

MYSTERY OF THE BAYOU WOODS

By WALKER KENNEDY.

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During the afternoon Warde ran again to explain to the city editor of the Journal, and how he got the points about the suicide in jail.

Jim laughed and said: "I scooped you badly on that, didn't I, old man? That item was in the 'Night' for it."

"But I have a curiosity, Jim, to know how you got it. Who gave it to you?"

"I can't tell you that. The party who put me on made me promise not to give him away. He also made me promise not to say that the 'Night' for it. Said he thought the authorities were trying to keep it dark, as it occurred shortly after supper, and nothing was known of it—at least not for publication—at the station house at midnight."

"He made a great guy of you, whoever he is."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, there is scarcely a word in his story from beginning to end. The man did not try to commit suicide, and your report that he is not expected to recover is all bosh. I found him sitting up in the jailer's office smoking a cigar this morning."

"Well, I'll be damned. If I find out that I have been imposed upon in that way I'll wring the neck of that little skunk!"

"Who is that?"

"Why—no; that won't do, Warde. I won't give him away until I've given him a chance to explain himself."

Holcombe departed in a brick dudgeon and Warde sought the office, where he found Fenton awaiting him.

"I got what I wanted this morning," he said.

"Tell me," said Warde.

"Mrs. Wright said that her nearest neighbor, a kind-hearted widow by the name of Mrs. Anderson, had been there at noon to take care of her child while she visited her husband. Just as Mrs. Anderson was about to take the child to her room, she had examined the pistol and called Mrs. Anderson's attention to the fact that it had not been shot off for a long time. I then went to see Mrs. Anderson. She remembered the pistol very well, and knew where it had been placed. The ivory-handled revolver was not the weapon she had seen there. But Mrs. Anderson had some other facts. She had seen a man coming out of the side door of the Wright house, and she called to him and told him there was no one in at present. He replied that he had found out that and would drop in again when Mrs. Wright was at home. Mrs. Anderson had thought nothing further of it until she was told about the pistols."

"Did she describe the man?"

"Yes; she said he was a rather stoutly built man with probably a couple of weeks' beard on his face, and that he wore a red flannel shirt."

"Fenton, you have done splendidly, and if you will agree to help me further, I will unravel one of the deepest-laid crimes ever planned in this section of the country."

"I'll do it," said Warde.

"Then we will win the game yet."

CHAPTER VIII.

The next evening at nine o'clock, Warde was working in the office when a negro boy brought him a note. He opened it casually and read the following:

"Mr. Warde—Come as soon as you can to Peter's Rest, No. 1,096 Commerce street. A risk is run there can give you a great story for the Gazette. His name is William Jackson. 'A Friend.'"

Irving received a great many notes like this, and it occasioned him no surprise. Peter's Rest had a reputation of a not very reassuring character; still he was anxious to catch places, and he gave it no particular thought. He finished the work upon which he was engaged, and at 11 o'clock started for the choice locality to which he had been called.

As he was passing the station house, Fenton, the detective, joined him and asked whether he was going.

"To Peter's Rest," said Warde.

"That's a nice place to go to," said Fenton, laughing.

"It was called there to get a piece of news," said Warde.

"I will go with you," said Fenton; "it may be something in my line."

"All right; but remember that this is mine, and if there's anything in it the Gazette gets it exclusively."

"Of course."

The locality which the two men were about to visit was a considerable distance from the station house, and it abutted on the river. Commerce street originally ran parallel with the river but the current of the Mississippi, which is ever making some excuse for a change, had taken away a large part of the bank so that the upper end of the street ran almost into the water. The rear end of several houses on the west side were actually suspended over the stream, and it was one of the things which they would topple into the swirling waters; but it is rather a venerable observation that because a thing did not happen yesterday people are inclined to think that it will not happen to-morrow. And so, many persons on upper Commerce street continued to reside above the river, knowing full well that there would be an end to it some time, but fondly expecting that somehow they would move out a day or two before the crash came and the river claimed a lot of refuse not its own.

That portion of the city Warde and Fenton entered knew no such luxuries as lamplights, and depended entirely upon such illuminations as a complacent moon would furnish. On this particular night the moon was contenting intermittently with a sea of crested clouds. To the right as they traversed the rounded street bending with the river bank, several cotton sheds spread their huge dimensions in solid blackness. The houses were mostly old and dilapidated and peopled with the city's dregs. It was here that thieves, rough boatmen, idle plantation hands, and that great huzza of the transient and the shifting known as the tramp, were fond of congregating. And it was apparent that the accommodations were ample for this kind of population. There were dens of various shades of filthiness, many of which were the tramp coveys ready and free accommodations for

the night; greasy corner groceries where stale vegetables and riot-breeding liquors were sold, together with the certainty that one would take up the trail of death where the other left off; boarding houses where river and plantation hands were packed (Chinese fashion). In short, one could see here every scene of squalor, except the church and the school house.

As the two men continued their walk the houses became less numerous, and they passed vacant lots, beyond which they could see the silvery gleam of the river.

As they came to Peter's Rest, it was a two-story house, which in its day had been considered one of the handsomest residences in the city; for, in the early days of Niles, this congeries of filth, crime and depravity had been the most eligible part of the town. Yet nobody ever dreamed at the time of this story that Hell's Half Acre, which lay banked in shadows to the north, would one day be reclaimed again and traversed by railroads and round with the hum of business; for now the desperado and the rough were omnipresent in that locality.

The exigencies of the time had converted this old mansion into the worst resort of its kind in the city. It was become the rendezvous of all sorts of disreputable men and women. It was here that under the influence of liquor, which was unqualified in violence, all sorts of evil plans were struck, crimes were planned and new lessons of depravity were learned.

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lighted it coolly, and then nonchalantly entered the parlor.

This was a simple room with a table and several chairs in it. A swinging lamp was suspended from above. The walls were covered with choice pictorial selections from the illustrated criminal weeklies. A few sensational papers suitable to the clientele at Peter's Rest were on the table, and Warde fished through these with about the same interest that a scaph might take in reading the London Times.

He had been there barely five minutes when the door opened and Old Tom entered the room. At first he seemed a bit embarrassed before Warde's cool and searching gaze and then he said: "You come here to see Bill Jackson, did you?"

"Yes; has he come back?"

"No, but maybe my partner can tell you something about him."

"Never mind your partner. Do not care to know what he has to say. Warde's suspicions were now aroused, and he did not propose to have a tete-a-tete with these brawny ruffians. There could be no doubt now that a trap of some sort had been laid for him.

"See here, young fellow," said Old Tom, "you ain't afraid to talk with a couple of gentlemen, are you?"

"I am not," said Warde, "but I have nothing to talk to you about. My business is up, say now."

He arose as he said this, but Old Tom stood before the door leading into the saloon, and there was something in his face that Irving had not seen before. The word "murder" was written upon it as plain as day.

Warde said that not a moment was to be squandered. He took the whistle from his pocket and was raising it to his lips when Old Tom sprang toward him and with one sweep of his powerful hand sent the whistle flying across the table to the floor. So vigorous was the blow that Warde was knocked against a door to the right and it gave way, sending him through it. Somewhat dazed, he picked himself up and with mechanical presence of mind he closed the door quickly. He had touched a key on the outside, and he turned it rapidly; and thus a locked door was between him and his assailant.

At first he could not tell where he was, it was so dark. But as soon as he became accustomed to the darkness he found that he was on a back porch shut in with lattice work. Round about him was the sense of something ghastly.

In the saloon there was a great commotion, and he knew that he was not yet safe. He would be pursued. There was a door doubtless leading from the barroom to the porch, and the ruffians would come that way or break down the rickety door which had just bolted. He felt that they were coming closer all the time. He could not spare even a moment. Hurriedly he felt with unsteady hand along the lattice work. If he could only find an opening he could cross the back yard and join Fenton in the vacant lot just to the south of the Rest. At last he found a door in the rear and a sense of triumph possessed him.

He flung it open and was about to plunge out, but for a moment he paused, appalled by the dense darkness beneath him; then he heard his pursuers coming, and a moment later a light flashed through the porch. Just then the moonlight fluttered feebly out of the clouds and he caught its gleam below. A cold horror came upon him.

Beneath him lay the river.

Now his pursuers were upon him indeed. Just below he saw the head of some black object projecting from the water, and as he gazed eagerly out he saw that there was a sense of these dark objects leading away to the ward where a tugboat lay moored. The object seemed solid, and without moment's hesitation he leaped upon it.

"He has gone!" he heard a hoarse voice cry.

"Then he's in the river," came the answer.

And there was a rush toward the rear.

The object upon which Warde had leaped was a half sunken pile, and a series of them were driven at intervals of a yard apart. Some had been sunk deeper than others, and they stood out from the water like the black pillars of a ruined temple.

If he could walk along the tops of these irregular columns he might reach the tugboat. This would place him where he could perhaps secure help or where he could defend himself.

The river had eaten a great semicircle in the bank under the Rest, and the current eddied and circled around therein with silent but tremendous power. None but an expert swimmer could save himself from being drawn into this impromptu whirlpool. The piles had served the purpose of protecting the bank from the further encroachments of the river, and the line began under the Rest and extended away from the shore.

At first Warde leaped from one to another of these pillars without much trouble, but to climb up to one a little higher than the others and then let himself down to one far below was a dangerous task, and the further he got out into the river the more difficult it became for him to make any headway.

Hardly had he traversed a dozen of these treacherous stepping stones when he was discovered, and glancing about he saw to his horror that he was being followed by Old Tom. He looked at the swirling river below him, and the world was reeling about him. A cold perspiration stood upon his face. He became nervous, and almost, and felt an almost irresistible impulse to throw himself into the river and end the suspense.

Old Tom, however, was at home in this kind of an enterprise. It was pastime to him, and he crept from pile to pile with the cat-like agility which had won him his name.

It was a fearful race. The moon had now made some headway, and its light fell upon the black river and gave it the semblance of oxidized silver. Another backward glance, and a gleam of light revealed something bright in Old Tom's hand. It was a long, sharp knife.

Warde shivered.

On went the two figures leaping from pile to pile, one with trembling and uncertain steps, the other with the easy confidence of one to whom the way was familiar.

Old Tom was gaining steadily upon him, and Warde, with some reeling and despair in his heart, saw that he could not escape.

Suddenly he remembered his pis-

tol. He did not want to use it as long as he had been in the saloon, for he knew very well that if he had killed anybody the mob would have torn him to pieces with joyous unanimity; and in his effort to escape he had for the time forgotten it. It was now his only hope unless Fenton should come to his assistance.

He turned about upon the pile on which he was standing so as to confront his adversary. The latter was approaching him confidently and resolutely. His one grim object was the death of the reporter.

The shadowy houses on the shore were rising and falling as if they were about to plunge into the stream. The silver lines of light played over the faces of the men. He could see the great steamboats, with their red and green lights and their trailing banners of black smoke, rounding the bends or putting into the wharf. All else was silence. Even the crowd of rickety criminals, craning their necks from the back door, were dumb with excitement as they waited the duel between the men upon these black stumps.

The stars were silent, and they were cold, too. Warde felt that out of his pistol, his hand trembled so that the weapon, catching in his clothing, slipped and fell into the river.

Where could Fenton be, he wondered in a vague way? Had he entered the Rest and been disposed of? Warde called to him several times, but received no response; but he had no time now to look toward the shore. Old Tom was nearly upon him, and he determined that if he had to die, it should only be after a good fight. He braced himself as firmly as he could upon his pile, prepared to use his fists upon his approaching antagonist, and drag him down to death with him.

Old Tom had just lighted on the pile next to him and was getting ready to leap.

A pistol shot broke upon the air, the gleaming knife dropped into the stream and Old Tom gave a terrible cry of mingled pain and disgust, and then crouched down and held to his side to prevent himself from falling into the river, but his strength was not great enough, and he slipped into the swirling water and was dragged away from sight.

In the meantime a skiff which had been moored on the bank just under the rear of the Rest was pushed out from shore, and in a few seconds Fenton had Warde safely within it. Getting outside the line of piles, Fenton began to pull away. It was a shrewd move on his part, for the crowd which had gathered about the back door of the Rest, and Bill McGee could be heard calling for his skiff. Then followed mingled cries of rage and disappointment, and when the boat was detected moving away beyond the row of piles, a number of scattering shots were fired.

Fenton stopped long enough to fire back at the crowd and as it turned out, casually shot away a small section of Mr. McGee's nose. Then he bent to the oars with all his might and pulled for the wharf, which was about a mile away. It did not take him long to get beyond the range of the strange shots that were sent sizing after him.

Warde was completely exhausted by the tense strain upon his physical and nervous system, and he lay in the bottom of the boat in a sort of stupor. Gradually, as they approached the wharf, and as he realized that he had, indeed, escaped with his life, his faculties began to fully assert themselves.

When they reached the wharf, and he began to feel more like himself, he gave Fenton an account of his adventures. The latter was profuse in his regrets that he had not gone to Warde's help sooner; but he explained that he had not heard the whistle, he concluded that the noise in the saloon was only some other jollification on the part of the Bacchanals inside. He had heard the cry for help, and ran down to the

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A Life Saving Order.

Many years ago the American warship Delaware came near foundering off the coast of Sardinia while bluffing through a heavy squall during a morning watch. The "unauthorized letting go of the fore sheet" almost saved the ship from going down with 1,100 souls on board. The first lieutenant, afterward Commodore Thomas W. Wymen, with difficult climbing succeeded in reaching the quarter deck, where, snatching a trumpet from an officer in charge, his first order, given in a voice heard distinctly fore and aft, was "Keep clear of the point work!" This command to hundreds of human beings packed in the lee scuppers like sardines in a box instantly restored them to their normal condition, and they naturally feeling that if at such a time, with a line of battle ship on her beam ends, clean paint work was of paramount importance their condition could not be a serious one.

The Eyes of the Musk Ox.

The skull of the musk ox is remarkable for the development of the eye orbits, which project sufficiently beyond the plane of the frontal bones to compensate for the interruption the horns would otherwise make in the range of vision. The musk ox, however, does not seem to rely greatly on keenness of sight, far less on acuteness of hearing, for the ears are of small dimensions and are completely covered by the heavy growth of fur about them. The organs of scent are evidently more highly developed, and they exact of the hunter his greatest cunning.

Safe From Poisonous Serpents.

A physician visiting some time in the countries bordering on the gulf of Mexico, found a curious body of men among the natives called curudos de culebra, or the safe from serpents. Having been inoculated with the poison of the serpents they were proof against their venomous bites. The inoculation was made with the venom of a viper and the bulb of a native plant called mano del sapo (toad's hand). The preventive inoculation has been an old custom among the natives of that region.

A Suggested Cure.

"Your son," said the phenologist to the anxious parents, "will become a poet some day."

"Will you interrupt with an air of deep concern. 'But don't you think we could cure him now if we could whack the poetical bump with a sledgehammer or something like that?'"

A Disgrace to His Race.

"Will you extend an olive branch with the 'prizefighter'?" he repeated. "Never! He's an Irishman and a disgrace to his native land; no less."

"How is that?"

"He won't fight except for money."

Land Poor.

Hasst—It's strange you're so hard on old man. I thought you owned half of Swamphurst and had lots to sell.

Haddit—I have, but what I want is lots to eat.—Town and Country.

What a man sees only in his best moments as truth is truth in all moments.—Cook.

Four Ways to Health.

Hygienic living demands imperatively the absolute purity of the four following necessities: Air, water, food and thoughts. Granted these, you have the constituents out of which nature forms a healthy man, a perfect creature that the inward purity seems to lend radiance to the personality. It is not simply a few breaths of fresh air a half dozen times a day that a woman needs, but a continuous supply, and just as the greater part of women are half starved for fresh air so they are also stunted, often from ignorance than necessity, in the quantity of water the body requires to keep it clean and healthy. Pleasure of a pure, elevating nature has come to be recognized as the greater part of the cure for the ailments of the body, and hence to be one of those factors which merit the same consideration and attention as other necessities in a well ordered life.

A Dream and a Reality.