

THE MESHES OF MISCHANCE

BY GILBERT WINTLE

A Great Human Interest Serial Filled With Action—Now Published for the First Time

Christmas Spirit Hovers Over Gotham

CHAPTER XXI.

Arrest and Re-arrest. Rather Mixed. There is two hours difference between Western Coast (or Pacific) time, and that of Winnipeg. So that when the Smiths were receiving the telegram, as recounted in the last chapter, at mid-day, Mrs. and Miss Alymer were only finishing breakfast at Krank Knoll, the house which they had taken on the outskirts of Victoria.

Their days passed quietly now, not for want of opportunity for gaiety, for Victoria lets itself go in winter, and among the naval and military officers quartered there, of course the Alymers had friends. But though they did not altogether eschew such opportunities for recreation as came their way, Ruth's chief pleasure was still in the weekly letter which, after various vicissitudes, arrived each Wednesday from the headwaters of the Fraser. It was Wednesday today, and while her mother glanced over the columns of the Victoria Colonist, Ruth was looking out for the postman.

"Here he comes, mother," she said, as she saw his neat fur cap with the red "tuque" showing at the corner of the road, "and there is someone with him—who can it be?"

But Ruth was not long in doubt, for, as she showed herself at the window, Horace waved his arm.

"Mother, it's Horace!" "Oh! dear, I hope that nothing has happened," said Mrs. Alymer nervously, for Horace had not been expected back for some weeks yet, nor had his last letter given any hint of a change of plan. "Happened? Why look at him, mother! If anything has happened, he is going to seem much the worse for it. Send for some more breakfast, dear; I'm going to let him in."

Certainly, if further proof were needed, Horace's appearance soon dispelled any maining fears that anything was wrong with his health. He had come dressed like a miner this time, and he wore a miner and a cowboy rolled into one!

"And now you want to know what brings me back," he said, as he at length put down his hat and fork. "Ruth, you agreed to marry an honest, hard-working farmer, and you are going to be cheated, you are now engaged to a common, vulgar millionaire!"

"Then he told them the story," he concluded; "that was a touch of poetry. Nor even a quarter of a million, even as they count them out here, reckoning in dollars; but all the same, my share of that bit of metallic ore, my living at the Molson's Bank, will come in very nicely for the furnishing. Ruth, we will cut a dash and have a real piano instead of a harmonium, which is the usual instrument on the prairie. I have made myself a little presentable, we will go round and see it. There is going to be a regular show this afternoon in the manager's room, local beauties, and the reporters, and so on, before it goes off to be assayed. Champagne and speeches, and so on, I suppose."

"I hope they won't drink so much champagne that they will let someone run off with the nut," said Ruth. "If they did, Molson's would have to fork up. Don't be afraid, I shall see to it, and what is more to the point, so will Sandy. You don't know Sandy. I left him breakfasting at a hotel opposite, and he wouldn't stir except at a window where he could see the building. Molson's wasn't going to run away while he was there to stop it!"

The private view came off, and made a great local splash, and furnished much copy for the Victoria and other western papers. Sandy, of course, staying in the bank until the nugget had, before his eyes, been once more deposited at the safe, whereby he was the recipient of not a little chaff from Horace. It almost seemed as if Horace was determined to do Ned's share of his line, and his own too, for Ned was not with them, having branched off at the main line of the C. P. R. to Winnipeg. For Horace, who used to be rather reserved, was now expanding. In truth, in Canadian parlance, he was feeling good. Everything had turned out well, ten times better than he had had any right to expect. And, to crown all, Ruth was here. No wonder that he was in the best of spirits.

Yet a day later he began to wonder whether the care of his new-found wealth were not beginning to tell on him already. He hardly liked to admit it, but he had a sort of feeling that when he went out he was being followed. At last, on the third day, the feeling grew so strong that he decided to speak to Sandy about it.

"It is so," replied the latter, "and I was going to speak to you myself."

"What! have you been followed too?" "Well, a bit—but I've noticed that ye were followed."

"What the deuce can be their idea? There can't be any reason, can there, to think that I carry our nugget about with me?"

"They'll be waitin' 'till ye see 'em, doon till ye say 'em. Ah! there's some muckle villans 't' ye world!" "But good gracious! What's to be done? I can't go to the police. They'd laugh at me. I tell you what, Sandy, do you feel inclined to lend me a hand?"

"Aye! that Ah will!" "Well, then, this shall be our plan. I'll come from the Alymers to see you at nine o'clock tonight. After staying five minutes or so, talking to you in the rotunda of the hotel, I will leave, turn to the right, and walk slowly to the main street, turn to my right again, and go on till I come to the cross car line. You give me three minutes' start, then come on in my tracks. If everything works all right, our gentlemen will be between us. What I come to the cross car line, I shall turn round. If we've got him sandwiched, you stop under a lamp post and take out your handkerchief with a flourish. Then I'll walk on to the right again where the road goes right out into the country, and where our gentlemen all to ourselves in a quiet place; then we can close up the ranks a bit and have a little serious talk with him."

This plan was carried out that evening to the letter. From the time that Horace quitted the rotunda of Sandy's hotel he reached the point agreed on, where the streetcar track crossed another, he did not look round, walking slowly and swinging his stick. Then, stationing himself well in the radius of a big arc-light,



CHRISTMAS TREE HEADQUARTERS IN WEST STREET, Dec. 19—Christmas trees are pouring into New York to help its citizens make merry in the holidays, and very few will be left unsold when the market closes on Christmas eve.

Balsams and spruces from the Canadian border may be had at Washington Market for from seventy-five cents for a bundle of little ones suitable for decorative use to \$10 for a big one such as are used in churches.

Among the Christmas greens mistletoe is the aristocrat in price. The smallest sprays sell at the street booths for fifteen cents each. Very beautiful pieces, having a knot of wood in the centre, from which the green branches in all directions, are three dollars apiece.



SALVATION ARMY LASSIE. "KEEPING THE HOT BOLLING"

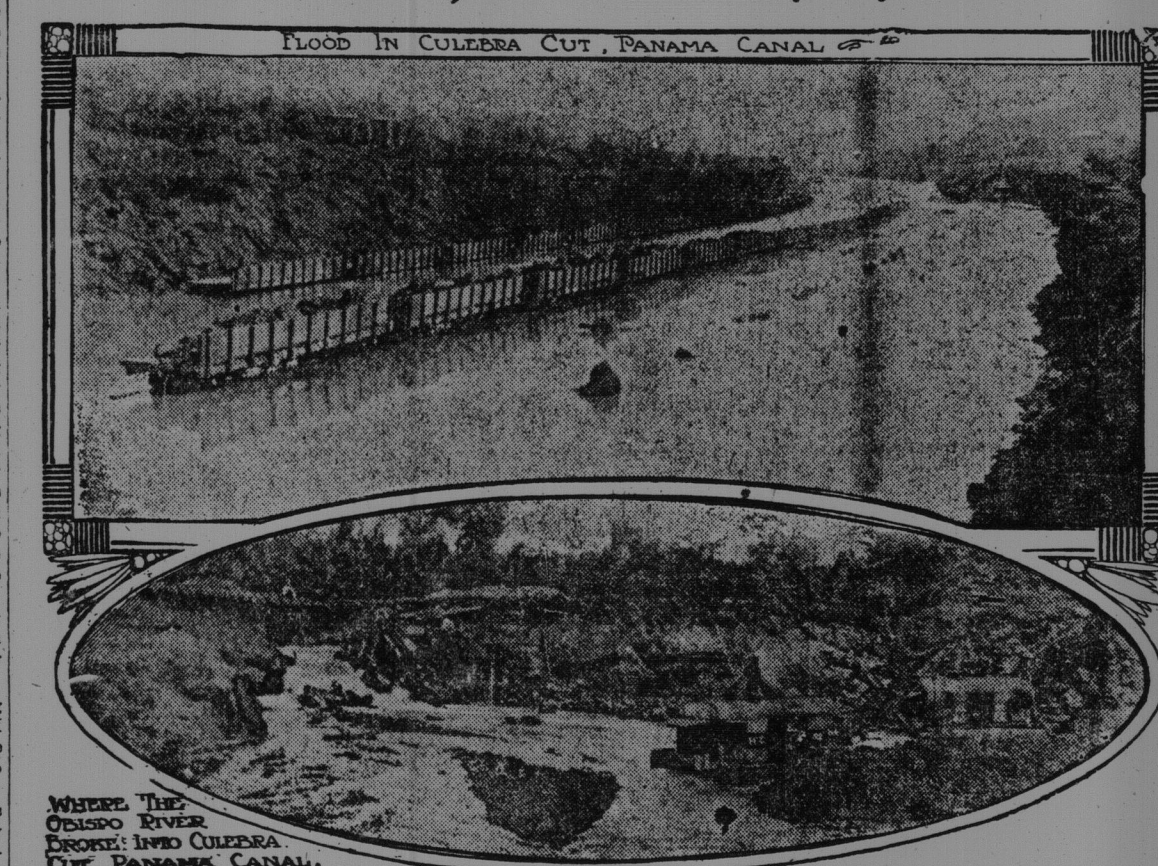
from which the green branches in all directions, are three dollars apiece. Nowhere else in the city is the Christmas spirit more prevalent than in the neighborhood of West street, bordering North River, or the streets adjacent to Washington Market, for between Park place and Fulton street is the Christmas tree headquarters, the spot whence every boy and girl in the city primarily get their holiday spruce or pine for Old Saint Nick to decorate on Christmas morning.



GOOD THINGS FOR XMAS DINNER IN WASHINGTON MARKET.

For days the Salvation Army lassies have held sway at the street corners, collecting coins for a big dinner on Christmas to persons too poor to provide one for themselves.

One Section of the Canal Swept by Flood



WHERE THE OREGON RIVER CROSSED INTO CULEBRA CUT, PANAMA CANAL.

Washington, D. C., Dec. 15.—Although the fact is little known and less appreciated in the United States, the Panama Canal suffered, on December 3 last, from the worst flood recorded on the isthmus since 1879.

The great ditch between Empire and Las Cascazas, which is the region where much of the great excavation work was done, was by the overflow of the Oregon River, converted into a torrential stream. The Oregon poured into the canal in a volume of 25 feet wide and 25 feet high, submerging all work tracks, surrounding every steam shovel so deeply as to cover the working machinery, and bringing all work to a standstill.

Despite the violence of this flood, which came almost at the end of the rainy season, Chief Engineer John F. Stevens is congratulating himself on the manner in which the canal withstood nature's attack. The flood caused general suspension of the

canal work for only two days, he said. "The result," Mr. Stevens declares, "attests me the canal work is not likely to be seriously retarded by flood. This was the worst since 1879. Within thirty-six hours after its occurrence trains on the Panama Railroad, which are necessary to the continuance of the work, were in motion. It is against the Panama Railroad that the flood is most dangerous. The extent to which the canal can be damaged is only the extent to which the railroad can be injured."

The Oregon River runs very close to the canal at certain points. It is fed by rivers and creeks from the mountains and in the rainy season frequently rises to great heights. Such was the case on November 3. The gap where the river broke into the canal cut during the president's visit was filled up with a mass of old French dump cans and earth, the whole forming a dam. The downpour of December 3 subjected the dam to a fearful strain.

The dump cars, according to reports received in the Canal Commission offices here, held together, but the pressure was so great that one end of the improvised dam was swept away and the river poured into the canal cut. The gap was widened until the torrent was 125 feet wide and 25 feet deep.

The water thus emptied into the canal took the current of about twelve miles an hour toward Las Cascazas, north of Empire, in the direction of Colon, the Caribbean terminal of the canal. The steam shovels were so far submerged that the great crane stuck out like a large bowerbird on a tug boat.

Chief Engineer Stevens received at his headquarters in Culebra on Monday evening reports from various points which showed that the flood was unusual. Indications were that the torrent in the canal menaced life at various work villages along the line. Most of the labor quarters are located on high ground.

a little valise in his hand, talking to the Vancouver chief. It was Inspector Mackay.

"Well, chief," he was saying, "there's nothing like getting a thing like this polished off at once. He might be all right tomorrow morning, as you say; on the other hand he might not, and I shall need not say anything now to the charge and I warn you that anything you do say is liable to be taken down in writing and used against you."

"Who the devil are you?" "Inspector Mackay, of the Criminal Investigation Department, New Scotland Yard. No warrant necessary; but I have one, and here it is."

For a few minutes Horace was too dazed to speak. Then he said, turning to Sandy: "I need not tell you I am quite innocent. Sandy, not only that, but I can easily prove it; but not, I fear, till I get to England. I was a clerk in the bank, and I left suddenly just before the robbery; and I can only suppose that they started to issue warrants against anyone of whom they had the slightest suspicion. Now, whether or not, they have heard of my whereabouts, and some idiotic rap rule or other makes them arrest me. At all events, that is all I can think of to account for it."

"Aye, mon, I believe you, as if it were myself," replied Sandy. "An' 'tis my own uncle, 'dye mind, that they say you murdered. Mr. Policeman, if you want my opinion, you're just a fool."

"Now, sir," said the chief, kindly enough, for he knew nothing of the evidence, and rather liked Wyndham's looks, more especially as he was quite a local celebrity from having been one of the founders of the nugget. "We'll treat you as well as we can; but you are in custody, and must come right away to a cell. We'll put you in a cot in it, and for tonight, that's the best we can do."

CHAPTER XXII. "Pawlet Died Yesterday." There are no extradition proceedings to be gone through in a British colony; but few formalities took up another day, during which Inspector Mackay chafed at the delay. He had been waiting for the ways of the colonial police. Not that the prisoner was not well guarded, for he was, but pretty well everyone, from reporters to the constable, knew that the man was not a criminal, and that he was a local celebrity from having been one of the founders of the nugget. "We'll treat you as well as we can; but you are in custody, and must come right away to a cell. We'll put you in a cot in it, and for tonight, that's the best we can do."

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cession—that was what the papers said—the warrant had not been at once withdrawn? It was now several months since Hocking's death. This was a point that he did clear up, a point that, the more he considered it, the less he liked.

There was a big crowd at the wharf to witness the departure of Inspector Mackay and his prisoner; but the crowd were disappointed, the inspector and his charge had gone on board at daylight, and were now comfortably installed in a lower-deck cabin, and there remained during the whole of the six hours taken by the trip from Victoria, on Vancouver Island, to Vancouver Town on the mainland. There the steamer came almost right alongside the train, and Horace and the inspector were but little annoyed chugging from the boat to the section which had been reserved for them in the transcontinental express. At two o'clock the train pulled out.

"Well, well," said Horace, cheerfully, "this C. P. R. seems to be running itself into the thread of my life in a remarkable way. A year ago I hardly realized its existence, since then I have done two long journeys on it, the first as a gem tender-foot going to the West, then as a stalwart Manitobian going to push my fortune as a miner; now I am making the complete transcontinental trip in the double capacity of millionaire, more or less, and accused man, on my way to be tried for my life! However, I hope the next trip will be a more cheerful one than any of them."

Inspector Mackay said nothing; but looked at him curiously. The inspector was sufficiently Scotch to be superstitious, and wondered whether he were not, for, according to his ideas, the chance of Horace Wyndham's ever recrossing the Canadian continent were, to put it mildly, exceedingly remote. Not that first day only, but throughout the journey, Inspector Mackay had constantly rubbed his eyes metaphorically, of course, and pinched himself to be sure that he was awake. He had never known a prisoner like this before. And the strange thing was that he began to like him.

"Decidedly," grumbled the inspector to himself, "I am getting a little restless. I have to do it to apply for my position and write my memoirs, or go in for growing potatoes, or bee-keeping, or some nice quiet occupation like that. I am getting past my usefulness as this business."

Not for Horace now the walk through the train, and the walk to stretch his legs at the various stopping places, which had served to while away the tedious of the journey, on the previous occasions on which he had traversed the line. He and his guard had an end of an old first-class sleeper, now used as a colonist's cabin, which means that they had a sort of little cabin to themselves. This cabin was made for three passengers, so that they were not at all cramped for room. Also they could smoke there. They did not go to the dining car, but, by special arrangement, had their meals brought to them.

Literature was to be obtained; and, as usual, the first thing he did was to read the paper. He had a copy of the Victoria Colonist, and he was to read the blind a little by the way of his berth, and to look to see whereabouts the train might be. His eyes fell on perhaps the most glorious sight of the world, a sunrise over the Canadian snow. His meditations, as he drank in the beauty of the spectacle, were interrupted by the whistle of the engine, succeeded by a perceptible slowing down of the train. Then a slight curve brought one of the numerous little country stations into view. These little boxes, dignified by the name of station, are made on one model at the C. P. R. work-shops, and brought by train to the point where the passenger is to alight. They are all painted a regulation color, and, till one is close enough to read the name, there is practically nothing to distinguish them from one another. In winter, on the prairie, when the surroundings are all equally the great white, even blanket of snow, one station is almost a replica of the next. So it was only when the train got quite close that Horace knew that it was indeed his own, the station nearest Church Farm. Someone was either getting on or getting off, or the train would have stopped, and the flag at the station proclaimed this. He was peeping through to see who, but could not at first, as he only got such a sidelong glance at the platform, that came a familiar face, and the train moving on a little, not having drawn up quite right, a familiar figure came into his field of view, no less than that of Tom Peters, a value for money, and a moment later, looking very bonny and smart, in her little astrakhan cap and racy frock, came Miss Sally, the daughter of the house. Horace never quite realized his position. Everything had been done in such a gentlemanly way, no handcuffs, no manhandling, no staring, no public examination before a magistrate, and himself and his friends so sure of his acquittal, that it had seemed more of a most annoying coincidence, a nuisance, rather than a real misfortune that had overtaken him. Now, however, the blood came gushing to his cheeks, and he blessed the arrangement that prevented any chance of Sally and him meeting, though it seemed to him that she would be sure to hear of his presence in the train. He took another look at the platform waving his mittened hand, at the comfortable box which he knew well, drawn up behind the station, and Maggie waiting philosophically—could it be that, by any horrible chance, any nightmare of mistake, that he would never again see or know this free Western life that he had learned to love so well, that he—? Oh! no, the thought was too absurd. And yet—? There was so much that he could not understand; there was something, too, in this English police officer's face, and the way he was peeping at him, that he had quite a notion that he believed him guilty. He would try to pump him that very day.

There being no reason for making the days any longer than they need be, Horace and his guardian used to lie in bed, and it was still wanting some minutes to the hour at which they usually got up. Before that time, to Horace's great relief, he saw Miss Sally get off the train at Winnipeg. He afterwards learned that she had been quite ignorant of his being there. Few of the passengers were up when she got on board, and she had sat in a first-class car and got off at Winnipeg without speaking to anyone.

(To be continued.)