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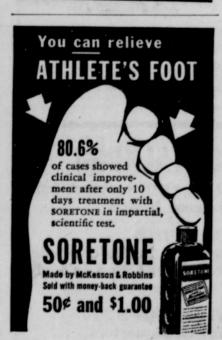
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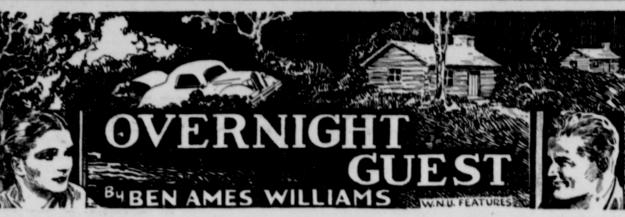
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CHAPTER I

Adam Bruce decided it was time for lunch, sought the hotel. He gave his order, and while he waited, two people came into the dining room and stood just inside the door. A gray-haired man, round without being fat, apple-cheeked, with a mild blue eye and a curious suggestion of physical readiness in his walk. Beside him a woman, not so old as he, with a certain formidable sobriety in her countenance that was belied by the warmth in her eyes.

Adam rose, stepped toward them, said in quick pleasure: "Hello, Tope!"

The old man turned, smiled broadly and clasped him by the hand. Why, hullo, Adam!-Mrs. Tope, this is Adam Bruce, an old friend of

"Sit down with me," Adam urged. They obeyed, and Bruce looked inquiringly at Mrs. Tope. "I didn't know you were married, Inspector."

"Oh, yes, over a year ago." And the old man told Mrs. Tope: "Adam here was a youngster on the force while I was on the Homicide squad. He spoiled a first-rate policeman to become a second-rate lawyer."

Bruce grinned. "You're behind the times, Inspector! I'm a policeman again." Tope looked surprised; and the younger man explained: "I passed the bar exams, but no one seemed to need a lawyer. So I went to work in the bank commissioner's office for a while, and now I've hooked up with Washington-Department of Justice."

"Your outfit has done some good jobs lately," Tope said approvingly. 'Anything happening up here?"

Adam said casually: "No, I'm on vacation." And under Tope's inquiring eye he added: "I used to live up this way, when I was a boy. Been home on a visit. I'm leaving on the midnight train. I often wish we had you with us, Inspector. We need a man who can see the hole in a doughnut . . . Which way are

"North, I think. We're just gypsying. I plan to do some fishing as we go. We may hit Canada by and by."

Bruce nodded. "Every little brook up this way had a trout in it when was a boy," he said. "I haven't tried them lately." And he asked: Where do you expect to stay to-

"We may camp out. Or we may try a hotel, if one attracts us. Or roadside camp."

"There's a good camp about forty miles from here, between Ridgcomb and Maddison village. I was there only last night," Adam said eagerly 'A place called Dewain's Mill. You'd like it!"

"We might take a look at it," Tope agreed.

"A girl named Bee Dewain runs it," Adam explained. "She's a cantankerous, stubborn young woman; but if you're careful not to mention my name, she may take you in!"

He felt Mrs. Tope's eye upon him, and was conscious that his ears were red; but after lunch, when he came out to see them continue on their way, he suggested again: "If you do stop at Dewain's Mill, tell that young hussy I sent her my love!"

When they were gone, Adam paid calls here and there, at police headquarters, the post office, the drugstore. There was a wealth of time upon his hands. A little past six o'clock, he returned to the hotel to dine; and while he was at table, a bell-boy came calling his name. Adam shut himself into the telephone booth and heard a familiar voice.

"Adam?" "Yes," Adam replied, wondering faintly at this call.

"This is Tope."

"Yes. Sure. What's up?" "I'm phoning from that place you recommended, Dewain's Mill. Adam, you'd better come up here."

"What's the matter?" "Rather not talk over the phone.

But you-" "Miss Dewain all right?"

"Yes, of course. Do you know the police up here?"

"Sure. Ned Quill-he's a state trooper-is an old friend of mine." "On your way here," Tope directed, "get word to your friend the trooper to meet you-without anyone seeing him-at the cabin called

Faraway. You hire that cabin for the night. I'll see you there." "But Tope, I'm due in New York tomorrow."

"You've a job to do here," Tope

insisted. "Good-by!" And Adam heard the receiver click as Tope hung up. The young man stared at the instrument for a moment in a perplexed and indecisive fashion; but-here was at least it up now, though. I would, in his a pretext for seeing Bee again, and place!"

Tope had not used to be one to cry "Wolf" without cause. Adam sent a wire to his chief. Possible trouble here. Staying to investigate. Will report. Bruce." Then he retrieved his bag from the check-room, hired a car and driver, and started north along the moonlit

that chance encounter with young | and he'd fly 'em up and back. But Adam Bruce, Mrs. Tope saw that he took a dive into Long Island her husband was silent, and she asked:

"What are you thinking?" "I was wondering why we happened to run into Adam."

'Just an accident?"

"Call it that, But-accidents have a trick of fitting into a pattern by and by. As if some one had planned them." And he added: "It struck me that Adam had something besides a vacation on his mind."

"I wondered whether Miss Dewain is as cantankerous and stubborn as he pretends!"

He chuckled. "You're looking for romance! But I'm wondering what fetched a Department of Justice man into these hills?" It was obviously impossible, as

yet, to answer this question. As they went on, the hills were bolder; the valleys deep, the streams swift and silver. They passed big estates, and great houses.

The little car required gas, and when they came to Ridgcomb, Chet's Place invited their patronage. A lean, dry man as old as Tope, with shrewd twinkling eyes, came out to serve them. Mrs. Tope



"We might take a look at it," Tope

stayed in the car, but Tope, mild and beaming and inquisitive, alighted. "Handsome stretch of country

through here!" he remarked. "All right in the summer-time," the man-this was doubtless Chet himself-assented. His hand was on the hose, his eye on the clicking pump gauge. "But in winter, it's cold as a banker's heart!"

Tope chuckled. "A lot of big places around."

"Summer folks, mostly! Not so many now as there used to be. There can't many people afford to hire a hundred men just to cut lawns, these

"I noticed one place that looked like a castle, back on the mountain," Tope suggested.

"That's where Ledforge lives, when he ain't in New York." Chet spat, as though the name left a bad taste in his mouth. "He owns half the water power in New England. He sold a pile of his stocks and bonds to the folks around here. Stuck 'em, mostly."

"Didn't stick you," Tope flatteringly surmised.

"Not me! Me, I keep my money where I can handle it any time I'm a mind." And Chet volunteered: "You don't see Ledforge around here much, now. I dunno as it'd be safe for him to walk through the village."

"Married?" "Sister keeps house for him. She's all right; but they don't mix with nobody only the Holdoms."

"What Holdom is that?"

Chet shook his head. "I dunno. 'H.H.' they call him. In the stock market I guess. Good feller. He'll stop and talk, when he fills up at my pump here." He hung up the hose. "Check your oil?" Mrs. Tope nodded. "You c'n stand a quart," Chet decided. And he said: "I sell H.H. all his gas. Cars and airplanes

"He's got him a landing-field down by the river. I dunno but he'll give

"Why?" Tope was always curi-

ous. "Don't you like flying?" "Guess't I don't! Never done any of it my own self; but my nephew, Bob Flint, he got killed here Sat'day in one of the dummed things. Holdom and Ledforge, they used to ride back and forth from New York in Holdom's airplane about half the When they left Middleford after time, and Bob worked for Holdom she directed.

Sound, long about daylight Sat'day He added resentfully: "I'll have Bob's ma to support, I guess. It ain't likely he'd saved anything." He shut the hood.

Mrs. Tope said quietly: "Shall we go on?" So the inspector climbed in beside her, but as they moved away he protested:

"Don't you hurry me all the time, ma'am! I like to get the flavor of the country as I go along. I like to talk to folks." And he said inquiringly: "You acted kind of

"I was," she admitted. "When he spoke of Mr. Holdom."

"Know him, do you?" "I know who he is." Mrs. Tope, before her marriage, had been the effective head of the Jervis Trust, with an active interest in business and finance; and she explained: "He's the floor specialist in the Ledforge stocks, and he's a crook!"

Slowly they drove on, stopping now and then to look across the hills and down the deep bright valleys. They ascended a steep grade, and at the top she checked the car. Tope looked to see why she slowed down, and discovered beside the road a large white-painted sign, on which black letters cried invitingly:

COME IN AND MILL AROUND!

He chuckled, and a moment later saw by the brook the gray weathered structure of an old mill, neat and in repair. An arched entrance and a gravel drive offered admis-

Mrs. Tope said: "This must be the place your young friend Adam Bruce told us about. It looks clean. Shall we try it?"

"I'd like to try that brook below the road," he admitted, so she turned in and stopped by the Mill

Tope surveyed the surroundings with that quick interest any new scene always provoked in him. The Mill was on their left. Beyond it by the stream side there was a turfed terrace, an open hearth, picnic tables. A gray-haired man sat on one of these tables and played a violin; and a girl stood near by, her shoulders against the trunk of a tree, watching him and listening. A State Trooper in uniform bestrode his silent motorcycle-to which a side car was attached-in the drive near them, and his eyes were on the girl.

Beyond, the millpond was visible, and a spring-board; and two small learly twins were diving, swimming ashore, climbing on the board and diving again, chasing each other like squirrels in a cage. A bald-headed little man in a bathing suit sat with his feet in the water; and an ample, comely woman with knitting in her hands, seated on a boulder near by. turned an interested eye on the car and the newcomers. Small cabins were scattered among the trees.

The scene was peaceful, but abruptly its peace was shattered. The trooper kicked his motorcycle into life with a series of explosions of entirely unnecessary violence. and he wheeled his machine, darted past the little car, turned into the highroad and raced away. The girl looked after him with amused eyes, and so saw these old people in their car, and came toward them.

"Have you room for two lodgers?" Mrs. Tope asked.

"Oh, yes, plenty," she assured them. "There's hardly anyone here. Not many people travel these days.;" Tope remarked: "That policeman don't really enjoy the violin!"

The girl laughed softly. "Ned's not very musical," she agreed. "But it was rotten of him to start his motorcycle right in the middle of Mr. Vade's fiddling. I shall tell him

"Be back, will he?" "Oh, he always comes back!"

Mrs. Tope looked around with an appreciative glance. "You run this place?"

The girl said readily: "Oh, yes. I'm Bee Dewain. Mrs. Priddy cooks for us, and she's been famous for her biscuits and waffles ever since I was a child. Earl-he's Mrs. Priddy's husband-does the chores. and rakes the drives, and cleans the cabins. But I keep the books and generally run things.'

"How's the fishing?" Tope inquired.

"Earl Priddy brings in a good mess, now and then.' Mrs. Tope asked: "May wechoose our cabin?"

"They're all just alike, inside, only those up there on the knoll are nearer the road of course, with cars go-

ing by-" "I shouldn't like that," Mrs. Tope decided.

"Then why don't you take Faraway?" Bee advised. "It's new this year, and it's clear out of sight up in the woods, so if you want to be really quiet . . . No one has ever spent even one night in Faraway. It was only finished about two weeks ago. You'll be the very first ones." She stepped up on the running board. "Just go straight ahead,"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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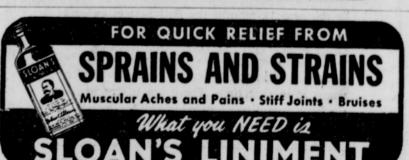
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