

"His two partners in America; myself and Mr. Harbord there."

Peace turned to the young man with a smile and a polite bow.

"Can you add any names to the list?" he asked.

"No," said Harbord, staring at the detective with a puzzled look, as if trying to catch the drift of his questions.

"Thank you," said the inspector; "and now, will you show me the place where this curious disappearance occurred?"

We crossed the drive, where the snow lay torn and trampled by the carriages, and so to the white, even

surface of the lawn. We soon struck the trail, a confused path beaten by many footprints. Peace stooped for a moment, and then turned to the secretary with an angry glance.

"Were you with them?" he said.

"Yes."

"Then why, in the name of common sense, didn't you keep them off his tracks? You have simply trampled them out of existence, between you."

"We were in a hurry, inspector," said the secretary, meekly. "We didn't think about it."

(To be continued.)

The Shining Band

(Continued from page 6.)

heathen rage! Then they drew that there net out, an' it were full o' trout, big an' little—"

"Great Heavens!" roared the Major, black in the face.

"I think," said Lansing, quietly, "that I'll walk down to O'Hara's and reason with our friend Munn. Sprowl may want a man to help him in this matter."

III

When Sprowl galloped his sorrel mare across the bridge and up to the O'Hara house, he saw a man and a young girl seated on the grass of the river-bank under the shade of an enormous elm.

Sprowl dismounted heavily, and led his horse towards the couple under the elm. He recognized Munn in the thin, long-haired, full-bearded man who rose to face him; and he dropped the bridle from his hand, feeling the sorrel mare.

The two men regarded each other in silence; the mare strayed leisurely upstream, cropping the fresh grass; the young girl turned her head towards Sprowl with a curious movement, as though listening rather than looking.

"Mr. Munn, I believe," said Sprowl, in a low voice.

"The Reverend Amasa Munn," corrected the Prophet, quietly. "You are Peyster Sprowl."

Sprowl turned and looked full at the girl on the grass.

The shadow of her big straw hat fell across her eyes; she faced him intently.

Sprowl glanced at his mare, whistled, and turned squarely on his heel, walking slowly along the river-bank. The sorrel followed like a dog; presently Munn stood up and deliberately stalked off after Sprowl, rejoicing that gentleman a few rods down the river-bank.

"Well," said Sprowl, turning suddenly on Munn, "what are you doing here?"

From his bank height Munn's eyes were nevertheless scarcely level with the eyes of the burly president.

"I'm here," said Munn, "to sell the land."

"I thought so," said Sprowl, curtly. "How much?"

Munn picked a buttercup and bit off the stem. With the blossom between his teeth he surveyed the sky, the river, the forest, and then the features of Sprowl.

"How much?" asked Sprowl, impatiently.

Munn named a sum that staggered Sprowl, but Munn could perceive no tremor in the fat, blank face before him. "And if we refuse?" suggested Sprowl.

Munn only looked at him.

Sprowl repeated the question.

"Well," observed Munn, stroking his beard reflectively, "there's that matter of the title."

This time Sprowl went white to his fat ears. Munn merely glanced at him, then looked at the river.

"I will buy the title this time," said Sprowl, hoarsely.

"You can't," said Munn.

A terrible shock struck through Sprowl; he saw through a mist; he laid his hand on a tree-trunk for support, mechanically facing Munn all the while.

"Can't!" he repeated, with dry lips.

"No, you can't buy it."

"Why?"

"O'Hara's daughter has it."

"But—she will sell! Won't she sell? Where is she?" burst out Sprowl.

"She won't sell," said Munn, studying the ghastly face of the president.

"You can make her sell," said Sprowl. "What is your price?"

"I can't make her sell the title to your club property," said Munn. "She'll sell this land here. Take it or leave it."

"If I take it—will you leave?" asked Sprowl, hoarsely. Munn smiled, then nodded.

"And will that shut your mouth, you dirty scoundrel?" said Sprowl, gripping his riding-crop till his fat finger-nails turned white.

"It will shut my mouth," said Munn, still with his fixed smile.

"How much extra to keep this matter of the title quiet—as long as I live?"

"As long as you live?" repeated Munn, surprised.

"Yes, I don't care a damn what they say of me after I'm dead," snarled Sprowl.

Munn watched him for a moment, plucked another buttercup, pondered, smoothed out his rich, brown, silky beard, and finally mentioned a second sum.

Sprowl drew a check-book from the breast-pocket of his coat, and filled in two checks with a fountain pen. These he held up before Munn's snapping, yellowish eyes.

"This blackmail," said Sprowl, thickly, "is paid now for the last time. If you come after me again you come to your death, for I'll smash your skull in with one blow, and then take my chance to prove insanity. And I've enough money to prove it."

Munn waited.

"I'll buy you this last time," continued Sprowl, recovering his self-command. "Now, you tell me where O'Hara's child is, and how you are going to prevent her from ever pressing that suit which he dropped."

"O'Hara's daughter is here. I control her," said Munn, quietly.

"You mean she's one of your infernal flock?" demanded Sprowl.

"One of the Shining Band," said Munn, with a trace of a whine in his voice.

"Where are the papers in that proceeding, then? You said O'Hara burned them, you liar!"

"She has them in a box in her bedroom," replied Munn.

"Does she know what they mean?" asked Sprowl, agast.

"No—but I do," replied Munn, with his ominous smile.

"How do you know she does not understand their meaning?"

"Because," replied Munn, laughing, "she can't read."

Sprowl did not believe him, but he was at his mercy.

He stood with his heavy head hanging, pondering a moment, then whistled his sorrel. The mare came to him and laid her dusty nose on his shoulders.

"You see those checks?" he said.

Munn assented.

"You get them when you put those papers in my hands. Understand? And when you bring me the deed of this cursed property here—house and all."

"A week from to-day," said Munn; his voice shook in spite of him. Few men can face sudden wealth with a yawn.

"And after that—" began Sprowl, and glared at Munn with such a furry that the prophet hastily stepped backward and raised a nervous hand to his beard.

"It's a square deal," he said; and Sprowl knew that he meant it, at least for the moment.

The president mounted heavily, and sought his bridle and stirrups.

"I'll meet you here in a week from to-day, hour for hour; I'll give you twenty-four hours after that to pack up and move, bag and baggage."

"Done," said Munn.

"Then get out of my way, you filthy beast!" growled Sprowl, swinging his horse and driving the spurs in.

Munn fell back with a cry; the horse plunged past, brushing him, tearing out across the pasture, over the bridge, and far down the stony road Munn heard the galloping. He had been close to death; he did not quite know whether Sprowl had meant murder or whether it was carelessness or his own fault that the horse had not struck him and ground him into the sod.

However it was, he conceived a new respect for Sprowl, and promised himself that if he ever was obliged to call again upon Sprowl for financial assistance he would do it through a telephone.

A dozen women, dressed alike in a rather pretty gray uniform, were singing up by the house; he looked at them with a sneer, then walked back along the river to where the young girl still sat under the elm.

"I want to talk to you," he said, abruptly, "and I don't want any more refusals or reasons or sentiments. I want to see the papers in that steel box."

She turned towards him in that quaint hesitating, listening attitude.

"The Lord," he said, more cheerfully, "has put it into my head that we must journey once more. I've had a prayerful wrestle out yonder, and I see light. The Lord tells me to sell this land to the strangers without the gates, and I'm going to sell it to the glory of God."

"How can you sell it?" said the girl, quietly.

"Isn't all our holdings in common?" demanded Munn, sharply.

"You know that I am not one of you," said the girl.

"Yes, you are," said Munn; "you don't want to be because the light has been denied you, but I've sealed you and sanctified you to the Shining Band, and you just can't help being one of us. Besides," he continued, with an ugly smile, "I'm your legal guardian."

This was a lie; but she did not know it.

"So I want to see those papers," he added.

"Why?" she asked.

"Oh, legal matters; I've got to examine 'em or I can't sell this land."

"Father told me not to open the box until... I found an... honest man," she said, steadily.

Munn glared at her. She had caught him in a lie years ago; she never forgot it.

"Where's the key?" he demanded. She was silent.

"I'll give you till supper-time to find that key," said Munn, confidently, and walked on towards the house.

But before he had fairly emerged from the shadow of the elm he met Lansing face to face, and the young man halted him with a pleasant greeting, asking if he were not the Reverend Doctor Munn.

"That's my name," said Munn, briefly.

"I was looking for Mr. Sprowl; I thought to meet him here; we were to

talk to you about the netting of trout in the river," said Lansing, good-humoredly.

Munn regarded him in sulky silence. "It won't do," continued Lansing, smiling; "if you net trout you'll have the wardens after you."

"Oh! and I suppose you'll furnish the information," sneered Munn.

"I certainly will," replied Lansing.

Munn had retraced his steps towards the river. As the men passed before Eileen O'Hara, Lansing raised his cap.

She did not return his salute; she looked towards the spot where he and Munn had halted, and her face bore that quaint, listening expression, almost pitifully sweet, as though she were deaf.

"Peter, our head-keeper, saw you netting trout in that pool last night," said Lansing.

Munn examined the water and muttered that the Bible gave him his authority for that sort of fishing.

"He's a fake," thought Lansing, in sudden disgust. Involuntarily he glanced around at the girl under the elm. The beauty of her pale face startled him. Surely innocence looked out of those dark-blue eyes, fixed on him under the shadow of her hat straw. He noted that she also wore the silvery-gray uniform of the elect. He turned his eyes towards the house, where a dozen women, old and young, were sitting out under the tree, sewing and singing peacefully.

The burden of their song came sweetly across the pasture; a golden robin, high in the elm's feathery tip, warbled incessant accompaniment to the breeze and the flowing of water and the far song of the women.

"We don't mean to annoy you," said Lansing, quietly; "I for one believe that we shall find you and your community the best of courteous neighbors."

Munn looked at him with his cunning, amber-yellow eyes and stroked his beard.

"What do you want, anyway?" he said.

"I'll tell you what I want," said Lansing, sharply; "I want you and your people to observe the game laws."

"Keep your shirt on, young man," said Munn, coarsely, and turned on his heel. Before he had taken the second step Lansing laid his hand on his shoulder and spun him around, his grip tightening like a vise.

"What y' doing?" snarled Munn, shrinking and squirming, terrified by the violent grasp, the pain of which almost sickened him.

Lansing looked at him, then shoved him out of his path, and carefully rinsed his hands in the stream. Then he laughed and turned around, but Munn was making rapid time towards the house, where the gray-clad women sat singing under the neglected apple-trees. The young man's eyes fell on the girl under the elm; she was apparently watching his every movement from those dark-blue eyes under the straw hat.

He took off his cap and went to her, and told her politely how amiable had been his intentions and how stringent the game laws were, and begged her to believe that he intended no discourtesy to her community when he warned them against the wholesale destruction of the trout.

He had a pleasant, low voice, very attractive to women; she smiled and listened, offering no comment.

"And I want to assure you," he ended, "that we at the club will always respect your boundaries as we know you will respect ours. I fear one of our keepers was needlessly rude last night—from his own account. He's an

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