

The PRICE

By FRANCIS LYNDE

ILLUSTRATIONS by C. D. RHODES

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SYNOPSIS.

Kenneth Griswold, an unsuccessful writer because of socialistic tendencies, supes with his friend Belbridge at Chau-diere's restaurant in New Orleans and declares that if necessary he will steal to keep from starving. He holds up Andrew Galbraith, president of the Bayou State Security, in his private office and escapes with \$200,000 in cash. By original methods he escapes the hue and cry and goes aboard the Belle Julie as a deckhand. He unexpectedly confronts Charlotte Farnham of Wahaska, Minn., who had seen him cash Galbraith's check in the bank. Charlotte recognizes Griswold, but decides to write to Galbraith rather than denounce the robber to the captain. She sees the brutal mate rescued from drowning by Griswold and delays sending her letter to Galbraith. She talks to Griswold and by his advice sends her letter of betrayal to Galbraith anonymously. Griswold is arrested on the arrival of the boat at St. Louis but escapes from his captors. Griswold decides on Wahaska, Minn., as a hiding place, and after outfitting himself properly, takes the train. Margery Grierson, daughter of Jasper Grierson, the financial magnate of Wahaska, starts a campaign for social recognition by the "old families" of the town.

CHAPTER IX—Continued.

"Good-morning, doctor," she began cheerfully, bursting in upon the head of the First church board of administrators as a charming embodiment of youthful enthusiasm. "I'm running errands for poppa this morning. Mr. Rodney was telling us about that little First church mission in Pottery Flat, and poppa wanted to help. But we are not Methodists, you know, and he was afraid—that is, he didn't quite know how you might—"

It was an exceedingly clever bit of acting, and the good doctor capitulated at once, discrediting, for the first time in his life, the intuition of his home womanhood.

"Now that is very thoughtful and kind of you, Miss Margery," he said, wiping his glasses and looking a second time at the generous figure of the piece of money paper. "I appreciate it the more because I know you must have a great many other calls upon your charity. We've been wanting to put a trained worker in charge of that mission for I don't know how long, and this gift of yours makes it possible."

"The kindness is in allowing us to help," murmured the small diplomat. "You'll let me know when more is needed? Promise me that, Doctor Farnham."

"I shouldn't be a good Methodist if I didn't," laughed the doctor. Then he remembered the Mercedes reception and the regrets, and was moved to make amends. "I'm sorry we couldn't be neighborly last night; but my sister-in-law is very frail, and Charlotte doesn't go out much. They are both getting ready to go to Pass Christian, but I'm sure they'll call before they go south."

"I shall be ever so glad to welcome them," purred Miss Margery, "and I do hope they will come before I leave. I'm going to Palm Beach next week, you know."

"I'll tell them," volunteered the doctor. "They'll find time to run in, I'm sure."

But for some reason the vicarious promise was not kept; and the Raymers held aloof; and the Oswalds and the Barrs relinquished the new public library project when it became noised about that Jasper Grierson and his daughter were moving in it.

Miss Margery possessed her soul in patience up to the final day of her home staying, and the explosion might have been indefinitely postponed it, on that last day, the Raymers, mother and daughter, had not pointedly taken pains to avoid her at the lingerie counter in Thorvalden's. It was as the match to the fuse, and when Miss Grierson left the department store there were red spots in her cheeks and the dark eyes were flashing.

"They think I'm a jay!" she said, with a snap of the white teeth. "They need a lesson, and they're going to get it before I leave. I'm not going to sing small all the time!"

It was surely the goddess of discord who ordained that the blow should be struck while the iron was hot. Five minutes after the rebuff in Thorvalden's, Miss Grierson met Raymer as he was coming out of the Farmers' and Merchants' bank. There was an exchange of commonplaces, but in the midst of it Miss Margery broke off abruptly to say, "Mr. Raymer, please tell me what I have done to offend your mother and sister."

If she had been in the mood to compromise, half of the deferred payment of triumph might have been discharged on the spot by Raymer's blundering attempt at disavowal.

"Why, Miss Margery! I don't know—that is—er—really, you must be mistaken, I'm sure!"

"I am not mistaken, and I'd like to know," she persisted, looking him hardily in the eyes. "It must be something I have been doing, and if I can find out what it is, I'll reform."

Raymer got away as soon as he could; and when the opportunity offered, was besotted enough to repeat the question to his mother and sister. Mrs. Raymer was a large and placid matron of the immovable type, and her smile emphasized her opinion of Miss Grierson.

"The mere fact of her saying such

a thing to you ought to be a sufficient answer, I should think," was her mild retort.

"I don't see why," Raymer objected. "What would you think if Gertrude did such a thing?"

"Oh, well; that is different. In the first place, Gertrude wouldn't do it, and—"

"Precisely. And Miss Grierson shouldn't have done it. It is because she can do such things that a few think she wouldn't be a pleasant person to know, socially."

"But why?" insisted Raymer, with masculine obtuseness.

It was his sister who undertook to make the reason plain to him.

"It isn't anything she does, or doesn't do, particularly; it is the atmosphere in which she lives and moves and has her being. If it weren't for her father's money, she would just well, it is rather hard to say just what she would be. But she always makes me think of the bonanza people—the pick and shovel one day and a million the next. I believe she is a frank little savage, at heart."

"I don't," the brother contended, doggedly. "She may be a trifle new and fresh for Wahaska, but she is clever and bright, and honest enough to ignore a social code which makes a mock of sincerity and a virtue of hypocrisy. I like her all the better for the way she flared out at me. There isn't one young woman in a thousand who would have had the nerve and the courage to do it."

"Or the impudence," added Mrs. Raymer, when her son had left the room. Then: "I do hope Edward isn't going to let that girl come between him and Charlotte!"

The daughter laughed.

"I should say there is room for a regiment to march between them, as it is. Miss Gilman took particular pains to let him know what train they were leaving on, and I happen to know he never went near the station to tell them good-by."

CHAPTER X.

Good Samaritans.

Since she had undertaken to show Wahaska precisely how to deport itself in the conventional field, Miss Grierson had telegraphed her father to meet her in St. Louis on her return from Florida.

When Jasper Grierson traveled alone he was democratic enough to be satisfied with a section in the body of the car. But when Margery's tastes were to be consulted, the drawing-room was none too good. Indeed, as it transpired on the journey northward from St. Louis, the Anita's drawing-room proved to be not good enough.

"It is simply a crude insult, the way they wear out their old, broken-down cars on us up here!" she protested to her father. "You ought to do something about it."

Jasper Grierson's smile was a capitalistic acquirement, and some of his fellow-townsmen described it as "cast iron." But for his daughter it was always indulgent.

"I don't own the railroad yet, Madgie; you'll have to give me a little more time," he pleaded, clipping the tip from a black cigar of heroic proportions and reaching for the box of safety matches.

"I'll begin now, if you are going to smoke that dreadful thing in this stuffy little den," was the unflinching retort; and the daughter found a magazine and exchanged the drawing-room with its threat of asphyxiation for a seat in the body of the car. Half-way down the car one of the sections was still curtained and bulkheaded; of course, the occupant of the middle section must be ill. Quite suddenly her interest became acute. Who was the sick one, and why was he, or she, traveling without an attendant?

With Margery Grierson, to question was to ascertain; and the Pullman conductor, once more checking his diagrams in Section 11, offered the readiest means of enlightenment. A few minutes later Margery rejoined her father in the private compartment.

"Do you remember the nice-looking young man who sat at the table with us in the Chateau last night?" she began abruptly.

The gray-wolf Jasper nodded. He had an excellent memory for faces.

"What did you think of him?" The query followed the nod like a nimble boxer's return blow.

"I thought he paid a whole lot more attention to you than he did to his supper. Why?"

"He is on this car; sick with a fever of some kind, and out of his head. He is going to Wahaska."

"How do you know it's the same one?"

"I made the conductor take me to see him. He talked to me in Italian and called me 'Carlotta mia.'"

"Humph! he didn't look like a dago."

"He isn't; it's just because he is delirious."

There was a long pause, broken finally by a curt "Well?" from the father.

"I've been thinking," was the slow response. "Of course, there is a

chance that he has friends in Wahaska, and that someone will be at the train to meet him. But it is only a chance."

"Why doesn't the conductor telegraph ahead and find out?"

"He doesn't know the man's name. I tried to get him to look for a card, or to break into the suitcases under the berth, but he says the regulations won't let him."

"Well?" said the father again, this time with a more decided upward inflection. Then he added: "You've made up your mind what you're going to do: say it."

Margery's decision was announced crisply. "There is no hospital to send him to—which is Wahaska's shame. Maybe he will be met and taken care of by his friends; if he is, well and good; if he isn't, we'll put him in the carriage and take him home with us."

The cast-iron smile with the indulgent attachment wrinkled frostily upon Jasper Grierson's heavy face.

"The Good Samaritan act, eh? I've known you a long time, Madgie, but I never can tell when you're going to break out in a brand-new spot. Didn't lose any of your unexpectedness in Florida, did you?"

Miss Margery tossed her pretty head, and the dark eyes snapped.

"Somebody in the family has to think of something besides making money," she retorted. "Please lend me your pencil; I want to do some wiring."

All other gifts apart, Miss Grierson could boast of a degree of executive ability little inferior to her father's; did boast of it when the occasion offered; and by the time the whistle was sounding for Wahaska, all the arrangements had been made for the provisional rescue of the sick man in lower six.

At the station a single inquiry served to give the Good Samaritan intention the right of way. There were no friends to meet lower six; but the Grierson carriage was waiting, with the coachman and a Mercedes gardener for bearers. From that to putting the sick man to bed in one of the guest chambers of the lake-fronting mansion at the opposite end of the town was a mere bit of routine for one so capable as Miss Grierson; and twenty minutes after the successful transfer she had Doctor Farnham at the nameless one's bedside and was telephoning the college infirmary for a nurse.

Naturally, there were explanations to be made when the doctor came down. To her first anxious question

While the little ormolu clock on the dressing case was whirring softly and chiming the hour she stared at the money-block as if the sight of it had fascinated her. Then she sprang up and flew to the door, not to escape, but to turn the key noiselessly in the lock. Secure against interruption, she pulled the rubber bands from the packet. The block was built up in layers, each layer banded with a paper slip on which was printed in red the name of the certifying bank and the amount. "Bayou State Security, \$5,000." There were twenty of these layers in all, nineteen of them unbroken. But through the printed figures on the twentieth a pen-stroke had been drawn, and underneath was written "\$4,000."

Quite coolly and methodically Margery Grierson verified the bank's count as indicated by the paper bands. There were one hundred thousand dollars, lacking the one thousand taken from the broken packet. The counting completed, she replaced the rubber bands and the brown paper wrapping. Then she repacked the suitcases, arranging the contents as nearly as might be just as she had found them, locking the cases and returning the keys to the waistcoat pocket from which she had taken them.

When all was done, she tiptoed across to the bed, with the brown paper packet under her arm. The sick man stirred uneasily and began to mutter again. She bent to catch the words, and when she heard, the light of understanding leaped swiftly into the dark eyes. For the mumbled words were the echo of a fierce threat: "Sign it: sign it now, or, by God, I'll shoot to kill!"

The robbery of the Bayou State Security bank was already an old story when Mr. Matthew Broffin, chief of the New Orleans branch of a notable detective agency, took over the case of the bank robbery a few days after his return from Central America. Since two members of his own staff had fired and missed their mark in St. Louis, there was a blunder to be retrieved.

After a week of patient groping, Broffin was obliged to confess that the problem of identification was too difficult to be solved on conventional lines. It presented no point of attack. With neither a name nor a pictured face for reference, inquiry was crippled at the very outset. None of the many boarding and rooming houses he visited had lost a lodger answering the verbal description of the missing man. Very reluctantly, for bulldog tenacity was the detective's ruling characteristic, he was forced to the conclusion that the only untried solution lay in Teller Johnson's unfortified impression that the chance meeting at his wicket was not the first meeting between the robber and the young woman with the draft to be cashed.

It was the slenderest of threads, and Broffin realized sweatingly how difficult it might be to follow. Assuming that there had been a previous meeting or meetings, or rather the passing acquaintance which was all the young woman's later betrayal of the man made conceivable, would the writer of the accusing letter be willing to add to her burden of responsibility by giving

to whom you belong? I suppose somebody has got to be mean and sneaky and find out. Would you rather it would be I than someone else who might care even less than I do?"

The sleeping man opened unseeing eyes and closed them again heavily. "I found the money, Carlotta mia; I didn't know that, did you?" he muttered; and then the narcotic seized and held him again.

His clothes were on a chair, and when she had carried them to a light that could be shaded completely from the bed and its occupant, she searched the pockets one by one. It was a little surprising to find all but two of them quite empty; no cards, no letters, no pen, pencil, pocketknife, or purse; nothing but a handkerchief, and in one pocket of the waistcoat a small roll of paper money, a few coins and two small keys.

She held the coat up to the electric and examined it closely; the workmanship, the trimmings. It was not tailor-made, she decided, and by all the little signs and tokens it was quite new. And the same was true of the other garments. But there was no tag or trademark on any of them to show where they came from.

Falling to find the necessary clue to the castaway's identity in this preliminary search, she went on resolutely, dragging the two suitcases over to the lighted corner and unlocking them with the keys taken from the pocket of the waistcoat.

The first yielded nothing but clothing, all new and evidently unworn. The second held more clothing, a man's toilet appliances, also new and unused, but apparently no scrap of writing or hint of a name. With a little sigh of bafflement she took the last tightly rolled bundle of clothing from the suitcase. While she was lifting it a pistol fell out.

In times past, Jasper Grierson's daughter had known weapons and their faults and excellences. "That places him—a little," she mused, putting the pistol aside after she had glanced at it: "He's from the East; he doesn't know a gun from a piece of common hardware."

Further search in the tightly rolled bundle was rewarded by the discovery of a typewritten book manuscript, unsigned, and with it an oblong packet wrapped in brown paper and tied with twine. She slipped the string and removed the wrapping. The brick-shaped packet proved to be a thick block of bank notes held together by heavy rubber bands snapped over the ends.

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the true name and standing of the man whose real identity—if she knew it—she had been careful to conceal in the unsigned note to Mr. Galbraith? Broffin read the note again—"a deck-hand, whose name on the mate's book is John Wesley Gavit," was the description she had given. It might, or it might not, be an equivocation; but the longer Broffin dwelt upon it the more he leaned toward the conclusion to which his theory and the few known facts pointed. The young woman knew the man in his proper person; she had been reluctant to betray him—that, he decided, was sufficiently proved by the lapse of time intervening between the date of her note and its postmark date; having finally decided to give him up, she had told only what was absolutely necessary, leaving him free to conceal his real name and identity if he would—and could.

Having come thus far on the road to conviction, Broffin knew what he had to do and set about doing it methodically. A telegram to the clerk of the Belle Julie served to place the steamer in the lower river; and boarding a night train he planned to reach Vicksburg in time to intercept the witnesses whose evidence would determine roughly how many hundreds or thousands of miles he could safely cut out of the zigzag journeyings to which

the following up of the hypothetical clue would lead.

For, cost what it might, he was determined to find the writer of the unsigned letter.

CHAPTER XI.

The Zweibund.

On his second visit to the sick man lodged in the padded luxuries of one of the guest rooms at Mercedes, made on the morning following the Grierson home-coming, Doctor Farnham found the hospital status established, a good-natured Swede installed as nurse, the bells muffled and Miss Margery playing the part of sister superior and dressing it, from the dainty, felt-soled slippers to the smooth banding of her hair.

An hour later, however, it was Margery of the Wahaska renaissance, joyously clad and radiant, who was holding the reins over a big English trap horse, parading down Main street and smiling greetings to everybody.

By one of the chances which he was willing to call fortunate, Edward Raymer was at the curb to help her down from her high seat in the trap when she pulled the big horse to a stand in front of her father's bank.

"I'm the luckiest man in Red Earth county; I was just wondering when I should get in line to tell you how glad we are