

Satan Sanderson

By HALLIE ERMINE RIVES,
Author of "Heart Courageous," Etc

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Chapter 26

At the sound of steps in the jail corridor and the harsh grating of the key in the lock, Harry rose hastily from the iron cot whereon he had been sitting and took a step forward.

"Jessica!" he exclaimed. She came toward him, her breath hurried, her cheek pale. Tom Felder's face was at her shoulder. "I have a little matter to attend to in the office," he said, nodding to Harry. "I shall wait for you there, Miss Holme."

She thanked him with a grateful look, and as he vanished, Harry took her hand and kissed it. He longed to take her in his arms. "I heard of it only at noon," she began, her voice uncertain. "I was afraid they would not let me see you, so I went to Mr. Felder. They were saying on the street that he had offered to defend you."

"I had not been here an hour when he came," he said.

"I know you have no money," she went on. "I know what you did with the gold you found. And I have begged him to let me pay for any other counsel he will name. I have not told him—that I am to you, but I have told him that I am far from poor and that nothing counts beside your life. He says you have forbidden him to do this— forbidden him to allow any help from any one. Hugh, Hugh! Why do you do this? The money should be yours, not mine, for it was your father's! It is yours, for I am your wife!"

He kissed her hand again without answering.

"Haven't I a right now to be at your side? Mayn't I tell them?"

He shook his head. "Not yet, Jessica."

"I must obey you," she said, with a wan smile, "yet I would share your shame as proudly as your glory! You are thinking me weak and despicable, perhaps, because I wanted you to go away. But women are not men, and I—I love you so, Hugh!"

"I think you are all that is brave and good," he protested.

"I want you to believe," she went on, "that I knew you had done no murder. If an angel from heaven were to come to declare it I would not have believed it. I only want now to understand."

"What do you not understand?" he asked gently.

She half turned toward the door as she said, in a lower key: "After you had gone many things came back to me that seemed strange—something curious in your manner. You had not seemed wholly surprised when I told you you were accused. Why did you shut the cabin door and speak so low? Was there any one else there when I came?"

He averted his face, but he did not answer. She was treading on near ground.

"My horse came back this afternoon," she continued. "He had been ridden hard in the night, and his flanks were cut cruelly with a whip. You did not use him, but some one did."

She waited a moment. Still he made no reply.

"I want to ask you," she said abruptly, "do you know who killed Dr. Moreau?"

His blood chilled at the question. He looked down at her speechless. "You must let me speak," she said. "You won't answer that. Then you do know who really did it. Oh, I have thought so much since last night! For some reason you are shielding him. Was it the man who was in the cabin—who rode my horse? If he is guilty, why do you help him off and so make yourself partly guilty? The whole town believes you are guilty—I see it in all their faces. They are sorry, many of them, for they don't hate you as they did, but they think you did it—even Mr. Felder, though I have told him what I suspect and though he is working now to defend you!"

"Jessica," he urged, "you must trust me and have faith in me. I know it is hard, but I can't explain to you! I can't tell you—yet—why I do as I am doing, but you must believe that I am right."

"You speak as if you were sorry for me," she said, "and not for yourself. Is it because you know you are not in real danger—that you know the truth must come out, only you can't tell it yourself or tell me either? Is that it?"

"It is not that, Jessica," he said gravely, "yet you must not fear for me—for my life. Try to believe me when I say that some time you will understand and know that I did only what I must."

"Will that be soon?" she asked.

"I think it may be soon," he answered.

Her face lighted. The puzzle and dread lifted. "Oh, then," she said—"oh, then, I shall not be afraid. I cannot share your thoughts nor your secret, and I must rebel at that. You mustn't blame me—I wouldn't be a woman if I did not—but I love you more than all the world, and I shall believe that you know best. Hugh," she added softly, "do you know that—you haven't kissed me?"

Before her upturned, pleading eyes and trembling lips the iron of his purpose bent to the man in him, and he

took her into his arms.

A frosty gloom was over the city of Aniston, moon and stars hidden by a cloudy sky, from which a light snow, the first of the season, was drifting down. The streets were asleep. Only occasional belated pedestrians were to be seen in the chilly air. Tom saw a man, his face muffled from snowflakes, pass hurriedly toward the fountain square, from whose steeple 2 o'clock was just striking. The wayfarer skirted the square, keeping in cover of the buildings as though avoiding chance observation, till he stood on the pavement of a Gothic chapel fronting the open space.

On the night of his flight from Smoky Mountain, Hugh had ridden hard till dawn, abandoning the horse to find its way back as best it might. He had slept through the next day. For two days after his arrival he had hung about outside the town in a fever of impatience, for, though he had readily ascertained that the premises were unoccupied, the first night he had been frightened away by the too zealous scrutiny of a policeman, and on the next he had been unable to force the door. That morning he had secured a skeleton key, and now the weather was propitious for his purpose.

After a moment's reconnoitering he scaled the frost-fretted iron railings and gained the shelter of the porch. He tried the key anxiously. To his relief, it fitted. Another minute and he stood in the study, the door locked behind him, his veins beating with excitement.

Crouching down before the safe, he took from his pocket the paper upon which was written the combination.

The match scorched his fingers, and he lighted another and began to turn

the knob. The lock bore both figures and letters in concentric rings, and he saw that the seven figures Harry had written formed a word. Hugh dropped the match with a smothered exclamation, for the word was Jessica! So Harry really had loved her in the old days! He swung the massive door wide and took out the canvas bag with the thousand dollars. With this and the ruby ring—it must easily be worth as much again—he could put the round world between himself and capture.

He closed the safe and with the bag of coin in his hand groped his way to the door of the chapel. It was less dark there, for the snow was making a white night outside, and the stained glass cast a wan glimmer across the aisles. He greatly needed sleep, and tonight in the open that was out of the question. He could gain several hours' rest where he was and still get away before daybreak. He drew together the altar cushions and lay down, the canvas bag beside him, but he was cold, and at length he rose and went into the vestry for a surplice. He wrapped this about him and, lighting a cigarette, lay down again. He was very tired, and in a few minutes he was sleeping heavily.

The last half consumed cigarette dropped from his relaxing fingers to the cushion, where it made a smoldering nest of fire. A tiny tongue of flame caught the edge of a wall hanging, ran up to the dry oaken rafters and speedily ignited them. In fifteen minutes the interior of the chapel was a mass of flame, and Hugh woke gasping and bewildered.

With a cry of alarm he sprang to his feet, seized the bag of coin and ran to the door of the study. In his haste he stumbled against it, and the dead lock snapped to. He was a prisoner now, for he had left the skeleton key in the inside of the outer door. Clutching his treasure, he ran to the main entrance. It was fast. He tried the smaller windows. Iron bars were set across them.

He made shift to wrap the surplice about his mouth against the stifling smoke and fiery vapors. The bag dropped from his hand, and the gold rolled about the floor. He stooped and clutched a handful of the coins and crammed them into his pocket. Was he to die, after all, like this, caught like a rat in a trap?

Uttering a hoarse cry, with the strength of despair, Hugh wrenched a pew from the floor and made of it a ladder to reach the rose window. Mounting this, he beat frantically with his fist upon the painted glass. The crystal shivered beneath the blows, and clinging to the iron supports, his beard burned to the skin, he set his face to the aperture and drew a gulping breath of the sweet, cold air. In his agony, with that fiery hell opening beneath him, he could see the massed people watching from the safety that was so near.

"Look! Look!" The sudden cry went up, and a thrill of awe ran through the crowd. The glass Hugh had shattered had formed the face of the penitent thief in the window design, and his outstretched arms fitted those of the figure. It was as though by some ghastly miracle the painted features had suddenly sprung into life, the haggard eyes opened in appeal.

All at once there came a shout of warning. The wall opened outward, tottered and fell.

Then it was that they saw the writhing figure, tangled in the twisted lead bars of the wrecked rose window. Shielding their faces from the unendurable heat, they reached and bore it to safety, laying it on the crisp, snowy grass and tearing off the singed and smoking ministerial robes.

Judge Conwell was one of these. In the flaring confusion he leaned over the figure. The gleam of the ruby ring on the finger caught his eye. He bent forward to look into the drawn and distorted face.

"Good God!" he said. "It's Harry Sanderson!"

Chapter 27

An communities such as Smoky Mountain the law moves with fearful rapidity. Harry had been formally arraigned the second morning after his self-surrender and had pleaded not guilty. The grand jury was in session—indeed, had about finished its labors—and there had been no reason for delay. All necessary witnesses for the state were on the ground, and Felder for his part had no others to summon. So that when Dr. Brent one keen forenoon swung himself off a Pullman at the station, returning from his ten days' absence, he found the town thrilling with the excitement of the first day of the trial. Before he left the station he had learned of Prendergast's death and accusation and knew that Tom Felder had come to the prisoner's defense. Dr. Brent had taken no stock in the young lawyer's view of Hugh Stires.

He betook himself to the filled courtroom. The court had opened two hours before and half the jury had been selected. His attention was given first to the bench where the prisoner sat and second to a chair close to the railing beside Mrs. Halloran's, where a girl's face glimmered palely under a light veil.

Toward this chair the hundreds of eyes in the room that morning had often turned. Since the day Mrs. Halloran had surprised Jessica at work upon the rock statue she had kept her counsel; but, as the physician had conjectured, the monument had been stumbled upon and had drawn curious visitors. Thus the name on the grave had become common property and the coincidence had been chattered of. That Jessica had chiseled the statue was not doubted. She had bought the tools in town, and old Paddy Wise, the black smith, had sharpened them for her. The story Prendergast had told in the general store, too, had not been forgotten, and the old she had given the fever-stricken man had acquired a new significance in face of the knowledge that she had more than once been admitted to the jail with Felder. From the moment of the opening of the trial Jessica had divided interest with the prisoner.

Circumstantially speaking, the evidence was flawless. Dr. Moreau, while little known and less liked, had figured in the town as a promoter and an inventor of "slick" stock schemes. He had come there with Hugh Stires from Sacramento, where they had had a business partnership of short duration. There had been bad blood between them there, as the latter had once admitted. The prisoner had pre-empted the claim on Smoky Mountain in an abortive "boom" which Moreau had engineered, and over whose proceeds the pair, it was believed, had fallen out. He had then, to use the attorney's phrase, "swapped the devil for the witch" and had taken up with Prendergast, who by the manner of his talking off had finally justified a jail record in another state. Soon after this break Hugh Stires had vanished. On the day following his last appearance in the town the body of Moreau had been found on the Little Paymaster claim shot by a cowardly bullet through the back, a fact which precluded the possibility that the deed had been done in self-defense. There was evidence that he had died a painful and lingering death. Suspicion had naturally pointed to the vanished man, and this suspicion had grown until, after some months' absence, he had returned, alleging that he had lost his memory of the past, to resume his life in the cabin on the mountain and his

carnations was pinned to her coat, and as she passed Harry she bent and laid one in his hand. The slight act, not lost upon the spectators, called forth a sibilant flutter of sympathy, for it wore no touch of designed effect. Its impulse was as pure and unmistakable as its meaning.

Harry had started uncontrollably as she rose, for he had had no inkling of the lawyer's intention, and a flush darkened his cheek at the cool touch of the flower. But this faded to a settled pallor as under Felder's grave questioning she told in a voice as clear as a child's, yet with a woman's emotion struggling through it, the story of her disregarded warning. While she spoke pain and shame traveled through his every vein, for, though technically she had not brought herself into the perplexing purview of the law, she was laying bare the secret of her own heart, which now he would have covered at any cost.

"That is all, your honor," said Felder when Jessica had finished her story.

"Do you wish to cross examine?" asked the judge perfunctorily.

The prosecutor looked at her an instant. He saw the faintness in her eyes, the twitching of the gloved hand on the rail. "By no means," he said courteously and turned to his papers.

At the same moment as Jessica stepped into the open aisle the ironic chance treated the spellbound audience to a novel sensation. Every electric light suddenly went out, and darkness swooped upon the town and the courtroom. Hubbub arose—people stood up in their places.

The judge's gavel pounded viciously, and his stentorian voice bellowed for order.

"Keep your seats, everybody!" he commanded. "Mr. Clerk, get some candles. This court is not yet adjourned."

As the pall of darkness fell upon the courtroom it brought to Jessica a sense of premonition as though the incident prefigured the gloomy end. She turned sick and stumbled down the aisle, feeling that she must reach the outer air.

To Be Continued.

THE SLEEPING SICKNESS WHICH MEANS DEATH

How many readers have heard of this terrible disease? It prevails in that far-away country—Africa—especially the Congo district. It is caused by the bite of the tsetse fly. When it bites a person, the sleeping symptoms begin and finally the sufferer sleeps until death occurs.

Contrast this with the peaceful, balmy sleep of health. Is there anything more wearing than to lie awake at night, tossing about, nervous, with cold feet, hot head and mercy knows what else? Short of letting the tsetse fly bite us we would do almost anything for relief. How can we prevent it? Mr. George Hayes, of Union City, Pa., writes: "I had lost my appetite, was all run-down, could not sleep nights. I had tried everything without relief. Vinol was recommended, and to my surprise, it helped me at once; gave me a splendid appetite, and now I sleep soundly."

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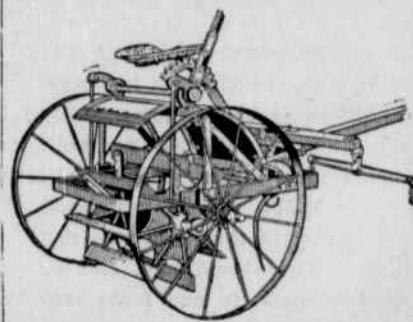
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