

# 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. She warns him against Silent Poll and Joe who are his deadly enemies but Gray has no fear. He learns that The Lifter is his friend. This strengthens the hope he has of securing his own and Nancy's escape from the den in the near future. He tells Nancy of his plan and a new light comes into her life as a result of the utter faith Gray has in her.

"Oh, I thought I was dreamer. I warned you; if I didn't she would have crushed in your head. I knew she was contemplating some harm. Where is she now?" Roland related all that had happened; and The Lifter seemed to be more his friend than ever. After Roland and Nancy had bound up his wounds he crept into the tunnel and went into his bed. Silent Poll returned with a scowling face when the old woman whom she had dosed with brandy, went to sleep, and resumed her yarn balling. Roland lay upon the ground and read. When Poll had finished her thread she descended the cavern, and Roland and Nancy were left to themselves.

"Suppose we go now and explore the tunnel Nancy; I am anxious to see the extent of this retreat of murder and crime."

"We can descend by a hole close to the tallest of those three pines yonder," she said as she seized a small coil of rope and led the way. Having fastened the rope around the trunk of the pine she said:

"We descend by this. I go first; and I shall tell you to come when I am down." In a second she disappeared; presently he heard her telling him to come. The sensation, as he descended into the pitch dark cavern, was not an agreeable one; but when his feet touched bottom Nancy took him by the hand.

"We go this way; presently your eyes will be of some use," she had spoken the truth. After our hero was a few minutes underground the walls, roof and floor of the tunnel became fairly visible. As for the floor it was hard and level, the flood having carried all the turf and earth away, leaving the rock bare. Here and there a mass of turf and clay had fallen from above, almost impeding the progress of the explorers; and Roland was well aware that the peril of walking through the place was not small.

When the river sank into the swamp, it did not take a straight course for the lake but wound now to the right and again to the left, according to the solidity of the ground. In addition to these sinuosities there were several pockets or alcoves along the tunnel as if the stream had here found a passage for a short way, and was then obliged to recede. The walls were oozy, and little rivulets trickled through, and went rippling over the floor of the passage.

"A short distance from the dwelling," Nancy explained, "a dam has been put before this stream and it runs through a channel which they cut for it into Silent Lake."

The two explorers now reached

a point well lighted and turning up his eyes Roland observed a number of holes in the roofing.

"Ah; this is a treacherous spot," "Yes; and from here nearly to the end of the passage the roof is much like that. It was all along here that the men who came into the bush fell through; and as they fell the old woman, Poll and the Lifter despatched them with clubs. Did you never wonder why we are risky enough to light fires by night and assemble by day on the open ground?"

"I have thought that the risk was great, indeed; but I had no way of accounting for it."

"Well it is impossible for anyone to approach without having to cross the tunnel at its dangerous part. Why, the very day before you came amongst us, some young man, after woodcock in the swamp, strayed down this way, saw water glimmering beyond him and walked towards it. He fell through, sir, at this very place. His leg was broken by the fall, and he moaned very loudly. Charge of the tunnel and all that it may catch has from the first been held by the old woman; and either she or Poll passes through it every day. The poor sportsman was found by the old woman; and when she appeared he was astonished and besought her assistance. But her reply was made with that very same iron poker with which she attempted your life to-day. Silent Poll and The Lifter afterwards dragged the body to the pond. How my heart ached as I heard the dog of the poor young fellow whine as he went about the wood seeking for its master. The Captain sent The Lifter out to fetch the animal in, but the poor brute seemed to know that harm was intended, and it went back further into the bush. All night it cried there but at sunrise Murrey crept out with a long barrelled gun and shot it."

They had now reached the extremity of the tunnel, and Nancy suggested that they hasten back. Above all other things we must prevent them from surmising that there is any friendship or understanding between us," Nancy said, "and the only way it can be done is by your pretending to hold me in the same sort of cold contempt as you bestow upon Silent Poll. You must impress them with the belief that you look upon me as an abandoned woman and a murderess. My part shall be to show sympathy to the old woman in to-day's offence, and to denounce you. I shall speak of you to Murrey as well as to the woman as a desperado. In doing this I shall serve the double end of blinding their eyes, and of making them fear your arm." To this plan Roland cordially agreed, and the two returned to the robber's lair.

## CHAPTER IX

Discipline And Other Incidents. On the morning after the foregoing occurrence breakfast was taken at the usual hour. All the robbers were present; and the Rev. Mr. Jonas thanked God for the repast and begged that his brethren would be given strength from above to carry on the good work in which they had engaged.

The old woman had taken her place at the head of the table, and upon her hands and face were many plasters. The face of the captain was as dark as night and he did not for many minutes speak to anybody. At last, when the meal was nearly ended, he fixed his fierce eyes upon Roland.

"Those whose hearts are too craven he said, "to go out for adventure among men, like to amuse themselves by assailing old women."

"She may thank the fiend who presides over her destiny that she came off so easily," Roland replied with the most consummate coolness.

"But the fact remains," sneered the chief, "that while you are afraid to face men, you wreak your vengeance upon an old woman."

"If you were not what you are, a despicable villain, I should open this discussion by saying that you are a liar. I will merely say that at all events, I am not afraid to meet you now or any other time, here or any other where." The effects of this daring speech was much the same as if a thunderbolt had fallen out of the heavens among the party. As Roland concluded he rose from the table

and placed his back against the bluff face of the boulder. The chief did not reply or make any demonstration of violence as they all evidently imagined that he would. Murrey looked meaningly at his captain; and then rushing from the table, approached our hero. He had his hand in his hip pocket, and there was a gleam of brutal ferocity in his face. Roland immediately drew his pistol.

"Ruffian," he cried, "I am always prepared. If you make one step further you fall where you stand. I am not afraid of you nor of your captain, nor of any one or of all, your bloody band. I seek no quarrel with anybody; my great wish is to avoid quarrel; but as you choose, one and all to insult me, and to attempt my life, this is my only course." The robber was dumfounded but he was speedily recalled to his senses by his chief.

"We will deal with this fellow some other time. I have a different matter on hand now. Take this rope and fasten an end of it to his arm," pointing to The Lifter.

The poor wretch knew that some horrible punishment was in store for him, and his face grew deadly pale. Otherwise he showed no sign of terror.

Murrey fastened the cord, securely, as directed, and stood awaiting further instructions. But the chief had a lecture to deliver before he gave the order; and this was the lecture:

(To Be Continued)

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## MAPLE

A bazaar under the auspices of the W. A. of St. Stephen's Church will be held in the Masonic Hall on Saturday of this week at 6.30 p.m. There will be a sale of fancy goods, home-made candy, home-baking, ice cream and cake, also a fish pond.

Last Friday evening Mr. B Ireland took a bus load of the people of the village of Fisherville, where they spent a very pleasant time at the home of Mr. and Mrs. T. A. Reid. The monthly meeting of the Women's Institute will be held at the home of Mrs. T. A. Cousins, on Wednesday afternoon, December 8.

The sabbath school class of Mrs. J. Routley was entertained in the school room of the United Church last Friday evening. George Lloyd had the misfortune to break a small bone in one of his limbs, last week by a fall. He is progressing favorably.

Mr. and Mrs. S. D. Roberts, Mr. and Mrs. T. McBride and little daughter of Toronto spent part of Sunday at Mr. J. T. Saigeon's.

## BUTTONVILLE

Although the night was stormy a large number attended the dance held in the hall, November 26.

The next dance will take place in the hall, December 9.

Mr. and Mrs. R. Brillinger spent the week-end at the home of his parents at Newmarket.

Mrs. C. Burr held a quilting bee on Thursday afternoon. A number of the ladies of the village were present.

Mr. F. Stephenson is slowly recovering from a bad cold.

Buttonville School held their return spelling match at Gormley school on Friday afternoon. Gormley school was again declared the winner.

The school concert will be held on Tuesday evening, December 21 and the Church concert will take place the following evening, December 22.

The Young People held their regular meeting, Sunday evening. The subject "Poets" proved to be very interesting and profitable.

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