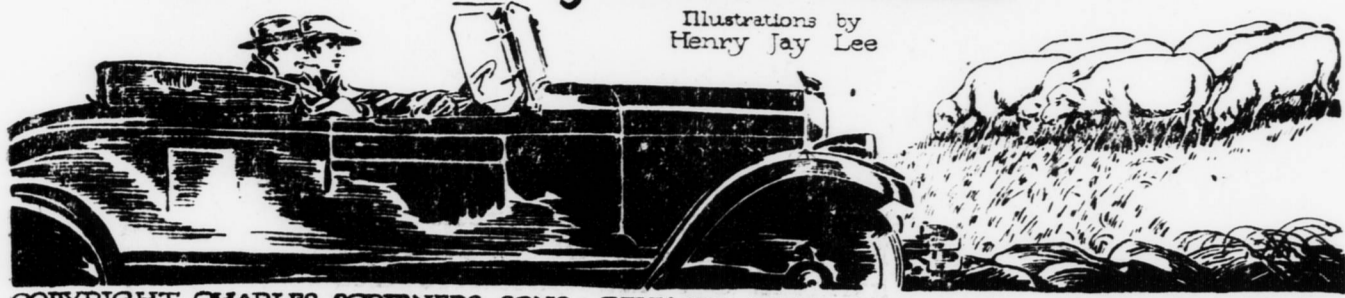


BLACKSHEEP!

By Meredith Nicholson

Illustrations by Henry Jay Lee



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The Governor quickly recovered his spirits and with characteristic enthusiasm began putting the new launch through its paces. When he found that Putney was skilled in the handling of such craft he cheerfully turned the launch over to him. "You take it and run up to Caldwellville, where you'd better get supper. Pick up the Heart O' Dreams mail and bring it back to Huddleston, and meet us on the wharf at nightfall. We've got a heavy night's work ahead of us. Archie and I are going aboard the tug to study your father's case carefully. You may rely upon us to extricate him from his embarrassments."

As they boarded the Arthur B.

Grover the Governor bade Archie follow him to the bow where Eliphalet was moodily gazing into the water.

"Mr. Congdon," the Governor began, "as a mere looker-on at the passing show I'm much out of life."

"What I do or do not do," cried the old man, "is none of your infernal business."

"An error of considerable magnitude. I am qualified to offer you excellent advice based on exact information as to your intimate domestic affairs. You're a meddling person, Mr. Congdon, with a slight element of cruelty in your makeup, and morally you are skidding. As a result of your miserly ways and your selfishness you've just about ruined your life. The penitentiary yawns for you. But in spite of your cowardly conduct I'm right disposed to pull you out of the hole."

"I'll make you a proposition. I've heard that you make a habit of carrying your will around in that umbrella. Give me the thing!"

Eliphalet hesitated, but the Governor gently pried it from the old man's fingers. It was a heavy, bulgy, disreputable-looking umbrella with a battered curved handle. The Governor opened it, shook out a number of manilla envelopes, all carefully sealed, and flung the umbrella from him. As it struck the water it spread open and the wind seized it and bore it gaily away. The Governor watched it for a moment—then began opening the envelopes and scanning the contents.

"It's evident from the dates of these wills that you've been steadily cutting down the amount of your bequest to your son," the Governor was saying. "Watch me, Archie, so you can bear witness to the destruction of these things; they're all going to feed the fishes except this earliest one, which divides the property in generous lumps between Putney Congdon and his children, with a handsome personal recognition of Mrs. Congdon. That shall be preserved."

"Now, Mr. Congdon, if you will promise me never to make another will without consulting me, but will let this one stand, and if you agree not to interfere any further with your son's family or his wife or his children, I'll guarantee that in due season you'll leave this tug a free man."

"I promise," said the old man steadily. And his face expressed

infinite relief. The pathos of the weakened little figure now stripped of its arrogance, and the assertion of a long-latent kindness in his countenance, encouraged the hope that happier times were in store for all the Congdons.

The Governor and Archie were waiting on the Huddleston wharf when Putney and Leary returned from Caldwellville, bringing two sacks of Heart O' Dreams mail.

"That's fine," said the Governor. "Archie, you and Leary take the launch and carry the mail over to Heart O' Dreams. At twelve o'clock meet me about a quarter of a mile this side of Carey's barricade; Leary's got the place spotted so he can find it in the dark."

"I have a surprise for you," said Ruth, when Archie handed over the mail. "If you will step to the door, bear left ten yards and stop by a bench under our tallest pine, some one you pretend to like rather particularly may appear."

"Isabel!" he exclaimed, as she came toward him out of the shadows and paused by the bench.

"I haven't yet had the opportunity to say how happy I am that you are able to be up. I'm grateful for this glimpse of you. It's always just glimpses. But those glimpses do funny things to my heart."

"That heart of yours! How did it ever manage to survive the strain and excitement of last night?"

"Oh, it functioned splendidly. But it was at work in a good cause. I love you Isabel, I love you!" he said softly.

"You must never say that to me again," she said slowly and determinedly. "After my stupid, cruel thoughtlessness you must hate me. I've had time to do a good deal of thinking, and my opinion of myself isn't very high. Out of sheer contrariness that night in Washington I teased you into doing things that led you into danger—and the danger is still about us. I'm sorry; with all my heart I'm sorry! If anything should happen to you it would be my fault—my very grievous sin! And maybe there are other men that I may have said similar things to—oh, you were not the first!" she laughed forlornly. "They, too, may have plunged into the same pit I dug for you. Oh, how foolish I've been!"

"I want you to promise," she was saying, "that you won't in any way interfere with my cousin here. I can't have you taking further risks."

"You would have us run just as the game grows interesting. Of course we're not going to quit the field and leave that fellow here to annoy you! He's a dangerous character and we're going to get rid of him."

She was depressed, much as Ruth had been a few hours earlier, and his efforts to win her to a happier frame of mind were unavailing.

She jumped up quickly and hurried away, her head bowed. He watched her until she was swallowed up in the darkness.

Shortly before midnight Archie and Leary left the Arthur B. Grover and paddled cautiously toward the point fixed by the Governor for their rendezvous. They were fortified with a rifle, a shotgun, and several packets of rockets for signaling the tug. Leary, restless because he couldn't smoke, was silent. He managed his paddle so deftly that there was hardly a drip that could announce their proximity to any one lying in wait on the bay. Several minutes before Archie caught the listless wash of calm waters on a beach, Leary heard it and paused, peering at the opaque curtain of the woodland beyond the lighter shadow of the shore.

"We struck it right," he announced, returning from an examination of the shore markings. They carried the canoe into the wood and lay down beside it, communicating in whispers.

An instant later the Governor threw himself on the ground beside them. He rested for a few moments—then jumped up.

"Well, boys, everything's ready!" One by one his little army assembled, rising from the ground like spectres. Leary was already deploying the men. The Governor laid his hand on Archie's shoulder. In the contact

something passed between them, such a communication as does not often pass from the heart of one man to another.

"If it comes to the worst for me, you and Isabel will look out for Ruth. I needn't ask you that. Use the tug quickly to clear things up here; there must be nothing left to tell the tale. See old man Congdon keeps his promise. That will of his is in my blue serge coat in the closet of my room. If I die, bury me on the spot; no foolishness about that. I died to the world seven years tonight, so a second departure will call for no flowers!"

When they reached the little stream that defined the boundary of Heart O' Dreams territory the Governor, Archie and Leary got in readiness for their dash across the bridge and over the barricade. The purl of water eager for its entrance into the bay struck upon Archie's ear with a spiteful insistence. There was not a sound from the further side of the stream. They crawled across the bridge and Archie ran his hand over the frame of logs against which stones had been heaped in a rough wall, as the Governor explained to him. Archie had determined to lead the assault, but while he was seeking a footing in the crevices the Governor swung himself to the top. His foot struck a stone perched on the edge and it rolled down into the camp with a great clatter.

As though it had touched a trigger a shot-gun boomed upon the night, indicating that Carey had not been caught napping. Orders given in a shrill voice and answering shouts proclaimed the marshaling of his forces. Archie and Leary reached the Governor as he was crawling over the stones. Some one threw a shovelful of coals upon a heap of wood that evidently had been soaked in inflammable oil, for the flames rose with a roar.

It may have been that Carey had grown wary of murder as a means of gaining his end after the escape of the previous night, for the first move of his men was to attempt to drive out the invaders with rifles swung as clubs. Carey screamed at them hysterically, urging them to greater efforts.

The great bonfire kept the belligerents constantly in sight of each other, sulking, dodging, engaging in individual encounters poorly calculated to bring victory to either side. One of Carey's men lay near the barricade, insensible from a crack over the head from a rifle butt. His plight was causing uneasiness among his comrades, who began drawing back toward the shadows. Carey, seeing that their pluck was ebbing, cursed them.

"We ain't gettin' anywhere!" growled Leary at the end of a third inconclusive hand-to-hand struggle with only a few battered heads as the result.

(To Be Continued)

ADMINISTRATRIX'S NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that I have qualified as Administratrix of the estate of A. W. Falvey, deceased, late of Rutherford County, N. C., and all persons indebted to said estate will make immediate payment to the undersigned. All persons having claims against said estate will present them to me properly proven for payment on or before December 8th, 1928, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

This December 8th, 1927.
DORCAS M. FALVEY,
Administratrix of A. W. Falvey,
Deceased. 16-4t.

Nell: "Say, does Harold know how to drive?"

Mell: "Does he? Say, he hit a deputy sheriff this afternoon that everybody else has been trying to hit for months with succeeding."

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A suggestion to parents with youngsters away at school . . .



Next to seeing them in person there is nothing so utterly satisfying as hearing the voices of the youngsters who are away at school. And the young people, too, are cheered and encouraged after a chat with the folks at home.

Thoughtful parents arrange to have their son or daughter call home, say once or twice a week, using the cheaper station-to-station service, and reversing the charges.

Ask the long distance operator to give you the night station-to-station rate to the town in which the school is located. It is sure to be less than you expect.



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