



CROOKED TRAILS AND STRAIGHT By William MacLeod Raine

CHAPTER IV.

Two Hats on a Rack.

One casual remark of Mackenzie had given Kate a clew. Even before she had explained it, Curly caught the point and began to dig for the truth.

In the morning he and Kate had a talk with his uncle on the subject. Not content with this, he made the whole party adjourn to the club rooms so that he might see exactly where Luck had sat and the different places the sheepman had stood from the time he entered until the poker players left.

Together Billie Mackenzie and Alec Flandrau dramatized the scene for the young people. Mac personated the sheepman, came into the room, hung up his hat, lounged over to the poker table, said his little piece as well as he could remember it, and passed into the next room.

Flandrau, senior, taking the role of Cullison, presently got up, lifted his hat from the rack, and went to the door.

With excitement trembling in her voice, the girl asked an eager question. "Were their hats side by side like that on adjoining pegs?"

"That's how I remember it." "Both gray hats?" Curly cut in. "Can't be sure of that. Luck's was gray all right."

Curly looked at Kate and nodded. "I reckon we know how Cass got Mr. Cullison's hat. It was left on the rack."

"How do you mean?" his uncle asked. "Don't you see?" the girl explained, her eyes shining with excitement.

"Father took the wrong hat. You know how absent-minded he is sometimes."

Mackenzie slapped his knee. "I'll bet a stack of blues you've guessed it." "There's a way to make sure," Curly said. "Fendrick couldn't wear Mr. Cullison's hat around without the risk of someone remembering it later. What would he do then?"

Kate beamed. "Buy another at the nearest store."

"That would be my guess. And the nearest store is the New York emporium. We've got to find out whether he did buy one there on Tuesday some time after nine o'clock in the morning."

The girl's eyes were sparkling. She bustled with businesslike energy. "I'll go and ask right away."

"Don't you think we'd better let Uncle Alec find out? He's not so likely to stir up curiosity," Curly suggested.

Within a quarter of an hour Alec Flandrau joined the others at the hotel. "You kids are right at the head of the class in the detective game. Cass bought a brown hat, about 9:30 in the morning. Paid five dollars for it. Wouldn't let them deliver the old one but took it with him in a paper sack."

With her lieutenants flanking her Kate went straight to the office of the sheriff. Bolt heard the story out and considered it thoughtfully.

"You win, Miss Cullison. You haven't proved Fendrick caused your father's disappearance by foul play, and you haven't proved he committed the robbery. Point of fact I don't think he did either one. But it certainly looks like he may possibly have manufactured evidence."

Curly snorted scornfully. "You're letting your friend down easy, Mr. Bolt. By his own story he was on the ground a minute after the robbery took place. How do you know he wasn't there a minute before? For if he didn't know the holdup was going to occur why'd he bring Mr. Cullison's hat with him punctured so neatly with bullet holes?"

"Hold your haves a while, Flandrau, and look at this thing reasonable. You're all prejudiced for Cullison and against Fendrick. Talk about evidence! There's ten times as much against your friend as there is against Cass."

the hills it would only be serving notice that we were getting warm. No, I'm for a still hunt. Let Cass ride around and meet his partners in this deal. We'll keep an eye on him, all right."

"Maybe you're right," Kate admitted with a sigh.

Sheriff Bolt, though a politician, was an honest man. It troubled him that Cullison's friends believed him to be a partisan in a matter of this sort. For which reason he met more than half way Curly's overtures. Young Flandrau was in the office of the sheriff a good deal, because he wanted to keep informed of any new developments in the W. & S. robbery case.

It was on one of those occasions that Bolt tossed across to him a letter he had just opened.

"I've been getting letters from the village cutup or from some crank, I don't know which. Here's a sample."

The envelope, addressed evidently in a disguised hand, contained one sheet of paper. Upon this was lettered roughly, "PLAY THE JACK OF HEARTS."

Flandrau looked up with a suggestion of eagerness in his eyes. "What do you reckon it means?" he asked.

"Search me. Like as not it don't mean a thing. The others had just as much sense as that one. I chucked them into the waste-paper basket. One came by the morning mail yesterday and one by the afternoon. I'm no mind reader, and I've got no time to guess fool puzzles."

Curly emptied the basket on the floor and went over its contents carefully. He found three communications

from the unknown writer. Each of them was printed by hand on a sheet of cheap lined paper torn from a scratch pad. He smoothed them out and put them side by side on the table. This was what he read:

"HEARTS ARE TRUMPS." "WHEN IN DOUBT PLAY TRUMPS." "PLAY TRUMPS NOW."

There was only the one line to each message, and all of them were plainly in the same hand. He could make out only one thing, that someone was trying to give the sheriff information in a guarded way.

It was still puzzling over the thing when a boy came with a special delivery letter for the sheriff. Bolt glanced at it and handed the note to Curly.

"Another billy doo from my anxious friend."

This time the sender had been in too much of a hurry to print the words. They were written in a stiff hand by some uneducated person. "THE JACK OF TRUMPS, TODAY."

"Mama if I keep these?" Curly asked.

"Take 'em along."

Flandrau strolled back to town along El Molino street and down Main. He had just crossed the old Spanish plaza when his absorbed gaze fell on a sign that brought him up short. In front of a cigar store stretched across the sidewalk a painted picture of a Jack of hearts. The same name was on the window.

Fifty yards behind him was the Silver Dollar saloon, where Luck Cullison had last been seen on his way to the Del Mar one hundred and fifty yards in front of him. Somewhere within that distance of two hundred yards the owner of the Circle C had vanished from the sight of men. The evidence showed he had not reached the hotel, for a cattle buyer had been waiting there to talk with him. His testimony, as well as that of the hotel clerk, was positive.

Could this little store, the Jack of Hearts, be the central point of the mystery? In his search for information Curly had already been in it, had

bought a cigar, and had stopped to talk with Mrs. Wylie, the proprietor. She was a washed-out little woman who had once been pretty. She had protested with absurd earnestness that she had seen nothing of Mr. Cullison. A single glance had been enough to dismiss her from any possible suspicion.

Now Curly stepped in a second time. The frightened gaze of Mrs. Wylie fastened upon him instantly. He observed that her hand moved instinctively to her heart. Beyond question she was in fear. A flash of light clarified his mind. She was a conspirator, but an unwilling one. Possibly she might be the author of the anonymous warnings sent Bolt.

The young vaquero subscribed for a magazine and paid her the money. Tremblingly she filled out the receipt. He glanced at the slip and handed it back.

"Just write below the signature 'of the Jack of Hearts,' so that I'll remember where I paid the money if the magazine doesn't come," he suggested.

She did so, and Curly put the receipt in his pocket carelessly. He sauntered leisurely to the hotel, but as soon as he could get into a telephone booth his listlessness vanished. Maloney had returned to town and he telephoned him to get Mackenzie at once and watch the Jack of Hearts in front and rear. Before he left the booth Curly had compared the writing of Mrs. Wylie with that on the sheet that had come by special delivery. Beyond question the same person had written both.

Certainly Mrs. Wylie was not warning the sheriff against herself. Then against whom? He must know her antecedents, and at once. Calling up a local detective agency, he asked the manager to let him know within an hour or two all that could be found out about the woman without alarming her.

"Wait a moment. I think we have her on file. Hold the phone." The detective presently returned. "Yes. We can give you the facts. Will you come to the office for them?"

Fifteen minutes later Curly knew that Mrs. Wylie was the divorced wife of Lute Blackwell.

He returned to the Del Mar and sent his name up to Miss Cullison. With Kate and Bob there was also in the room Alec Flandrau.

The girl came forward lightly to meet him. "Have you heard something?" she asked quickly.

"Yes. Tell me, when did your father last meet Lute Blackwell so far as you know?"

The owner of the Map of Texas answered the question of his nephew. "He met him the other day. Let's see. It was right after the big poker game. We met him downstairs here. Luck had to straighten out some notions he had got."

"How?"

Flandrau, senior, told the story of what had occurred in the hotel lobby. "And you say he swore to get even?"

"That's what he said. And he looked like he meant it, too."

"What is it? What have you found out?" Kate implored.

The young man told about the letters and Mrs. Wylie.

"We've got to get a move on us," he concluded. "For if Lute Blackwell did this thing to your father it's mighty serious for him."

Kate was white to the lips, but in no danger of breaking down. "Yes, if this man is in it he would not stop at less than murder. But I don't believe it. My father is alive. Cass Fendrick is the man we want. I'm sure of it."

"First thing is to search the Jack of Hearts and see what's there. Are you with me, Uncle Alec?"

"I sure am, Curly," and he reached for his hat.

Curly turned at the door with his warm smile. "By the way, I've got some news I forgot. I know where your father got the money to pay his poker debts. Mr. Jordan of the Cattlemen's National made him a personal loan. He figured it would not hurt the bank because the three men Luck paid it to would deposit it with the bank again."

"By George, that's what we did, too, every last one of us," his uncle admitted.

"Every little helps," Kate said, and her little double nod thanked Curly. Maloney met them in front of the Jack of Hearts.

"Dick, you go with me inside. Uncle Alec, will you keep guard outside?"

"No, bub, I won't. I knew Luck before you were walking hookeyed," the old cattleman answered brusquely. Curly grinned. "All right. Don't blame me if you get shot up."

Mrs. Wylie's startled eyes told tales when she saw the three men. Her face was ashen.

"I'm here to play trumps, Mrs. Wylie. What secret has the Jack of Hearts got hidden from us?" young Flandrau demanded, his hard eyes fastened to her timorous ones.

"I—I don't know what you mean." "No use. We're here for business, Dick, you stay with her. Don't let her leave or shout a warning."

He passed into the back room which was a kind of combination living room, kitchen and bedroom. A door led from the rear into a back yard littered with empty packing cases, garbage cans and waste paper. After taking a look around the yard he locked the back door noiselessly. There was no other apparent exit from the kitchen-bedroom except the one by which he and his uncle had entered from the shop. But he knew the place must have a cellar, and his inspection of the yard had showed an entrance there. He drew back the Navajo rug that covered the floor and found one of the old-fashioned 17th century doors some cheap lugs have. In this was fitted an iron ring with white to lift it.

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sound, but Curly's imagination con-

700 pounds daily. The picker, at the end of a flexible tube, is placed against the boll and the cotton is drawn from the bolls by means of two cylindrical horsehair brushes which revolve. A suction arrangement draws the cotton to a receptacle in the rear.

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From the Darkness Below Came No Sound.

celved the place as full of shiing eyes glaring up at him. Any bad men down there already had the drop on them. Therefore neither Curly nor his uncle made the mistake of drawing a weapon.

"I'm coming down, boys," young Flandrau announced in a quiet confident voice. "The place is surrounded by our friends and it won't do you a whole lot of good to shoot me up. I'd advise you not to be too impulsive."

He descended the steps, his face like a stone wall for all the emotion it recorded. At his heels came the older man. Curly struck a match, found an electric bulb above his head and turned the button. Instantly the darkness was driven from the cellar.

The two Flandraus were quite alone in the room. For furniture there was a table, a cot which had been slept in and not made up, and a couple of rough chairs. The place had no windows, no means of ventilation except through the trap door. Yet there were evidences to show that it had recently been inhabited. Half-smoked cigars littered the floor. A pack of cards lay in disorder on the table. The Sentinel with date line of that day lay tossed in a corner.

"Make anything out of it?" the older Flandrau asked.

"He's been here, but they've taken him away. Will you cover the telephoning? Have all the ranches notified that Luck is being taken into the hills, so they can picket the trails."

"How do you know he is being taken there?"

"I don't know. I guess. Blackwell is in it. He knows every nook of the hills. The party left here not two hours since, looks like."

Curly put the newspaper in his pocket and led the way back to the store.

"The birds have flown, Dick. Made their getaway through the alley late this afternoon, probably just after it got dark." He turned to the woman.

"Mrs. Wylie, murder is going to be done, I shouldn't wonder. And you're liable to be held guilty of it unless you tell us all you know."

She began to weep, helplessly, but with a sort of stubbornness, too. Frightened she certainly was, but some greater fear held her silent as to the secret. "I don't know anything about it," she repeated over and over.

Maloney had an inspiration. He spoke in a low voice to Curly. "Let's take her to the hotel. Miss Kate will know how to get it out of her better than we can."

Mrs. Wylie went with them quietly enough. She was shaken with fears, but still resolute not to speak. They would tell her nothing—nothing at all. For some one who had made terror the habit of her life had put the fear of death into her soul.

(To be Continued.)

OYSTERS AND SHAD INCREASE

Last Year 200,000 Bushels of Oysters Planted on Carolina Coast.

Big increases in the oyster and shad industries of South Carolina are reported for 1920, by the State Board of Fisheries in its annual report made last week, to the legislature and the governor. The oyster industry of the state is growing each year, in quantity, quality and size, says the report. During 1920 there were planted 200,000 bushels of oysters on the South Carolina coast. "There is no scarcity of oysters in our state," says the report; "all we need to make this a more profitable industry is to get people interested in settling our own coast for we have everything but the people."

As to commerce in shad in South Carolina, the report shows that during last year the catch was the biggest in many years. \$5,736 shad being caught and bringing in revenue to the state of \$3,900 not counting the shad caught for personal use, of which the board has no records.

The report also shows that during 1920 a total of 45,400 pounds of sturgeon and 344 pounds of caviar was caught and shipped. This industry the report says, gives employment to hundreds of people during the summer months.

The report also says that the clam industry in South Carolina shows slight increase; but that commerce in terrapins is on the wane in South Carolina. E. C. Epps, of Kingstree, and Thos. H. Rainford, of Edgewood, constitute this board.

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700 pounds daily. The picker, at the end of a flexible tube, is placed against the boll and the cotton is drawn from the bolls by means of two cylindrical horsehair brushes which revolve. A suction arrangement draws the cotton to a receptacle in the rear.

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TO SUBSCRIBERS AND CLUBMAKERS

Annual Revision of Mailing List of The Yorkville Enquirer.

PRICE REDUCTION AND PREMIUM OFFERS

All Invited to Join In Campaign Now On and Continuing Until February 19, 1921.

THIS is the sixty-sixth annual announcement that The Yorkville Enquirer has made to subscribers and clubmakers preliminary to revising the mailing lists for the year following, and there is very little that is different from the sixty-five announcements that have gone before.

THE YORKVILLE ENQUIRER is a public institution under private ownership and direction, having for its object the public good through the dissemination of news of interest and importance, useful information and wholesome entertainment. For their continued ability to carry on their work the publishers are proudly, but none the less gratefully, dependent upon that portion of the public which is sufficiently appreciative to lend their voluntary support.

There is no ground for complaint on the part of the publishers at the manner in which The Yorkville Enquirer has been and is being supported. It is a fact that throughout the whole South there is not another newspaper in the class of The Yorkville Enquirer of whom The Yorkville Enquirer has occasion to be envious. The subscribers of The Yorkville Enquirer, however, have noticed that as the mailing list grows larger, the paper increases in size, interest and usefulness, and on this ground the publishers desire to offer this suggestion:

That every subscriber of The Yorkville Enquirer who feels that he derives due benefit and satisfaction from its semi-weekly visits, recommend the paper to others with whom he has influence, and in whom he has an interest, to the end that its circulation and influence may be still further increased. An easy and effective way for the subscriber to do this is to give the Clubmaker as much assistance as he can without expense or too much inconvenience.

All of the Clubmakers who have been making clubs are cordially invited to continue their work, and all other well wishers of the paper who desire to become Clubmakers will be welcome.

To the individual subscriber sending in his subscription independently of the Clubmaker, the price of The Yorkville Enquirer is \$3 per annum, cash, with the entry of the name.

The price of the paper to the Clubmaker is \$2.50 per annum, and he may give the paper to the subscriber who subscribes through him at that price if he so desires; but not for less. For any Clubmaker who give the paper to any one for less than the price to all is strictly forbidden by the postal regulations.

Clubmakers may return names as they secure them, and must pay the cash on or before 6 o'clock a. m., Saturday, February 19. Names not paid for by that date will be discontinued and the Clubmaker will be liable for the time during which the paper has been sent at the rate of 6 cents per week.

WOODSTOCK TYPEWRITER. FOR THE LARGEST CLUB of names returned and paid for in accordance with the foregoing the premium is a WOODSTOCK TYPEWRITER. This is a standard keyboard machine and absolutely one of the best on the market. The cash price of it is \$110.

NINETY DOLLARS CASH. FOR THE SECOND LARGEST NUMBER of subscribers the premium will be \$90.00 CASH, with the understanding that this sum goes to the largest club and the first premium to the second largest club at the option of the maker of the largest club.

FORTY-FIVE PIECE SILVER SET. FOR THE THIRD LARGEST CLUB the premium will be 45 Pieces (1847 Rogers Bros.) TABLE SILVER in mahogany chest, blue velvet lined with drawer, lock and key, brass trimmed, containing: Six hollow handle medium knives, 12 teaspoons, 6 flat handle medium forks, 6 individual salad forks, 6 butter spreaders, 6 dessert spoons, 3 table spoons. Cash value including war tax, \$75.75.

FORTY DOLLARS CASH. FOR THE FOURTH LARGEST CLUB Forty Dollars Cash.

TWENTY-SIX PIECE SILVER SET. FOR THE FIFTH LARGEST CLUB, 26 Pieces (1847 Rogers Bros.) TABLE SILVER in Leatherette case, containing 6 embossed solid handle medium knives, 6 solid handle medium forks, 6 teaspoons, 6 dessert spoons, one sugar shell and one butter knife. Value including war tax, \$26.65.

TWENTY DOLLARS CASH. FOR THE SIXTH LARGEST CLUB the premium will be \$20.00 Cash.

42-PIECE DINNER SET. FOR THE SEVENTH LARGEST CLUB the premium will be 42-Piece DINNER SET, that retails for \$14.00 Cash.

42-PIECE DINNER SET. FOR THE EIGHTH LARGEST CLUB the premium will be one 42-Piece DINNER SET, that retails for \$14.00 Cash.

42-PIECE DINNER SET. FOR THE NINTH LARGEST CLUB the premium will be one 42-Piece DINNER SET, that retails for \$14.00 Cash.

OTHER PREMIUMS. FOR FIVE NAMES—Three-bladed Pocket Knife with name in handle, worth \$1.50.

FOR TEN NAMES—Year's subscription to The Yorkville Enquirer, sent to any address in the United States.

FOR FIFTEEN NAMES—Thirty-one-Piece Dinner Set, worth \$3.50.

FOR TWENTY-FIVE NAMES—Set of 1847 Rogers Bros.'s Knives and Forks—6 knives and 6 forks. Knives medium swaged blades. Value \$9.00, including war tax.

CASH PREMIUMS. CLUBMAKERS who prefer may have Cash Commissions in lieu of any of the above premiums. The amount of commission may be learned on application.

BOOKS ARE NOW OPEN. THE CLUB BOOKS ARE NOW OPEN and New and Old Subscribers may be returned as rapidly as secured. It is distinctly understood that there can be no transfers of names from one club to another after the names have been entered on our books.

IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS. In sending names Clubmakers are especially requested to write names and addresses plainly, and in the case of a name already on the mailing list, it is desirable that it be written in the same manner as it now appears on the printed label. Clubmakers will confer a favor if in sending renewals they will begin the letter with "Renew" or in the case of a New name if they will begin with the word "Enter." That will save the bookkeeper trouble in having to hunt the list to avoid entering the same name twice.

And let it be remembered also that this offer of the paper at \$2.50 a year will be withdrawn on February 19, and that after that date the price will be \$3.00 a year.

L. M. GRIST'S SONS, York, S. C.