

HOSTILE VALLEY

By Ben Ames Williams



Will, it appeared, made no effort to send Zeke away; he treated Zeke with a slow courtesy, and Huldy, too. He seemed to preserve by his demeanor the fiction that Zeke was a loyal hand, a willing hand about the farm; that Huldy was all a wife should be. Old Win Haven, according to rumor, taunted him one day; and then shrank in affright before Will's blazing eyes, and babbled his apologies, withdrawing the offending word. This had happened in Liberty village, by the store, with other men about; and it was said that Will had looked like death, till the others hurried Win away.

And Jenny thought of Huldy moving insolently to and fro about the farm, doing the housework with a casual ease—it was agreed that she was a good housekeeper—idling alone on the ledge above the brook, strolling in the orchard or across the fields; and always with Zeke like a jealous guardian on her heels. Zeke, some one said, was not so stalwart as he had used to be. He had begun to cough, and to lose weight. It was even predicted that he might not live the winter through. Bart came to the door one day, on his way home from the village, and he said:

"Huldy and Zeke was in Liberty today. Drove over in Will's sleigh." This was in February, with snow deep on the road. He chuckled: "If Zeke and me went at it again, I guess I could handle him now. He's falled pitiful, this last six months." "You leave the pore thing be, Bart," Marm Pierce warned him. "He's got enough trouble on his hands."

Bart nodded soberly. "It's a wonder to me how Will stands it," he confessed. "I see her today. She's the same as ever, with an eye for every man around, and that smiling way she has." Marm Pierce, putting away the parcels he had brought, asked with a glance toward the dining room whether Jenny had withdrawn:

"Will wa'n't along with them today?"

"Didn't see him, no," Bart returned. "He stays to home, the most of the time."

And he chuckled, and said: "It was funny to see the men today, kind of circling, and watching, like they was waiting for something. Like a bunch of crows around a sick horse, waiting to see what was going to happen next." And he said: "Zeke, he won't last long!"

"Guess you won't go to his funeral when he dies," Marm Pierce commented.

"Oh, I don't hold a thing against Zeke," Bart assured her. "I figure I've got all the better of our argument, by now." "How would Amy feel about that?" the old woman demanded; and Bart said slowly:

"Pore Amy!" But he rose as though unwearily. "Well," he decided, "I'll be going along."

After he was gone, Marm Pierce was busy with supper for a while, Jenny helping her; but when they had finished the meal, as though after long reflection, the old woman said:

"Child, there's things the less said about them the better; but I can feel it in my bones, something's going to happen around here. I dunno what it'll be; but I don't want you mixed up in it." Jenny looked at her gravely. "What can happen, Granny?"

The old woman hesitated. "I dunno as I know," she confessed. "But Jenny, don't you let what hurts other folks hurt you." She added vigorously: "And don't let other folks hurt you, Jenny. There's apt as not to be trouble. Don't get in the way of it. One of these days, somebody, some man's going to . . ." She shook her head. "Child," she said. "I don't know what I'm scared of, but I'm scared."

"Of what?" Jenny protested reassuringly. "If I knowed that, I'd know what to do," the old woman retorted; yet she said slowly: "Amy died of it, Jenny. I don't want a thing to happen to you."

Jenny could not understand; yet she could share her grandmother's doubts and fears. This season from late February till the flood tide of summer must always be a weary one, when nerves are ragged and frayed; and especially in this northern land where the inhospitable earth is still unwilling to receive the stroke of plow, so that man can only wait, his energies restrained and fuming for an outlet, till the time for action comes. This year, the season of waiting was a long one; the frost was deep, the spring was slow. Bart stopped at the house one morning, the wheels of his buggy mud-clogged to

the hubs; to take commissions for shopping at the village; and after he was gone, it rained, so that they were kept all day indoors. Dusk came early, till the lamps in the kitchen and dining room made all snug and warm. Marm Pierce and Jenny began to prepare supper; and the old woman went out to survey the weather signs.

"It might lift tomorrow," she said. "The wind's this way, that way, now; but if it shifts, we'll get a change. It'll be a late spring, and sudden. First touch of sun, and everything will grow a week in a day. A spring like this, I can't get my simples when they're right."

"I'll go tomorrow and see what I can find," Jenny offered.

"You can get me a water lily root, anyway," Marm Pierce reflected. "If the water ain't too deep." The girl said: "There's a pool down toward the bog with an old log in it, and lilies grow in back of the log. It's not deep there. I can reach down."

Marm Pierce opened the oven to see if the biscuits were done, and a blast of hot air struck her in the face. "Whew!" she exclaimed, and closed the oven. "I'm bound to air out or suffocate," she said, and opened the kitchen door.

Then she ejaculated: "Bart! I shut down across the land. There-after, till spring, neither Jenny nor her grandmother went far from the house. The girl had been used to wander sometimes in the winter woods; but this winter there were many tracks along the brook, where men had come up from the stream mill to Bart's. Marm Pierce, and Jenny's own wit, warned her not to risk casual encounters with these strangers.

"Most times, I wouldn't worry a mite about them," the old woman admitted. "But a woman like Huldy, she'll poison every man anywhere around her, till you can't tell what'll happen!"

So for the most part Jenny stayed at home. Bart now and then stopped on the way to the village, and this was almost their only contact with the world. Disaster might have come to them and none have known for days; but Jenny was not afraid. It was not easy to be afraid, in the presence of her old grandmother. That dauntless old woman was as voluble, as brisk, as diligent and as crisp of spirit as of old; and the two were congenial and content.

And Will was always in Jenny's mind, and she held long hopes and dreams. And sometimes to ease the girl, Marm Pierce led her to talk of Will, and sometimes they played a game of make-believe in which Huldy did not exist, and Will was free to come to Jenny.

"Sulphur and molasses is likely all she needs," Marm Pierce guessed. "Amy knows that well as me, but if she needs me, I 'low she'll let me know." But in this conjecture Marm Pierce was tragically wrong. Amy needed more than homey remedies; but she did not come to consult the old woman, and though Jenny went once to the house to see the



"Amy's Drunk Some Apple Spray!"

other, she saw only Bart, and he showed an unaccustomed ill humor at her solicitude. "He was fixing to spray his apple trees," Jenny explained, when she returned. "Working in the barn. I guess Amy was inside the house; but Bart said she was all right."

She did not confess Bart's ill humor. It had seemed to her at the time futile and reasonless, yet not her concern.

But two or three days later she would remember it, and regret that she had not persisted in her intent to see Amy. For Bart came in haste through the woods path, Marm Pierce to take measures of prevention.

"You'll have to," she said. "Because Win won't never do anything. He was to our house the other night, and talked about it; and he 'lows to be round when his side of the house falls, and to watch and see the trouble it makes for you. Brags that if you try to mend anything he'll take a shotgun to you."

"He around again, is he?" Marm Pierce demanded tartly. "I didn't know but he'd died in a gutter somewhere before now." "He comes to our place right along," Amy assured them. "There's a new steam mill putting in down brook below here, opposite where Seth's mill used to be. They come in from Liberty village. Win, he's working there. He comes up and him and Bart set and drink and brag." She added huskily: "Win, he's shining up to Huldy, too."

"That old fool!" Marm Pierce exclaimed. "You can't go to blame him," Amy said ruefully. "Seems like she takes a kind of satisfaction in fretting a man, and getting him haired up, and laughing at him after." And she said slowly: "But I don't know as she's bothering with anyone, only Zeke, now."

Jenny caught some accent in the girl's tone. Her perceptions were perhaps quickened by her own love for Will; but Marm Pierce, in this matter not so wise, said sharply: "Zeke's as big a fool as any of them. I 'lowed he had more sense than that."

"Zeke's all right," Amy said, in humble defense. "Only he . . ." Her eyes filled with slow tears. "He used to come down to set with me," she confessed. "Always joking and laughing, he was. Zeke's a hand to make a joke out of things. But I ain't seen him lately."

So Marm Pierce understood, and her lips set in anger. "I'd like to give that hussy a piece of my mind!" she cried impotently.

Amy whispered: "Sometimes I'm scared!" she shivered uneasily. "Dunno what I'm scared of, either. But the men that have seen her, sometimes they come down to our place; and they're half crazy, kind of. Bart, he hates the sight of her. He can't say anything hard enough of her. He's always been a good friend to Will, and to have her treat Will so frets Bart awful. And Win Haven, he'll come down and cuss and rave and rant about her, like he wanted to twist her neck. But Zeke, he don't ever come down!"

"Nor Will?" Jenny guessed. "Will, he stays up there," Amy assented. "Him and Zeke." The girl shuddered. "I dunno what's going to come of it," she admitted, fearfully.

And she said: "Bart talks about licking Zeke. He says somebody'd ought to, long as Will can't do it himself." Marm Pierce asked sharply: "Can't Will take a gun to him, or a cart stove? If he had any gumption in him. . . ."

(Continued next week)

"How did you make your neighbor keep his hens in his own yard?"

"One night I hid a half dozen eggs under a bush in my garden, and next day I let him see me gather them. I wasn't bothered after that."

Dillon Jenrette Convicted of Murder in Second Degree; Other Criminal Cases Tried

(Continued From Page 1) Judge Williams expressed his opinion that the jury had been good to the defendant; that he was a very fortunate young man. He declared the crime for which he had been convicted to be one of the most brutal he had ever heard unfolded in a court room. He told Jenrette that he had no respect for the law and that the public must be protected against men of his type. The jury, he continued, might easily have found him guilty of first degree murder. He added that he had no quarrel with the jury concerning their verdict, but that he considered that the defendant had been the recipient of a merciful verdict.

Judgment His judgment was that the defendant, Dillon Jenrette, be confined to the North Carolina state penitentiary at Raleigh for a period of not less than 29 years nor more than 30 years, to be worked at hard labor under the supervision of the State Highway and Public Works Commission.

Thus ended the murder case which has been the chief topic of conversation in all sections of Brunswick county since the body of Louis W. Ganus was found in the woods near his home on Friday morning, September 6, with a bullet hole in his head. Four negro men were arrested upon suspicion immediately following the crime and were held in jail for several days. Jenrette was not arrested until one week later. After he had been placed in the Columbus county jail at Whiteville he confessed that he had killed Ganus, a near neighbor of his, but insisted that he had shot him accidentally.

It was the contention of the state that the killing was deliberate and evidence was introduced tending to show that Ganus was struck on the side of his head with a hammer before he was shot. Solicitor J. J. Burney was assisted in the prosecution by G. Van Fesperman and R. E. Sentelle of Southport.

The defense attempted to strengthen the story of an accidental shooting as related by Jenrette. Counsel contended that there was no motive for murder and asked that their client be found not guilty. R. W. Davis and S. B. Frink of Southport and Dwight McEwen, of Wilmington appeared for the defendant.

Began Thursday The trial began Thursday morning. A special venire of 100 men had been summoned for jury service and the last juror was secured about 1:30 o'clock in the afternoon. The jury was composed of E. D. Miliken, foreman, T. A. Caison, R. F. Swain, E. M. Danford, A. B. Willis, J. T. Nelson, Bill Lennon, Kenneth McKeithan, Arthur Sue, J. D. Johnson, E. M. Hickman, Robert Peterson and Johnnie Peterson, alternate.

Coroner M. A. Northrop was the first witness to take the stand. He told of being notified on the morning of September 6 that the body of Louis W. Ganus had been found in the woods near his home. He told of going to the scene where the body was discovered and of finding the body almost immersed in a pond of water, only the head remaining on dry land.

He said that the deceased was 58 years of age, was 5 feet six inches in height and weighed approximately 140 pounds. The clothes cut from the body of the dead man were offered in evidence.

Coroner Northrop said that there was a bullet hole in the head of the deceased and there was a bruise on his right side. On Friday, September 13, the body of Louis Ganus was exhumed for the purpose of performing an autopsy, according to the testimony of the coroner. At that time the skull cap was removed from the body, and this also offered in evidence by the state. A lead bullet removed from the brain of the deceased also was exhibited and offered in evidence.

Confession The coroner then told of a confession made to him by the defendant, Dillon Jenrette, at the Columbus county jail in Whiteville on the night of September 13. This statement was made in the presence of Jailor J. W. Burney and Deputy Sheriff Melvin Lewis. Following is the confession made at that time:

"I saw that you all knew it and I decided that the best thing I could do was to own it. On the evening of September 4 I went bird hunting with a 22 rifle. It belonged to Curtis Ganus and I was hunting in the bay on the side of the road between his house and Mr. Fletcher McKeithan's. While I was shooting I heard the man and I came out in the road where he was and he was laying in the road and I was very frightened. I did not see the man when I was shooting. I drug him off outside the road and run and left him. This happened just before sundown."

Dr. W. R. Goley of Shallotte was qualified as an expert witness and took the stand. He reported that he examined the body on the day it was found, and discovered what appeared to be blows on the side of the head and a bullet wound in the top of the head near the back. He declared that he had probed the wound and expressed an opinion that the direction of the bullet had been down and toward the front of the head.

Dr. William S. Doshier also was qualified as an expert witness and took the stand. He reported that he had examined a hammer which was brought to him by G. Van Fesperman and Detectives A. A. Nelms and J. B. Russ. He reported that he found what appeared to be matted hair on the hammer and what appeared to be blood stains. A chemical analysis which he ran indicated that these stains were blood. The hammer was offered in evidence by the state.

Dr. Doshier told of the autopsy performed by him and Dr. Arthur Doshier on Friday, September 13, after the body of Louis Ganus had been exhumed. He reported finding a bullet hole in the top of the head of the deceased, of finding a communitive fracture on the right side of the head with a linear fracture which extended from the right temple region to the bullet hole. He read letters to the jury showing the official findings of this autopsy.

Dr. Arthur Doshier was qualified as an expert witness and offered testimony in corroboration of the testimony of Dr. William S. Doshier.

Map Drill J. B. Russ, an employee of the National Bureau of Investigation of Wilmington, was called to the stand and was asked by Solicitor Burney to make a chalk map on the floor showing the roads, paths and houses in the immediate neighborhood where the body was discovered.

Dr. Arthur Doshier was recalled to the stand and in response to a question from the solicitor declared that it was his belief that the fracture appearing in the right temple region of the deceased occurred before the bullet wound.

By this time Detective Russ had completed his drawing on the floor and, under direction of lawyers for both sides, proceeded to give the lay of the land.

Willie Ganus, brother of the dead man, was the next witness to go on the stand. He said that he last saw his brother alive about the middle of the afternoon on September 4. He said that he learned Thursday morning that his brother was missing when he discovered he had not slept at his home on the previous night. He declared that he searched for his brother all day long, but was forced to give up at dark without any result.

By Friday morning a general alarm had been spread concerning the continued absence of the missing man and several persons gathered to aid in the search, according to the testimony of Mr. Ganus. While searching with Sam Butler, colored, Mr. Ganus said that he came upon the body of his brother. He offered other evidence concerning the inquest and autopsy. He declared that it was the custom for his brother to carry a large amount of money with him and he said that this money was always in an old, tan pocket book. This pocket book was missing when the body was found, he said, and the watch pocket where the deceased carried his money was open.

Friday's Session Court adjourned shortly after 6 o'clock in the afternoon for the day. Friday's session opened at 9 o'clock.

Willie Ganus again took the stand and gave evidence concerning the grading and sale of tobacco by his brother before his death. During the cross examination he was submitted to a geography examination of his home community and also was required to answer questions which tended to show that his brother was not as financially independent as he had implied by his testimony of the previous afternoon.

F. N. McKeithan, neighbor of the deceased and the man with whom Louis Ganus took his meals, was next on the stand. He testified that he last saw the deceased alive about 5 o'clock on the afternoon of September 4 at his barn. He told of going to the home of Louis Ganus that

night to discover why he had not come for his supper and of the search conducted on the two following days, ending in the finding of the body. He said that on Thursday while the search was being conducted Dillon Jenrette suggested that the body of the missing man might have been hid in a pile of hay under a tobacco barn shelter and he said that the defendant volunteered to look there himself for the body. He said that on Thursday during the search members of the party passed along a road within a few steps of where the body was found the next day but saw no sign of it.

Bird Hunting Curtis Ganus was called to the stand. He said that he and Dillon Jenrette were in the woods shooting birds with a 22 rifle on the afternoon his uncle was killed. About 4 o'clock, he said, he left the defendant and went to his home to help load some tobacco to be taken to market. He saw Dillon Jenrette again that night, he said, when the latter was on his way to church where a protracted meeting was in progress. The defendant returned his rifle to him at that time, he added. His other testimony corroborated that of other witnesses.

Sheriff John W. Hall of Columbus county took the stand and testified that he heard the defendant when he made a statement that he had shot Louis Ganus while he was in the woods hunting birds. This statement which Sheriff Hall heard him make was similar in detail to the one made to Coroner Northrop.

Detective A. A. Nelms, of the National Bureau of Investigation of Wilmington was the next witness to testify. He said that he was called on the case on September 9. J. B. Russ was with him, he said. The first place they visited, according to him, was the home of Willie Ganus. Later they went to the home of Louis Ganus and from there they followed a trail to where the body was located. An examination of papers in the home of the deceased failed to disclose anything of interest, according to Detective Nelms.

While looking through the house again on the morning of September 12, Detective Nelms said he discovered a hammer which had some hair in the claws. There also appeared to be blood stains on the hammer, he said. In company with Mr. Fesperman, who assisted in the investigation, and Detective Russ, he went to the hospital where Dr. William S. Doshier made an analysis of the stains on the hammer and found them to be caused by blood. Specimens of the hair were placed in a glass slide.

On the morning of September 12 several men of the neighborhood were engaged in target shooting at the home of Willie Ganus and Detective Nelms said that Dillon Jenrette, who by this time was under suspicion, was induced to join in the target practice. His object, he said, was to find out just how skilled the defendant was in the use of a rifle. He was a good shot, he said.

On Friday, September 13, Detective Nelms said that he made an investigation of the hay pile under the tobacco barn shelter and discovered a depression in the hay about six feet long and two feet wide. It was the theory of those in charge of the investigation that the body of Louis Ganus had been hidden there after he was killed. Jenrette was arrested that afternoon when he returned to his home from a trip to Whiteville.

Detective Nelms then recounted the story told him by the defendant which later in the day was repeated on the stand.

John McKeithan, another resident of the neighborhood, told of having passed along the road near which the body was discovered on Thursday but said that he saw no sign of the body.

Girls Testify Dottie Bell McKeithan took the stand and said that she had been grading tobacco with the deceased on the day of the murder. The deceased was expected at her home for supper, she said, but failed to show up.

Aggie McKeithan testified that she, too, had been working with the deceased on September 4. She was staying at the same home with Dottie Bell McKeithan and told the same story about the search for Louis Ganus.

Court adjourned for lunch. Ceasar Daniels, colored, was the first witness on the stand Friday afternoon and all his testimony was corroborative.

Leamon Russ, nephew of the deceased said that he and several other boys searched for the body of his missing uncle on Thursday. They rode mule back, he said, and passed near the spot where the body was found the following day but saw no sign of it.

D. L. Ganus, another nephew, testified that he aided in the mule back search but saw no sign of his uncle. Casper Ganus and Otis Russ, the other boys who aided in the riding search, told similar stories.

(Continued on page 8)

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