

BLACKSHEEP!

By Meredith Nicholson



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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 about 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, feeling, 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—he is rewarded with a fond farewell kiss—and he turns to find Isabel Perry had witnessed the whole scene. Isabel is not pleased at meeting Archie again and accuses his of spying on her. She tells him that if he has really shot Putney Congdon, as he claims, he has ruined everything. Archie returns to the hotel greatly mystified. Next morning the Governor arrives—explains to Archie that he has aided Sallie to marry a notorious diamond thief—and that Sallie had deceived him concerning the whole affair. They proceed to New York to the Governor's home, where they are visit-

ed by Julia, the Governor's sister. Julia explains to Archie that her brother is passing through a strange phase—caused by a cruel shock some time before. Now read on:

The draperies at the end of the room swayed a little and Archie walked back and glanced into the dining-room. He nodded reassuringly and she indicated a seat a little nearer than the one he had left.

"Please don't be alarmed, but it's a singular fact that I know you; we met once, passingly at tea in Cambridge; it's a good while ago and we exchanged only a word, so don't try to remember. I much prefer that you shouldn't." Archie didn't remember; he had attended many teas at Cambridge during commencement festivities and had always hated them. "It was not until we were at the table that I placed you tonight. I'm relieved, infinitely relieved, to know that you are with my brother. How it came about is none of my affair. But you are a gentleman; in the strange phase through which"—her lips formed to speak a name but she caught herself up sharply—"through which he is passing I'm gratified that he has your companionship. Once something

very cruel happened to him; something that greatly embittered him, a very cruel, hard thing. Indeed, and after the first shock of it—" She turned her head slightly and her lips quivered.

"That is all," she said, and faced him again with her beautiful repose accentuated, her perfect self-control that touched him with an infinite pity.

CHAPTER X.

When the Governor reappeared Julia and Archie were seemingly in the midst of a leisurely discussion of the drama. Later, when they were again alone for a few moments, she slipped a sealed envelope into his hands.

"If anything should happen to him I should like to know. It was understood between us when he called me by telephone this morning that I was not to hint in any way as to his identity, or mine, for that matter, and I shall not break faith with him. I trust you completely. I shall be at that address until the first of October. You can wire me in any emergency." Shortly after, she too her leave.

Archie learned from Baring, who brought his breakfast, that the Governor had left the house, and would hardly return before six.

Later he chose a stick with care from a rack at the front door, walked to the Avenue and turned determinedly cityward, walking jauntily. He grinned as he saw seated in the upper window of the most conservative of all his clubs one of his several prosperous uncles, and having sufficiently exposed himself to the eyes of the world he determined to eat luncheon in the park restaurant. He watched a young woman with two children who occupied a table directly in his line of vision. Children always interested him, and the boy was a handsome little fellow, but it was the girl who held Archie's attention, with a perplexed sense that he had seen her before. The fine oval face, the eyes dancing

with merriment, sent his thoughts flying to Bailey Harbor.

He continued to inspect them with a deepening conviction that the woman was Mrs. Congdon. It was a dispiriting thought that there under his eyes, so close that the babble of the children occasionally reached his across the intervening tables, was the family of

the man he had shot. The Congdons had eaten their meal hurriedly and were already paying their check. He watched them move away toward the interior of the park, marked their direction and chose a parallel course with a view of keeping them in sight. (Continued on Page 5)

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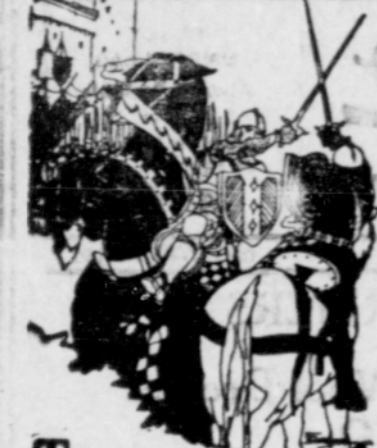
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