

THE GOOSE FEATHER.

[An American Indian song.]
Black lake, black lake,
The wild geese hid within the brake.

STOPPED IN TIME.

At the time of which I am writing I was living in seclusion in a small town about 35 miles north of London.

There is a morbid fascination for most people in an execution, and so, yielding to this feeling, I proceeded to read the paragraph:

"The murderer of the unfortunate James Renfrew will be hanged tomorrow morning at 8 o'clock. The wretched man, whose name—Charles Fenthrust—is now in everybody's mouth, still persists in his plea of innocence."

Here I became deeply interested. The name of Fenthrust was most familiar to me. I had formed a deep friendship with a man of that name. He was a good 15 years my senior and had died about two years previously.

"It will be remembered that at the trial the strongest circumstantial evidence was brought to bear upon Fenthrust. The murder took place in a house on the outskirts of the small town of Clinfold. It was proved that Fenthrust was in the habit of frequenting Renfrew's premises and that apparently he was expected there on the evening in question.

A mad and desperate idea took possession of me. Fortunately I am a small man. The bag hung just over my head. I jumped at it, seized it, drew myself up parallel with it, held it firmly at the top, where it swung by a hook, and drew my legs up so as to present as small a compass as possible.

When I came to my senses I was lying on the floor of the postal van. Two men in their shirt sleeves were busily engaged in sorting letters at a rack. I felt bruised and stiff all over, and I found that my left arm was bound in a sling made out of a handkerchief.

"Where are we?" I asked.
They turned around.
"Ob, you've come to, have you?" said one of them.

I told them the motive that had prompted me to take the desperate step I had done. They piled a quantity of empty mailbags on the floor and made me a rough shakedown.

A little after 3 we drew up at Silkminster station. There was a policeman on the platform, and I at once told my story to him, the result being that we drove round to the jail and insisted upon seeing the governor.

It was impossible to telegraph. Then I thought of going to the police (there were just two constables and a sergeant in our little town), but what could they do more than B? Country police are proverbial for the leisurely "routine" manner in which they set about an inquiry, and it would never do to trust to them. I was in despair.

Maddy I threw on my hat and rushed out. I ran in a mechanical way to the postoffice. Of course it was shut, and if I had aroused the caretaker he could not have wired. Besides, all our wires went first to F—, and, as I have said, all communication was shut off after 8 o'clock. Then I started for the railway station. This was about half a mile from the postoffice and well outside the town. As I hurried along I thought,

with fresh dismay, that this would also prove a fruitless errand, for the last train to Silkminster was the 8:30 p. m., by which, I have mentioned, the postmaster always traveled.

Should I wait till the morning and telegraph? I remembered that the office did not open till 8 o'clock. I had by this time reached the station. Of course it was all shut up, and all the lights were out except those in the signal lamps for the night expresses.

At that instant my eye fell upon a ghastly looking structure by the side of the track, looming grimly through the darkness. It resembled a one armed gallow with a man hanging from it! For a moment I thought it must have been a fearful fancy conjured up by the thought of Fenthrust's dreadful fate, but immediately I remembered that this strange looking apparatus was none other than a mailbag suspended from a post—in fact, part of the apparatus by which a train going at full speed picks up the mails.

Even as I reached the rails a semaphore signal that was near me let fall its arm, and the red light was changed into a brilliant green. The express was signaled! Would there be time? I dashed along over the rough sleepers toward the signal box. It was very dark, and I stumbled over and over again.

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