

# BLACKSHEEP

By Meredith Nicholson

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### SYNOPSIS

Archibald Bennett, wealthy bachelor, travels constantly in the interest of his health. He meets Isabel Perry, who recommends a life of crime, adventure, romance and excitement as a cure for his nerves. Archie goes to Bailey Harbor to investigate a summer house for his sister. A heavy storm forces him to spend the night there. During the night he is awakened by footsteps, and in an encounter with the intruder, who sees Archie's figure reflected in the mirror and shoots. Archie fires in return, wounding the intruder, who makes his escape. Archie plans flight to evade publicity. He starts across country on foot in the night.

At dawn he is stopped on a lonely country road by "The Governor," master-mind criminal who mistakes him for a fellow-criminal. Archie, fleeing, is afraid to tell the truth, falls in with "The Governor" and is whisked across country in a stolen car. Sees story in newspaper of killing at Bailey Harbor and frightened, he decides to say nothing but stick with his strange friend and await developments.

struck her as the vaporings of a dangerous lunatic. He had never been clever; he snarled now under the revelation that all things considered he was an immitigable ass.

He went back to the hotel, bitter but fortified by a resolution that nothing should check him now in his desperate career. He had quarreled with the inspiration of his new life, but in the end Isabel should have reason to know how unjust she had been. After all, it was something to have seen her, perplexed, anxious though she had been. He would bear his martyrdom manfully, keeping the humiliating interview carefully from the Governor.

Isabel was still the most wonderful girl he had ever met!

### CHAPTER V

The next morning the Governor announced Cornford as their next stopping point, a town, he explained, whose history thrust far back into Colonial times. When they were seated in the parlor car, he drew a small volume from his pocket. Archie saw that it was really a volume of the Horatian odes. The Governor was utterly beyond him and he stared moodily at the flying landscape.

The Cornford Inn proved to be a quaint old tavern, and after a leisurely luncheon they took their coffee in a pleasant garden on one side of the house.

Two men came into the garden and seated themselves at a table on the other side of a screen of shrubbery. They ordered coffee and one of them remarked in a low tone:

"You oughtn't to have carried that cash up here. The old man is a fool or he wouldn't have suggested such a thing."

The Governor nodded to Archie to keep on talking, while he played the role of eavesdropper.

"Well, he wrote that he was coming here to spend a week and said if I wanted the stock I could bring the currency here and close the transaction. The Congdon are all a lot of cranks, you know. This old cardmaker carries a small fortune around all the time, and never accepts a check in any transaction."

"Let's stroll about a little," said the Governor. He led the way through the garden to the street, and bade Archie proceed down to the postoffice while he walked toward the main entrance of the inn.

When he joined Archie, he informed him that the two gentlemen were Seebrook and Walters, and they had rooms on the floor below them.

"You don't think they've got any considerable sum of money with them, do you?" Archie asked breathlessly.

"That remains to be seen."

When they reached the green which the town's growth had left to one side, he sat down on a bench and directed attention to a church whose history he read impressively from the book.

"And in the cellar of that stumpy edifice where the early colonists used to hide from predatory Indians, is hidden fifty thousand dollars. It must be saved from destruction. We can't fail Leary."

They found half a dozen visitors roaming through the church, and while Archie cautiously answered a question asked him by a stout lady, the Governor disappeared.

When he reappeared, he called out in a cheery voice: "If you want to see the cellar, don't tumble down the steps as I did. It's an abominable hole."

He brushed the dust from his knees and mopped his face until the voices from below receded.

"All safe and sound. Stuck it out through a back window into a lilac bush, and we'll pick it up at our leisure. It's a very decent suitcase and you can hand it to a bell boy and bid him fly with it to your room. You were a little short of linen and made a few purchases—the thing explains itself."

When they reached the hotel, Archie, following the Governor's instruction, gave the suitcase to a bell boy, and shortly after, they followed the suitcase upstairs, where the Governor unlocked it with an implement that looked like a nut pick. Archie picked up several bundles of the bills and turned them over, reflecting that to his other crimes he had now added the receipt and concealment of stolen money.

"Dinner in an hour, Archie," remarked the Governor. "Meanwhile, I wish you would look in at Barclay & Pedding's garage, just around the corner, and ask if a car has been left there for Mr. Reginald H. Saulsbury. You needn't be afraid of getting pinched, for the machine was acquired by purchase. I am merely borrowing it from Abe Collins, alias Shippy Abe. We'll leave here like honest men, with the landlord bowing us away from the door."

When he returned the Governor was dressing and manifested no surprise that the car awaited his pleas-

ure.

"Yes, of course," he remarked absently. "You can always rely on Abe. It's time for you to dress, and we must look our prettiest. I caught a glimpse of Mr. Seebrook's daughter a bit ago. It may be necessary for you to cultivate her a trifle."

When Archie reached the parlor half an hour later he found the Governor engaged in lively conversation with a gentleman he introduced immediately as Mr. Seebrook. "And Mr. Walters, Mr. Coly, and

"Mr. Saulsbury and Mr. Comly, daughter, Miss Seebrook."

Seebrook and Walters were undoubtedly enjoying the Governor, proof of which was immediately forthcoming when Seebrook suggested that they should all dine together.

"You do us much honor," said the Governor. "Mr. Comly and I shall be pleased, I'm sure."

### CHAPTER VI

Dinner over, they continued their talk over coffee served in the garden. When the music began, Seebrook and Walters revealed a bridge engagement and the Governor announced that he must look up an old friend who lived in Cornford.

"I shall be back shortly," he said as they separated in the office.

Archie and Miss Seebrook joined the boys outside, among them were already dancing. After several dances, Miss Seebrook thought it would be time to take a breath of air, and gathering up her cloak they went into the garden for an ice.

Miss Seebrook was speaking of music, and reciting the list of operas she loved best when Archie's gaze was caught and held by a shadow that darted along an iron fence escape that zigzagged down from the fourth to the first story of the long rambling inn.

"You seem very dreamy," she remarked. "I know how that is for I can dream for hours and hours."

"Yes, reverie just floating on clouds, on and on," Archie replied, though the shadow moving on and on along the side of the inn was troubling him not a little.

He had surmised that the Governor's declared purpose to call on an old friend was merely to cover his withdrawal from the party, but that he could have meditated a predatory excursion through the inn had not entered into Archie's speculations as to his friend's absence. There was no mistaking the heavy tent that moved swiftly along the little balcony at the third floor. He paused a moment and then vaulted into an open window. The Governor had said that Seebrook party had rooms just under their own, but—

They danced again, and in the handclapping that followed the first number he turned to find the Governor calm and with no marks of his escapade upon him.

At midnight Seebrook and Walters came in from their card game, and after a few pleasant words, the party broke up.

In Archie's room the Governor hummed one of his favorite ballads as he slipped out of his coat and jerked a speck from his snowy waistcoat. "It is evident," he remarked goodhumoredly, "that you are perturbed, anxious, and have slight symptoms of paralysis agitans. Pray be seated and I will do my best to restore your peace of mind."

But Archie was not to be thwarted in his purpose to learn just what the Governor meant by endangering their security so recklessly. He slammed the transom shut and drew down the shades.

"You needn't expose yourself to observation by sticking down the fire escape of this hotel—I know that."

"My dear boy, I was merely gathering a few blossoms of the crimson rambler from the ancient walls of the inn. You may have noted that I wore a spray of buds in my lapel when I joined you in the ball room. Now seat yourself on the bed and I'll tell you the whole story. When I left you I hastened into the drug store and bought a stick of shaving soap. Then I bought a few cigars in a tobacconist's. In each place I conversed with the clerk, thus laying ample ground for an alibi, hurrying back to the inn. I avoided observation by entering by the side door, slipped up to our rooms—and there you are! I exchanged our new bank notes for sixty well-worn one-thousand-dollar gold certificates negotiable in all parts of the republic. That means a net gain of ten thousand dollars to Red Leary."

"My God!" moaned Archie. "You don't think you can get away with this!"

"I think," returned the Governor imperturbably, "that we must and will get away with it." His emphasis on the plural pronoun caused Archie to cringe.

"You're getting me in pretty deep," mumbled Archie dejectedly.

"How about those blood stains on the sidewalk at Bailey Harbor?" asked the Governor in his blandest tones. "When you speak of getting in deep you forget that someone besides Hoky was shot back yonder. You came to me red-handed from a deed of violence, and I took you in and became your protector, asking no questions. It's the basest ingratitude for you to whimper over a small larceny when you have added assault or murder to the liabilities of our partnership! But don't forget for a moment that we're pals and pledged to see each other through."

The reference to the blood stains reported by the Bailey Harbor police threw Archie back instantly upon the Governor's mercy. Complicity in the robbery of Seebrook was, nothing compared with the haunting fear that the man he had shot in the Congdon house had died from the wound. Unable to determine this question he was floundering in a veritable sea of crime. The Governor was addressing with provoking indifference to his companion's perturbation.

"Sleep, lad, sleep! You may be sure that nothing will harm us tonight, and I have faith that more

stirring adventures are ahead of us. I forgive you for your quins and quavers, the pardonable manifestations of youth and inexperience. We walk in slippery places but we shall not stumble, at least not while the Governor keeps his head!"

Nothing appalled Archie as of greater importance than the retention by his companion of the head that now lay chastely upon a snowy pillow. A handsome well-formed head suggestive of family and the pride of race, though filled with the most complicated mental machinery with which a human being had ever

been endowed.

"Put out the lights and get out to your couch!" the Governor muttered drowsily.

The man certainly wore his crimes lightly. He was sound asleep before Archie had got into his pajamas.

(Continued Next Week)

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**An Unexpected Meeting**

"No Mrs. Congdon has registered here within a week, I'm sure. Will you leave any message?"

Archie paused by the desk, staring open mouthed at the young woman who was asking for Mrs. Congdon. If he was not possessed of his senses the girl was Isabel Perry. She glanced carelessly in his direction as the clerk, addressing him as Mr. Comly, asked if there was anything he wanted. Archie promptly raised his hat, only to be met with a reluctant nod and a look of displeasure with connotations of alarm. She was walking toward the door as though anxious to escape from him.

A taxi drew up and Isabel stepped into it, but Archie, resolved to risk another snub, before allowing her to slip away ignorant of the vast change that had been wrought in him since their last meeting in Washington, jumped in beside her.

"This is unpardonable," she exclaimed angrily. "May I ask just what you are doing here, under an assumed name?"

"Really?" he exclaimed, "Isn't it perfectly jolly that we've met in this way? You know," he added, "you told me to throw a brick at the woman and I've been following your advice."

Having dramatized himself as appearing before her, a splendid heroic figure, this reception was all but the last straw to his spirit. Her frowning silence moved him to further frantic efforts to impress her with the fact that he was a dare-devil, wicked person—the man she would have him be.

"You were asking for Mrs. Congdon. Well, I certainly could tell you a story if you would give me time. If I had known Mrs. Congdon was a friend of yours I should have acted differently, very differently, indeed."

"I think," she said, sweeping him with a look of scorn, "that you've been following me or were put here to watch me. You went to Bailey Harbor to look at a cottage, didn't you? Putney Congdon was there, wasn't he?"

"That's the scream of it, you know," Archie cried. "I don't know for the life of me whether it was Putney Congdon I met at the Congdon house or Hoky, the burglar. And it's so deliciously funny that you should be looking for Mrs. Congdon who only was a widow for an hour."

"A widow?" Isabel, with her hand clutching the door, swung round him with consternation and looked severely depicted in her face.

"Oh, that's the mystery just at present, whether poor old Putney is dead or not. No great loss, I imagine. But where do you suppose Mrs. Congdon went to hide her children from the brute?"

"That's exactly what I suspected," she exclaimed furiously. "You are waiting here to find that out. How can you play the spy for him? You talk about shooting a man? Why, you haven't the moral courage to kill a flea! The kindest interpretation I can put upon your actions is to assume that you are hopelessly mad."

They had reached the station; she jumped out and snatched her bag. He tossed a bill to the driver and dashed across the platform, after her only to see her vanish into the vestibule of a Boston train just as it was drawing out.

He walked to the water front, firmly resolved to drown himself, but his courage failing, he yielded himself luxuriously to melancholy reflections.

Congdon was a name of evil omen. What business could Isabel have with Mrs. Congdon? Why should she think him capable of spying upon her movements? Why was she in Portsmouth when she had told him she was leaving immediately for her girls' camp in Michigan?

He had been wholly stupid and factless in pouncing upon her with what he realized under the calming influence of the brisk air, must have