

Rich and Reckless

By Mary Raymond

CHAPTER VII

streamed through a small, barred window into the room into which she had been unceremoniously thrust at night before.

It was not the sun, but loud, raucous voices that awakened her. "Of the dirty rotten tricks! So he ought to be pulled a joke like that and get by with it. Bringing a little nobody—while that Milford girl!" The man's voice died in angry rumble.

Molly could not distinguish the sense of the sentence, but she had heard enough.

For some reason the kidnappers were confused about her identity. They believed she was that other girl—the one who had changed dresses with her and did not even know the other.

She reached for the small brown bag, her heart fluttering wildly. In a moment, a handkerchief, compact, a coin purse with some loose change, and a letter.

The letter was postmarked the night before and was addressed to Leola Barlow. Molly hesitated a moment. It was necessary for her to know something about this girl. At any moment now they might open and they would begin listening her.

"Honey," the letter, written in a careless hand, began, "I'm sorry to break it like this, but Mae and I are married yesterday. It was something we couldn't help. Don't feel too bad about it. Somebody else will be along soon. Anybody as pretty as you shouldn't worry about one."

You were kind of off your head when you got over it. You ought to have Joe back if you crooked your finger. He's worth two of me. You're a better kid than Mae. I've got her skinned 40 ways in my mind. She don't look like any millionaire's daughter. But she got me. I didn't bat an eye toward her, honey. I came all the way to be fighting and she's up all the time. You were too good for me, Leola. Maybe if you had hated me rough I wouldn't have hated you a raw deal. So long and good luck. You've been pretty swell. I'll be back up and forget—Jimmy."

Molly put the letter back into the envelope soberly. In the next room the war was continuing, punctuated frequently by a furious oath. "It beats me. What did he expect out of a job like that?"

A good laugh. He was going back to Chicago, laughing up his sleeves at Leola and Louis, the woman said. "He said you wasn't goin' to do no kidnapin' for you, and you wouldn't be any meaner it. Neise wasn't no fool. He knew you and Louis had him like rat poison, Steve, and he hadn't turned him up long ago if he hadn't been scared."

"Well, I did turn him up, didn't I?" A man's cold, menacing voice. "Sure you did, Steve. You trapped him with that bank robbery, and then the police where to find him. You weren't taking much chance because you knew Neise would fight in a trap and they'd pump him full of lead if he made a move."

"You were laughin' at him, Steve," a woman continued. "Thinking how we were gettin' rid of the only man who could throw a scare into you, and him a prize package delivered right to your hands—at the same time. Little a half million dollars, with the gettin' the big end, didn't look too good to you. But it looks to me like you've got nothing but a package of trouble for your pains. I guess Neise still laughin' if he knows."

"Oh, dry up. What'll we do with this girl, Louis?"

"Listen to you, Steve, but I know what I'd do." "Bring her out."

The key grated in the lock. The door was thrown open and a man in the opening, surveying Molly with hostile eyes through the slits of a mask.

"Come on outta there, you cheap little doll!"

Molly got to her feet. In a cracked voice she caught a glimpse of her shorn hair, shadowed eyes and worn, white face.

The man caught her by the arm and stared down at her face. "It beats all!" he exclaimed.

They were all masked. The woman of the two men formed an amusing scene around Molly.

"Take a look at this," the fat man said, pointing a stubby finger at a photograph on the front page of a newspaper.

Above her own picture, bold words read out at Molly, "Hellrais Takes a Life. Molly Milford, daughter of Mr. Milford, commits suicide in a department store. Body found on sofa in room by cleaning woman. Father distraught, can give no motive."

Molly sat down weakly and covered her face with her hands. That poor, straitened girl!

All right, now, sister. It's your turn. And talk fast!"

"They're too high-class for poison, but they might give me the wrong steer—"

"That sounds like Neise, all right. The double-crossin' scorpion!"

"Let her talk, Louis."

"He said he wanted me to dress up in the best things I had because he was going to play a joke on these friends and make them think he was okay with this Milford girl. They will eat it up, Leola," he said. "They're snobs, and won't play around with people who don't have money. And then he laughed. So I dressed up and—"

"In them things!" the woman's contemptuous voice cut through. Molly's voice faltered. "Please don't think hard of me. I was feelin' pretty low. My best fellow had fallen for somebody else, and that's all."

"That's all. A fine joke that was, cutting us out of a cool half million."

"It was Neise did that," the woman put in. "And this Milford girl was in out at the same time, Steve."

"I know," Steve spoke impatiently. "Just the same, she was friendly with Neise."

He turned to Molly. "I suppose you think because you're the wrong dame we'll let you beat it home. That's what you'd like, girl?"

"Yes, I'd like to get back," Molly's lips trembled.

"Sure you would! So you could go straight to headquarters and spill everything you know."

"I wouldn't spill any—nothing."

"I know your kind. You're probably lying about this other man. You were Neise's girl. Come clean! You knew him pretty well!"

Molly shook her head. "I never would have gone out with him, but Jimmy told for this other girl. I guess I would have done something to get even with him. I was that crazy."

"Well, you done it, all right. And you sure was crazy. Now get back into that room."

Molly stood still for a moment after the door had closed behind her. She felt that terrible faintness coming over her again. But she must not faint. So much depended on keeping cool and sane.

Evidently she had played her part well. They had been completely deceived. But then, it was easy for them to be convinced after reading that elaborate story about her death.

How poor Leola Barlow had suffered! How deeply she must have loved this Jimmy, who had written her so casually.

It would be kind to destroy that revealing note, now that it had served its purpose. First she would memorize the address. She might need it.

Molly took the letter out of the purse once more and looked down at it.

The door was flung wide and the woman with the frowny, corn-colored hair came in. "I'll trouble you for that purse," she said shortly. "And that letter, too."

She examined the purse carefully and then handed it back. She went out of the room with the letter in her hand. After a few moments she returned. Her voice held a hint of sympathy.

"I'll bring you some breakfast," she said. "If I was you I wouldn't waste any tears on that fellow. He don't sound so much to me. It wouldn't surprise me if you wouldn't be better off without him. With your looks you won't have any trouble finding somebody else. Just like he said."

"I know," Molly spoke wearily. Fear, unhappiness, hunger and made her feel really ill. Tears slipped down her white cheeks.

"We women are all alike, I guess," the masked woman said, "but you got more to cry about than a man."

With this doubtful consolation, she left the room.

(To Be Continued)

At Mosby Creek

MOSBY CREEK, Aug. 26.—(Special)—Mr. and Mrs. Frank Erley and children Doris and Jimmy of Portland, spent several days of their vacation at the George Hastings home.

Ivan Morris of Husum, Wash., and Mrs. Earnest Duncan of Newberg are visiting at the George Morris home.

Mr. and Mrs. Harry Brewster and Mr. and Mrs. Lester Spandenburg and children June and Shirley visited with relatives on Smith River Sunday.

The get-together club met with a picnic along the Plank road going to the Butte Mooney home last Wednesday. The next meeting will be Sept. 2 when those who have taken the first aid course will have their examination.

Berta Lancaster who has been working at the James Lancaster home in Drain has returned home.

Company Sunday at the Jake Stalder home included Mr. and Mrs. Roy Kennedy and family of Blue Mountain, Mr. and Mrs. Andy Plog of Dorena, Joe Denourke of South Dakota, John and Sam Mock and Selma Ebert of Eugene.

Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Duerst and children have left for a motor trip to Canada where they will visit Mr. Duerst's sister and family. Mr. and Mrs. George Duerst and family of Gresham are staying on their place in their absence.

Donna Craig of Lancaster, Calif., is visiting her aunt, Mrs. Fred Overton.

The Harry Patton and Clifford Lebow family picnicked at Palmer Ford Sunday.

Mrs. Albert Lancaster and children visited at the Foster home at Thornton Corners Sunday.

From Dexter

DEXTER, Aug. 26.—(Special)—Marie Williams and Louise Ferriss of Dexter will be delegates from the Trent Christian Endeavor to the state convention at Turner.

The 46 club meets on Thursday at the home of Mrs. Fred Hostick. Mr. Ferriss is erecting a new barn on his place.

The young people of the Baptist church held a picnic dinner at the Williams camp ground on Sunday.

The federal government during 1935 purchased 1078 passenger cars valued at \$637,400, and 2042 trucks valued at \$1,364,700.

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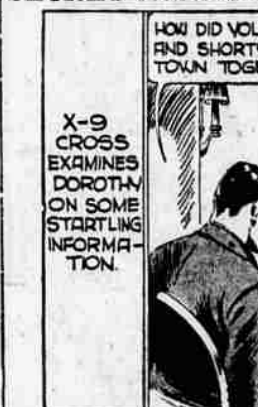
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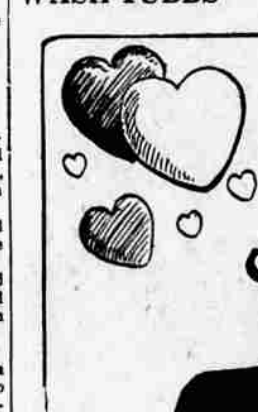
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