

UNLOCKING ADVENTURE

By Charles Courtney

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CHAPTER I

I HAVE an arrogant pair of hands. Whether they are making way for a doctor, picking the lock on a door behind which a frightened girl is hiding in child-birth, or ferreting at the secret bolts of the chest in which Queen Isabella kept the jewels that financed Columbus, they are always leading me into unpredictable adventures. Some of these adventures are hilarious and fantastic; others, spine-freezing, and most of them, profitable.

From my earliest memory my fingers molested every lock, watch, or motor within reach. They strewed my childhood with dismembered mechanical gadgets, but they did not pick locks until my seventh year. Then they began by pantry raiding. Our stepmother was a cook with a reputation, whose jams and jellies brought highest prices at the local church raffles and school affairs.

She had resigned herself to a house strewn with dog bones, ragged caps, all the flotsam and jetsam of seven children, but the jam closet was her holy of holies. Inside, on the shelves, tidily covered with scalloped white wrapping paper, were rows of sweets: apple jelly, grape chips, wild blackberry, plum, and blueberry jam.

One summer afternoon when "mother" and father had driven away in the buggy and left us to tend the baby, we tried to raid the pantry. The batten door was of thin, soft pine with such wide spaces between the boards that the light showed through, and the lock was cheap, but we could not force it.

I ran into the kitchen and looked around. In a pan on the table was the skeleton of the chicken that we had eaten for dinner, picked white and clean. Collecting a

tables but rarely enough cash to buy a pair of shoes.

Our two boarders were a Miss Neville and a friend from Portsmouth, Va. My brother and I called them school teachers because they were kind to us and tried to make a dent in our ignorance. Miss Neville liked cantaloupes, so I ran a mile down the road to a farmer who grew them and brought back melons that were perfectly ripe. She gave me



Charles Courtney stumbles into a fabulous modern room in the Bronx. (Chapter XI)

nickels and told me tales about her brother who was an officer in the marines.

In the autumn, when Miss Neville left, I ran away from home. I WAS 9 years old and had never seen a sidewalk. Somebody gave me a ride to Marion. It was a wonderful town standing against the mountain, with streets so steep that you were afraid the wagons and carriages coming down the hill would fall on you. I wandered down Main street, looking at the shop windows, trying to decide what to do. Before the blacksmith's shop several horses were tied, waiting to be shod; at one side of the entrance hung an iron key a foot long, enclosed in a scroll; inside the shop, a heavy, bald man with his sleeves rolled up was striking sparks from a red-hot piece of iron. This was where I wanted to work.

From breakfast until supper I ran errands, delivered heavy packages of hinges or doorstops, or mended saddles; for in those days the blacksmith made and repaired everything from keys to iron cart tires. Sometimes I helped about the forge, and that I liked. When the smith saw that I was quick with my hands and good at making keys, he often turned them



A most ingenious device protects a sleeping husband from a marauding wife. (Chapter VII)

drumstick, a paring knife, and a file. I returned to the attack. After hours of gouging and scraping, I whittled at the bone until it sprang the lock; then I opened the closet, took out three jars of peach butter, and invited the rest of the children to a party in the woods. We might have escaped punishment if nature hadn't taken a hand, but father soon found out why we were groaning with stomach-aches. He went into the back yard and cut a peach-tree switch. Because I was the ring leader, I took the beating, but I was comforted by my pride.

WHEN her first child was born, our stepmother began to want the house for herself and her own family. She complained to father that she was overworked, and we grumbled because we felt neglected. Father was trapped by conflicting loyalties: sympathy for us and love for his young wife. As a result the family was broken up. My oldest brother and sister and a younger brother were sent to our grandmother in Prussia, another brother went to Arkansas, and a sister to relatives in Cincinnati. They were all gone except me and my half-brother.

At first I was gnawed by a miserable loneliness and moped about in the woods, looking for the first arbutus at the edge of the patches burned by forest fires, or hunting wild persimmons that puckered the mouth when they were not entirely ripe. At home I helped about the farm, hoeing potatoes and gathering apples. With the house to herself, my stepmother fixed up the large room upstairs and rented it to the summer boarders who came to the mountains from Norfolk, Richmond, even as far away as Baltimore and Washington. They boarded with the farmers, fished in Three Forks river, and rode along dirt highways that were little more than bridle paths. The \$2.50 a week that they paid for board was a godsend to the farmers who had plenty of ham, eggs, and vege-

over to me. He disliked locks, but their intricacies fascinated me. Before long I had made for myself a set of picks and skeleton keys. Soon I made friends with the boys in the neighborhood. One evening when the whole town was celebrating the victory of the local high school football team, four of us walked down Main street, looking for mischief.

"Bet you I can open every door on this street," I boasted. While my confederates stood watch, I picked the locks of five stores. "Hsst!" they warned. "Here comes the cop." We hid while the one village policeman made his rounds and perfunctorily started to try the doors. The first one opened; so did the others. He trumpeted up the street, shouting for the owners. The merchants came running. We stuffed our fists into our mouths to keep from giggling while they made hasty inventories, found nothing missing, and persuaded themselves that in the excitement over the game they had forgotten to lock their doors. In my own circle, I was established as a first-class magician.

"(To Be Continued)
(From the book of the same name written in collaboration with Thomas M. Johnson and published by Whittlesey House, New York City.)

Record Air Raid



Nearly 100 Liberators, Flying Fortresses and Mitchells, escorted by Lightning fighters staged the South Pacific's biggest Allied air raid when they plastered Jap-held Hansa Bay, northwest of Salamaua, with 180 tons of bombs. In the attack on the area, indicated by arrow, two Jap freighters and 64 barges were destroyed or damaged.



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SEARS, ROEBUCK AND CO.

Largest known star has a diameter of 690,000,000 miles.

THIS CURIOUS WORLD By William Ferguson



IN INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA, AN AVERAGE OF 826 POUNDS OF RAGWEED POLLEN FALLS ON EACH SQUARE FALE OF THE CITY DURING THE POLLINATING SEASON.

A PATCH ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF TROUSERS IS ON THE WRONG SIDE," Says MRS. R. C. JEWELL, Brlkly, Miss.

NEXT: A robin worth robbing.

FORMER CABINET MEMBER

HORIZONTAL

1,6 Pictured World War I U. S. cabinet member

10 Fastener

11 Age

12 Aluminum (symbol)

13 He was Secretary of

15 Ancient

16 Convey information

18 Before

19 Music note

20 Print measures

21 Musical pipe

23 Electrical engineer (abbr.)

24 Dance step

25 Fish eggs

27 Withered

29 Strikes lightly

31 Registered nurse (abbr.)

32 International language

33 Operative solo

35 Insects

37 Weep

39 Force (Latin)

40 Exists

42 Hairdressing device

45 Dull

46 Accomplish

47 Her

49 English city

51 2000 pounds

52 Pig

53 Cloth measure

54 Suffix denoting tumor

55 Be indebted

56 He was a cab-

Out Our Way

By J. R. Williams



THE OLD FENCE CORNER, WHERE OL' BRER RABBIT AN' A COVEY OF QUAIL ALLUS SEEM TO HANG OUT!

A PLACE LIKE THAT SHOULD BE PRESERVED FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS, WITH ITS FINE OLD AMERICAN SENTIMENT

FELLER TRIED THAT ON A BIG RANCH ONCE - HE SAVED TWO BUFFALO, TWO ELK AN' A LOT OF OTHER SENTIMENT AN' IN TIME HAD NO ROOM FER CATTLE, WENT BROKE AND TH' GOVERNMENT TOOK IT OVER FER A FOREST PRESERVE AN' GIVE HIM ENOUGH TO BE BURIED!

THE SENTIMENTALISTS

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HOLD EVERYTHING!

DEFENSE PLANT

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Luncheon is served, ma'am!

Largest known star has a diameter of 690,000,000 miles.

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Our Boarding House

With Major Hoopla



SINCE TOM LINED UP THAT JOB FOR YOU AS TRACTION EXPERT, YOU'VE BEEN AS BUSY AS A PIG IN A CORNCRIB, SKETCHING FURNITURE! HAS THE BLOW CRACKED THE OLD BELL?

POOH! I'VE ALWAYS DETESTED STUFFY AND UNCOMFORTABLE STREET CARS - I'M DESIGNING A MODERN, AIR-CONDITIONED CONVEYANCE WITH EASY CHAIRS, A CARD ROOM AND CIGAR STAND!

HOW ABOUT A POOL TABLE, A SNACK BAR AND A NIGHT CLUB DANCE FLOOR?

MOTORMAN'S DREAM

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Red Ryder

TH' TABLES ARE TURNED NOW, RYDER! HAW HAW!

YEAH! I KILLED PETE AND TOOK HIS GOLD DUST... JUST LIKE YOU GUESSED? THAT'S A CONFESSION!

YOU'LL NEVER LIVE TO TELL ABOUT IT! GIT MOVIN'!

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Freckles and His Friends

YES, J.B., I KNOW I CAUGHT THEM, BUT PLEASE DON'T ASK ME TO PUNISH THEM!

YOU'RE UNREASONABLE, J.B. ... AFTER ALL, THE CRIME ISN'T THAT SERIOUS! ... I KNOW THEY HOARDED CANNED PARTNERSHIP BUT ... WHAT? NO - NO! I CAN'T DO THAT TO THEM! I JUST CAN'T!!!

IN WAR TIMES, A MAN HAS TO PUT ASIDE HIS PERSONAL FEELINGS, I GUESS, AND THINK ONLY OF DUTY!

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Wash Tubbs

THE ONLY CLUE TO LIEUTENANT MASCOTT'S MURDER AT A2 HEADQUARTERS IS A CRUDE DRAWING OF TWO HANDS!

I BELIEVE MASCOTT WAS STUDYING THIS WHEN HE WAS STABBED, SUH!

I ASKED MASCOTT TO INVESTIGATE THAT NOTE MISS BURKE RECEIVED. DO YOU THINK THERE'S ANY CONNECTION?

THAT MAY BE, SUH, BUT THIS ISN'T HAND WRITING... IT'S A DRAWING!

I KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT THAT PAPER, SIR!

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Boots and Her Buddies

THERE'S SOMETHING FAMILIAR... BUT - BUT - BUT...

THAT'S THE TUTT HOME RIGHT BEHIND YOU, SIR

THANKS

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Allep Oop

NOW LET'S SEE WHAT CHANGES THIS NEW HIGH CONCENTRATION ROCKET FUEL WILL NECESSITATE IN THE DESIGN OF MY PROJECTILE ENGINE... FIRST THERE WILL BE...

WOLFGANG... WHAT'S COOKIN'?

I'M BUSY OOP... DON'T BOTHER ME!

HMM... WHAT'S THIS?

WELL, WELL...

CANDY!!

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Little Orphan Annie

YOU SAY THERE ARE KIDS IN TH' LIMBO LAKE ADDITION WHO MIGHT JOIN TH' JUNIOR COMMANDOS? WHERE'S LIMBO LAKE?

OH, LIMBO LAKE IS WHAT THEY CALL THAT BUNCH O' SHACKS ON TH' EDGE OF TOWN, NEAR THE OLD ICE HOUSE POND...

OH SURE! I KNOW THAT PLACE - C'MON! LET'S GO DOWN THERE RIGHT NOW AND DO SOME RECRUITIN'!

GEE! I DUNNO! THOSE LIMBO LAKE KIDS ARE PRETTY TOUGH BABIES!

FINE! THE JUNIOR COMMANDOS AREN'T LOOKIN' FOR SOTTIES!

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Emergency coffee ration, sir!