CHAPPTER I

—1—

I Attend a Funeral.

IF MY cousin, Geoffrey Bohun, had had to work for his living, he would, as a painter of portraits, have made his mark, but work within doors he would not, and since he cared nothing at all for riches or fame, he painted old buildings and landscapes and lazy streams, and though I think that he painted these very well, the public would not have them, but clamored for portraits instead.

Whether Geoffrey was right or wrong, I cannot pretend to say, but I must confess that I was glad of his choice, for since my parents' death I had lived with him, and the work he preferred made us free of the countryside. Indeed, of the four

"We're Out to Fight These Men."

years preceding the matters which I am to tell we had not spent six months at his London house, but had traveled winter and summer, at home and abroad. We visited many places and saw all manner of beauties that few men see.

Of such was my education, after I left my school, and though I might have done better to go to Oxford instead, I learned to speak German and French with a pretty good grace and to share with the peasants of Europe their several hopes and fears.

I was in as fine a condition as a man of two-and-twenty may be, and my only care was the knowledge that very soon now the agreeable life I was leading must come to an end. This by my cousin's decree, for Geoffrey was trustee of my fortune, and though he was only some twelve years older than I, I had to a great extent to do as he said. And at twenty-three, he declared, I must take to work: "and from then," said he, "till you're thirty your allowance will be exactly as much as you earn. Earn five pounds a week, and I'll give you another five. You've got to make good."

I was brooding on this one morning—for my birthday was the first of October, and June was very near out—when I heard the sound of voices a little way off.

This was unusual enough, for, save for the birds and beasts, an Austrian forest at dawn is a lonely place; but what was stranger still was that the voices were English, and coarse at that.

Geoffrey was painting a vista two furlongs away, and Barley, his man, was half a mile off with the Rolls. I made my way quietly forward to see and hear what I could.

Then a spout of oaths startled the silence, and two men were cursing each other.

A third man spoke.

"Suppose you go on now."

"But he'll do me in in a minute, layin' about with that pick."

"The world will be the cleaner," said the other, and stifled a yawn. "Till then, get on with your work, I say, get on."

His voice was deadly.

More curious than ever, I lay down on the ground and, wriggling cautiously forward into the bushes which screened the men from my view.

I shall never forget the scene.

Directly below me, in the midst of a sparkling dell, were five grown men. Two, with pickaxe and shovel, were digging a hasty grave; the sods had been piled to one side, but a third man was taking the earth and casting it into a brook. A fourth man was leaning against the trunk of a tree, smoking a cigarette. And the fifth lay dead beside him.

This spectacle shocked me so much that a moment or two went by before I had collected my wits: then I knew that the man had been murdered, for his gay, green, belted smock was heavily stained with blood.

As the porter came back from the brook—

"That's enough earth away, Dewdrop," said the man who had spoken last. "Take another stroll in the country and see there's nobody up."

The man who was shoveling stopped and straightened his back.

"Lemme do that, Pharaoh. I'm sick of this—spade."

The man addressed as Pharaoh wrinkled his brow.

"I've never liked you," he said. "And when you question my orders, I like you less. There's food for thought there. Rush. . . ."

An instant later Dewdrop was out of sight.

That I was in some danger was perfectly clear. I was, however, determined not to withdraw, for the corpse cried out for vengeance.

I decided to try and "pick up" Dewdrop without delay.

Without more ado I therefore abandoned my covert and almost at once I heard the fellow stumble over the root of some tree and two minutes later I was afoot behind him.

I had hoped that after a casual survey the man would return to the dell, for then I could reach my cousin and tell him my news. While he was fetching Barley, I could then go back to my covert to keep an eye on the rogues. But Dewdrop stayed on.

He was passing the covert in which I had lain, when he stopped and peered at the bushes and then glanced round.

Satisfied that no one was looking, he went on his hands and knees, to pluck from the heart of the bushes a paper some four inches long.

I shall never forget that moment—I think that my heart stood still: for, as my hand flew to my pocket, I knew that paper was . . . a shoemaker's bill, which had followed me out from London . . . complete with its envelope bearing my name and address—the address of the inn at which Geoffrey and I were lodging some five miles off.

I saw Dewdrop finger the letter and find it dry. Then he looked from his find to the spot at which it had lain. Then he lay down and drew himself forward, parting the bushes before him exactly as I had done. Plainly, the man was no fool. He wished to be sure how much John Spencer had seen—John Spencer, of The Three Kings, Lass.

The next moment he was up and was whipping back to the dell.

The murder was out.

* * * * * * *

As we hurried back to the Rolls, I told my cousin my tale, and though he made no comment, I saw that he was perturbed.

Arrived at the car, I saw him take out a pistol and slip it into his coat.

Ten minutes later we slid into the yard of the inn at Lass.

As we stepped out, my cousin turned to his man.

"Put her away," he said. "Then take the other pistol and come to our rooms."

As we entered the inn, I heard him order our breakfast to be served in a quarter of an hour.

My cousin strolled to the bay and stood looking out.

"When Barley comes up," he said, "I want you to tell your story over again."

I was glad of his words, for Barley was a very good man and true as steel.

The door was opened and Barley came into the room.

My cousin spoke over his shoulder.

"Mr. Spencer has had an adventure. I want you to hear it, Barley, so he's going to tell it again."

When I had done—

"Well, Barley," said my cousin, "what do you think?"

"It's a pity about that letter, sir, bearing the name and address."

"A very great pity," said Geoffrey. "Anything else?"

"If Mr. Spencer, sir, could describe the men . . . I'd like to hear what they look like, 'Dewdrop' is a nickname, for sure. I take it he's got a drop on the end of his nose."

"That's right," said I. "I marked it. He's a little dark man, very wiry. I think he's a Jew. Pharaoh is tall and slight—much better class than the others and well turned out. His hair is fair, and he has rather protruding eyes. Rush looks an awful blackguard. A very low forehead, and his ears stick out from his head. Very dark he is, and a scar runs down from the edge of his mouth to his chin. The fourth man looked the best of the lot. He was very broad and had rather an open face; rough, you know, but cheerful. Not very tall, but I'd say he was very strong."

"Good," said Geoffrey. He turned to Barley. "And now come and take my place. I mean, if they should mean business. . . ."

As Barley stepped to the window, he flung himself into a chair and lighted a cigarette.

"These things happen," he said. "It wasn't your fault, my dear John, but if we don't look out, it may be your great misfortune. In plain words, as you probably know, you stand in danger of death. You viewed at your leisure certain terrible rites which no one was meant to see."

"I can't help that," said I. "I'm sorry about that letter, but I'm not going to hold my tongue. They'd murdered that poor devil and they damned well ought to be hung."

"I quite agree," said Geoffrey. "They must be brought to justice—I'm inclined to think Fate sent you with that intent. But Fate works in a curious way, and at the present moment I'm thinking much less of their lives than I'm thinking of yours."

"Yes, I see that," said I.

"If we were at home," said Geoffrey, "we should go straight to Scotland Yard. They'd give you armed protection and turn out the Flying Squad. But give those four reason to think that you've been to the police, and they'll strike out of hand."

"But how can we bring them to justice unless we go to the police?"

"I've no idea," said my cousin. "But we've got to sit tight for the moment—extremely tight."

"Meanwhile they'll clear out of the country."

"No, they won't," said Geoffrey. "I'll tell you why. Those four didn't come out here to do in somebody's servant—for that's who their victim was. What he had was a tunic, and some of the old houses here still dress their people like that.

"He was wearing livery. Very well. Those four are here on some job, and the murdered man got in their way. He may have surprised them—as you did: and so they just bumped him off. But, unless I'm mistaken, the job remains to be done. Otherwise, they wouldn't have buried him.

"And now," said Geoffrey, rising, "I'll lay before you the card that I've up my sleeve.

"I was staying with the Lyvedens in Hampshire a few years back. It was a Goodwood party, and the jewels in the house were worth a lot. Well, they were stolen all right. Barley wasn't with me, but he'll remember the case."

"The Bell Hammer murders, sir?"

"Exactly. Three servants and a policeman were murdered by the fellows who took those jewels. They could have laid them out and tied them up: but they preferred to kill them, because then they knew where they were.

"They never got the thieves, but Anthony Lyveden told me as much as he knew: and amongst other things he told me that the moment they heard of the matter the police knew who'd done the job. Only one man, they said, was ruthless and daring enough to go such lengths. And the man was known as 'Pharaoh.'

"Now, that's all I know. This may or may not be the man. But if it is—well, from what I've just told you, you'll gather that he doesn't like witnesses."

To my great dismay my cousin then announced that we must be gone from the inn as soon as we could.

"We're out to fight these men. Well, the first thing to do is to vanish, for until we are out of their ken, we cannot attack, but must waste our time taking precautions against an attempt on your life. More. At the moment not one of those wallahs knows you by sight, and that's a card which must not be thrown away. And now you go out and lose yourself in the town. Barley and I will pack, and I'll pick you up at nine in front of St. Jacques'. I shall give out we're going to Salzburg, and Barley can go to the station and point the lie."

"To Annabel," said my cousin. "I liked the look of the village and I'm sure they'll do us proud at The Reaping Hook. And now you pop off, my son. Every minute is precious, as you must see."

I made my way out of the inn, and when some servant or other ran after me, letter in hand, I took the missive from him as a man in a dream. I did not open the letter—I had no need: for one thing, it was already open, and, for another, I knew what the envelope held. And that was a shoemaker's bill.

That I now felt far from easy, I frankly confess. I could not get away from the fact that the enemies that I had made were no ordinary men.

First, they had frustrated the watch we had kept: then, they had gained their end, which was, of course, to get to know me by sight—for someone, no doubt, was in waiting, to see me come out of the inn and, lastly, they had informed me in unmistakable terms that they were fully aware that I had seen them at work. All this, I may say, in a little more than an hour.

It suddenly came to my mind that as like as not I now was being followed by whoever it was that had watched me come out of the inn. At once I determined to see if this was the case and if it was, to endeavor to turn the tables on the man who was so engaged.

I made my way out of the market and into an alley too narrow for carts to use.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Mary Pines for Her Pines

(A Christmas Story)

By Luella B. Lyons

MARY MINTER left her home from south of the Mason-Dixon line to marry Jack Howard. That's how she happened to be hating her new home in the North—hating the snow and cold and the fireworks she knew she was missing down home that Christmas day. Gazing out of the window all she could see were pine trees from four inches to sixty feet in height. Cedars! Pines! Spruces! She hated the words, even.

"How about a Christmas tree in the house, honey? Maybe that would help cheer you, do you suppose? I know you're eating your heart out with lonesomeness for home this, your first Christmas away," Jack offered, but Mary spurned his sympathy.

"A tree. A tree, did you say? Ha ha," she laughed bitterly, "go out there and on up the Ridge and look at those trees there by the hundreds and thousands. Imagine they are all Christmas trees if you like." Jack gave up trying to placate her but he understood—she was at that stage of homesickness.

About noon there came a phone call from their nearest neighbor, Milt Spears. His wife was in the city hospital, 40 miles away, and he had promised to visit her there, taking the two youngsters, but about an hour ago Milt had sprained an ankle and now—would Mary and Jack take the kids and go in his place?

What difference did it make if it was nearly nightfall when the pair and the two youngsters reached

They Reached Ann Spear's Hospital Room and Made Explanations.

Ann Spear's hospital room and made the explanations and witnessed the relief that was so evident on the anxious wife's face.

"But where did you find such a novel tree arrangement, Mrs. Howard?" Ann's doctor wanted to know the moment he sighted the midget Christmas tree Mary had fixed up at a moment's notice. "Why, they are the niftiest things I've ever seen yet, and I'd like to buy a dozen of them."

A strip of painted tin that was bent to hang over the head of a bed into the shape of a shelf or bracket formed the foundation. A tiny cedar seedling about eight inches high formed the tree. Mary had striped a wealth of tube roses she had been growing, to tie the blossoms all over that midget village tree. Fitting into a slot on that little tin bracket, it smiled its blessing upon the gathering.

Any Yuletide you might stop by the Howard Midget Christmas Tree Farm to find Mary and Jack getting a bit of rest from their labors, another glorious selling campaign over for another year.

Mrs. Durkee's Christmas Gander

By Martha B. Thomas

MRS. DURKEE had a gander, a fine strong bird with fine strong wings. Wherever Mrs. Durkee went the gander went, too.

Some years ago a goose egg had been given to Mrs. Durkee. It was a very large egg and ready to hatch, but a fox had killed the mother goose. It should make, when hatched and grown up, a fine Christmas dinner! Just as Mrs. Durkee prepared a nest for it, the shell cracked and out popped a head with very surprised eyes. From that moment the gosling and Mrs. Durkee became friends. She no more thought of him in terms of roasting than she would think of a neighbor in that unkind manner.

The widow lived alone and as the gander grew to manhood (so to speak), she depended more and more on him. Sometimes at night she would rouse him and he would untuck his head from his wing and escort her forth under a wintry moon.

And now, at the Christmas season, Gander was in full plumage and of a stern temper.

Christmas eve she sat alone by her kitchen fire, and there came a knock at the door. A man stood there and before she could speak pushed his way in. Seeing no one about, he ordered her to bring him bread and coffee and meat. She brought the man what he asked, and when he had eaten he said, "Now, give me all your money and I'll go with no trouble."

"No," said Mrs. Durkee, "I will not!"

Out came his fist and she just escaped a hard cuff on the head. She was angry enough to fight but instead went to her pantry. "I keep money in a jug here," she said and jingled some coins. At the same time she softly raised the window and whistled.

"Hey come on with cash! I'm in a hurry!"

The man shoved out his foot as if to kick him. In a moment, hissing and nipping, the great bird seemed to surround the man with heavy beating wings. The harder the unwelcome guest tried to escape the harder he was beaten back. At last, crouching and fending off the blows, he fled through the door . . scattering coins all the way. The wad of bills had merely been a piece of make-believe.

The door slammed and the lonely widow sat down in a chair and laughed and laughed and laughed. The gander stood beside her, looking dignified and preening his ruffled feathers.

"I'd rather have you for a friend," cried Mrs. Durkee, "than all the roast ducks, turkeys and geese in the world. Merry Christmas . . . ! and I'll give you some fresh lettuce this minute."

The gander's bright eyes roved about the room, and he followed Mrs. Durkee into the pantry.

POULTRY

"FRESH EGGS" MAY MEAN BETTER EGGS

Poultrymen, Egg Dealers Have Improved Quality.

By R. E. Cray, Extension Specialist, Ohio State University.—WNU Service.

The last five years have witnessed a vast improvement in the egg marketing facilities in many sections. There is now some encouragement for the farmers to produce high quality eggs, because they do not have to take the same price for them as the man who keeps a mongrel flock under filthy conditions and markets his eggs at infrequent intervals.

The improvements in the methods of egg marketing have followed many different lines, but in every instance it is based upon two principles: (1) paying the farmers on the basis of the quality of eggs delivered, and (2) selling eggs on a graded basis which pays a premium for that particular grade of eggs.

It is beyond the power of man to improve the quality of a fresh egg, but it is entirely within his power, through feeding and management, to produce a fine quality egg. It is also within his power greatly to improve grading and marketing practices, so as to retain the fresh egg quality until the egg reaches the consumer.

Some suggestions for producing quality eggs are: remove all roosters from the laying flock, keep the laying house clean, gather the eggs four times a day, place them immediately in a cool room, usually the cellar, grade the eggs according to size and color, and market them twice a week.

Hens Confined Lay Well as Those Out on Range

Hens kept in confinement and properly fed will lay as many eggs and tend to lay larger eggs than birds of the same age on limited range. These conclusions are the outcome of experiments conducted since 1928 at the Animal Husbandry Experiment farm at Beltsville, Md.

Birds kept under confinement in these experiments were fed cod liver oil along with other feed and had access to sunshine through open windows in the laying house, thereby preventing possible adverse effects from vitamin deficiency. These hens had a tendency to lay a larger number of eggs during the winter months instead of in the spring as was the case with the hens on range. Electric lights were used in both pens from 5 a. m. until daylight each day from September until April. The fertility nor hatchability of the eggs was affected by the confinement of the hens, nor was there any noteworthy difference in mortality of the hens.

The flocks that were not confined were fed the same rations, except that cod liver oil was omitted, and were allowed to range in grass yards approximately 70 by 100 feet in size.

Housing Pullets

All pullets, whether or not mature, should be in their winter quarters in advance of the cold, frosty nights. In flocks where 5 per cent of the pullets are in production, one should move them immediately to the laying house. If the time of housing the pullets is delayed until more than 5 per cent of the pullets are in production, there is some danger of interfering with production when the pullets are transferred from the brooding quarters to the laying house. The laying house should be cleaned and thoroughly disinfected prior to moving the pullets. Furthermore, the pullets should be examined for lice and treated for same, if they are infested, in advance to placing them in their winter quarters.

With the Poultrymen

Comfort in the hen house spells winter eggs.

* * *

The farmer with a flock of chickens has a cash crop every week in the year.

* * *

Biddy will lay just about the same number of eggs whether it rains or shines.

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Mash which would be suitable for growing chicks, if properly moistened, would be suitable for ducklings.

* * *

A dozen eggs will average about 22 ounces. The large eggs known as the jumbo size weigh about 26 ounces to the dozen.

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Bonemeal is a by-product of a slaughter house where the offal from the slaughter house is collected, the meat removed from the bones, ground fine.

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If a slaughter of the flock is decided upon those birds in good flesh can be sold to market. Tuberculin tests can be made by a competent veterinarian and reactors destroyed.