

# BLACKSHEEP!

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## INTRODUCTION

Archibald Bennett, wealthy bachelor, travels constantly in the interest of his health. He meets Isabel Perry, who recommends a life of crime, adventure, romance and excitement as a cure for his nerves. Archie goes to Bailey Harbor to investigate a summer house for his sister. A heavy storm forces him to spend the night there. During the night he is awakened by footsteps, and in an encounter with the intruder, who sees Archie's figure reflected in the mirror and shoots. Archie fires in return, wounding the intruder, who makes his escape. Archie plans flight to evade publicity. He starts cross-country foot in the night. At dawn he is stopped on a lonely country road by "The Governor," master-mind criminal who mistakes him for a fellow criminal. Archie, fleeing, is afraid to tell the truth—falls in with "The Governor," is whisked across country in a stolen car. Sees story in Newspaper of killing at Bailey Harbor and, frightened, he decides to say nothing but stick with his strange friend and await developments. At Concord, N. H., Archie comes upon Isabel Perry at the hotel desk but she refuses to recognize him. The Governor, by a clever plan, switches stolen money for good money. Archie used as decoy—making love to niece of agent sent to meet eccentric Congdon here next day. Archie and the Governor drive away without creating suspicion and speed across the state to deliver the \$60,000 to train-robber Leary at Walker's farm, where Archie gets new insight into workings of the crime world. At the first opportunity Walker's daughter appeals to Archie to help her elope with a young farmhand. He decides to assist, cutting away from the Governor and taking the

couple across state in a wild night ride. Archie sees Sally onto the train—Now read on.

Archie laid to his soul the flattering unctious that Abijah was jealous. Justification of this suspicion was supported by the bridegroom's sudden anxiety to depart out of Vermont with the utmost expedition. Archie had every intention of ordering as gorgeous a breakfast as Bennington's best hotel could provide but Abijah promptly vetoed this suggestion and they ate at a lunch counter, which Archie found a most disagreeable proceeding. Abijah left Sally and Archie eating scrambled eggs while he set forth to acquire information about trains. He returned while they were still at the counter to report that a train was almost immediately available. His haste annoyed Archie, who hated being hurried at his meals. At the station Abijah hung about the baggage-room, where he had no business whatever, as though trying to create the impression that he was traveling alone. When the train came along he climbed into the smoker with his own bag, leaving Archie to assist Sally into the chair car.

"Abijah's just a little afraid pop might have telephoned you know, or be coming after us. He'll move in here when the train starts."

"I don't like to leave you like this," said Archie mournfully.

"Oh, it will be all right," Sally answered bravely. "Abijah's nervous; that's all. That was certainly some ride we had last night. I hope you'll go up to the hotel now and get a good sleep."

"Oh, I'll look out for that," Archie replied.

"I suppose we'll hardly meet again," he said with a dejection which he

hoped would elicit a promise of further meetings.

"I'm afraid it will be a long, long time before I see you," she said with a lingering tenderness and wistfulness.

"I hope you are going to be very happy, Sally. And I shall think of you always as you were last night. I shall never forget our talk by the brook."

"Neither shall I," she murmured. Her lashes were wonderful; not till that moment had he done justice to her lashes.

Belated passengers were now brushing past them in the aisle. The conductor, walking briskly along the platform, shouted all abroad with heartless finality. It seemed like the voice of doom to Archie.

"Good-bye, Sally!"

He put out his hand, but with a quickness that took his breath away she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him. The touch of her hand by the brook under the stars was as nothing to this. Two young girls seeking seats giggled at the frankness and heartiness of the salutation. In old times Archie would have perished with humiliation; but an overwhelming joy filled his soul. The giggles of bread-and-butter misses who knew nothing of life and love were beneath his notice. Sally's arms were still about his neck, her lips were parted expectantly.

"You must go, honey," she whispered and his kiss fell like a punctuation upon her last delectable word.

If she hadn't given him a gentle push toward the door he might never have reached the vestibule. Another person who shared his haste to leave the train materially assisted him by gentle pressure to the platform. His brain whirled from the intoxication

of Sally's kiss—indeed the two kisses, or specifically the kiss received and the kiss returned. But his exaltation was of brief duration, for there beside him stood Isabel like an accusing angel, severe and implacable. It was she whose gentle impulsion had facilitated his exit from the parlor car, and beyond question she had witnessed the kissing, a disagreeable circumstance that fell smotheringly upon his ecstatic mood.

## CHAPTER IX.

"You were on that train!" he exclaimed;—the most fatuous of questions and the poorest possible opening for a conversation.

"I thought I had made it sufficiently plain at Portsmouth that I resent your following me! The meeting there might have been by accident, but seeing you here I am convinced—I am convinced that you are spying on me!"

"But, Miss Peery—"

"I should think," she interrupted,

"that knowing or suspecting what I am trying to do you would show me some consideration—"

"But I can explain; really I can explain if you will give me a moment—"

"I understand perfectly that but for me you shouldn't be loitering here! And you practically acknowledged at Portsmouth that you were interesting yourself in the affairs of the Congdons!"

"We are playing at cross purposes quite unnecessarily," protested Archie.

"Why not confess just what your interest is in that family? I told you quite plainly at Portsmouth that I had reason to believe I had shot Putney Congdon at Bailey Harbor! But for the courage you put in my heart I should never have done that!"

"If you did that you have ruined everything. A dastardly act for which I hope you will pay the full penalty of the law!"

This was wholly unreasonable and quite beside himself he shook his finger in her face.

"You seem to forget that you advised me to flout the law; to do just the things I have been doing, roving the world, shooting and plundering!"

"Everything has gone wrong," she said, "and you may have all the satisfaction you can get out of your interference, your intrusion upon affairs of the greatest delicacy, in which my assistance and my honor are pledged. That car standing yonder belongs to me and before I leave I want you to walk away from here as rapidly as possible and not turn your head!"

He did not even confirm her statement as to the propinquity of the car,

but crossed the platform with the creafallen air of a child in disgrace.

He knew nothing save that he was enormously tired and he went to the hotel and crawled wearily into bed.

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He was setting on the edge of the bed when a gently insinuating knock caused him to start.

"Come!"

"Come!"

The door opened slowly, wide enough to permit a man's head to be thrust in. A face wearing an amused smile, a familiar face but the last he expected to see, met his gaze.

"Hi!"

The Governor widened the opening in the door and squeezed through.

"My dear Archie!" he exclaimed as he locked the door, "how infinitely relieved I am! I was afraid some harm had befallen you, but to find you here safe and sound fills my heart with gratitude."

He hung down his cap and linen duster, chose a chair by the window and seated himself with a little sigh.

"I hope," Archie ventured timidly, "that you came alone?"

"Oh, yes; I'm alone! Trust me for that; but my friend Walker was not easily shaken. And his provocation! O my boy, his provocation to justifiable homicide and all that sort of thing!"

"Well, I only did what I thought was right," Archie declared doggedly. "I wasn't weighing the consequences."

"Splendid, my dear Archie, to see how beautifully you rose to the situation—a situation that spoke powerfully to your generous heart! If there has been any error it is mine. I should have known from the way you played up to the Seebrook girl that you were far too susceptible to be trusted with women. The error is mine; not yours, Archie; I don't blame you a particle. Sally is a winsome lass; she has a way with her, that girl!"

"If you don't mind," said Archie with dignity, "we'll stop talking nonsense. What happened?"

"Just a little curious, are you, as to what followed your amazing breach of hospitality? Ran away with a pretty girl, assisted in marrying her to an undesirable son-in-law, and now you want to know how the old folks take it! Oh, Archie, for sheer innocence you are a wonder!"

"Walker had no right to force a girl like Sally to marry an old curmudgeon she hated. I never hesitated as to the course I should take after she told

me her story. The marriage was in proper form and I haven't a single regret!"

"What you did, Archie," the Governor resumed paternally, "was to marry Sally, the incomparable, Sally the divine, to Pete Barney, the diamond thief."

"You mean—you mean I married the girl to a crook?" gasped Archie.

"One of the smoothest in the game! And Sally knew he was a crook! I suppose it was the diamonds that fetched her. If you'd looked at his hands you would have noticed that he hadn't the paws of an honest Green Mountain farmer. Pick-pocket originally and marvelously deft; but precious stones are his true meter. The trifling little necklace he had on his person when he struck Walker's is worth a cool hundred thousand. He'll have to break it up and sell 'em in the usual way and it will take

time."

Archie sank upon the bed; he had done a horrible thing, hardly second to murder, and his penitence weighed heavily upon him.

"It doesn't seem possible that the girl would have deceived me!"

"We never know when they are going to deceive us, Archie! Sally hated the farm and was crazy to escape. She lifted a couple of hundred dollars the old man kept under a plank in the parlor floor—an emergency fund in case he ever had to run for it. A nasty trick, I call it; most unfilial on Sally's part. The Walkers are crushed by her conduct. And I had vouched for you at the Walkers; it's almost as bad as though I had betrayed them myself. You will not, of course, make the serious error of knocking at the Walker door again! That would be rubbing it in."

"I don't want you to think me ungrateful," Archie stammered. "The girl made a fool of me; I see it all now!"

"She made a fool of you but you in turn made a fool of me! And while I'm not caviling, you will pardon me, son, if I suggest that hereafter you play square with me. I don't mean to curb your personal enterprise, or set any limit on your little affairs of the heart. But let's have no more foolishness."

"I haven't a thing to say for myself!" blurted Archie, who was at the point of tears. "I was weak, miserably weak. I had no idea that any one could lie as that girl did. And it's not fair for me to stay on with you. I can't ask you to trust me again."

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