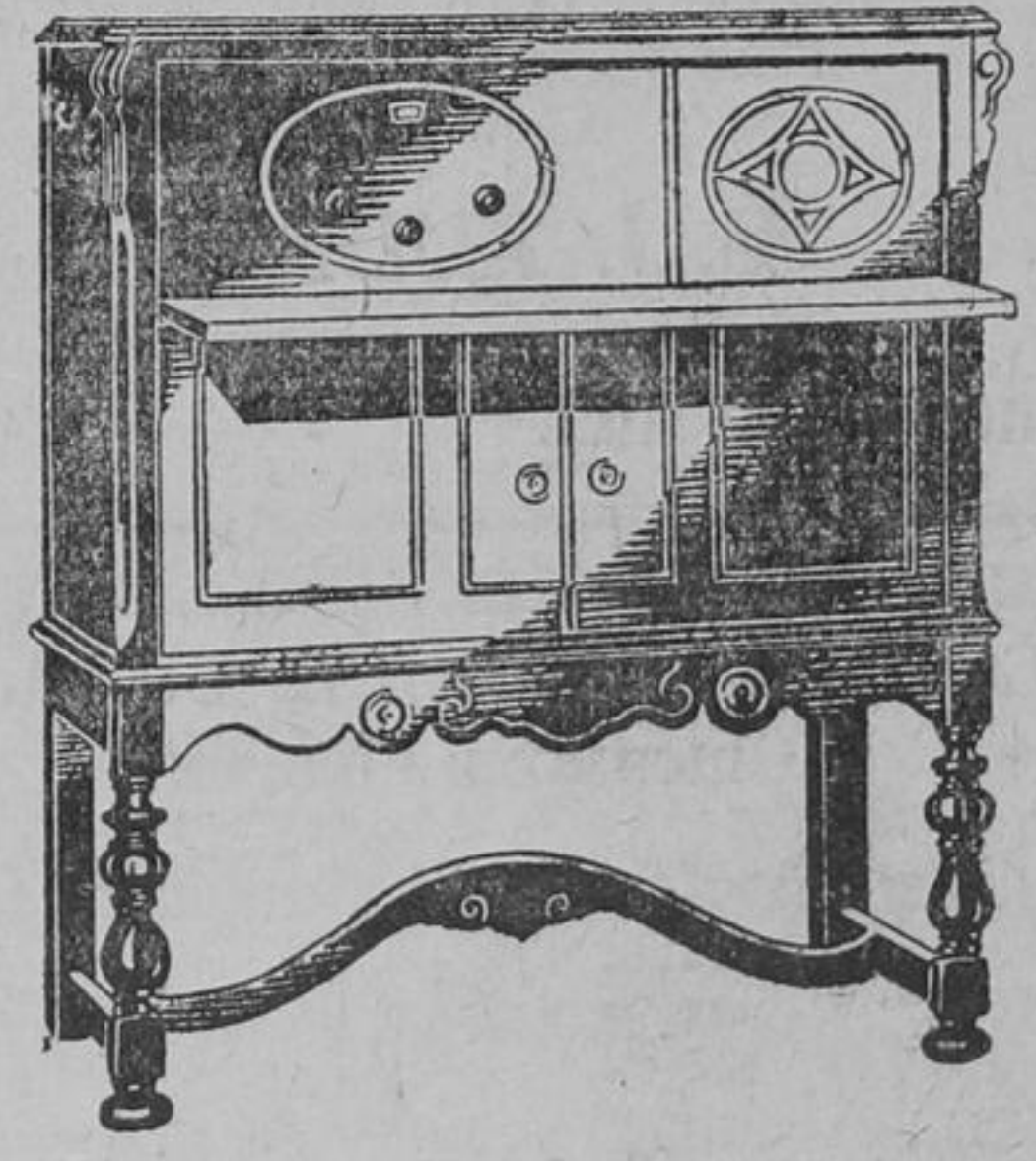
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