

DEPUTY of the DEVIL

By Ben Ames Williams

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CHAPTER IX—Continued

He began to work with a new intensity. Mary Ann, facing him across Dan's body, sensed this, and looked at him quickly. But she said nothing, asked no question, continued like a machine to supplement in every way his efforts with her own.

And presently, as his senses cleared, Doctor Greeding began to feel, with that fine instinct of the surgeon which is so often right without any tangible reason for its conclusions, that Dan might be saved. All went so smoothly. The bullet had been driven by a light powder-charge—by a target, rather than a service-load. Also, the ball had struck Dan's belt and thus lost somewhat of its force, so that its destructive effect was less than might otherwise have been the case.

Thus the wound itself was as mild as possible—though deadly serious enough. But also there seemed to Doctor Greeding ground for hope in the fact that this absurd, irregular surgical procedure insisted on performing itself without the least hitch. Razor-blades instead of the knife, blunt scissors for dissection, thread and needle in place of snaps, clumsily bent spoons for retractors, each in his hands so incredibly shrewd and skillful served their purpose well; and at the moment the supply of gauze for sponges neared exhaustion, Jerrell and Thomas came racing up the path, bringing all that might be required.

When Doctor Greeding saw the end of the task in sight, he spoke to Nancy. "Enough—take the towel away now." She obeyed, and he finished, sure that what he had done was well done; with a nod to Mary Ann, he withdrew from the table where Dan lay. He went to the sink to wash his hands. Nancy was there, leaning back against the drain-board, white and still. Doctor Greeding looked at his daughter, and he asked gently: "Head ache? It's the fumes. Get out of doors. We must keep Dan warm, can't open any windows here."

Nancy went obediently toward the kitchen door, and Mary Ann said: "We'll move him into the dining-room, arrange some sort of screen around him there to keep off drafts."

Doctor Greeding nodded. He said wearily: "It's been a strain. My head's whirling. A surgeon should never operate on his friends!"

"You did all that could be done, did it perfectly," Mary Ann assured him; and she asked, with a sudden weakening in her tones, her first confession of fear: "Tell me what you think?"

Doctor Greeding hesitated. "Everything was as fortunate as possible," he said. "There are many perforations, as you saw. That was inevitable. But not much poisonous matter free. Of course, all we could do was repair the damage, and drain the wound, and—wait. You know that as well as I." He added: "Yet—I believe he will get better!"

With Thomas and Jerrell helping, they carried Dan into the dining-room, and laid a mattress on the table for his bed, and set a fire on the hearth.

And thus began the vigil that must endure for days. Doctor Greeding assumed command. "Another procedure may be necessary later," he explained. "I'll get whatever we are likely to need, have it ready." He telephoned to Boston and arranged that a full kit should be dispatched by messenger. He suggested a nurse; but Mary Ann negated that.

"I shall be within call always," she said. "And Nancy will want to help. Any unnecessary people could only add to the confusion. He needs quiet, needs to sleep."

He assented. "Yes, that's true," he agreed.

"But I must let Father know," she remembered.

Doctor Greeding said quickly: "Of course." And he urged: "Have him come up here, Mary Ann." He was suddenly and for no tangible reason eager to see Professor Carlisle again.

Jerrell took this matter in hand; he volunteered to drive to Boston and fetch Dan's father. "It's better than having him make the trip alone," he said. "And—I must confess my fault to him, Mary Ann."

She reassured him. "It wasn't your fault. It was an accident," she urged. Yet she let him go.

Thomas took him in the boat to the landing where he had left his car. He would, they decided, return next day.

Dusk began to creep across the lake and cloak the island. Dan was drowsily conscious, murmuring absurdities and realizing their absurdity and chuckling at himself; and Nancy, close by him, holding his hand, laughed with him ever so tenderly. Mary Ann had made a couch in the billiard-room, close by where he lay. After dinner—they ate in the kitchen, in relays, one of them always by his side—Mary

Ann insisted that Doctor Greeding go to bed for a while.

"I'll call you later," she promised. "Nancy will stay with him, and I'll sleep here, and we'll call you!"

So Doctor Greeding went to his room; but at first he did not sleep. He turned on all the lights, unwilling that there should be anywhere a shadowed corner in which anything or nothing might be hidden. The man's nerves began to twitch raggedly. He had a sense of dark forces gathering like a smothering cloud. He slept at last unasily; and when at last some one came tapping at his door, he woke with a bound and a cry.

"It's Nancy, Father," the girl said reassuringly, through the panels. "It's all right. Nothing's happened. Only Mary Ann thought you might come down for a while now."

"At once," he promised, steadily enough; yet it was in fact some time before he was sufficiently composed to face them. When he came downstairs, he found Mary Ann by Dan's side, Nancy half asleep in a great chair near. Doctor Greeding touched Dan's wrist, his brow, and nodded reassuringly; and Mary Ann smiled. She went to spread a blanket gently over Nancy.

"You lie down too," Doctor Greeding directed.

She obeyed him, white and weary; and Doctor Greeding was left with the hurt man. He stood beside Dan for a moment; then he too sat down—sat without moving, while long thoughts absorbed him.

Sometime later he looked toward Nancy. Her eyes were open. He saw the glint of them.

"Awake, dear?" he murmured.

She smiled. "I had a bad dream," she whispered. "But it's all right if you're here." And she sighed, and slept again. Her faith was like a draft of warming wine.

Hours later Nancy roused, and came and stood with her hand touching Dan's. His fingers closed faintly over hers.

"He knows me," Nancy whispered; and Dan muttered: "Nancy. There?"

"Here always, Dan. Hush now, darling. Sleep."

She held him in her love as a mother holds a babe in arms. Doctor Greeding drew back into the shadows while she took his place at her lover's side. And so at last the long night ended, darkness yielding to the warm gray of dawn.

CHAPTER X

There followed days of waiting, of that inaction which is so much more difficult than action, when they could only tend the hurt man, and seek to cheer him with their smiles, feeding with the fuel of their untainted burned the flickering fire of life that burned in him. Sometimes he was in torment, but he managed to grin despite the pain, hiding his

anguish behind a brave mask of mirth from these folk who loved him. He did this deceive Nancy; but at such hours his brow was wet, and Mary Ann knew he suffered, and eased him as she could.

Doctor Greeding himself seldom went far from where the hurt man lay. He clung to Dan's proximity, as a mariner in stormy weather clings to safe anchorage, with a jealous diligence. Here was his task and his desire; to make sure, first of all, that Dan came back to health again. He would not by even a brief absence take the least risk of failure.

The vigil left its mark upon him, so that even Mary Ann urged him to rest, to walk around the island, or take a boat-ride, or find some other means of distraction.

"You need it," she insisted. "You're deadly tired."

Professor Carlisle puffed at his

"I'm all right," he protested. "I'll stand by."

Jerrell and Professor Carlisle had arrived early on the first morning, having left Cambridge at dawn. Doctor Greeding welcomed them. There was rising in him a deep affection for these folk, a new perception of the kindness and understanding in them all. Jerrell, for instance, had not offered to throw the resources of his wealth at their disposal; his silence seemed to assume that whatever could be done for Dan, they would do. Some men, Doctor Greeding reflected, would have displayed the arrogance natural to financial power; would have insisted on summoning other physicians, nurses, on importing hospital facilities of every kind. He liked Jerrell for his reticence in this direction.

And Doctor Greeding had, where the others were concerned, even more personal reasons for gratitude. The accident to Dan was, after all, his fault; and Nancy, and Dan too—since they were familiar with firearms—must know this. Yet neither reproached him, or offered him blame.

He welcomed Professor Carlisle's coming as an opportunity for confession, hoping by an open admission of his culpability to ease his own heart; and he took the first convenient occasion. He and Jerrell were in the big living-room; Mary Ann and Nancy and Professor Carlisle were with Dan in the dining-room, the length of the house away. Then Professor Carlisle came back from Dan's side; and he asked Doctor Greeding:

"You think he has a chance, Doctor? Mary Ann says that is your opinion."

"I believe so, yes," Doctor Greeding assented. And he said, to Jerrell as well as to Professor Carlisle: "I hope so. Because, Professor, this was not Jerrell's fault; it was mine."

Jerrell protested generously: "Hardly, Ned. It was my clumsiness."

But Professor Carlisle waited, watching Doctor Greeding; and the surgeon said explicitly:

"No, Ira. He spoke to Dan's father. 'You see, Professor Carlisle, I had just fired the pistol. I removed the empty clip, thinking I had fired the last cartridge. Most accidents with automatics occur through just such carelessness as mine. I should have worked the action to be sure that the barrel was empty. I neglected to do this. I should have made sure the gun was empty before giving it to Jerrell.'"

He smiled frankly. "No one has blamed me," he confessed. "They've all been mighty kind and generous. But it was my fault, just the same."

Neither man spoke; and he added honestly:

"As a matter of fact, this was worse than carelessness. With that particular pistol, if the barrel is empty, the action stays half-open. The fact that it was closed should have warned me that there was still a cartridge in the barrel. I was incredibly stupid!"

There was a moment's silence. Then Jerrell said uncomfortably: "Decent of you to say that, Ned. But after all, if I hadn't pointed the gun at Dan—"

He added, in an incredulous recollection: "I didn't mean to, tried not to. I can't understand it, even now. It was exactly as if some one's hand, on mine, swung the pistol toward Dan—"

"If it had been empty, you could have done no harm," Doctor Greeding insisted.

Professor Carlisle looked keenly at the Doctor. "No one is—blamable for an accident," he remarked. "This of course was an accident. Let it rest so."

And he repeated his question of a moment before. "You think he will recover?"

"Yes."

"Why?" the older man inquired. "On what signs do you rely?"

Doctor Greeding hesitated, shook his head, smiled. "I don't know," he said. "Instinct. A guess, perhaps." He chuckled. "Or it may be that I'm relying on my luck. I was born under a caul, Professor. The old women say that's a sign of luck, you know; and I've always been lucky, certainly."

Professor Carlisle sat down, almost suddenly, as though he were tired. His eyes still on Doctor Greeding's face, he filled his pipe and lighted it. So presently he spoke.

"Born under a caul, were you, Doctor?" he repeated thoughtfully. And he said: "I remember you once told me some strange experiences of a friend of yours, who was also born under a caul."

Doctor Greeding felt his cheek flame; then the blood drained away, and he cursed his folly, his own loose tongue. There was no accusation in the Professor's tone; yet Doctor Greeding felt himself accused.

"Yes, so I did," he confessed lamely.

Professor Carlisle puffed at his

pipe, his old eyes stern and still.

"Strange things do happen," he said gravely, "—some things too dark for the human mind to contemplate." He met Doctor Greeding's glance. "I perceive," he said, "that Dan and Nancy—"

"Yes. I am much pleased," Doctor Greeding said hurriedly.

"You do not—object?" the Professor asked.

"No," the other man assured him. "No!" And he said: "Strange things, yes. Dan's recovery—I think he will recover—is almost like a miracle, for instance." Something like an appeal for mercy was in his tone.

The old man said inflexibly: "Yes. If he does recover."

And at that, abruptly, Doctor Greeding turned away and went out through the billiard-room to where Dan lay. He questioned Mary Ann with a glance.

"He's fine," she said. "Not much pain, and no temperature. Doctor, you mustn't—doubt. He'll get better." She smiled hearteningly. "He's bound to. This is one of your miracles, you know."

"It's already twenty-four hours," he reflected. "Wound draining?"

"Perfectly."

"I'll stay with him for a while," he suggested. "If you want to rest."

And he did in fact stay close to Dan's side during the days that followed. This was not all solicitude for Dan. It was in part defensive; since so long as he stayed near Dan—who was conscious and rational now—he need not be alone with Professor Carlisle.

There was in Doctor Greeding a passionate desire to avoid that wise bold man, whose shrewd eyes saw so much, who might be kept enough to suspect, and even to credit, the incredible. He perceived that questions multiplied in the other's mind; but so long as he himself stayed near Dan, who must overhear any catechism that might be attempted, Professor Carlisle could not interrogate him.

And—Doctor Greeding had no answers ready for the old man's unasked questions; so he clung to Dan as a buckler and a shield.

He and Mary Ann and Nancy shared that vigil; but he bore the greater burden. It was as though he poured his own life and strength into the hurt man. He seemed in fact visibly to fail while Dan grew stronger. For Dan's strength did begin to return, his color to improve; and his spirits were brave and unshuffled.

Doctor Greeding, by contrast, began to look like an ill man. Nancy paid him a heavenly tenderness. And Mary Ann entered with her into this conspiracy of gentleness toward the man who so visibly grew weary and drawn before their eyes. She said to him, once, at dawn:

"You mustn't—wear yourself out, Doctor." And she added, understandingly: "Father told me you blame yourself for Dan's being hurt. But that's wrong. You mustn't worry. Grief and worry can make you ill, and Dan doesn't blame you. None of us do."

He said: "I wonder if that's why Dan's getting better. Because he's not blaming me, not—hating me. Hate and anger are poisonous things, Mary Ann. They can destroy a man, if he harbors them."

She protested smilingly: "Nobody hates anybody here!"

He said gently: "You're a very fine woman, Mary Ann." There was a question in his mind, but he did not ask it. There was no need. To any discerning eye, it was clear

enough that between Mary Ann and Jerrell there was a bond which grew stronger in these days under the same roof together. Jerrell seemed younger each day; and Mary Ann wore radiance like a garment, and a happy certainty and pride.

The second day after Dan's hurt, there was a change in the weather. It grew warmer, and a hot haze obscured the sky, diffusing the rays of the sun. Dan suffered from the heat, as they all did; yet the day passed somehow. After dinner, Nan-



"It's the Way the World Is, Though, Isn't It, Father?"

cy and Doctor Greeding went out on the open terrace in front of the house, where a faint breeze stirred. The stars were obscured by the haze across the sky; and Nancy said:

"We need a shower, Father, to clear the air."

He nodded. "Tomorrow, probably," he said. "It's never uncomfortably hot here for very long." They stood side by side, her arm through his. "But I don't think I shall ever like it here again," she confessed.

He was shaken. "No? Why, Nancy?"

"I think partly because Dan was—hurt here," she decided. "And—it can't ever be the same without Mother. When Dan can be moved, let's go back to Cambridge, Father. Sell the island."

"I wish you'd stay here with me," he suggested. "For a while, for this last time—"

She said, with the blind cruelty of youth: "I hate leaving you, Father. But—I want to be with Dan, always. Life's so short! I know that now. We've so little time. I don't want to miss a single day I might have with him!"

"I shall be lonely without you, Nancy," he confessed.

"I know," she nodded. "And I'm sorry. It's the way the world is, though, isn't it, Father? No matter how much I love you, I must go to Dan."

He assented gravely. "Yes. And I won't try to keep you from him."

She laughed, clinging to his arm, her voice deep and warm. "You couldn't, ever," she whispered ardently. "No matter how you tried. Nothing ever can."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Russians Unearth Rich Archeological Finds That Are of Historic Importance

Archeological finds of historic importance have been brought to light by a number of Soviet scientific expeditions, says the Chicago Tribune.

The Crimea, Kazakhstan in central Asia, the ancient Tatar republic, the Georgian republic in the mountainous Caucasus, and the Ural province, are among the regions which have yielded rich finds that are being studied by specialists in various Soviet museums.

Ancient flint implements on the site of a 200,000 year old settlement of Neanderthal man were found on the Katcha river in the Crimea by an expedition of the Moscow Historical museum. This is reported to be the first settlement of that era discovered in an open area, all previous Neanderthal settlements having been found in hillside caves.

In the village of Pychka nearby the expedition discovered some interesting examples of the art of the pre-Scythian culture of 3000-2000 B. C. These drawings depicted battle scenes, executed on the face of a cliff in red pigment, over an area of ten meters.

Numerous relics of the Bronze Age were found in Kazakhstan by another expedition of the Historical museum. After weeks of painstaking excavations, a communal

but twenty-five meters long, tombs and a sacrificial altar were uncovered. In the altar were found the charred bones of prehistoric domestic animals, pot containing the remains of food, and several bone cubes resembling modern dice.

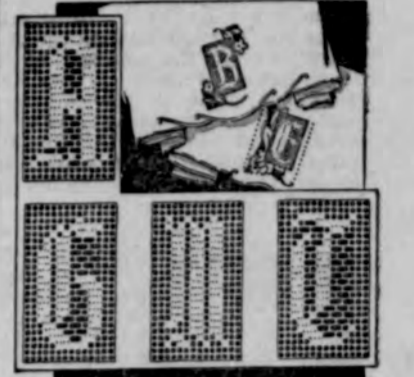
That the Stone Age man roamed the mountains of the Caucasus is indicated by the discovery of a cave near the city of Jugile, Georgia, in which a number of flint implements were found.

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