TANGLED TRAILS

By **WILLIAM MacLEOD RAINE**
Author of "A Man Four-Square," "Gunsight Pass," etc.

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THIS BEGINS THE STORY

James Cunningham is rich and ruthless. He turns down the plea of a girl who has a claim on him and kicks out a man who says Cunningham owes him a share on a business deal. At a cowboy carnival Wild Rose, a riding girl, is thrown and hurt by Wildfire, a wild broncho. The announcer calls out "Kirby Lane," who is a friend of "Wild Rose" McLean. He tames Wildfire, and learns of Rose's sister's troubles. Rose, hearing Cunningham is his uncle, says she'll have nothing to do with the family. Kirby then takes up the matter with his two cousins, favored proteges of James Cunningham, who demand to know the name of the girl, which Lane says he will tell only to his uncle. When he gets to his uncle's apartment he finds the man chloroformed bound and dead. On a table is a glove, one he had seen on Wild Rose. He takes it and makes his escape by the fire-escape, but is observed by a reporter, who good-naturedly lets him pass after "joshing" him.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

CHAPTER IX

The Story in the "News"

FROM a booth in a drugstore on Sixteenth street Kirby telephoned the police that James Cunningham had been murdered at his home in the Paradox Apartments. He stayed to answer no questions, but hung up at once. From a side door of the store he stepped out to Welton street and walked to his hotel.

He passed a wretched night. The distress that flooded his mind was due less to his own danger than to his anxiety for Rose. His course of action was not at all clear to him in case he should be identified as the man who had been seen going to and coming from the apartment of the murdered man. He could not explain why he was there without implicating Rose and her sister. He would not betray them. That, of course. But he had told his cousins why he was going. Would their story not start a hunt for the woman in the case?

Man is an illogical biped. Before Kirby had seen the glove on the table and associated it with the crime, his feeling had been that the gallows was the proper end of so cruel a murderer. Now he not only intended to protect Rose, but his heart was filled with pity for her. He understood her better than he did any other woman, her loyalty and love and swift, upblazing anger. Even if her hand had fired the shot, he told himself, it was not Wild Rose who had done it—not the little friend he had come to know and like so well, but a tortured woman beside herself with grief for the sister to whom she had always been a mother.

He slept little, and that brokenly. With the dawn he was out on the street to buy a copy of the News. The story of the murder had the two columns on the right-hand side of the front page and broke over to the third. He hurried back to his room to read it behind a locked door.

The story was of a kind in which newspapers revel. Cunningham was a well-known character, several times a millionaire. His death even by illness would have been worth a column. But the horrible and gruesome way of his taking off, the mystery surrounding it, the absence of any apparent motive unless it were revenge, all whetted the appetite of the editors. It was a big "story," one that would run for many days, and the News played it strong.

As Kirby had expected, he was selected as the probable assassin. A reporter had interviewed Mr. and Mrs. Cass Hull, who occupied the apartment just below that of the murdered man. They had told him that a young man, a stranger to them, powerfully built and dressed like a prosperous ranchman, had knocked on their door about 9:20 to ask the way to the apartment of Cunningham.

Hull explained that he remembered the time particularly because he happened to be winding the clock at the moment.

A description of Lane was given in a two-column "box." He read it with no amusement. It was too deadly accurate for comfort.

> The supposed assassin of James Cunningham is described by Mrs. Cass Hull as dressed in a pepper-and-salt suit and a white, pinched-in cattleman's hat. He is about six feet tall, between twenty-five and thirty years old, weighing about 200 or perhaps 210 pounds. His hair is a light brown and his face tanned from the sun.

His age and his weight were overstated, and his clothes were almost a khaki brown. Otherwise Mrs. Hull had given a very close description of him, considering her state of mind at the moment when she had seen him.

There was one sentence of the story he read over two or three times. Hull and his wife agreed that it was about 9:20 when he had knocked on their door, unless it was a printer's error or the reporter had made a mistake. Kirby knew this was wrong. He had looked at his watch just before he had entered the Paradox Apartment. He had stopped directly under a street globe, and the time was 9:55.

Had the Hulls deliberately shifted the time back thirty-five minutes? If so, why? He remembered how stark terror had stared out of both their faces. Did they know more about the murder than they pretended? When he had mentioned his uncle's name the woman had been close to collapse, though, of course, he could not be sure that had been the reason. To his mind there flashed the memory of the note he had seen on the table. The man had called on Cunningham and left word he might call again. Was it possible the Hulls had just come down from the apartment above when he had knocked on their door? If so, how did the presence of Rose fit into the schedule?

Lane pounced on the fear and the evasion of the Hulls as an out for Wild Rose. It was only a morsel of hope, but he made the most of it.

The newspaper was inclined to bring up stage the mysterious man who had called up the police at 10:25 to tell them that Cunningham had been murdered in his rooms. Who was this man? Could he be the murderer? If so, why should he telephone the police and start immediately the hunt after him? If not the killer, how did he know that a crime had been committed less than an hour before?

As soon as he had eaten breakfast, Kirby walked round to the boarding house on Cherokee street where Wild Rose was staying with her sister.

Rose was out, he learned from the landlady. He asked if he might see her sister. His anxiety was so great he could not leave without a word of her.

Presently Esther came down to the parlor where the young man waited for her. Lane introduced himself as a friend of Rose. He was worried about her, he said. She seemed to him in a highly wrought-up, nervous state. He wondered if it would not be well to get her out of Denver.

Esther swallowed a lump in her throat. She had never seen Rose so jumpy, she agreed. Last night she had gone out for an hour alone. The look in her eyes when she had come back had frightened Esther. She had gone at once to her bedroom and locked the door, but her sister had heard her moving about for hours.

Then, suddenly, Esther's throat swelled and she began to sob. She knew well enough that she was at the bottom of Wild Rose's worries.

"Where is she now?" asked Kirby gently.

"I don't know. She didn't tell me where she was going. There's—there's

What she did see was disgrace, the shipwreck of the young life she loved so much

something queer about her. I—I'm afraid."

"What are you afraid of?"

"She's so—so kinda fierce," Esther wailed.

It was impossible to explain, even to this big brown friend of Rose who looked as though his quiet strength could move mountains. He was a man. Besides, every instinct in her drove to keep hidden the secret that some day would tell itself.

Her eyes fell. They rested on the News some boarder had tossed on the table beside which she stood. Her thoughts were of herself and the plight in which she had become involved. She looked at the big headlines of the paper and for the moment did not see them. What she did see was disgrace, the shipwreck of the young life she loved so much.

Her pupils dilated. The words of the headline penetrated to the brain. A hand clutched at her heart. She read again hazily——

JAMES CUNNINGHAM MURDERED

——then collapsed fainting into a chair.

CHAPTER X

Kirby Asks a Direct Question

The story of the Cunningham mystery, as it was already being called, filled the early editions of the afternoon papers. The Times had the scoop of the day. It was a story signed by Chuck Ellis, who had seen the alleged murderer climb down by a fire-escape from the window of Cunningham's bedroom and had actually talked with the man as he emerged from the alley. His description of the suspect tallied fairly closely with that of Mrs. Hull, but it corrected errors in regard to weight, age and color of clothes.

As Kirby walked to the Equitable Building to keep his appointment with his cousins, it would not have surprised him if at any moment an officer had touched him on the shoulder and told him he was under arrest.

Entering the office of the oil broker, where the two brothers were waiting for him, Kirby had a sense of an interrupted conversation. They had been talking about him, he guessed. The atmosphere was electric.

James spoke quickly to bridge any embarrassment. "This is a dreadful thing about Uncle James. I've never been so shocked before in my life. The crime was absolutely fiendish."

Kirby nodded. "Or else the deed of some insane person. Men in their right senses don't do such things."

"No," agreed James. "Murder's one thing. Such cold-blooded deviltry is quite another. There may be insanity connected with it. But one thing is sure. I'll not rest till the villain's run to earth and punished."

His eyes met those of his cousin. They were cold and bleak.

"Do you think I did it?" asked Kirby quietly.

The directness of the question took James aback.

After the fraction of a second's hesitation he spoke. "If I did I wouldn't be going to lunch with you."

Jack cut in. Excitement had banished his usual almost insolent indolence. His dark eyes burned with a consuming fire. "Let's put our cards on the table. We think you're the man the police are looking for—the one described in the papers."

"What makes you think that?"

"You told us you were going to see him as soon as he got back from the Springs. The description fits you to a T. You can't get away with an alibi so far as I'm concerned."

"All right," said the rough rider, his low, even voice unruffled by excitement. "If I can't, I can't. We'll say I'm the man who came down the fire-escape. What then?"

James was watching his cousin steadily. The pupils of his eyes narrowed. He took the answer out of his brother's mouth. "Then we think you probably know something about this mystery that you'll want to tell us. You must have been on the spot very soon after the murderer escaped. Perhaps you saw him."

Kirby told the story of his night's adventure, omitting any reference whatever to Wild Rose or to anybody else in the apartment when he entered.

After he had finished James made his comment. "You've been very frank, Kirby. I accept your story. A guilty man would have denied being in the apartment, or he would have left town and disappeared."

The range rider smiled sardonically. "I'm not so sure of that. You've got the goods on me. I can't deny I'm the man the police are lookin' for. Mrs. Hull would identify me. So would this reporter Ellis. All you would have to do would be to hand my name to the nearest officer. An' I can't run away without confessin' guilt. Even if I had killed Uncle James, I couldn't do much else except tell some story like the one I've told you."

"It wouldn't go far in a courtroom," Jack said.

"Not far," admitted Kirby. "By the way, you haven't expressed an opinion, Jack. Do you think I shot Uncle James?"

Jack looked at him, almost sullenly, and looked away. He poked at the corner of the desk with the ferrule of his cane. "I don't know who shot him. You had quarreled with him, and you went to have another row with him. A cop told me that some one who knew how to tie ropes fastened the knots around his arms and throat. You beat it from the room by the fire-escape. A jury would hang you high as Haman on that evidence. Damn it, there's a bad bruise on your chin that wasn't there when we saw you yesterday. For all I know he may have done it before you put him out."

"I struck against a corner in the darkness," Kirby said.

"That's what you say. You've got to explain it somehow. I think your story's fishy, if you ask me."

"Then you'd better call up the police," suggested Lane.

"I didn't say I was going to call the cops," retorted Jack sulkily.

James looked at his cousin. Kirby Lane was strong. You could not deny his strength, audacious yet patient. He was a forty-horsepower man with the smile of a boy. Moreover, his face was a certificate of manhood. It was a recommendation more effective than words.

"I think you're wrong, Jack," the older brother, said. "Kirby had no more to do with this than I had."

"Thanks," Kirby nodded.

"Let's investigate this man Hull. What Kirby says fits in with what you saw a couple of evenings ago, Jack. I'm assuming he's the same man uncle flung downstairs. Uncle told you he was a blackmailer. There's one lead. Let's follow it."

Reluctantly Kirby broached one angle of the subject that must be faced. "What about this girl in uncle's office—this one in trouble? Are we goin' to bring her into this?"

There was a moment's silence. Jack's black eyes slid from Lane to his brother. It struck Kirby that he was waiting tensely for the decision of James, though the reason for his anxiety was not apparent.

James gave the matter consideration, then spoke judicially. "Better leave her out of it. No need to smirch uncle's reputation unless it's absolutely necessary. We don't want the newspapers gloating over any more scandals than they need."

The cattleman breathed freer. He had an odd feeling that Jack, too, was relieved. Had the young man, after all, a warmer feeling for his dead uncle's reputation than he had given him credit for?

As the three cousins stepped out of the Equitable Building to Stout street a newsboy was calling an extra.

"A-l-l 'bout Cunn'n'ham myst'ry. Huxtry! Huxtry!"

Kirby bought a paper. A streamer headline in red flashed at him.

HORIKAWA, VALET OF CUNNINGHAM, DISAPPEARS

The lead of the story below was to the effect that Cunningham had drawn $2000 in large bills from the bank the day of his death. Horikawa could not be found, and the police had a theory that he had killed and robbed his master for this money.

To be continued tomorrow

J. F. Black to Talk on Coal

A lecture on "The Chemical Formation of Coal" will be given tonight at the Pennsylvania School of Industrial Art by John F. Black, of the Newport Chemical Works, of Passaic, N. J. The lecture will be followed by another illustrating the manufacture of dyestuffs and intermediates.

TAKE HELIUM GAS FROM C-7

Government Will Experiment With It Elsewhere

Newport News, Va., Jan. 25.—The world's supply of helium, encased in the bag of the dirigible C-7 at the Hampton Roads naval base, is to be compressed and sent elsewhere. Orders to this effect have been received here and the C-7 is to be deflated before February 1.

The gas, it is understood, will be taken to another station for experimental purposes. The C-7 recently was given a successful test.

Evangelical Church Opposes Union

Reading, Pa., Jan. 25.—Officials of the First United Evangelical Church yesterday made public the unanimous passage of a resolution opposing reunion at this time with the parent church, the Evangelical Association. All of the five United Evangelical churches in this city have now gone on record against the merger.

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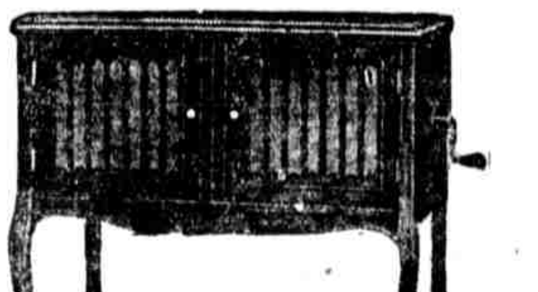

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Victrola No. 80, $110 with $10 worth of records. Pay only $1.50 weekly
Victrola No. 90, $135 with $10 worth of records. Pay only $1.75 weekly
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Victrola No. 130, $375 with $25 worth of records. Pay only $3.75 weekly

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