

WITH BANNERS

By Emilie Loring

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WNU Service.

CHAPTER XIV—Continued

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"We talked theater fast and furiously. It was a wonder that I could think of anything but the near escape the party had from a hold-up."

Kowa entered with his quick cat-like tread. His eyes sparkled like black diamonds as he set a Chinese teapoy of red and gold lacquer beside each chair.

"Boy, I'm tired! I feel all in," Sam confessed.

"It's reaction, and I'll bet you haven't eaten for hours and hours." Mark Trent spoke to Kowa as he returned with a laden tray.

"Serve Mr. Sam first. Here you are, maestro."

Sam's grin was swift and a trifle sheepish.

"I'm all right, m'lud; slumped for a minute, that's all."

"Don't apologize," Lucette mimicked.

"I'm not apologizing. I'm explain—" Sam broke off with a grimace at his sister. "Humorous, aren't you, kiddo? Fuss over Brooke, Mark, she needs it more than I. What with bracing me every time I got cold feet about 'Islands Arise' and getting dragged into the crime wave, she's had a hectic time since she came to Lookout House to live—I'll take another shot at those rolls, Kowa—I don't wonder she has decided to trek back to the town apartment. What will we do with the parrot when we go, Brooke?"

Brooke felt her color rise in response to the flash in Mark Trent's eyes as they met hers reflected in the great mirror. This was as good an opening as any she could bring about to tell the story of the paper Henri had produced. She rose and stood behind her chair.

"We won't have to consider the parrot, Sam. Mr. Micawber has gone."

"Gone!" Sam and Lucette chorused.

"Did he make another get-away, or has Henri kidnaped him?"

"Neither, Sam. He's in his cage, just a heap of green feathers."

"Poor old duffer. He hasn't had any pep since the night he took off in a hop for freedom. I liked that bird. Something's always taking the joy out of life."

"Cheerio, Master Reyrburn, you still have your option," Lucette reminded. "Why can't we move to town tomorrow? No more commuting! What a break! I suppose you'll close Lookout House, Brooke?"

Brooke tried to force a gay note into her voice:

"I'll close Lookout House, Lucette, because I have accepted an offer—"

The sentence trailed off as Inspector Bill Harrison strode into the room.

"Well, Mark, I got it!"

"Got it! You're too modest, Inspector, you got the whole gang, I understand."

"Cripes, I'm not talking about those dirty thugs, Mark. That isn't what I came for. I got the will you was telling me about."

The inspector pulled a paper from his pocket. Mark Trent glowered at it as if it were a rattler with head raised to strike.

"Here it is. The real thing. Signatures and everything o. k. I found it—"

"You found it in my desk, didn't you, Inspector?" Brooke interrupted icily.

Mark Trent's eyes were stormy, his lips were white.

"That's enough. Don't go on with this, Brooke."

"But I am going on with it."

"Let her tell her story, Mark. It's only fair to her."

Sam joined the two men before the fire.

"Jed's right, m'lud. The inspector found the paper in your desk. That's your cue, Brooke. Go on from there."

Brooke went on.

She told of her suspicion the first time she had come into this very

library that there was a reason other than a passion for the sea in winter which had brought two men from the city to live in Mark Trent's house; and she told of Mrs. Gregory's admission, the afternoon before the Supper club party, that she had witnessed a will of Mary Amanda Dane's and that she had been warned by Jed Stewart not to speak of it. And how, almost before Mrs. Gregory's car was out of the drive, Henri Jacques had confronted her with a paper and the lie that he had found it in her desk.

"Don't speak! Don't!" She interrupted her story sharply as Mark Trent opened his lips. "Let me finish!"

"I took it with the idea that if I didn't, he might make more trouble with it. I let him think that I was considering his proposition that I pay him for keeping quiet. Of course I wasn't, but I can't expect you two men who have been suspicious of me from the moment you learned of my friendship with Mrs. Dane, to believe that. I was coming directly to this house with it. First, locked in my room, I looked at it to be sure it wasn't a black-mailing scheme of Henri's. It wasn't. It was Mary Amanda Dane's will leaving all her property, except legacies to the Jacques, to her nephew, Mark Trent."

"Stop and get your breath, Brooke; you'll crack-up if you don't," Sam warned.

"I won't crack-up and I won't stop till I get this thing off my mind. It has been a hideous nightmare, holding back that paper, I mean. Of course the contents of that will were a shock for a minute; but I knew that Mrs. Dane had been just. Then I thought of the play, that the sudden appearance of a missing will—there's drama for you, Sam—might upset the performance; so I locked the thing in my desk. I had planned to bring it here this evening. When I got back from headquarters tonight, I went to my desk to get it. The drawer was empty. Now I know that Inspector Bill Harrison, your sleuth, had found it, Mr. Trent."

"That's enough, Brooke." Mark Trent's voice was low and authoritative. "I don't believe that you have had that will. I know—"

"Wait a minute!" Inspector Bill Harrison cut in. "Come over here."

He spread out the paper on the desk. He drew a flat leather case from his breast pocket and removed from it a white scrap.

"Exhibit A. Watch!"

The scrap fitted into the torn corner. There was a glint in his eyes as they passed from face to face of the three men bending over to read the finely written lines.

"I don't know what the rest of you folks think," his voice was as soft as velvet, "but in spite of the fact I found it in her desk, I'm sure Miss Reyrburn hasn't had the will in her possession ever since it was signed, because—"

He laid the tip of a square-topped finger on the torn-off corner:

"Because I found this scrap caught in Mrs. Hunt's bag the night her diamonds were snatched."

CHAPTER XV

For the length of time it took the old clock in the hall to chime the quarter hour, there was silence in the library, a silence as tense as if the still body of a black-haired woman with the open bag gripped in one bruised hand lay in their midst. Inspector Harrison broke the spell.

"And that ain't all I've got to show you. Bring him in, Tim!"

Brooke's breath stopped as a tall policeman with huge ears pushed a cowering figure into the room. Henri! Henri here! Would he dare persist in the lie that he had found that will in her desk?

"Sit down, Brooke."

With hands on her shoulders Mark Trent drew her from behind the chair and forced her gently into the seat. She felt his presence behind her as he said sharply:

"It's your move, Inspector. Let's get this thing over with."

"It ain't my move, Mark. It's Henri Jacques'. He's going to tell you what's kept him the busiest butler in the U. S. You're on the air, Jacques. Spill it!"

The command held the crack of a lion-tamer's whip. Henri drew his fingers over his slack lips. He made two attempts to speak before he produced a voice.

"I'll tell the whole story, Mr. Mark, and it isn't so bad as the inspector's trying to make out, I swear it isn't. I didn't kill—"

"Start at the beginning!"

"I will, Inspector, I will."

Brooke looked down at her clenched fingers. She couldn't keep her eyes on Henri. Once she had seen a dog being beaten who groveled as he groveled now. His voice shook as he went on:

"It was like this, Mr. Mark. Madame Dane sent for Clotilde and me to come to the living-room one afternoon. It was the nurse's day off. She was in the wheel chair and Madame Gregory was there. Your aunt said as how we were all to sign a paper in her presence and then she was to sign in our presence. She laughed kind of shaky and said:

"I don't know much law, Anne—Anne was Madame Gregory—but



"I Won't Crack Up and I Won't Stop."

I've learned how a will has to be signed to make it legal."

"Did Mrs. Gregory say anything?"

"Yes, Mr. Mark. She said, 'Do you think you should do this without consulting your lawyer?' and your aunt said that Mr. Stewart was away and she didn't dare wait till he came home because she hadn't been feeling well. We wrote our names. Mrs. Gregory left. Clotilde went back to the kitchen, and then the old madame handed the paper to me and said:

"Put that in my safe upstairs, Henri. I'll give it to Mr. Stewart when he gets back, but first bring me a glass of sherry. I'm tired."

"She looked so white I thought she was going to faint. I jammed the paper in my pocket and ran. When I came back with the wine, Miss Reyrburn was standing by the mantel laughing; you remember that afternoon, don't you, Miss?"

"Yes."

"Direct your question to me, not to Miss Reyrburn, Henri. What did you do with that paper?"

"I was coming to that, Mr. Mark. The old madame was taken very sick that night. Not until after she'd been gone a week or two did I think of it."

"Then of course you read it?"

"Yes, sir."

"You showed it to Clotilde?"

"Yes, sir."

"When did you and she decide to fasten the theft of it on Miss Reyrburn?"

The voice which came from behind Brooke's chair set her a-shiver. A steady hand rested on her shoulder.

"We—we didn't think of it, Mr. Mark. Mrs. Hunt suggested that."

"How did she know about it?"

Henri passed shaking fingers across his lips.

"Some way she found out that we were going to sell your aunt's silver. Clotilde and I thought we might as well have it as the strange girl she'd left it to."

The glance Henri Jacques cast at the inspector was green with venom.

"Mrs. Hunt said, if I'd get the silver to the white cottage, she'd dispose of it; that it was rare and worth lots of money, that a dealer would believe that it was hers, that he might suspect me. That seemed reasonable. Mrs. Hunt knew of a man to help. She said she'd take care of that will, too, she'd get money out of you for it and we'd go fifty-fifty."

"Go on, Henri!" Mark Trent's voice was hoarse.

"I gave it to her. The afternoon before the filling station mur—hold-up, I showed the man she sent where the silver was, forgot the keys and left them in the doors. I remembered them in the middle of a movie, came home, went upstairs very quiet and got them. The man who was to move the silver to the old limousine was waiting in my room. While you were all laughing and eating downstairs I let him through into the Other House by the upper connecting door. He took the stuff through your house—the Japs were out, and I pretended to go to bed. He was to make a cross on the white cover when he had it in the car. I drove it to the cottage. I went in to tell Mrs. Hunt the silver was outside, ready to take to the city. She—she was on the floor. I swear she was. I swear I didn't touch her."

"But you took that paper over there on the desk out of her bag, didn't you?"

"I told you once I did, Inspector. I felt it belonged to me. But I swear I never touched her."

"Take him out, Tim."

Henri stopped to hurl defiance at Inspector Bill Harrison.

"You think you're smart, but you wouldn't have known anything about this till we were safe out of the country, Inspector, if that expert thief Mrs. Hunt brought into the game hadn't stopped to wash and shave in Mr. Stewart's bathroom. Pretty snappy guy he was. I suppose he had to dress up fine before he called on her. She paid for pulling him in. He got her jewels all right, and he was out to get Mrs. Gregory's tonight. I wasn't in on that deal, Mr. Mark."

"Take him away, Tim." Inspector Harrison's eagle eyes followed the two men from the room before they came back to Brooke.

"Sorry I had to touch your desk, Miss Reyrburn, but a high falsetto voice phoned me you had the will—I know now that it was Henri Jacques—so I went through your room while you were all at the play. I guess you're glad the truth is out. The minute I heard of that bath stunt I knew who to look for. That guy has made a specialty of breaking into houses week-ends where the folks were away, of making himself at home in the tub and carrying off what he wanted when he left, mostly men's clothes. Maggie Cassidy was right when she said he was a swell dresser. He ought to be. He's had his pick of the best. It's kind of funny when you think of it, ain't it? When I accused him of killing Mrs. Hunt, he crumpled and spilled the whole story. He had seen her rings when she engaged him to move the silver. Wanted them. Knocked Hunt out first. He's a quick worker. He and his pals aren't killers. There wasn't a gun in the gangload. There's a joke to it, they don't one of them know yet that the coroner's verdict was 'heart failure from fright.' I've kept that under my hat so I could scare the truth out of them. Well, Mark, your silver's safe and you've got your aunt's money."

"Thanks, Inspector, I'll tell you how much I appreciate what you've done, later. Sam, get Brooke's wrap. I'll take her home. You and Lucette stay here and get the inspector something to eat. Wait for me, Bill, there are a few points that need clearing up. I have something to talk over with Miss Reyrburn, then I'll come back."

"You are not going home with me and we have nothing to talk over." Did he think that he could wipe out the memory of his suspicion of her in this lordly manner? Brooke asked herself.

"Oh yes, we have."

Sam chuckled.

"One of the thirty-six dramatic situations. Snap into it, Brooke. It is apparent even to this boyish intelligence that Mark wants to talk to you alone. Fair enough. Why make him go on the air? Be kind to him, he deserves well of his countrymen."

They crossed the terrace in silence. The snow had not been cleared from before the door of Lookout House. Mark Trent swept Brooke from her feet and carried her into the vestibule. He kept an arm about her as he opened the door. Something turning like the wings of an autogiro in her throat, cut off her protest. The green living-room awaited them, softly lighted, faintly fragrant. Above the mantel the Duchess looked down with grave eyes; below, coals, murmurous as purring kittens, gave out a gentle glow.

"Take off your wrap."

Brooke slipped from beneath the velvet and the hands tightening on her shoulders. She barricaded herself behind a high-back chair. With one arm on the mantel, Mark Trent faced her. His eyes, smiling a little, maddeningly cool, filled her with rage. She challenged:

"You would come. Why? Didn't you want to tell me before the others that you had known about that will all the time?"

"But I hadn't known."

"You suspected that there was one, didn't you? You and Jed Stewart came to live in Other House to watch me, didn't you? Do you think that I have forgotten that you called me a schemer?"

"This seems to be turning into a question and answer period. Suppose you let me tell my side of the story. Sit down, please."

"I prefer to stay here. Go on. I hope it doesn't take long. I have a lot to do before I leave in the morning—sorry to have to ask to let the furnishings stay here until Mother gets back, but—"

"Don't be so breathless, dearest."

"I'm not breathless, and I'm not your dearest. I wish you would say what you forced your way in here to say and—and go."

"All right, remember, you asked for it. I came to say that after I knew who you were that day in Jed's office, I didn't believe that you had used 'undue influence' with my aunt. I admit that for a while I tried to fool myself, but I couldn't keep it up. I didn't open my house because I wanted to 'watch' you. I decided to do it on Thanksgiving day, because I—liked you and your 'whole darn family.' As the weeks passed, Jed and I were sure that if the second will had not been destroyed, Henri knew where it was. Not knowing its contents hampered us."

"But you know now?"

"Yes. And it hurts infernally to think that you should have been drawn into this sordid mix-up."

"Why shouldn't I be? It's what might be called poetic justice, isn't it? Didn't I start the trouble when I went to Lookout House to see your aunt the first time? I'd been warned that business and friendship won't mix any better than oil and water. Now I know it. You had suspected for weeks that I had no right to your aunt's money, and yet you and Jed Stewart let me keep on spending and spending. When I think of those two cars I bought I almost lose my mind. How can I ever pay it back?"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Ordered First English Bible

When congress met in Philadelphia it ordered the printing in 1782 of the first English Bible in the United States.