

FLAME TRAIL

BY MARIE DE SERVAUD

SYNOPSIS: Kay Crandon of the Lazy Nine impulsively hires Ted Gaynor, a jobless puncher. He helps her fight Josh Hastings, a "friendly" neighbor who wants to buy her ranch and marry Kay. Ted punnels Scrap Johnson, a co-woman who molested Kay. They shoot it out, wounding each other. Hastings sneaks up and kills Scrap with Ted's gun. A girl named Marion finds Ted and her nursing saves his life. The sheriff arrests Ted on a tip unconsciously given by Kay. His trial for Scrap's murder is going against him when Kay stops it by protesting on a technicality. She is kidnapped by Hastings and locked in a cellar.

Chapter 41 Marriage, Or Else—

THE sight of Josh Hastings brought to the surface Kay's subconscious feeling that he was at the bottom of this outrage, and a sense of furious indignation swept away her fear at this confirmation of her suspicion.

"How dare you bring me to a place like this? Her voice vibrated with scorn as she faced him, proudly erect.

He came in and started to pull the door to behind him, without speaking.

With a broken cry of rage, Kay sprang for the slowly closing door and tried to force her way through, but Josh Hastings closed his hand over her wrist like a vise and pulled her back, as he slammed the door. Kay tried to wrench herself away, and called loudly for help, but the grip on her arm only tightened.

"Don't be a fool!" Josh Hastings finally made himself heard above Kay's shouts. "There's nobody to hear you."

Panting, and with her breath coming in great suffocating gasps, Kay braced herself against the closed door. In the darkness she could make out the bulk of Josh Hastings' figure, and feel his protruding eyes peering at her.

"There's nothing for you to worry about," he said at last, "if you'll behave like a sensible girl. The time has come for us to reach an understanding."

Kay's eyes burned at him out of the darkness, but she made no answer as she waited, every nerve tense and tingling for what was to come. He said, "I would Josh Hastings dare to go?"

He paused a few moments, as though summing up his arguments to himself, before he brought them out. When he finally spoke, his voice had the coaxing tone that one might use toward an unreasonable child.

"Now there's no point in getting all wrought up." He loosened his grip somewhat, although it still held with a firmness that admitted of no pulling away. "I had to get you somewhere where I could make you see reason, even if it took some time to do it."

There was no mistaking the veiled threat in his suave tone. Kay held herself rigid and motionless, waiting for him to go on.

"The first thing to get clear is that I intend to marry you," he went on. "The sooner you give in on that point, the easier it will be. Not that it will make any difference in the long run."

"I'll never marry you!" Kay said through clenched teeth.

"I expected you to say that," he observed calmly. "But in an hour or two, or a day or two, or—" he paused for sinister emphasis—"a week or two, if necessary, you'll think differently."

A deadly weakness gripped Kay's knees, and she nearly collapsed at the realization of how completely she was in this man's power. It would be easy enough for him to give out some plausible explanation of her absence to Aunt Kate, and no one else would have any way of knowing she had disappeared. Shrinking back, she stared at Josh Hastings and waited.

"He'll hang, unless..."

"WHY you pulled this fool stunt at the trial, God knows!" he went on at last, "unless you think you're in love with that murderer." He waited a moment to gauge the effect of this remark, but Kay preserved her same attitude of rigid attention.

He gave a disagreeable laugh. "Not that it matters to me! I'll cure you of that, after we're married. But it struck me that it might be a good bargaining point."

"What do you mean?" Kay hardly recognized her strangled voice.

"Just this. You've succeeded in delaying his necktie party, I'll admit. But it is nothing but a delay. A necktie party in Montana can do the trick as well as one in Idaho, and, believe me, Ted Gaynor'll have one, in a week or less."

Blazing indignation got the better of Kay's caution for the moment. "Don't be too sure!"

"I couldn't be," Josh Hastings answered coolly. "He'll hang as sure as you and I are talking here. Unless—" he left his sentence unfinished, waiting for Kay to take him up.

"Unless what?"

"Unless I tell something I hap-

pen to know. And that something won't be told until after you are Mrs. Josh Hastings. It's up to you, whether or not that necktie party comes off."

A muffled groan escaped Kay as she realized the diabolical cleverness of Josh Hastings' scheme.

"I thought you'd see the point!" His voice held a cruel satisfaction. "How about coming over now, and getting the holy knot of matrimony tied good and tight? Then I'll tell my story, and your friend Gaynor can cut out, with his neck saved, anyway."

Kay's mind worked like lightning while Josh Hastings was talking. Her momentary weakness left her, and she determined to meet his brute force with cunning, instead of futilely trying to defy it.

"How can I tell you could save him, if I did marry you?" She had an air of considering his suggestion. "How do I know this thing you say you know isn't all a bluff?"

"You'll have to take my word for that," Josh Hastings growled.

"You can't expect me to trust your word, when you treat me like this, can you?" Kay gave her arm a sudden jerk but his grip tightened on her wrist as though operated by an automatic device.

"It's all one to me," Josh Hastings observed. "I'll wear you down in time." He glanced around the cellar. "Not such a gay place to spend a week or two, if you ask me. I'm giving you the choice of marrying me now, and saving the neck of this Gaynor bird, or of marrying me later, for the sake of getting out of here."

"You can't force me to marry you!" Kay blazed. "No matter how long you keep me, I can refuse to marry you when I do get out!"

"Silly. There's a chance of that," Josh Hastings admitted with an air of brutal detachment. "That's the reason I'm making this other proposition, so you'll have an incentive to go through with the marriage without any fuss. On the other hand, I kind of reckon that by going easy on food and keeping you here long enough, you can break your spirit so you'll be glad enough to say 'yes.' The way I figure it, it'll be a lot pleasanter if you say 'yes' now, and save your boy friend into the bargain."

A Rash Accusation

"WHAT is it you know, that will save him?" Kay demanded.

"I'm not telling that to anyone but the sheriff."

"I don't believe you have anything to tell," Kay taunted.

An unlooked-for look flashed in Josh Hastings' eyes, but he made no answer.

"Unless you're the murderer yourself," Kay goaded.

"I'd be apt to mention that if I was, wouldn't I?" he sneered, but Kay detected a strained note in the hoarse laugh with which he greeted this suggestion. "Look here!" he temporized. "If I tell you what I've got to tell the sheriff, will you agree to marry me now?"

"I'm not making any promises," Kay answered warily, "but I'll never marry you without hearing it first. I happen to know that you were up there at the scene of the murder, and that you haven't said anything about it."

Josh Hastings grabbed Kay's other arm, and swinging her round so that she faced him, he bent down and peered into her eyes.

"What are you talking about?" he demanded roughly. "You're crazy!"

Already Kay was regretting her rash statement. She'd have to be cleverer than that to trap Josh Hastings!

"Perhaps I am." She felt his grip loosen at her indifferent tone. Following a sudden impulse, she twisted herself free, and made a dash for the door.

The next instant, she was rudely pulled back and held in a suffocating embrace. Blind panic seized her, and she struggled like a mad thing to break away, but the powerful arms only held her the tighter.

Forcing her head back, Josh Hastings deliberately kissed her. "Have it your own way," he muttered, "but I'll have my share of all her desperate struggles to the far end of the cellar. Kay twisted around and sank her teeth into his hand. With a howl of pain and rage, he dropped her and made for the door.

Before Kay could recover, he had rushed out and slammed it behind him. The next instant, there was the grating of a key in the lock, and Josh Hastings' muffled but raucous voice came to her through the heavy wooden door.

"Have it your own way," he little devil!" he shouted, "I'm through with bargaining! And I'm through with proposals of marriage, too! I've used this place before and I know what it will do! I'll be back to take what I want when I'm good and ready! Then we'll see how you feel about wedding bells—perhaps!"

With this sinister threat, he stamped up the stairs, leaving Kay crouching in shivering despair on the floor, where he had flung her.

(Copyright, 1937, Marie de Servaud)

Ted overhears a conversation through his cell window, tomorrow.

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PLEASE DON'T TAKE IT SO HARD, MR. BENTLY. I KNOW HOW YOU MUST FEEL, BUT

I'D OFTEN WARNED HER AGAINST GOING HIGH PLACES. SHE ALWAYS SEEMED TO HAVE AN INSANE URGE TO LEAP FROM TALL BUILDINGS

THEY SHOULD BE CONSOLED IN KNOWING THAT SHE DID NOT COMMIT SUICIDE BUT WAS A VICTIM OF

SHE WAS A VICTIM OF YOUR COMPANY'S CARELESSNESS! YOUR AIR HOSTESS COULD HAVE PREVENTED THIS IF SHE HAD BEEN WATCHFUL!

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Glad to Help

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LISTEN—LET'S GIVE THE YOUNGESTER A LIFT—STEAD O' GETTIN' THIS STOCK HERE ON THE WALK SPOSE WE—

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OH, MY! IS IT PERMANENT? DID YOU TRY HOT BEES' WAY?

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Moody, when informed of the charges, smiled and said, "that's all the pinball operators have to say."

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

For further proof address the author, inclosing a stamped envelope for reply. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

PROVIDENCE, N.J., DEFEATED PHILADELPHIA 28-0 AUG. 21, 1883 --THE LARGEST SCORE EVER MADE IN A MAJOR LEAGUE SHUTOUT GAME...

LAND OF THE CAVE DWELLERS! IN SHANSI PROVINCE, CHINA, OVER ONE MILLION PERSONS STILL LIVE IN CAVES...

MRS. E. FRITZ SCHMERL, Oakland, Cal., HER MOTHER, FATHER, ELDER SISTER, BROTHER, SON AND DAUGHTER ALL HAVE BIRTHDAYS ON WEDNESDAY IN 1937...

THE MYSTERY SHIP OF JUTLAND! AT THE HEIGHT OF THE GREATEST NAVAL BATTLE OF THE WORLD WAR, A LARGE SAILING SHIP WENT THROUGH THE THICKEST PART OF THE FIGHT AND DISAPPEARED... WHO SHE WAS AND WHAT HAPPENED TO HER IS UNKNOWN...

3-21-37 (Copyright, 1937, The Bell Syndicate, Inc.)

Mystery Ship of Jutland

At death grips in the greatest naval battle in history from a modern standpoint, the High Seas fleet of Germany and the British Grand fleet poured death and destruction at each other in the North Sea, May 31, 1916.

Guns roared at 3:48 p. m. as both fleets opened fire almost simultaneously at a range of about 16,000 yards. The ships closed in for a more lethal range, then raced back and forth over a wide area in a series of maneuvers wherein each fleet tried for strategic positions.

At the very height of the combat, directly in the way of the charging ships, appeared a large square-rigged sailing vessel. Beamed, she was helpless to move out of the battle's path. Like a ghost out of the past she lay, her panic-stricken crew lining the sides, as ship after ship surged past her, hurrying tons of steel explosives over her head. Almost alongside, a German shell found a vital mark and sent the H. M. S. Queen Mary to the bottom of a pall of smoke and flame. The battle took a turn and the men-of-war headed off to another position. What happened to the aged sailing vessel that went through the thickest fighting of the Battle of Jutland and who she was has never been determined.

Land of Cave Dwellers

For centuries peasants of the Shansi province in China have found it easier to dig homes than build them. Carved out of cliffs of loess, a loam, their caves are exceedingly sturdy when properly constructed.

Over a million persons live in the caves of Shansi, earning a scanty living by means of primitive farming. Yet, from this humble land have emerged some of China's greatest men.

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LETTER FROM CAMP

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

STARTS LETTER HOME DURING REST HOUR AT CAMP. HAS A LOT OF NEWS HE WANTS TO TELL

CAN'T GET COMFORTABLE FOR WRITING. TRIES LYING ON BACK, HOLDING PAPER AGAINST BOOK IN THE AIR. NOT SUCCESSFUL

WISHES PENCIL HAD BETTER POINT. HASN'T HIS KNIFE, AND TRIES TO SHARPEN PENCIL WITH HIS TEETH

MAKES PENCIL WORSE. WONDERS IF HE CAN, WITHOUT UNLACING SNEAKER, WORK IT OFF WITH OTHER FOOT

TRIES WRITING WITH PAPER ON FLOOR, WHICH PROVES MOST UNCOMFORTABLE WAY OF ALL

REST HOUR IS UP. ADDRESSES LETTER WHICH CONTAINS HIS LOVE AND THE NEWS HE CAUGHT A FISH AND IS HAVING GOOD TIME, ALL ILLEGIBLE

8-16 (Copyright, 1937, by The Bell Syndicate, Inc.)

SMATTER POF

By C M PAYNE

SMATTER, POP?

I CAN'T STAND THAT NOISE! IT ANNOYS ME!

YOW-W, YOW-W!

I KNOW WHAT! DON'T LISTEN TO IT!

YOW-W, YOW-W!

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By HAL FORRESTER

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