

TRAILS' END



by AGNES LOUISE PROVOST

THIRTEENTH INSTALLMENT

"I can't tell you. It isn't mine to tell. Can't you understand that, Barry? Why won't you believe it?"

He wanted to believe, but that dark tormenting suspicion was tearing both of them to pieces.

"Believe that you can't tell? Oh yes, you don't leave me in any doubt of that."

"Barry!" Anne quivered and stiffened. "I've told you all that I can tell."

She turned on him in passionate appeal. "Don't you trust me enough—don't you love me enough to believe me when I tell you that no matter what appearances may be, there was nothing, nothing wrong in my going to meet Jim Kennedy?"

She knew the second it came out that the familiar "Jim Kennedy" had been a mistake. Barry looked shaken, a man almost persuaded, but at the last words hot suspicion flamed again.

"Trust you! I did trust you. I trusted you that night when you came in fresh from keeping a cheap rendezvous with this same man. And you lied to me."

"I have told you all that I can." "You've answered me." He turned abruptly and walked toward the door.

With his hand on the knob he paused. "I have this much more to say. There are some things which can't be overlooked or forgiven—not between man and wife. But I am not going to have any open break with my wife over somebody's chauffeur, nor have my mother's name and mine dragged through a tabloid scandal. We'll go on for the present as we are, and at least maintain the outward civilities. And then if you still refuse to clear this up satisfactorily, you and I are through."

She made no attempt to answer him. There was something in her eyes that hurt him savagely. If he stayed he'd be sweeping her into his arms and pleading with her. He jerked the door open and went out, without a backward glance.

After the door had closed Anne still stood there sick at heart. Barry expected her to stay, but Jim Kennedy had said that she must go. Just for a little, lying back with closed eyes, she wondered what would happen if she defied Jim's orders—if she stayed, and let John Gage meet her here. Upheaval and ruin, and a slimy hail of disgrace. She laughed with a rising note of hysteria, choked it back and abruptly pulled herself out of the chair.

She moved quietly around the room, opening drawers and closets, choosing articles here and there and dropping them on the bed. Indecision was gone.

There was a tap on the door. It was Bertha, with a message. "Mr. Barry sent me up to pack for you. He says he's called back to Marston, and can you be ready to leave tomorrow morning on the seven-forty-three? He's just 'phoned for reservations."

A filmy garment dropped from Anne's fingers. "The seven-forty-three," she repeated blankly. Then she remembered the waiting Bertha.

"Yes, Bertha, of course I can be ready. Here are some of my things. I've just been gathering them together."

Anne went toward the window and looked out to conceal her face from the maid's too-friendly eyes.

"I'll fight for him!" she thought fiercely. "I won't let both of our lives be wrecked like this. I love him and when we're at the Perch again I'll get him back."

Cleo's blue roadster swept recklessly up the drive. A watchful footman sped down the steps.

"Send Kennedy to me," she ordered.

The footman was a new man, but he seemed to be well trained.

Cleo waited impatiently in the library. Here Kennedy came, an infuriating eight minutes late.

"Well, you've bungled your work nicely, haven't you?" "Think so?" He was defiant in an instant.

"I do! You undertook to see that Mrs. Duane left here within a week. She was to disappear completely, and alone. And early this morning they started back to that ranch. Together! Imbecile!"

"I've done better than you think. If she and Duane are starting West on the same train it's for appearances, not for any joy ride. You'll probably find that one or the other of them will go on to Reno," he added significantly.

"Why?" "Oh, Duane horned in while we were talking. At a place where I'd asked her to meet me."

Kennedy looked sharply at Miss Cleo Pendleton. The small childish face was lit for a second with a sort of greedy joy.

"Now that they've gone, I'd better hold myself ready to follow up and see that it goes through. I'll need money for that. How about letting me have the other five grand now? Cash this time."

Cleo considered it. "I will give you the ten thousand in cash and you may turn over the check."

"I couldn't think of asking it." Kennedy bowed politely. "Five thousand will be plenty. When the job is complete I can come back for the other five, and trade it in for the check."

Cleo could have killed him. "Very well. I will have it for you tomorrow at noon."

The door closed on Kennedy. In the hall the new footman appeared from a cross corridor and obligingly let Kennedy out. They exchanged a word or two, and the door closed. Kennedy paused for a second on the steps.

"There's something phony about that bird," he reflected. "He was out of breath. I'll drift, as soon as I get the five grand."

He got it the next day. Inside of an hour he had sent in his notice, received his wages and was on his way to the station.

A few days later Kennedy's eye picked up an item in the paper.

"Mr. and Mrs. Gage will leave next Friday on a trip to the Pacific coast."

Kennedy's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. Gage had business interests out there. It was not likely to be more than just coincidence. "I don't see how there could be anything in it," he reflected, "but it wouldn't hurt to be on hand."

Cleo saw the same item. She sat up suddenly. Nancy and Barry had gone West. The Gages were going West, ostensibly to the Coast, but Marston was on the way. Jim Kennedy, if he kept his word, was going West also.

"I don't suppose there can be anything in it," she thought. "But Barry knows the Gages, and he had been trying for years to get John Gage interested in that old valley. It's queer. I wish I had a decent excuse to follow them."

Anne was discovering that not even the beloved Perch could banish a tormenting devil of jealousy and suspicion. Things grew worse instead of better. As a slow week dragged by, each day held less hope of reconciliation.

Ling's bland face never betrayed anything. Anne was glad that Martha Larrabee had gone back to Marston.

Martha had closed the little house at Trail's End only a week before their return. It was quiet and peaceful, but it was lonely. Sometimes she wished bitterly that she had never seen Barry Duane.

She rode Comet often but always alone. She saw Barry in the distance one day, sitting with the Captain at a jutting point in the trail. Comet whickered a shrill greeting and Captain replied, but Barry merely turned his head, raised his hat and turned back.

Anne's face stung with angry heat. She'd rather be ordered out of the house than treated like a child in disgrace.

She went back to her own loneliness, and presently Barry came in, saying little. She was dropping her small efforts at cheerfulness now. She must have it out with him and end this, one way or another.

"Are you busy, Barry?" "No." He put down the book he was reading.

"Don't you think it is time we came to a different understanding, Barry? You know we can't go on this way."

"I agree with you entirely. I am ready and have been, whenever you want to do your part."

Her eyes closed for a moment. "But I have told you that there are things that I cannot explain, with-

out—without involving other people. I've promised—you shouldn't ask me to break that."

"Most escapades do involve other people," he retorted.

"I've done rash things, I know, but nothing that I am ashamed of. Won't you believe that? You've got to, Barry. All the rest of our lives depends on it—just having some—some faith between us. If you can't have that, I'm going. I won't stay in your house like this."

He was on his feet now, tramping impatiently up and down.

"How can you expect me to accept a situation like that blindly?" He stopped in front of her and caught her arm in a close grip.

"Don't you know that I'd give up everything I have on earth to hear you say something which would set this hideous thing right? To have you back as you used to be—and to be able to take my wife back among my friends without—"

If he only hadn't said that, about his friends! Anne shivered. "I have told you all I can."

She swayed a little, stiffened and stared at him bitterly.

"As for your friends, they needn't matter so much now. Marston is a long way from Granleigh. Tell them I'm dead if you want to. That's quite respectable, isn't it? The best people do it, Barry."

"You're talking ridiculously! What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing. I'm not going to commit suicide. Not because my husband refuses to believe that I'm decent." She walked slowly toward the door, pausing to look back.

"I'm going—back to Trail's End. Good-bye."

"You can't go now," he said sharply. "The Gages are coming. They will be here next Tuesday."

She stared at him in a shocked sort of way, and said "Oh!" half under her breath. "I am sorry," she added hurriedly. "But you see, I shall not be here."

In spite of all that had passed he could scarcely credit his ears.

"I suppose," he said in a tight voice, "that you understand what this visit means to me? Whatever our personal differences may be, they expect a hostess."

"I'm sorry, Barry. Truly I am." Her eyes were desperate. "But I can't stay. I—"

"Don't trouble to apologize. I'm not a jailor, to keep you here against your will. But if you leave me now, I'm through. Don't ever try to come back again."

She put her hand to her throat. "I understand. I shan't come back, Barry. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," he said curtly. He was cruel with anger and savagely hurt.

He heard a door close softly, and light footsteps that died. Silence after that. Empty silence.

Many miles to the East a number of small things had happened.

The new footman had left after less than a week of service, a circumstance which vaguely disturbed the colorless Mrs. Pendleton. Cleo looked contentedly at her own image in a long mirror and decided to contrive a call on Mrs. John Gage.

At the Gage offices Winston called to make a personal report and found that Gage had been called away. A secretary admitted that Mr. Gage was due to start shortly on a trip West. Winston kept his verbal dynamite stored in his own cautious head.

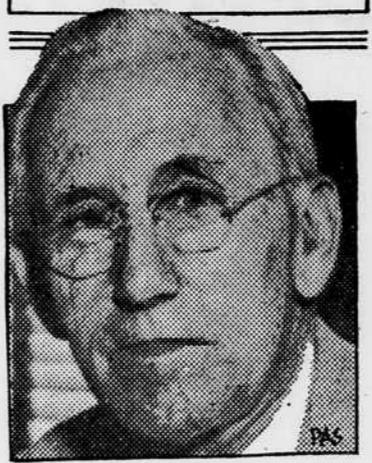
In his comfortable hotel Kennedy was studying plump time-tables and discovering possibilities. He also discovered that at odd moments he was seeing the same face with suspicious frequency. Being resourceful he considered the situation and took reservations for New Orleans, where he had no intention of going. Then by car and plane and modest day coach he shook off his exasperated shadow and zigzagged his way to Marston.

The Junction's best hostelry was the railroad hotel. Kennedy registered as Frederick James acquired a light, but convincing cough to account for his aimless presence, and a battered old car.

He might have been interested if he had known of Gage's absence from town. This time Paula had been left behind in their huge hotel apartment.

Nevertheless she pouted at the thought of having to go to some doleful ranch in a rough mountain valley. She had just received a telegram from John, too, saying that he would have to join her at Chicago, but had made all arrangements for her by wire.

Now Vice-Governor



WASHINGTON . . . Judge J. Thomas (above), Democrat of Nebraska is now Vice-Governor of the Federal Reserve Board on appointment by President Roosevelt. He is the "farthest West" member of the Board.

Paula was feeling just a little sorry for herself. Miss Cleo Pendleton could not have chosen a better moment to ask of Mrs. John Gage.

A few days later, when Gage boarded his own car in Chicago, his first glimpse was of a head of snug, shining gold, very much at home in one of his chairs. In the privacy of a stateroom he jerked an expressive thumb and said "How come?"

"You don't mind, John, do you? She is a friend of this Mrs. Duane's and she told me that Mrs. Duane had been asking her to come out and visit them. I thought it would be nice to have somebody along and she's frightfully amusing."

"Oh yes . . . yes, honey, it's all right. Old Ambrose's girl, is she? How did she know we were headed for Duane's place?"

"Why, I don't know. She just seemed to know it. You're not angry, are you? I did want somebody with me, and I had to start all alone!"

"There, there!" He smoothed a roseleaf cheek and kissed her. (CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

Red Cross To Have Regional Meetings

The first of a series of three regional conferences for Red Cross chapters in North Carolina will be held at Tarboro Tuesday, September 25. The other conference will be at Pinehurst Wednesday, September 26, and at Asheville Friday, September 28.

The conference at Tarboro will open at 10 a. m. at the First Baptist church. Richard F. Allen, manager of the eastern area, of Washington, will attend the conference and will speak at the luncheon session on "Today's Challenge to the Red Cross." William Carl Hunt, assistant manager from the area, will be another speaker from national headquarters, leading forum discussions on membership and financial problems and fundamentals of Red Cross organization and service. A. J. Berres, Jr., a state field representative, will give a report on Red Cross work in North Carolina during the past year. A life-saving demonstration will be given in the municipal swimming pool by members of the Edgecombe county Red Cross life saving service.

The prize dogs are winning ribbons at the fair, while many other purps, in the opinion of the neighbors, should have ribbons tightly drawn around their necks.

The poets write sad verses about the fading leaves of autumn, while the average man is more worried over the fading of the summer suit.

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