FORBIDDEN VALLEY

by William Byron Mowery

SYNOPSIS: Curt Tennyson has left his party in the wilderness of Northwest Canada, and has flown to British Columbia to learn what he can of Sonya and Ralph Nichols, whom he has picked up in the wilds while trailing Igor Karakhan, wealthy crook. Sonya is, he finds, a Russian princess, but he cannot learn her reason for making so dangerous a trip, although Curt's associate in Vancouver suggests it is to meet Karakhan, a suggestion Curt indignantly rejects.

Chapter 29

SONYA'S WELCOME

THE next morning Curt and Smash started north once more in the plane.

On that long trip up across the latitudes, Baldwin's suggestion in the car the night before haunted him like a nightmare. He fought against it but stray thoughts kept getting past his guard.

There was Sonya's passionate determination to go into the Lilluars. Her secrecy. Her mention, once, of a week-end trip to Juneau. LeNoir's order that she must not be harmed. The woman's description of the tall Russian who'd been so frequent a caller at the Volkov home. . . .

In the hush of twilight they sailed over a spearhead range and saw the Iskitimwah lake nestling in its mountain cradle. They cut off ignition, made a long fourteen-mile glide, and drifted down upon the water.

Curt's canoe was there near the cabin, where he had left it. He floated the craft, shook hands with Smash, gave him final instructions, and set out down the Iskitimwah.

It was a little before midnight when he threaded the river delta and pointed his canoe out across the lake toward camp. After three days of freedom from ambushes and ramhorn bows, he was oppressed by the feeling of danger closing around him again. With Siam-Klale's main band whipping south and LeNoir probably suspecting who Paul and he really were, something drastic was bound to happen, and quickly too.

The island loomed up ahead, dark, and silent. Everything seemed peaceful there. Presently he distinguished the outlines of the two tents. Thank God, nothing had gone very wrong while he'd been away!

From the upper tip of the island a hawk-owl's cluck challenged him, so sharp and peremptory that he had to smile. Trust Paul to spot any canoe approaching that island!

He answered back, landed at the lower end, beached his canoe and hurried up to camp. Beside the boulder "fort" François and Jocku were rolled up in their elder pokes, sleeping soundly while Paul stood guard. On a spruce mattress under his tent fly Ralph was tossing restlessly in a dream. The Indian, Tenn-Og, was not around.

Beyond the tents Sonya was sitting on a canoe near the water edge, looking out toward the willow island.

"Sonya——"

She sprang up from the canoe and whirled around.

"Oh-oo! Curt! It's you! I waan't expecting—Curt, where have you been all these days? Why did you leave us that night?"

"I've been prospecting a creek that old John told me about," he lied. "Everything went all right here, didn't it?"

"Yes, but you were gone so long and Paul wouldn't tell me a thing, and I—I worried about you."

IN THE ghostly light her face was white and ethereal as she confronted him, and her bosom still was heaving from the start he'd given her. She appeared so afraid and alone that all the stern things he meant to tell her dropped away, as once before in the canoe at Russian Lake.

"I worried about you too, dear. Are you glad I'm back?"

"Awfully glad! Paul is dependable, but he's—he's not you."

Her fingers tightened upon his as though asking him not to go away again. Impulsively Curt swept her into his arms.

"Sonya"—his hand caressed her hair, he was flittingly conscious of that small automatic beneath her blouse as he held her close to him—"you seemed so glad—when you saw me. . . . Can't I hope you do care—a little bit, sweetheart?"

Sonya did not look up or answer his question. For a few moments she lay in his arms, not resisting, with the velvety softness of her cheek against his own.

"Sonya, listen," he urged, not knowing how to interpret her passiveness, "I know it's wrong to force myself on you when you feel under obligations, but I can't go on not knowing——"

She stopped him. "Don't say that, dear; you'd never take advantage of obligations." But even as she said it, she tried to draw her hand away, and Curt felt her stiffen against him. "Dear, please," she insisted, as his arm tightened about her. "I asked you not to, once."

He allowed her to free herself. When she looked up and saw the bitter disappointment on his face, she kissed his cheek, a brief formal caress which meant no more than her assurance that she forgave his impulsiveness.

"Sonya, look here," he demanded, "is there somebody else?"

She turned his question aside. "Curt, I wish you didn't idealize me so much. You have, ever since we met. You know so terribly little, about the actual me. Our codes are so different. Something that I consider right in my deepest heart might seem to you an unthinkable wrong."

"Are you meaning this trip of yours?"

She debated a moment. "Yes."

"You're making a mountain out of some molehill. The idea of you doing an 'unthinkable wrong' is ridiculous."

"We won't argue it, Curt. You just wouldn't approve, you'd violently disapprove, of my trip."

"But you told Ralph, and he evidently doesn't oppose——"

"Ralph's too gentle to oppose anybody. This has to be a matter of my own choice and conscience. Afterward, after it's all over, I'll write you or let you know somehow—I'll answer every question you've ever asked me."

"You say you'll write me—won't I see you afterward? Can't I come to see you?"

She laughed, bitterly. "You may, if you still want to. But you won't want to."

Before he could stop her she turned away from him and disappeared in the darkness toward her tent.

CURT stared after her, torn by the desire to follow and find out what she meant. He thought it ominous that she had not answered his question, "Is it somebody else?" She seemed to be at war with herself, doing something which violated a part of her instincts, yet driven to it by a passion she could not resist.

In a tortured mood he started up the island to join his partner. That ugly suggestion of Arnold Baldwin's was jigging through his brain again, and for once he could not fight it away.

Paul came a little way to meet him. "Any luck in Vancouver?" he asked in guarded voice.

"Nothing that I hoped for."

"You still don't know what she's doing in this country?"

"D'you mean you found out something?"

Paul changed the subject abruptly. "Our Indian friend has decamped."

"Tenn-Og? When?"

"Last night. I knew he was going, but I didn't try to stop him. We don't need a prisoner to guard; our party is clumsy enough now."

"So he pitched off! Well, you did the wise thing; if he wouldn't stay voluntarily he'd only have been a bother. Did he steal one of our canoes?"

"No, he swam it. A little matter like a bullet through his shoulder bothered him not at all."

"Hmmph! If he ever gets the chance, I suppose he'll show his gratitude to us by sticking us full of arrows. What else happened around here?"

Paul fidgeted and looked out across the dark water. His reluctance and the somber pain on his face struck a chill into Curt.

"What's worrying you, Paul? It's something about Sonya, isn't it?"

"I hate to be the one who brings odious news."

"Why Paul, what is it?"

Paul sidled into his story with slow unwilling steps.

"Sonya was partly the cause of Tenn-Og's going away. On the day after you left she made friends with him, and I knew she had some reason for doing that. Last night, when he left, she sent a message by him. I overheard. They were here by these sentry rocks. I put my self-respect into my pocket, and crept up close enough to listen."

"She sent a message by him?"

"To that 'breed."

"LeNoir?" Curt gasped. "To that fellow! Why Paul, you've—you've made some mistake there!"

"I heard what I heard," Paul insisted. "She had trouble making Tenn-Og understand and she repeated her instructions so many times that I caught every bit of her message. She's meeting LeNoir tonight. Over on the willow island. That's why she's staying awake down there."

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Tomorrow, Curt sustains the hardest blow of his career.

DUCKS SUICIDE TO PREVENT DISHONOR

PORTAGE, Wis. —(UP)— Stanley Manteufel, an ardent hunter, had four ducks which he trained as decoys. They were great pets.

He took the four birds to hunt several days ago. While he waited in his blind for the birds to attract their wild neighbors within gun range, he noticed the three were "headed for the bottom."

Finally they floated to the surface, all three dead. Manteufel, greatly grieved over his loss, claims the birds committed suicide because they could not stand the dishonor of luring their wild friends to their death. All were in good health previous to the incident, Manteufel claims.

Inventor Dies.

PHOLADELPHIA, Dec. 20.—(AP)—Herbert Thacker Herr, 57, vice president of the Westinghouse Electric & Manufacturing Co., died yesterday.

TAXES POURING IN FROM RUM SALES

WASHINGTON, Dec. 20.—(AP)—The government collected $9,111,173 in liquor taxes during the first 12 days of December.

The internal revenue bureau said today that $3,174,338 was derived from stamp taxes on distilled spirits and wines. Another $3,565,180 was collected on beer of more than 3.2 per cent.

While repeal did not become effective until December 5, officials explained that heavy stamp sales began December 1 in anticipation of the day and consequently in guaging the first returns, officials took the days immediately preceding repeal.

Other taxes included in the total were $2,126,792 on 3.2 beer, $191,148 on retail liquor licenses, $49,564 on wholesale licenses and $4,100 on rectifiers.

The tax on beer exceeding 3.2 per cent is $6 a barrel while that on 3.2 is $5 a barrel.

Textbook Writers Accused.

ST. LOUIS.—(UP)—Prof. Maynard C. Kreuger of the University of Chicago, in a recent address, accused textbook writers and teachers of "doing their best to develop a generation of spineless people."

Undertaker Bought Jail.

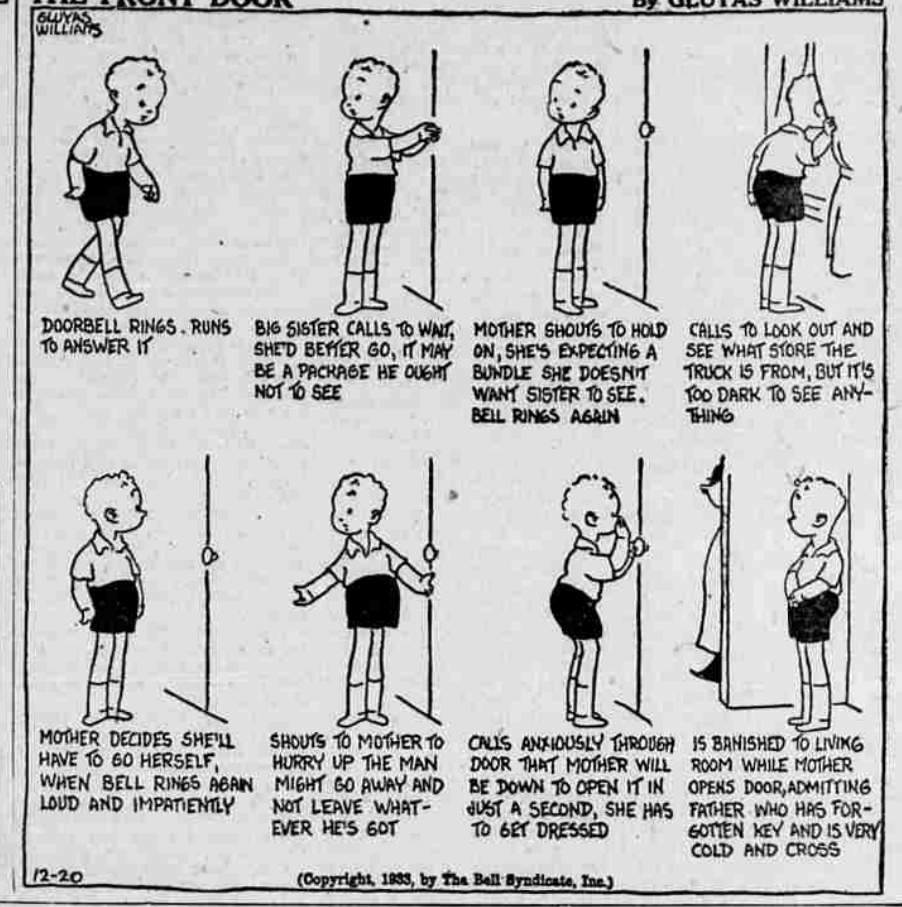
CARRIER MILLS, Ill. — (UP) — Ed Miller, an undertaker, offered $50 for the city jail at an auction here recently. He was the only bidder, and so now he has the jail.

S'MATTER POP—

By C. M. PAYNE

THE FRONT DOOR

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



TAILSPIN TOMMY—The Wrecked Plane—But Can They Identify It?

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