

The Highgrader

by Wm MacLeod Raine

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(Continued from last week.)

To Moya, looking around upon the little group of armed men, there was a menacing tenseness in his manner. Her mind was groping for an explanation, but she understood this much—that the law was reaching out for the devil-may-care youth who had so interested her.

"What do you want with him? What has he done?" she cried quickly.

"He and his friend held up the gatekeeper of the fair association and got away with three thousand dollars. How long since they passed?"

"Between a quarter and half an hour," answered Farquhar.

The sheriff nodded. "All ready, boys."

The clattering hoofs disappeared in a cloud of dust down the road.

The rough places of life had been padded for all these young women. Never before had they come so close to its raw, ugly seams. The shadow of the law, the sacredness of caste, had always guarded them.

India turned upon her brother his dilated eyes. "He said Kilmeny. Who can the man be?"

"I don't know." He was silent a moment in frowning thought, struck by an unwelcome idea. "You remember Uncle Azhile. He had a son named Jack who lives somewhere in Colorado. D'ye remember he came home when you were a little kiddie? Stopped at granddad's. Thought I had seen his face before. He's our cousin Jack. That's who he is."

"And now he's a highwayman. By Jove, he doesn't look it," contributed Farquhar.

"I don't believe it. Such nonsense!" flamed Moya. "There must be a mistake."

"He was troubled about something, Moya," Lord Farquhar suggested. "He and his friend were riding fast and plain in a hurry."

"Didn't he stop to talk?"

"He had to do that to avoid suspicion. I could see his mind wasn't on what he was saying. The man was anxious."

"I thought you liked him," Moya charged scornfully.

Her guardian smiled. "I did, but that isn't evidence that will acquit him in court of being a road agent."

"He's India's cousin—maybe. How could he be a criminal? Shall we have to cut her and Captain Kilmeny now?" Miss Dwight demanded hotly.

The captain laughed, but there was no mirth in his laughter. "You're a stanch friend, Miss Dwight. By Jove, I hope you're right about him."

Deep in her heart Moya was not at all sure. What did she know of him? And why should she care what he was? The man was a stranger to her. Forty-eight hours ago she had never seen him. Why was it that every good-looking vagabond with a dash of the devil in him drew on her sympathies? She recalled now that he had hesitated when she had mentioned his name, no doubt making up his mind to let her think him other than he was. The sheriff must know what he was talking about when he said the man was an outlaw. But the appearance of him pleaded potentially. Surely those clear unflinching eyes were not the homes of villainy. Nor could she find it possible to think his gallant grace of bearing the possession of a miscreant.

Before the day was out her faith in him had sunk to zero. Captain Kilmeny returned from the camp of the miners with the detailed story of the holdup.

Two masked men on horseback had robbed the treasurer of the Gunnison County Fair association as he was driving to the bank to deposit the receipts of the day. The men had not been recognized, but the description of the horses corresponded closely to those ridden by Kilmeny and Colter. It was recalled that these two men had disappeared as soon as the bucking broncho contest was over, not half an hour before the robbery. This would allow them just time to return to the corral on the outskirts of the town, where they had left their mounts, and to saddle so as to meet the treasurer on his way to the bank. It happened that the corral was deserted at the time, the boy in charge having left to see the finals of the contest. Cumulative evidence of guilt lay in the disappearance from the fishing camp not only of the two men suspected, but also of their companions, Curly and Mosby.

"Think he really did it, Ned?" India asked her brother.

"Can't say, sis. Looks like it," he answered gloomily.

Of the party at the lodge only one member was pleased at the turn events had taken. Verinder's manner was as openly triumphant as he dared allow it to become. It cried offensively, "I told you so!"

CHAPTER IV

"I'm Here, Neighbor."

Moya still rode afternoons with her friends, fished occasionally, and took her regular hand at bridge. But it was unaccountably true that her seat in these amusements was gone. She could give no satisfactory reason for it, but she felt as if something had passed out of her life forever. It was as if the bubbling youth in her were quenched. The outstanding note of her had been the eagerness with which she had run out to meet new experiences. Now she found herself

morning from them. Whenever she could the girl was glad to slip away by herself. To the charge that she was in love with this young vagabond she would have given a prompt denial. Nevertheless, Lady Farquhar recognized the symptoms as dangerous.

On the fifth day after the Gunnison trip the young people at the lodge made a party to fish Sunbeam creek. They followed the stream far into the hills, riding along the trail which bordered it. Kilmeny and Verinder carried lunch baskets, for they were to make a day of it and return only in time for a late dinner.

Moya made her brave pretense of gaiety. With alacrity she responded to Verinder's challenge of a bet on the relative sizes of their catches. But as soon as the rest were out of sight she sat down in a shady spot and fell to musing.

The voice of a grizzled rider startled her from her dreams. Her lifted eyes took in the grim look of the man, garbed with weapons ready to his hands.

"Morning, miss," he nodded amiably. "Good-morning." And swift on the heels of it, "You are a deputy sheriff, are you not?"

"That's the bell, ma'am. You belong to the English outfit, I reckon. Funny about some members of your crowd having the same name as the man we're looking for."

"Mr. Kilmeny, you mean?"

"Jack Kilmeny! Yes, ma'am. Came from the old country, his father did—son of some big gun over there. Likely he's some kin to your friends."

He put the last observation as a question, with a sharp glance under his heavy gray eyebrows. Moya chose to regard it as a statement.

"Are you still searching for him?" she asked.

"You bet we are. The sheriff's got a notion he's up in these hills somewhere. But if you ask me, I'd say he was busy losing himself 'way off in Routt county, clear off the map. He used to punch cows up there and he knows all kinds of holes to hide in."

"Yes," Moya assented listlessly.

"He had his getaway all planned before ever he came down here. That's a cinch. The fishing was all a bluff. The four of them had the hold-up arranged weeks ago."

"Don't you think there's a chance he didn't do it?" she asked in a forlorn way.

"Not a chance. Jack Kilmeny and Colter pulled off the play. What the others had to do with it I don't know."

The deputy passed to the fishing in his conversation, hoped she would have luck, stroked his white goatee, and presently departed.

The man had scarcely disappeared around a bend in the gulch before a sound startled her. Moya turned quickly, to see a man drop down the face of a large rock to the ground. Even before he turned she recognized that pantherine grace and her heart lost a beat.

He came straight toward her, with the smile in his blue eyes that claimed, commandingly as a matter of course, "You—here, she gasped.

"You—here, neighbor. Where ought I to be—in Routt county losing myself?"

Her little hand was lost in his big brown fist, her gaze locked in his.

"You heard him?"

"Couldn't help it. I was working down through that grove of pines to the river when I saw 'im."

"He may come back."

"I reckon not. Let's sit down and talk."

Her first thought had been of his danger, but she remembered something else now. "No, I think not, Mr. Kilmeny."

The deep eyes that met his steadily had in them the rapier flash. He smiled.

"Because I am a miscreant, I reckon," he drawled.

"You say it, not I."

"Now you're dodging, neighbor. You think it."

"If so, do I think more than the truth? Your actions convict you."

"So you think. Isn't it just possible you don't understand them?" There was the faintest hint of derision in his polite inquiry.

A light flashed in her dusky eyes, a shining hope newborn in her eager heart. "Are you telling me that you are innocent?"

"You've been thinking me guilty, then," he countered swiftly.

"What else could I think?"

"You might have waited to hear the defense."

"If you had stayed to make one, but you ran away."

"How do you know I did?"

"You were gone when the officers reached your camp."

His smile was grim and his voice defiant. "There was a man up in the hills I wanted to see in a hurry."

By the look in her eyes it was as if he had struck her. With fine contempt her answer came. "Was there another man up there in the rocks just now that you had to see until the deputy left?"

"Anyhow, there was a young woman down by the banks of Sunbeam I wanted to see after he was gone," the fugitive claimed boldly.

A faint angry flush glowed delicately beneath the olive of her cheeks. "Excusations—nothing but evasions."

She turned away, sick at heart. He had treated with flippancy the chance she had given him. Would an innocent man have done that?

Swift as an arrow his hand shot out, caught her shoulder, and held her firmly. The eyes that lifted to his flamed with proud resentment.

"I'm not going to let you go like this. Don't think it."

"Sir?"

"You'll do me justice first." His hand dropped from her shoulder, but the masterful look of him stayed her steps. "You'll tell me what evidence you've got against me."

Again an insurgent hope warmed her heart. Wild he might be, but surely no criminal—if there was any truth in faces.

What she had heard against him she told. "The robbers were riding horses like yours. You left the fair grounds early. When you passed us on the road you were anxious about something. You looked back two or three times. Both you and Mr. Colter showed you were in a hurry. Then you ran away before the sheriff reached your camp. Does an innocent man do that?" She put her question as an accusation, but in the voice was a little tremor that asked to be refuted.

"Sometimes he does. Now listen to me. The horses ridden by the robbers were Colter's and mine. We certainly were worried about the time we met you. And we did break camp in a hurry so as to mislead the sheriff. Does this prove me guilty?"

She brushed away the soft waves of dark hair that had fallen over her forehead in little escaping tendrils. The fearless level eyes of the outdoors west were looking straight at her.

"I don't know. Does it?"

"We'll say this evidence had piled up against Captain Kilmeny instead of against me. Would you have believed him guilty?"

"No. He couldn't have done it."

"On the same evidence you would acquit him and condemn me. Is that fair?"

"I have known him for years—his standards, his ways of thinking. All his life he has schooled himself to run a straight course."

"Whereas I—?" He waited, the sardonic frosty smile on his lean strong face.

(To be continued next week.)

FARM REMINDERS

Want to start beekeeping? Here are seven ways to get a start listed by H. A. Scullen of the Oregon experiment station:

Buy purebred Italian bees in modern hive; get your neighbor to have a swarm for you; buy bees in old hive and transfer to modern; have a colony from a bee tree; buy nucleus from reliable dealer; buy bees by the pound with queen.

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WEEKLY MENU SUGGESTIONS

By NELLIE MAXWELL

We should try to follow the French cook. It is his business in life to extract the utmost possibility from every article on the menu and present it in the most attractive form.

SUNDAY—Breakfast: Waffles. Dinner: Roast of beef, browned potatoes. Supper: Medley sandwich.

MONDAY—Breakfast: Coffee cake. Dinner: Date cream puffs. Supper: Potato soup.

TUESDAY—Breakfast: Griddle cakes. Dinner: Chili con carne. Supper: Cabbage salad.

WEDNESDAY—Breakfast: Fried ham. Dinner: Sliced roast of beef, brown gravy. Supper: Sponge cake.

THURSDAY—Breakfast: Farm sausage, corn bread. Dinner: Apple pie, cheese. Supper: Whipped cream on sponge cake.

FRIDAY—Breakfast: Omelet. Dinner: Fried fish, lemon sauce. Supper: Cream of tomato soup.

SATURDAY—Breakfast: Oatmeal, cream, strawberries. Dinner: Swiss steak, baked potatoes. Supper: Salad of lettuce.

Medley Sandwich. Take two-thirds of a cupful of minced chicken, one-third of a cupful of ham and tongue; add cayenne and enough mayonnaise to make a smooth paste and spread on buttered brown bread and white bread, making ribbon sandwiches.

Cream Date Puffs. Fill cream puffs with a mixture of whipped cream, nuts and finely chopped dates. Roll in sugar and serve. If the puffs are made very small two or three may be used for a serving and they are much daintier in appearance.

Chili Con Carne. Boil a pound of small red chili beans until tender. Just before the beans are soft, add one onion, a clove of garlic, chopped fine, and a can of chili powder. There should be about three parts of water in the beans. Add salt to season. Chop a pound of sweet, cook until the scraps are brown, add a pound of hamburger steak and cook until brown. Stir constantly while adding the beans, cook slowly in a casserole for three or four hours. Add more water if needed.

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EVEN TIDE IS WISE

She (at resort)—How the tide comes in with its green roll.

He—I suppose it realizes that there's no use coming here without one.