

TANGLED TRAILS

By WILLIAM MacLEOD RAINE
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"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 saves Cunningham's life in a share on a business deal. She is the sister of Wild Rose, a famous cowboy, who tells her sister's trouble to Kirby Lane, an upstanding and chivalrous cowboy. Kirby then takes up the matter with his two cousins, favored protégés of James Cunningham, who do not know the name of the girl. When he gets to his uncle's apartment, he finds the man chloroformed, bound and dead. On a table is a glove, one he has seen on Wild Rose. He takes it and makes his escape by the fire-escape, but is observed by a superior. Kirby disappears, adding a new sensation. Both Kirby and Wild Rose are in the apartment, also a woman whose photograph signed "Rosalie" was in the room. Kirby is arrested for the murder, and reveals the night of the murder. Kirby and James Cunningham, nephews of the murdered man, send Lane to Dry Valley to look up a clue.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

"WITHOUT meeting anybody?"

"Yes."

"You don't know who it was you struck?"

"Unless it was Kirby."

"Jove! That explains the bruise on his chin," Jack cried out. "Why didn't he tell us that?"

The color flushed the young woman's cheeks. "We're friends, he and I. If he guessed I was the one that struck him he wouldn't tell."

"How would he guess it?" asked James.

"He knew I meant to see your uncle—meant to make him do justice to Esther. I suppose I'd made wild threats. Besides, I left my glove there on the table. I think I'd taken it off with some notion of writing a note telling your uncle I had been there and that he had to see me next day."

"The police didn't find a woman's glove in the room, did they?" James asked his brother.

"Didn't hear of it if they did," Jack replied.

"That's it, you see," explained Rose. "Kirby would know my glove. It was a small riding gauntlet with a rose embroidered on it. He probably took it with him when he left. He kept still about the whole thing because I was the woman and he was afraid of getting me into trouble."

"Sounds reasonable," agreed James. "That's how it was. Kirby's a good friend. He'd never tell on me if they banged him for it."

"They won't do that, Miss McLean," the older brother assured her. "We're going to find who did this thing. Kirby and I have shaken hands on that. But about your story. I don't quite see how we're going to use it. We must protect your sister, too, as well as my cousin. If you've got the police with your evidence and ask them to release Kirby, they'll want to arrest you."

"I know," she nodded wisely. "and of course they'll find out about Esther and the papers would get it and scatter the story everywhere."

"Exactly. We must protect her first. Kirby wouldn't want anything, but that would hurt her. Suppose we put it to him and see what he wants to do."

"But we can't have him kept in jail," she protested.

"I'll get him out on bond; if not today, tomorrow."

"Well," she agreed reluctantly. "If that's the best we can do."

Rose would have liked to have paid back Kirby's generosity in kind. If her sister had not been a factor of the equation she would have gone straight to arrest Kirby with her story and suffered the circumstances did not permit a heroic gesture. She had to take and not give.



His left arm hung limp—Kirby's quick eye noticed that

told her he would be right out to Cherokee street.

She came to meet him in the stuffy parlor of the boarding house with hand outstretched.

"Oh, Kirby, I'm so glad to see you and so sorry I was such a horrid little beast last time we met."

"I'm ashamed of myself. My temper explodes so—and after you came to leave to help me and gave up so much for me. You'll forgive me, won't you?"

"You know it, Rose," he said, smiling.

"Yes, I do know it," she cried quickly. "That makes it worse for me to impose on you. Now you're in trouble because of me. I should think you'd pretty near hate me."

"We're in trouble together," he corrected. "I thought that was supposed

to bring friends closer and not to drive them apart."

She flashed a quick look at him and changed the subject of conversation. Just now she could not afford to be emotional.

"Are you going back to Twin Buttes?"

"No, I'm going to find out who killed James Cunningham and bring the man to justice. That's the only way to clear us both before the world."

"Yes!" she cried eagerly. "Let me help you. Let's be partners in it, Kirby."

He already had one partner, but he threw him overboard instantly. James Cunningham was retired to the position of an adviser.

"But!" he'll start this very minute. Tell me all you know about what happened the evening of the murder."

She told again the story she had confessed to her cousins. He asked questions, pushed home inquiries. When she mentioned the woman who had passed her on the stairs he showed a keen interest.

"You say you knew it was a woman with the man by the perfume. What kind of perfume was it?"

"Violet."

"Did you notice a violet perfume anywhere else that night?"

"In your uncle's living room."

"Sure?"

"No did I."

"The woman I met on the stairs, then, had just come from your uncle's rooms?"

"Looks like it," he nodded in agreement.

"Then we've got to find her. She must have been in his apartment when he was killed." The thought came to Kirby as a revelation.

"I'm right after her."

"All we've got to do is find her and the man with her, and we've solved the mystery," the girl cried eagerly.

"That's not quite all," said Kirby, smiling at the way her mind leaped gaps. "We've got to induce them to talk, and it's not certain they know any more than we do."

"Her skirts rustled like silk and the perfume wasn't cheap. I couldn't really see her, but I knew she was well dressed," Rose told him.

"Well, that's something," he said

with the whimsical quirk to his mouth she knew of old. "We'll advertise for a well-dressed lady who uses violet perfume. Supposed to be connected with the murder at the Paradox Apartments. Generous reward on many questions asked."

His badinage was of the surface only. The subconscious mind of the rough rider was preoccupied with a sense of vague groping. The thought of violet perfume associated itself with something else in addition to the darkness of his uncle's living room, but he did not find himself able to localize the nebulous memory. Where was it his nostrils had whiffed the scent more recently?

"Don't you think we ought to see all the tenants at the Paradox and talk with them? Some of them may have seen people going in or out. Or they may have heard voices," she said.

"That's a good idea. We'll make a canvass of the house."

Her eyes sparkled. "We'll find who did it! When two people look for the truth intelligently they're bound to find it. Don't you think so?"

"I think we'll sure round up the wolf that did this killing," he drawled. "Anyhow, we'll sleep on his trail for a moon or two."

They shook hands on it.

CHAPTER XVII
In Dry Valley

If Kirby had been a properly authenticated detective of fiction, he would have gone to his uncle's apartment, locked the door, measured the rooms with a tape line, found imprints of fingers on a door panel and carefully antedated into an envelope the ashes from the cigar his uncle had been smoking. The data obtained would have proved conclusively that Cunningham had come to his death at the hands of a Brahmin of high caste on account of priceless gems stolen from a temple in India. An analysis of the cigar ashes would have shown that a subtle poison, unknown to the Western world, had caused the victim's heart to stop beating exactly two minutes and twelve seconds after taking the first puff at the cigar. Thus the fictional ethics of the situation would have been correctly met.

But Kirby was only a plain, out-

doors Westerner. He did not know the conventional method of procedure. It did not even occur to him at first that Apartment 12 might still have secrets to tell him after the police and the reporters had pawed over it for several days. But his steps turned back several times to the Paradox as the center from which all clues must emanate.

He found himself wandering around in that vicinity trying to pick up some of the pieces of the Chinese puzzle that made up the mystery of his uncle's death.

It was on one of these occasions that he and Rose met his cousin James coming out of the apartment house. Cunningham was a man of admirable self-control, but he looked shaken this morning. His hand trembled as it met that of his cousin. In his eyes was the look of a man who has suffered a shock.

"I've been sitting alone for an hour in the room where Uncle James met his death—been arranging his papers," he explained. "It began to get my nerve. I couldn't stand it any longer. The horrible thing kept jumping to my mind." He drew his right hand heavily across his eyes, as though to shut out and brush away the sight his imagination conjured.

His left arm hung limp. Kirby's quick eyes noticed it.

"You've hurt yourself," Lane said.

"Yes," admitted James. "My heel caught on the top step as I started to walk down. I've wrenched my arm badly. Maybe I've broken it."

"Oh, I hope not," Rose said quickly, a warm sympathy in her vibrant young voice. "A broken arm's no fun. I find it an awful nuisance."

The janitor of the Paradox came out and joined them. He was a little Japanese well on toward middle life, a small-featured man with small, neat feet.

"You feelum all right yes now?" he asked, directing his slant, oval eyes toward Cunningham.

"Yes, I've got over the nausea, thanks, Shibo," James turned to the others. "Shibo was at the foot of the stairs when I caught my heel. He gathered up the pieces, I guess I was all in, wasn't I, Shibo?"

The Japanese nodded agreement. "You heap sick for minute."

"I've been worrying a good deal about this business of Uncle James, I suppose. Anyhow, I've had two or three dizzy spells lately. Nothing serious, though."

"I don't wonder. You sit at a desk too much, James. What you need is exercise. If you'd get in the saddle a couple o' hours a day an' do some stiff ridin' you'd quit havin' dizzy spells. Sorry you're hurt, old man. I'll trail along with you to a doctor's."

"Not necessary. I'll be all right. It's only a few blocks to his office. Fact is, I'm feeling quite myself again."

"Well, if you're sure. Prob'ly you've only sprained your arm. By the way, I'd kinda like to go over uncle's apartment again. Mind if I do? I don't reckon the police missed anything, but you can never tell."

James hesitated. "I promised the Chief of Police not to let anybody else in. Tell you what I'll do. I'll see

him about it and get a permit for you. Say, Kirby, I've been thinking you ought to go up to Dry Valley and check things up there. We might find out who wrote that note to Uncle James. Maybe some one has been making threats in public. We could see who was in town from there last week. Could you go? Today? Train leaves in half an hour."

To be continued tomorrow



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CHAPTER XVI
The Lady With the Violet Perfume

"I won't have it," Kirby said flatly.

"Miss McLean tells her story to the District Attorney he'll probably arrest her. It'll come out about her sister and the papers will run scare-heads. No need of it a-tall. Won't hurt me to stay here a few days if I have to."

Jack, dapper and trim, leaned on his cane and watched his cousin. He felt a reluctant admiration for the virile, clean-cut and four-square of mind. Was he in love with the Wild Rose from Wyoming, whose spirit also was like a breath from the sunny hill pines? Or was his decision only the expression of a native chivalry that went out to all his friends and perhaps to all women?

"They'd certainly arrest her," Jack commented. "From a lawyer's point of view, there's every reason why they should. Motive for the crime, sufficient; intention to force the victim to make reparation or punish him, declared openly; opportunity to commit it, confessed; presence on scene and eagerness to escape being seen there, admitted. The case against her is stronger than the one against you."

He offered this last with a smile decorously but not wholly concealed.

"Yet she couldn't possibly have done it," the cattolium replied.

"Couldn't she?" I wonder." The Beau Brummel stroked his bit of mustache, with the hint of insolence his manner often suggested.

"Not possible," said Lane forcefully.

"Uncle James was a big, two-fisted fighter. No slip of a girl could have overpowered him and tied him. It's not within reason." He spoke urgently, though still in the low murmur both the cousins were using in order not to be overheard.

Jack put a neat, highly polished boot on the desk of the sergeant of police. "Ever hear of a lady called Delilah?" he asked lightly.

"What about her?" In Kirby's quiet eye there was a warning.

The man-about-town shrugged his well-tailored shoulders. "They have a way, the ladies. Guile, my son, is more potent than force."

"Meaning?"

"Delilah chloroformed Samson's suspicions before she sheared his locks."

Kirby repressed an anger that he knew was worse than futile. If you knew Miss McLean you couldn't judge her so. She thinks an' acts as straight as a man."

"I don't say she did it, old top. I'm merely pointing out that it's possible she did. Point of fact, your friend made a hit with me. I'd say she's a game little thoroughbred."

"You an' James will regard what she told you as confidential, of course."

"Of course. We're of your mind, too, though I put her proposition to you. Can't see anything to be gained by airing her story unless it's absolutely necessary on your account. By the way, James wants me to tell you that he thinks you won't have to spend another night at this delightful hotel; the city keeps for its guests' sakes. Bond has been virtually agreed on."

"Fine. Your brother's a brick. We're going to run down this business, he an' I, an' drag the truth to light. A glitter of sarcasm mockery shone out of the dark eyes of Cunningham. "You'll work together fine, and Sherlock Holmes this thing till it's as clear as mud."

By the middle of the afternoon Kirby was free. After he had talked over with James a plan of campaign, he called Rose up on the telephone and

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