

Rich and Reckless

By Mary Raymond

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CHAPTER VI

the possibility that Nelson Whitaker might be a gangster did not enter Molly's mind until later in the day. She had merely come to the conclusion that he was surly and un-pleasant.

Through the meal, Molly listened to a phrase of Donna's, "The town so overrun with gangsters."

She paid then, studying her face and finding something in his strained, tense manner the way he kept watching the

It couldn't be possible. "In being rude, conceited and centered," Molly reasoned, "he the criminal type. Besides I had been interested that at 'The Red Poppy.' Dancing

the dark with this same man holding close and saying things in a urgent voice that had made her quiver strangely.

Molly's face crimsoned now at the memory. What blind madness had possessed her?

Some time the seat which had been occupied by the nice young man had been vacant. Molly could see him, speeding toward the city of Brent.

The proprietor came to the platform and explained: "My friends, these are most unfortunate. If my boys see ill with a ver- at pain in one side. It sees that which have trouble him times. I have excuse him to find a doctor ver' quick, or he'll be dead."

Without him the best way they had dealing young man with his appendix!

Molly had muted her voice to the sympathetic note. "What a! Do you think they can play more opera selections without a mist?"

He could do without all of 'em," Nelson Whitaker answered coldly. "He doesn't raise my blood pres-

He had not remembered her notes request numbers. If he had been clever, he might have connected sudden illness of the young man them. He was so sure that she trustful and unsuspecting. Then, all his attention was apparently on the outer door. Each time

when there was a commotion the door and the sound of the proprietor's protesting voice reached a half smile played across Nelson Whitaker's face. He leaned over whisper, "Don't be frightened, I'll be out of this."

He was out of what? Molly's mind was startled.

He said, if I don't miss my guess, Nelson's always getting into trouble with the boys of the police depart-

He's sort of forgetful about things, and now and then they get out to refresh his memory with a bit of law. It's too bad I happen to pick this night to bring you but don't worry. We'll probably be able to persuade them not to lock up I'm sure they won't when they see who you are.

"You poor kid," he added. "You're threatened to death, aren't you?" He had discarded his moody man- and apparently was the friendly, trusting young man she had danced a week ago. But much had hap- ped since then.

"No," Molly thought, "I'm not threatened. I was frightened before police came."

She was going to wake up behind a jail as Brent said. But she had to go to jail quite happily. To row Brent or Donna would bail her out. The newspapers would be to treat the episode lightly. That would be all!

That let Nelson Whitaker plead in case before the policemen and would make it plain that she pre- pared going to jail. She would in- been taken there!

That a fortunate break for her, but Brent might not have reached in time. . . to save her from making vague, indefinite, that had been threatening.

The door opened. Trained by the visiting proprietor, four policemen entered the room, pistols drawn. "Don't move, folks. Keep your arms on the table, Nelson Ferguson, in your pocket won't help you because you're covered four ways. . . on out of that corner and keep your arms on the table. The man's up. You've pulled your last trick."

Those dirty, double-crossing," he said, in a split second two guns were simultaneously.

Molly's horrified eyes registered the scene. The dark head of Nelson Whitaker falling forward on the

table, hands grotesquely outflung, the white cloth turning crimson.

Then the room went dark. There were excited cries, the commands of the police. Someone caught her roughly by the arm. A hand was clapped across her mouth.

"Someone is trying to get me out of this terrible thing," Molly was thinking. "One of the musicians, prob- ably. He needn't have covered my mouth, because I wouldn't have screamed."

She felt weak and faint, and her feet seemed to be crumpling under her. Then everything went black.

When Molly awakened, she felt the sense of motion. Memory came and she wanted to cry weakly, pitifully. Wanted more than that to awake to a reality which would assure her that the dark happenings of the night were nothing more than a fantastic night- mare.

But she could not cry out because her lips were bound. And all too real, she knew, were the tragic incidents through which she had just passed. Now came another realization—her eyes were bandaged.

How long she had been unconscious, she could not tell. She was in a car which was traveling at great speed. The person who had seized her in the darkness was evidently the one who was driving the car.

Although her hands were bound, the rest of her body was free. She shifted her position, straining to hear the conversation between the two men on the seat in front of her.

"They are taking me back home," Molly told herself, trying desperately to believe it.

But almost instantly came the con- viction: "No, they are not. They are taking me far away. I've been kid- napped. It was a pilot, from the be- ginning. . . the lights going out at 'The Red Poppy' were part of the plot. It was planned for the lights to go out tonight so this man could grab me."

But why had Nelson Whitaker been shot when he was in on the plot? Those must have been real police- men or they wouldn't have killed him. The tortured questioning was get- ting her nowhere. It would be so easy to break under the strain and become hysterical. All Molly's hope now lay in trying to put dreadful memories behind her, keeping calm and fighting for time. Surely, it was only a question of time when she would be found. Brent—the thought of him brought an ache to her throat—would receive her message and dash to "Frenchy's" piloted by the young musician. The police might still be there and they would begin at once the search which would eventually lead to her. She must believe that or she would go mad.

For some time she had been jolted about on the seat, which indicated they were on a rough, little-traveled road. Then the car stopped suddenly and the door was opened.

A harsh voice said, "Now, girl, don't give us any trouble and you'll be all right. You won't find things as well as you're used to, but make be- lieve you're roughin' it a while, and things won't be so bad. If your old man comes across, you'll be back in your fine house in no time. If he's stubborn or puts the police on us— why, use your imagination, girlie."

"We're going to untie your hands," the same voice continued, "and take the tape off your mouth. You can sleep nice and peaceful tonight, but tomorrow we're going to have you write a little letter asking your dad for a half million . . . after you're good and rested, girlie."

Molly shuddered under the touch of the man's hand on her arm. "Cold? Scared maybe," the man chuckled. "Don't worry. Nobody's going to harm you while we're around. You're too valuable."

They had reached a porch. Rough boards creaked under the heavy feet of the men. A door opened and a woman's thin, querulous voice came, "So you got her?"

"What did you expect?" drawled the harsh voice. "Don't we generally get what we go after?"

"I've got that little woodroom fixed up with a bed," the woman said. "Louis put a good lock on the door yesterday and bars on the window. Guess she'll be safe as a bird in a cage in there."

Somebody was loosening Molly's arm. The tape was torn from her mouth, but her eyes were still band- aged.

"Just as well to leave her eyes bound until she's in her room," one of the men said. "It wouldn't be so good for her health to see too much or remember anything she sees. Shove her in, Winnie, but keep your trap shut. We'll do all the talking to- morrow."

(To Be Continued)

VISITORS AT GOSHEN
GOSHEN, Aug. 25.—(Special)—Mr. and Mrs. Curtis Goshorn of Rhame, North Dakota, were guests of the P. A. Wick family at Goshen on Friday evening. They have been touring the states since June 15, having visited Niagara Falls and New York City. They traveled down the Atlantic coast, covering most of the southern states, and have been visiting friends in San Francisco and Los Angeles. They expect to spend the winter in Seattle, after which they intend to permanently locate somewhere in the west. Mrs. Goshorn was postmistress at Rhame, N. D., for twelve years.

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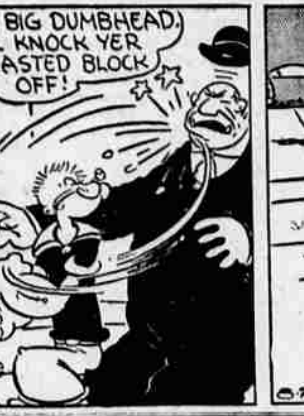
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