

The GOOSE WOMAN

by REX BEACH

SECOND INSTALMENT

The mystery of the murder, by the way, still remained unsolved. The clues left by the slayer of Amos Ethridge were so slender that no progress had been made in piecing them together, and, naturally theories of various sorts began to be advanced. Several of the Chicago papers declared that the cross of twigs on the dead man's breast proved to be a Klan outrage, and this explanation was generally accepted, for Westland was a strong hold of the secret order and Ethridge was a bitter enemy of the organization. What is more, an impressive demonstration had recently occurred here. There had been a parade and a midnight conclave at which scores of new members had been initiated. Special trains had been run from distant points, hundreds of automobiles had assembled, thousands of robed men had gathered in the light of a tremendous fiery cross erected on a hill just outside the city limits.

Out of this occurrence had sprung a bitter political quarrel, for Amos Ethridge had boldly proclaimed through the press that the Governor was an avowed member and that the conclave had been planned with his knowledge and consent. Ethridge had gone further; he had charged that the entire machinery of law enforcement had been betrayed, delivered over to the Invisible Empire. He had promised to adduce irrefutable evidence, proof positive, when the time came. His accusations had met with a tremendous popular response and, as a matter of fact, it was largely as a result of this outspoken support that he announced his intention to

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went out, just as it had gone out a week previously at this precise point. Tonight he did what he had done on that other occasion; he stopped, got out, and went around to the front of the car to investigate. Gerald did not pretend to have much knowledge of automobiles, but this coincidence, it seemed to him, proved precisely what he had told the dealer; to wit, there was a loose electric connection somewhere and a certain sort of jar destroyed the contact, dislocated something or other. The dealer had promised to have it fixed but—well, this was a sample of his work. Fine way to turn out a brand-new car, even a cheap one!

Gerald shook the lamp gently, but it appeared to be rigidly attached to its support and the bulb did not relight. He was afraid to shake it too hard, for fear of pulling it off—this was no rugged, hand-made, foreign car. Then he fingered aimlessly at the wire beneath the lamp, but that, too, was disappointingly secure. He reasoned that the wire must run under the hood of the machine and somewhere attach itself to a battery or a dynamo or a generator or something, so he stepped back, lifted the bonnet, and peered inside. He could make out very little indeed, even with the aid of a match, and recognized nothing that could by any possibility be considered a dynamo or an electric lighting plant. The vital organs of an automobile, it seemed to him, were unnecessarily complicated; he would have considered many of them utterly useless except for the fact that here and there "things" were revolving. He quickly discovered several wires, any one of which might be the cause of his trouble, so, striking a second, then a third match, he gingerly tested them. He had not gone far when he uttered a grunt and jerked his hand away, incidentally bumping his elbow against something sharp and hard. Automobiles are full of painful corners. He dropped the match and swore, whereupon he heard subdued laughter and through the gloom discovered a couple of figures near by.

"Do you fellows know anything about automobiles?" he inquired. There came an answer in Italian, so he confessed, ruefully: "Well, neither do I. I can drive 'em, but I can't fix 'em." "He closed the bonnet, passed back through the glare of his good headlight, and, stepping into the car, drove on. It was a relief to note that the car ran as well with one light as with two. Some car! This little buggy might have her faults, but he loved her, just the same. It was the first automobile he had ever possessed and his pride of ownership was inordinate, for it represented a terrible extravagance. It was a lovely shade of blue, too, the particular shade he adored, and he would have immensely enjoyed showing it to his mother. That, however, was impossible. He could never make her understand. Involuntarily, he fetched a deep sigh and shook his head.

Instead of proceeding on past the poultry farm and parking his machine in the grove near the entrance to the Ethridge lane, as he had done a week previously, he turned in through a break in the fence before reaching the farm, and killed his motor under a wide-spreading tree. It was barely possible that the police might be watching the scene of the tragedy, and in any event it was not a nice place to be on a dark night. Gerald hated dark colors, dark nights, dark deeds, and the thought of what had occurred a week ago tonight in that lane, half a mile ahead, gave him a sick feeling. He felt jumpy as he set out across the open pasture land towards the lights of his mother's cottage, and more than once he cast apprehensive glances back of him or stopped to listen.

Soon the familiar outlines of chicken houses and runs appeared, then a dog barked. It was Jack, the old Airdale. The dog recognized Gerald's voice and greeted him with extravagant affection when the young man dropped down inside the fence. Mrs. Holmes had heard the disturbance; she opened the kitchen door and peered out, inquiring guardedly:

"It that you, Jerry?" "Hello, mother!" Gerald entered and closed the door behind him, then stooped to kiss the woman's upturned lips. When his face was within a hand's breadth of hers he checked the movement and cried, reproachfully. "Oh, mother?"

Mrs. Holmes answered petulantly: "Very well! Don't kiss me if you don't want to. But for Heaven's sake don't start in with a temperance lecture!" There was a moment of silence, then: "You don't understand what it is to live all alone, in a place like this. You're never lonesome. You have people to talk to. You see things and hear

ture. But you know how I feel about—drinking!" The young man bent his head and pressed his things—

"All right, mother. I won't lec-



"Is that you, Jerry?" she asked.

lips to the woman's cheek.

"When did you get back from Chicago?"

"Today. This afternoon."

"Have a good trip?"

"Yes. They liked my drawings and gave me more work. I got a new story to illustrate, too. But—I was all broken up over the murder, of course! I left here the next morning, you remember? I didn't hear of it until that afternoon—then just the bare account. Gee! It was a shock. I felt as if I ought to get on the train and come right back. I wanted to be here for the funeral, too, but—I couldn't get my money in time and I didn't dare try to borrow from that editor."

Mrs. Holmes smiled faintly, almost sneeringly. "The funeral went off all right without you."

"You don't understand how I felt towards Mr. Ethridge. You never liked him, after what he did for me, but I did, for he gave me my start; made it possible for me to have a career. Not many rich men would interest themselves in a ragged, obscure young—"

"In the son of a 'goose woman!'" Mrs. Holmes broke in. "Of course you read the papers and saw what they called me?"

Gerald flushed. "Yes. Yes, I read—everything."

"The rotters. Well, you're not ragged now, are you?" Mrs. Holmes stared at her son, and in her gaze, oddly enough, there were both pride and resentment. As an artist she hated Gerald, as a man she—well, he was her son, blood of her blood. What she beheld was a handsome youth—a boy of sufficient good looks and charm of manner to warm any mother's heart. Gerald's face was frank and sunny; it was unusually expressive, too, but curbed with that veil of conscious repression common to supersensitive people; it was the eager, dreamy face of an artist, a writer, a musician. The boy's faults and his weakness, Mary Holmes well knew, were the faults and the weaknesses of most dreamers.

She had never dared to analyze very closely her feelings for this child of hers—it is doubtful if she would have succeeded very well had she tried—for ever since she had nursed him at her breast he had roused within her emotions that violently clasped. There were times when he filled her with a great satisfaction, a sublime contentment, then again times when she hated him fiercely—yes, hated him. There were occasions when she lavished upon him a sort of savage affection—these occasions were rare, by the way—and again occasions when she treated him with a cruelty that was positively feline. Nearly always, however, her feelings were mixed and he excited that distressing warfare within her bosom. He was at once her comfort and her torture, her blessing and her bane.

"Gee. It gave me a fright to realize that I hadn't been gone from here for half an hour—an hour at most—when it happened," Gerald went on. "Why I might have been involved in it."

"You? Nonsense. Whoever killed Ethridge drove up in an automobile and left it standing in that pine grove across from the lane. I saw the tracks the next morning." Young Holmes started; he eyed his mother apprehensively. "By the way, you must have met Mr. Ethridge on your way back to town?"

"N-no."

"You must have met him. You couldn't have had time to walk to the end of the street-car-line before he came along. It didn't seem to me you'd been gone ten minutes when I heard his car pass and then the shots. Of course, it was longer than that—"

"Have you talked to the police?"

"Certainly. They questioned me the morning of the murder and they've been here a couple of times since."

"Did you—tell them about those—those automobile tracks? I suppose of course they noticed them?" Mrs. Holmes nodded. "Sure! You couldn't miss them—they were as plain as the nose on your face."

"Have they formed any suspicions?" (CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE)

Employment Gain Loosening Purse Strings of Public

New York—The spending public's confidence has been substantially repaired and its purse strings loosened by rising employment and pay rolls in the last three years, says the Standard Statistics Company in a survey of current changes in spending habits.

A sharp contraction in personal expenditures was noted during the depression; even those factory, store and office workers who were still employed, farmers who were making money, and individuals whose incomes had not ceased were apprehensive to the future, and inclined to hold on to what they had, the analysis reveals. With the trend of income now reversed, and rising pay rolls, farm revenues and security prices, and a munificent government, providing additional cash income, greater confidence has inspired more liberal spending policies.

Most conspicuous has been the reversal of the trend away from high-priced cars and toward those in the lowest price grouping. In 1934, about 65 per cent of all automobiles sold carried a wholesale price of \$500 or less—corresponding to a retail price of about \$700. In 1935, the proportion in the lowest price class was reduced to about 58 per cent, and a further moderate extension of the trend has been noted so far this year.

Sales of such products as vacuum cleaners, ironing machines, washing machines, radios, electric refrigerators, furniture and rugs and carpets have been showing steady gains since 1932. Sales of vacuum cleaners for 1935, for instance, were more than double the 1932 figure. Since these are semi-luxury items, rather than necessities, there is a definite tendency to delay purchase when curtailment of income is feared.

Motion picture theater attendance is running some 15 per cent above last year. European travel increased 8 per cent last year, and reservations to date indicate an increase of perhaps 20 per cent more this year.

Airplane passenger miles rose 66 per cent in 1935, as compared with

1934. The rise in automobile travel is indicated by the American Petroleum Institute estimate of a 9 per cent increase in gasoline consumption for the first quarter of 1936.

Wilson Man Gets Picking Record

Wilson—Charlie Gill, of Wilson, has been picking winners in athletic and political contests for 20 years, and feels he is entitled to claim some kind of a record.

Here is what he claims to have accomplished in his predictions: He has successfully predicted the election of every president since 1916. He has named before election day every North Carolina Governor since 1916. He has picked seven out of eight

world's series winners in baseball, and 16 of the last 20.

He has picked winners in every heavyweight boxing champion match since 1916 except two—"Dempsey let me down," he says. He has chosen 14 out of the last eighteen American and National League pennant winners correctly. Said Charlie: "There's one thing I'm not going to venture a guess on—the 1936 presidential race."

IN AN IRISH SCHOOL

Teacher: "Now children, who can tell me what a lake is?"

Jimmie McFadden: "Plaze, Miss, it do be a howl in the bottom of a tay-kittle."

Social Security Check



WASHINGTON . . . A check for \$274,000, signed by Guy F. Allen (above), of the Treasury Department, is the first social security payment under the new Federal law. It went to Pennsylvania for social security payments throughout the state.

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