

HOSTILE VALLEY



By Ben Ames Williams

THE STORY

PROLOGUE—At a gathering of cronies in the village of Liberty, Maine, Jim Saladine listens to the history of the neighboring Hostile Valley—its past tragedies, its superb fishing streams, and above all, the mysterious, enticing "Huldy" wife of Will Ferrin. Interested, he drives to the Valley for a day's fishing, though admitting to himself his chief desire is to see the reputedly glamorous Huldy Ferrin.

CHAPTER VI—Amy Carey commits suicide. Before Huldy's return Zeke Dace had been showing her attention, and his defection (he has succumbed completely to Huldy's wiles) is believed to have led Amy to take her life. Saladine comes to the Valley. Bad roads cause him to stop at the Ferrin farm, where he meets Huldy. She endeavors to detain him, but remembering what he has heard of the woman, he is uneasy, and leaves her to fish an adjacent stream.

And at once she did so; but that instant was for Jenny an eternity, in which she had time to comprehend, and to consider, and desperately plan. When she whirled to face them, she was already resolved that this dark secret none but herself should ever know; yet her own countenance might betray her to the old woman's shrewdly understanding eye.

Nevertheless she must face them; and she whirled toward the door, standing with her arms spread as though to hide this behind her, as though half fearful that even now Huldy would speak again. And she sought desperately some expedient to divert their eyes from her, their minds from her, lest her secret be too desperately plain.

For—secret it must be! Though this hour must shadow and distort her whole life hereafter, yet none should ever know.

The door opened and Marm Pierce came in, came toward her; but the old woman's eyes and mind were on Huldy, and Jenny made way for her to come to the dead woman's side. Yet she felt Saladine's glance upon her, and fought desperately for composure; and then Marm Pierce said soberly: "No use now!"

Bart asked huskily. "She's dead?" "Certain, she's dead."

Bart spoke to the girl, in a quick whisper. "Jenny, did she come to at all?" he asked.

Jenny wetted her lips; but she could not speak. She could only move her head in desperate denial; and there was a dreadful, shaken terror in her. Then Marm Pierce demanded irritably: "Well, Jen! What you goggling for? Folks have died before!"

So Jenny found an expedient to turn this scrutiny away from herself. She remembered that toppling chair.

"There's someone in the Win-side the house," she said; and with a vast surge of relief saw their glances swing that way.

When Jenny had closed the door, shutting herself into the dining room where Huldy lay, Marm Pierce said insistently to Bart: "You go along and fetch Will. Not that hurrying can help her; but Will had ought to know."

"I might do some help here," Bart still protested.

Marm Pierce spoke to Saladine. "Set down, you," she bade him. "Till I can rub that ankle of yours." And then, over her shoulder, to Bart still lingering: "Well then, go out in the hen pen and get me some feathers."

"Feathers?" he echoed.

"I'll burn 'em under her nose. Might make her gasp and gag and start breathing. Don't stand there arguing. Go along with you!"

So Bart went out through the shed, and Saladine said gravely: "Ma'am, this ankle of mine can wait, if you can be doing anything for her."

"There's nought to do for Huldy Ferrin now," she told him in slow tones, and tossed her head. "And I dunno as I'd do it if there was! But I'll have to wait till the pot boils, anyhow. Might as well be doing 'his as setting here."

He suggested: "You sent Carey to get some feathers. If there's no chance, why . . ."

She retorted: "I got fidgety with him hanging around." And after a silent moment she looked toward the dining room, as though her thoughts turned that way.

Saladine asked: "How do you reckon Mis' Ferrin come to fall?"

"I want to know," said old Marm Pierce, and Jim stirred in quick attention. The phrase was usual enough, as an expression of surprise and interest and wonder; yet Saladine thought her accent and her intonation had not been usual.

There was a step in the shed, and Bart returned. She looked over her shoulder, saw him empty-handed. "Where's them feathers?" she demanded.

Bart seemed faintly to hesitate. "I couldn't find a dry one anywhere," he declared. "The rain has wet them all!"

She protested irritably: "Land sakes, I sh'd think you could find a dry one somewhere! You come along of me!" And she said to Jim, pointing toward the stove: "Let that boil up good, and then set it to cool. I'll be back in a minute to try it on her."

He nodded, and she went out through the shed with Bart on her heels; and Saladine was left wondering why old Marm Pierce was so bent on finding feathers to burn under Huldy's nose, if there was in fact no chance that the hurt woman could revive. Then suddenly his hair prickled faintly; for it seemed to him there was a low murmur in the dining room.

And a chair toppled over, somewhere. The sound was loud and startling. Saladine came to his feet, half-crouching, ready for any apparition; but nothing did appear, nor did he hear any further sound.

The pot on the stove boiled, and as he lifted it, Marm Pierce and Bart returned, and the old woman had a tuft of feathers in her hands. "Men are all blind as bats!" she exclaimed trisically. She saw the boiling pot. "Now we'll try if there's anything to do!" And she went directly to the door between kitchen and dining room. "Jenny, I'm opening the door," she called, and waited a moment and then made good her word.

So they came into the dining room, and learned that Huldy was dead; and when Jenny said there was some one in the Win-side of the house, Saladine remembered that sound of a falling chair; and there seemed to him something hideous in the thought that anyone should prowl through those moldering and empty rooms while a woman here was dying. But Bart said reassuringly: "That's likely Win, Granny. He stayed at my place last night. He set out to go to Liberty this morning, but he might stop by here!"

The old woman assented scornfully: "He would if he was drunk enough! You go ahead, Bart, and fetch Will, and don't waste no time."

So Bart at last departed; but Saladine paid no particular attention to his going. He was watching Jenny, puzzled by something in her eyes he could not read. He had seen in her a while ago deep terror, unmistakable; yet now it was gone. She had put on composure, and a steady courage; and he wondered, and wished to read her mind.

There was nothing to keep Saladine here; yet he stayed, and with a sense of waiting, an acute expectancy. He thought more and more of Jenny, remembering her terror at the sight of death, and the shadow in her eyes. Life for her must in the end center about some man. Bart Carey, perhaps? Bart stood straight, and his eye was bold and strong. It was suddenly strange to Saladine that Bart and Jenny were not married long ago. They were neighbors, of a like age, both comely with the splendor of youth, their interests akin. Between them no obstacle appeared.

Unless old Marm Pierce were an obstacle? Yet Saladine thought she had met Bart kindly today, treated him with courtesy. This might be guile, she might, while appearing to approve, nevertheless check in every possible way the tendency of these two lives to flow together. Inconsequently, Saladine recalled the heavy footstock of the water lily, which Jenny had fetched that morning from the brook. Some shadow of a forgotten memory stirred in him, and was gone without recognition; yet this memory would recur. It was one of the intangibles which made the whole of this day like a disordered dream.

The root itself was tangible enough; yet there were implications in it, just as there were implications in that peg leg Will Ferrin wore, and the cowboy hat so jauntily set atop the bowed and knobby head of Zeke Dace, and the knotted rope that held Huldy Ferrin's garment close about her, and the boot prints on the fisherman's trail beside the brook, which had somehow ended without Saladine's remarking where they turned aside.

But most of all he thought of Huldy, and wondered how she came to fall to her death this day.

Then suddenly the dining room door opened, and Jenny came out into the kitchen, the old woman following her. "I'd best go myself," Jenny insisted; and Saladine saw a sort of stubborn haste in her eyes.

Marm Pierce protested: "Like enough Will and Bart will remember to bring something."

"Not Will," Jenny retorted. Her voice was gentle as she spoke the name. "A man wouldn't think of it. And it isn't for men to do, anyway. Rummaging through her things." She took down a heavy oil-skin coat from behind the kitchen door. "I'll go myself," she said. "If I meet Will, I'll have him come on here, case you need anything. I'll get what's wanted and fetch it." Then she was gone.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Jenny, thus departing, left Saladine and Marm Pierce alone, the old woman seemed for a moment almost embarrassed. She looked at Jim with her small bright eyes.

"I'll boil up a cup of tea," she decided. "It's past dinner time, and I'm hungry. Low you could eat a bit your own self." She filled the kettle at the pump in the sink and clapped it on the stove. Bread from the pantry, jam, butter from the cellar, and a bit of salt pork and some cold boiled potatoes to slice and fry in the sweet fat.

"Jenny's a fine girl," Saladine suggested presently. "It's a wonder she ain't married."

Marm Pierce looked at him with eyes suddenly shrewd. "You said Huldy Ferrin showed you the path down to the brook," she remembered. "Go back to the house when you left her, did she?"

"I don't know," he replied. "I looked up, from down below, and saw her still there."

"Jenny told me," she said, "that you claimed somebody had fished down brook ahead of you."

"I saw tracks in the trail," he assented.

Rain began to drive against the windows, against the glass panel in the door. She said: "Well, everything's ready. You can set down!"

He perceived in her the pent garb of a lonely old woman who too seldom has an audience; and while they ate, he encouraged her, skillfully, to speech. Marm Pierce, at first guardedly and then warming to her theme, told him about Jenny and Will. Once she was well started, he listened without interruption, finding in what she said the explanation of much that he had seen today.

"She didn't know the meaning of it, first off," the old woman concluded. "Didn't know what was happening to her. She wa'n't but a girl then." And added: "But Jenny's growed to be a woman now . . ."

She broke off, seemed to listen; and he asked softly: "Hear something?"

"Nothing, likely," she said after a moment. "Seemed like I heard some one in the barn. Like as not it was that no-good brother of mine."

And she talked on and on; and rose at last and began to scrape the dishes clean and pile them in a pan in the sink. She chunked the fire, noisily.

Then suddenly the old woman replaced the lid on the stove with a clatter, and crossed as quiet as a mouse, to the shed door. Jim came to her side.

"Seemed like I did hear some one," she whispered.

He touched the latch and swung the shed door wide, to reveal—nothing.

"Don't see anything!" he said doubtfully.

But Marm Pierce pointed to the floor. Here were wet, muddy traces where booted feet had stood, where soaked garments had dripped upon the boards.

"It's that Win," Marm Pierce decided scornfully. "He's forever prying around!" She shut the door with a slam.

"I should think you'd be nervous, you and Jenny, living here alone," he suggested.

"The Valley gets some folks," she agreed. "Folks that don't know how to be alone without being lonely. You've got to know how to be company for yourself, and get along around here!" And she added with a wry chuckle: "Just the same, I'm full as well pleased to have you 'round."

"You mean—on account of your brother?"

"Land, no!" she said scornfully. "No, I don't pay no heed to him. He comes and goes. But I'd as soon have a man in the house right now, for all that!"

He watched her curiously, but before she could answer his unspoken question, there was a step on the porch outside the door; and they turned to see Bart appear. He leaned a steel rod beside the door before he came in. He had changed into dry clothes, coat and overalls.

"Where's Will?" Marm Pierce demanded.

"He wa'n't around," Bart explained. "Nor Zeke either. I figured they'd heard about Huldy and come over here." He looked around.

"Where's Jenny?" he asked.

"Gone to fetch Huldy's clothes," Marm Pierce told him. "It's a wonder you didn't meet her."

Bart shook his head. Saladine saw a broad leather belt about his waist, with a bait attached, and to which a holster hung.

tried the trigger, he found that the pull was feather light.

"I always carry it when I go fishing," Bart explained. "You never know when you run into a moose down here in the woods, or a wildcat."

Marm Pierce was in the dining room, and Bart lowered his tones. "That's the gun Seth shot Will Ferrin with," he said.

Marm Pierce returned, and Jim handed the weapon back to Bart. The old woman was putting on an oilskin coat. "Bart, you see anybody fishing down brook this morning?" she inquired. "I heard there was tracks along the bank."

"Win likely went that way," Bart reminded her. "I noticed tracks my own self, when I came down along. Figured it was him."

Marm Pierce pulled an oilskin hat over her white hair. "I get strangled for air, when I stay indoors the whole day," she declared, and went out. As she closed the door, they heard something silt-her and fall, and saw her stoop down.

"Knocked your rod over, Bart," she called.

"Can't hurt that rod," he assured her cheerfully. She stepped down off the porch and disappeared toward the barn.

"I met Will Ferrin, and Mis' Ferrin, and Zeke Dace, this morning," Saladine said. "I was on my way to your place. I'll run into the washout; so I hacked up and left my car in Will's yard."

"I see it there a while ago," Bart assented.

"Zeke looked like a sick man, to me," Saladine suggested.

Bart grinned as though abashed. "He's falled a lot," he said. "But he was an able man, two years ago. He worked me over, proper, one day. The Valley will whittle a man down." And he added: "Some, like Marm Pierce and Jenny here, they're always the same, and Will's always the same, or would be if it wa'n't for Huldy. She's—twisted him, turned him wrong ways." His brow clouded.

"I wouldn't blame him for anything he was to do. If I was Will, I'd have . . ." He changed this. "If she was mine, I'd have known how to handle her!"

Rain, rain, rain; the lash of whips against this little house, the pelt of bullets.

Bart looked thoughtfully at the door into the dining room; and said huskily, with a nod toward the other room: "You see her this morning, you said. What did you think of her?"

"She was a queer one," Saladine confessed.

Bart leaned forward with a deep intentness. "Saladine," he said. "How would she come to fall?"

"Got dizzy, maybe? Or tripped over something?"

"She wa'n't the sort to get dizzy," Bart protested. "And—the ledge is all smooth, and it's good footing there."

"You mean to say she jumped?"

Bart grinned almost in derision. "She look to you like one that would kill herself, did she?" he demanded.

"No," Saladine admitted. "No, she didn't."

"Then put a name on it," Bart whispered. "If she didn't fall, and didn't jump . . ."

But Saladine was always inclined to think twice before he spoke, and there was matter enough for thought here today. He shook his head, silently.

Bart—though they were quite alone—whispered: "There ain't a soul around here would blame Will!"

But Saladine stared silently at the stove, and Bart did not repeat his sinister suggestion; and a little after, Marm Pierce came briskly in.

"Well, you've let the fire go out, between you!" she said sharply. This was almost true. She whisked off a lid of the stove and thrust a billet in, scolding them impartially. She hung up her coat and hat. "Wet to the knees, I am. Got to go change."

She left them, departing through the dining room; and Bart's glance flickered after her through the open door, as though his eyes were drawn irresistibly that way. Then the two men sat alone a while, till Saladine heard a familiar sound, remotely, coming near. He rose and moved to the door, Bart at his shoulder.

"It's Will Ferrin," Saladine remarked. "And Jenny, in my car." And Bart said in a low, surprised tone: "So 'tis! I didn't know but Will would've got out of the country by now!"

Saladine, to avoid reply, opened the door and stepped out on the porch. Then Will and Jenny, Will with an old suitcase in his hand, alighted from the car and came toward them here.

When Huldy, with that black accusation on her lips, died, Jenny was at first left desperate; till quick loyalty brought her strength again, and resolution too. Marm Pierce, seeing without understanding the girl's deep distress, as soon as they were alone asked gently: "Jenny, you all right? I'm troubled about you."

"Seeing her die upset me," Jenny whispered. "That was all, Granny."

Marm Pierce, only half convinced, yet forebore to question further. "Well, she's dead," she said. She touched Jenny's arm reassuringly.

"Child, she's dead; and Will, he'll be coming soon. Nought now to keep him away from you. . . ."

Jenny's pulse failed and the blood drained from her lips. "Don't, Granny," she protested softly. "With her lying there. Not now."

And she urged: "We'd ought to dress her in dry clothes. Will, he hadn't ought to see her so."

Marm Pierce nodded. Jenny's thoughts were plunging now. There was in her a blind desperate hunger to see Will, to comfort him, to assure him of her loyalty and silence and deep understanding and forgiveness too. She wished on any count to see him, to be with him now. Yet it was some time before she devised that errand involving Huldy's clothes.

Even when she proposed this errand, Marm Pierce at first demurred; but longing to be with Will, Jenny would not be restrained. In a sort of breathless rush, she overbore her grandmother's remonstrances, and so was away.

She took by habit the path toward the woods; and her lips shaped unspoken words of tenderness and comforting. But when she came to the dark border of the wood, the girl paused, shrinking, reluctant to plunge into the shadows. This path would take her by the foot of the ledge, by the very spot where Huldy a while ago had fallen to her death; and Jenny could not endure the prospect. So she retraced her way and turned aside toward Carey's. And halfway up the hill she saw ahead of her a figure, tremendous in the dim rain, familiar, beloved, Will, coming toward her. She stood weak and shaken by the sight of him; yet when he came near, lest he might think she shrank from him, she took one step forward to meet him steadily.

Will looked down at her for a long moment in silence. He said at last, heavily: "Jenny, where you going in this rain?"

"To find you, Will," she told him. "I'm on my way to Bart's," he explained. "To see if maybe Huldy's there?"

Jenny felt her spine chill. "She's not there, Will," she said. "She's at our house."

He frowned in a deep bewilderment. "Your house?"

"Will," she told him gravely, "Huldy's dead!"

The man stood huge above her; wind whipped his hat brim, rain lashed his cheek and struck his face



"Huldy's Dead!"

and filled his eyes. He wiped his eyes with his hand, shook the water off his hand, wiped it on the side of his coat. A storm, visibly, swept across his countenance and left a shadow there.

Yet she thought he was not surprised, and she spoke quickly, to spare him need of speech. "She fell off the ledge down back of your house," she said. "Bart found her, and fetched her over to our place, case Granny could do her any good. But she died."

He asked, after a long moment, dumbly: "Bart know how she come to fall?"

Jenny steeled her tones, made them all reassurance. "No one will ever know that, Will," she said; and she added: "We did all could be done!"

"I guess you would," he agreed. His shoulders bowed as though under a crushing load; and after a moment he said heavily: "Well, I'll go on over."

But Jenny checked him. "I have to get some clothes to dress her," she said gently. "You'd best come back to the house with me, show me her things."

He accepted this without speech; and he and Jenny climbed the steep grade side by side. In Will's barnyard Jenny saw a car standing, and so remembered Saladine. "That man, he's over 't the house," she told Will. "I guess he wouldn't mind if we drove his car over. He'll want it, and that way we can keep Huldy's things dry."

"Over there, is he?" Will echoed, with haunted eyes. "Last time I see Huldy," he said, "she was taking him off down to the ledge. Said she'd show him the brook trail."

And his brow furrowed. "I want to talk to him," he said, ominously. "He left her on the ledge," Jenny

Two Good Pictures Billed For Carolina Theatre, Wilmington

"O'Shaughnessey's Boy," an honest-to-goodness circus picture starring Jackie Cooper and Wallace Beery, is the feature attraction at the Carolina theatre in Wilmington Thursday, Friday and Saturday of this week.

For the first time, the spirit of the circus with all its thrills, excitement and color has been brought to the screen. It is superb entertainment for every age. Comedy, pathos, spectacle and a dramatically powerful story are deftly blended into a picture that wins new honors of its co-stars—Wallace Beery and Jackie Cooper.

The picture is a fitting successor to "The Champ" and "Treason Island," which so firmly established Beery and Cooper as one of the screen's greatest partnerships. Not only is it a fitting successor, it is surpasses both in the eloquence of its human heart interest story and the brilliance of its circus setting.

Beery is given every opportunity to reach new dramatic heights as "Windy," a swaggering, easy-going animal trainer. Jackie, too, has one of his finest roles as "Stubby," Beery's son in the picture, and both give performances that will long stand as standards of excellence.

The animal scenes are the most spectacular ever seen on the screen, particularly those of Beery wrestling with a huge Bengal tiger. It is a thriller, as are the sequences showing Beery breaking in a dangerous tiger-phant act, which has never before been accomplished, on or off the screen.

Next Week Greta Garbo is the star of "Anna Karenina" the feature attraction at the Carolina the first three days of next week.

Her performance as Anna Karenina places her at the very top of her long starring career. It reveals her as a greater actress than she has ever been before, and more beautiful than she has ever been in her former pictures.

Apparently, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios have spared no pains to make Garbo's Tenth Anniversary picture her greatest one.

As her fifteenth lover of the screen, she has been given such an admirable romantic actor as Frederic March, who is co-starred with her.

As her stern husband, the diplomat Karenin, they have given her Basil Rathbone, who so recently scored in the role of the merciless Murdstone in "David Copperfield."

As her little son, they have given her Freddie Bartholomew, one of the greatest child actors of the screen, whose first appearance was, also, in "David Copperfield."

The story, one of the great "immortals" of the past century, is Leo Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina," presented against a background of imperialistic Russia of fifty years ago—the story of a woman torn between the clandestine love for Count Vronsky, a romantic youth, and duty to her stern husband, Karenin.

He never see her, after." They went indoors. "Now you get some dry clothes onto you," she bade him. "I'll pack the things we'll need for her. Where are they, Will?"

He looked at her in a sort of shame. "In there," he said, and pointed through the dining-room door to the bedroom beyond. "That's hers. I mostly sleep 'up attic." He opened a door beside the stove, and she heard him climb the narrow stairs.

She selected what she required; and then on impulse, she made Huldy's bed. Huldy's nightgown she put away; and when she was done, the room was in immaculate order. It pleased her to leave all things as Huldy would have wished to leave them.

When she had packed the suitcase, she came back to the kitchen, and called up the attic stairs: "I'm ready, Will."

He answered her, after a moment. "I'm coming, Jenny."

When they were in Saladine's car, Will said: "The road looked to me like we could get through down to Carey's, Jenny. We'd save a lot of time that way."

She made no comment, trusting such matters to his judgment; and he turned the car down the hill and drove on across the bridge, past Bart's, out to the Valley road, and thus in toward Marm Pierce's farm.

In the yard they stopped, and Will took the suitcase from the back of the car. Saladine and Bart were on the porch to meet them; but if Will had known a passing doubt of Saladine, it was forgotten now. He said to the other man:

(Continued next week)

Dentist—Now, open wide! I'm not going to hurt you.

New Patient—Cut out the professional guff, old man. I'm a dentist myself.

COMMISSIONER'S SALE OF REAL ESTATE

In accordance with the judgment heretofore rendered on the 2nd day of October, A. D. 1935, in the case of Maud McKelthan, et al., vs. Maud McKelthan, et al., the undersigned having been appointed Commissioner to make sale in said case will offer for sale at public auction to the highest bidder for cash at the court house door in the City of Southport, North Carolina, on the 23rd day of November, A. D. 1936, at 12 o'clock noon, as per direction in the above named Judgment, all or parcel of land lying and being in the Township, State of North Carolina, bounded and described as follows: Beginning at a two-inch iron pipe lettered "McK" same being on the east side of State Highway No. 1 in the Township of Liberty, and being the north corner of land, and being the south 58 degrees 45' east 1/2 inch to another iron pipe lettered "McK", same being the east corner of land, thence north 58 degrees 45' east 185 feet and seven inches to another iron pipe lettered "McK", same being the north corner of the same land aforesaid, and being the same land conveyed to Maud McKelthan by J. W. Brooks as appears in Book 38, at page 8, Records of Brunswick County, to which reference is hereby especially made. Dated and posted, this 23rd day of October, A. D. 1936.

ROBERT WATKINS, Commissioner.

NOTICE OF FORECLOSURE

Under and by virtue of a power of sale contained in a certain mortgage deed executed by C. L. Cotton and wife to A. T. McKelthan, on the 12th day of February, 1927, duly recorded in Book No. 23 at Page No. 321, records of Brunswick County, N. C., to secure payment of certain debt therein recited, and thereafter duly assigned to the undersigned, and default having been made in payment of said notes, the undersigned assignee of the mortgage, will on Monday, November 23rd, 1936, at twelve o'clock noon, at the court house door in Brunswick County, N. C., offer for sale to the highest bidder for cash, a certain tract of land in the Township of Liberty, Brunswick County, N. C., bounded and described as follows: Beginning at gate in Southern line of said tract being old Thomas Drenth's line, now C. G. Chambliss' drive, the north 27 east 330 feet with the center of said road leading through the field to a stake; thence south 65 degrees 15 minutes east 410 feet to a stake on said canal; on the west side of a small island; thence north 11 degrees east 724 feet to another gate on the north side of said canal, being E. B. Hewett's corner, thence south 82 east 690 feet to a stake; thence south 11 degrees east 1240 feet to a stake on the center line of said road; thence north 10 degrees west 1200 feet to beginning containing 2 1/2 acres, more or less. Dated and posted, this October 22nd, 1936.

PEOPLES UNITED BANK, Assignee of A. T. McKelthan, Mortgagee.

J. W. Ruark, Attorney, Southport, N. C.

NOTICE OF SUMMONS

State of North Carolina, County of Brunswick. In the Superior Court of the State of North Carolina