

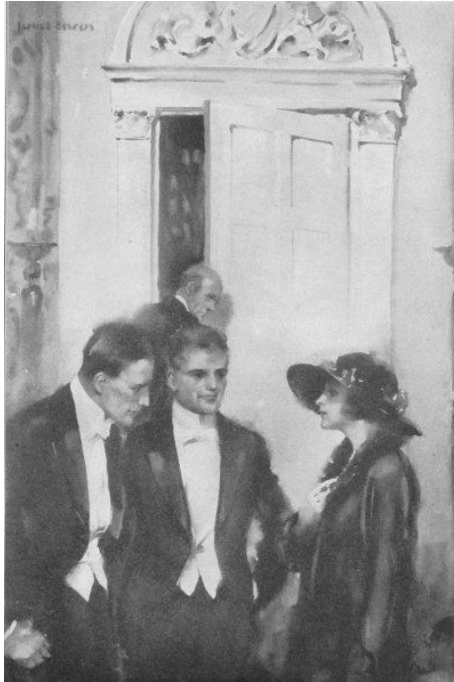
Blacksheep! Blacksheep!

BY

MEREDITH NICHOLSON

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Her "Very glad, I'm sure," was uttered with reservations

Maybe, in spite of their tameless days
Of outcast liberty,
They're sick at heart for the homely ways
Where their gathered brothers be.

Meanwhile, "Blacksheep! Blacksheep!" we cry,
Safe in the inner fold;
And maybe they hear, and wonder why,
And marvel, out in the cold.

—Richard Burton.

BLACKSHEEP! BLACKSHEEP!

CHAPTER ONE

I

Mrs. Howard Featherstone spent much time thinking up things for her brother Archibald Bennett to do, and as Archie was the ideal bachelor brother, always remembering the children's birthdays and turning up dutifully for Christmas dinners, he accepted her commissions in the most amiable spirit and his services were unfailingly satisfactory. He knew perfectly well that most of the jobs she imposed upon him had been politely but firmly declined by her busy husband, but this made no difference to Archie, who had all the time in the world, and infinite patience, and he rather enjoyed tracing express packages and matching ribbons.

"The agent who's been looking up a summer house for us says this is an unusual opportunity, as there are few places to let at Bailey Harbor and this one is unexpectedly on the market. The owner is obliged to leave just after settling in it, so it's all in perfect condition and if it meets our needs we can go right up. Howard's simply swamped with work—he's conducting some sort of investigation with night meetings and that sort of thing—and we'd all appreciate it if you could run up there for us."

The many preoccupations of his brother-in-law, who held a seat in Congress and took his job seriously, were well known to Archie. Featherstone was an important cog in the

governmental machinery while Archie had nothing on earth to do, so it was eminently fitting that he, as an unattached and unemployed brother-in-law, should assume some of Featherstone's domestic burdens. Archie had planned to leave for the Canadian Rockies two days later, but as no urgent business called him in that direction, he obligingly agreed to take a look at the Bailey Harbor house that had been placed so providentially within reach of his sister.

"The owner belongs to that old New England Congdon family," Mrs. Featherstone explained; "they date from the beginning of time, and some of them are a trifle eccentric. You remember one of them—he must be the father or an uncle of the owner of this house—Eliphalet Congdon, who lives in Boston and is horribly rich but is always doing weird things. There was a perfectly killing article in the paper just the other day telling of his latest exploit, which was getting arrested for refusing to allow them to check his umbrella at the Metropolitan Museum. They thought, of course, that he was a crank who wanted to poke holes through the pictures, and he made such a fuss that they had to arrest him and he wouldn't give bail but had his lawyer get him out on a writ of habeas corpus."

"The same philanthropist who had a bus built just like the Fifth Avenue busses and wanted to run it himself to pick up women and children the regular busses wouldn't stop for," laughed Archie. "If you're renting a house from that family it's just as well to look into it carefully. All right, May; I'll inspect the premises for you."

In spite of his good-natured assent she continued to pile up excuses for her husband and explained in great detail the rundown condition of the children which made it necessary to get them out of Washington as quickly as possible. Archie was already mentally planning the details of his trip with his customary exactness. As he traveled constantly in the interest of his health, which had been a cause of solicitude to himself and all his relatives as far back as any one could remember, he knew train schedules by heart, and by catching the Federal Express the next night he would be able to connect with a train at Boston that would land him at Bailey Harbor at two o'clock the same day.

With any sort of luck he could escape from the Harbor, reach New York the following morning and proceed immediately westward. A few telegrams would readjust matters so that he would lose only a day in setting out for Banff, which his newest doctor had told him was an ideal spot for him. Many other doctors had posted him off to numerous other places in pursuit of the calm or stimulus or whatever it was he needed to make him a sound man capable of taking some part in the world's affairs. Archie's condition was always a grateful topic of conversation and now that his sister had told him how many bedrooms her menage required, and warned him particularly to be sure that there was a sleeping porch and a garage, and not to forget to look carefully into the drainage system of the entire Maine coast; having watched him make notes of these matters, Mrs. Featherstone, in her most sisterly tone, broached the subject of his health.

"Your troubles, Archie, are all due to the scarlet fever you had when you were a child. I've thought that if you could ever get into some active work it would cure you. These sanatoriums you live in most of the time never do you any good. They just keep you thinking about yourself. What you need is a complete upsetting,—something that would give a new turn to your life. And, you know," she went on softly, "I'd hoped, Archie, that the right girl would turn up one of these days and that that would prove the panacea. But the girls I've picked out never pleased you, and here you are, the finest brother in the world, and the most conscientious man alive, always doing generous things for people—you know you do, Archie—with nothing ahead of you but just one sanatorium after another. I haven't much faith in this idea of your going to the Rockies; you know you tried the Alps five years ago and the altitude nearly killed you."

"I seem doomed to sit on the sidelines and watch the game," Archie agreed gloomily.

"But sometimes, I think you yield too easily to discouragement. Please don't think I mean to be unkind or unjust, but if at some turn of the road you were obliged to put your back to the wall and fight for your life! Really, dear, I think you would win the battle and be a very different man afterward."

Archie smiled wanly. He had the lively imagination of the neurasthenic and very often he had dreamed of vanquishing single-handed a dozen enemies, or plunging into a burning house and staggering out half dead bearing a helpless child

in his arms. To look at him no one would believe that he had a nerve in his tall frame. Once a friend carried him off to a farm where an autocratic athletic trainer rejuvenated tired business men; and Archie survived the heroic treatment and reappeared bronzed and hardened and feeling better than he had ever felt in his life. But a winter spent in an office and leisure to think of himself as an invalid brought back the old apprehensions, and there being no one at hand to drag him again to the trainer's, he renewed his acquaintance with the waiting-rooms of specialists.

"There will be a few people in for dinner tonight," remarked Mrs. Featherstone as he rose to go; "very simple, you know; and Howard just telephoned that he can't possibly come, so if you can arrange it, Archie—"

"All right, May. Weld and Coburn are in town and I was going to have dinner with them at the Army and Navy, but if you really want me—"

"Oh, that's perfectly fine of you, Archie! You are splendid to break your engagement with them when you three don't meet very often; but it will be a real help to me to have you. It's so late now that I can't ask any one else in Howard's place. And Isabel Perry will be here; you know she's the dearest girl, and I always thought you really did like Isabel. Her father lost all his money before he died and she's had a position as gymnasium teacher in Miss Gordon's school. This summer she's to run a girls' camp up in Michigan and she can't help making a splendid success of it."

Archie did not at once detach Miss Perry from the innumerable host of young women his sister had introduced him to; they were a hazy composite in his memory, but when Mrs. Featherstone insisted that he couldn't have forgotten Miss Perry's smile and merry laugh, he promptly declared that he remembered her perfectly. When he found himself sitting beside her later at Mrs. Featherstone's table, with a lady on his right who was undoubtedly most distinguished in spite of the fact that he failed to catch her name and understood very little of her rapid French, he was very grateful for Miss Perry's propinquity. The smile and the laugh were both better even than Mrs. Featherstone's specifications, and her English had a refreshing Western tang and raciness that pleased him.

"I passed you on the street the other day and made frantic efforts to attract your attention but you were in a trance and failed to see my signals."

"I was taking my walk," he stammered.

"*My walk!*" she repeated. "You speak as though you had a monopoly of that form of exercise. I must say you didn't appear to be enjoying yourself. Your aspect was wholly funereal and your demeanor that of a man with a certain number of miles wished on him."

"Four a day," Archie confessed with an air of resignation; "two in the morning and two before dinner."

"Then you were doing your morning lap when I passed you. Only four miles a day?"

"By the doctor's orders," he assented with the wistful smile that usually evoked sympathetic murmurs in feminine auditors.

"Oh, the doctors!" remarked the girl as though she had no great opinion of doctors in general or of Mr. Bennett's medical advisers in particular. He was used to a great deal of sympathy and he was convinced that Miss Perry was an utterly unsympathetic person.

"What would you call a good walk?" he asked a little tartly.

"Oh, ten, twenty, thirty! I've done fifteen and gone to a dance at the end of the tramp."

"But you haven't my handicap," he protested defensively. "You can't be very gay about walking when you're warned that excessive fatigue may have disastrous consequences!"

She was not wholly without feeling for her face grew grave for a moment and she met his eyes searchingly, with something of the professional scrutiny to which he had long been accustomed.

"Eyes clear; color very good; voice a trifle weak and suggesting timidity and feeble initiative. Introspective; a little self-conscious, and unimportant nervous symptoms indicated by the rolling of bread crumbs."

"I've paid doctors large fees for telling me the same things," he said, hastily hiding the bread crumbs under the edge of his plate. "I wish you'd write those items down for me. I'm in earnest about that."

"When did you say you were leaving town?"

"Tomorrow evening. If you'll write out your diagnosis and any suggestions you may have as to my habits, diet and general course of life, I promise to put them into practice."

"Your case interests me and I'll consider this matter of advising you."

"I shall expect the document tomorrow afternoon!"

"I should want to be very sure," she laughed, "that you were really leaving town and that I shouldn't see you for a long time—perhaps never again!"

"That has an ominous sound, as though you were going to give me a death sentence! Is my case as bad as that?"

"Not at all; but it calls for that disagreeable frankness we all dislike in our friends and very properly resent in mere acquaintances. I should be enormously embarrassed to meet you until after—"

She paused and surveyed him once more, questioningly. The French lady was telling a story to the whole company, and they were obliged to give heed to it; and as Archie failed to catch the point of it Miss Perry very kindly gave him the clue. The talk was general for a few minutes and then he begged her to finish the sentence that had been left in the air.

"Oh, it doesn't matter! I think I was going to say that it would be embarrassing to see you until after you had given my little hints a trial. I'll say now that just the orderly

course of your life, with four miles a day, no more, no less, isn't a bit likely to get you anywhere. My treatment for such a case as yours would be very drastic. I'd set you some real stunts to do if you were my patient. May tells me that they won't have you in the army, the navy, or the flying corps, but I believe I could find some excitement for you," she ended musingly.

"As, for example—?" he asked, finding the French lady conspiring with an attaché of the Italian embassy. "To meet the competition of the nerve specialists, you'll have to be very explicit and tell me exactly what to do."

"Right there is one of your troubles—living by fixed schedules. You've never felt the world's rough hand; you don't know life! Clubs and sanatoriums and week-ends in comfortable houses don't count. You're a tremendously formal person, Mr. Bennett! What you really need is a good hard jar! Every morning you know exactly what you're going to do every hour of the day. It's routine that kills! Now just suppose when you're out on one of your walks you were to overpower the chauffeur of, we will say, the British ambassador, and drive the car bearing his Excellency into some lonely fastness of the Virginia hills, and hold him for a ransom, and collect the money in twenty-dollar gold pieces and escape with it and then come back to Washington and spend it all on a big party with the ambassador as the guest of honor. There would be a real achievement—something that would make you famous in two hemispheres."

"And incidentally lock me up for life if I escaped being shot! Such an escapade would very likely spoil our cordial relations with England and cause no end of trouble."

"There you are!" she exclaimed, "thinking always of the cost, never of the fun! Of course you would never do any such thing. Let me try again! Suppose you were to hold up a bank messenger in Wall Street and skip with a satchelful of negotiable securities and then, after the papers were through ragging the police for their inefficiency, you would drive up to the bank in a taxi, walk in and return the money, saying you had found it in the old family pew at Trinity when you went in to say your prayers! Here would be an opportunity to break the force of habit and awaken your self-confidence."

"Am I to understand that you practice what you preach? I don't mean to be impertinent, but really,—"

"Oh, I'm perfectly capable of doing anything I've suggested. I'm merely biding my time. Parents are pardonably fussy about the sort of person they turn their children over to, so I must have a care. I mean to dig for buried treasure this summer, realizing the dream of a lifetime."

"That appeals to me strongly. Perhaps you'd let me assist in that undertaking?"

"Impossible! I want all the glory and eke the gold if I find the hidden chests. Talk about romance being dead! My grandfather was a planter in Mississippi before the Civil War. In about 1860 he saw trouble ahead, and as he was opposed to secession he turned everything he had into gold,

bought several tracts of land in Michigan and New York and secretly planted his money. His wife and children refused to share his lonely exile and he sent them to England but clung to America himself, and died suddenly and alone the second year of the war on the very acres my father inherited in Michigan. That's where I'm opening my camp."

"And the gold hasn't been found?" asked Archie deeply interested.

"Not a coin so far! You see grandfather made his will in war time and only divided the land, being afraid to mention the buried treasure in a document that would become a public record when he died."

"This is most exciting. It's only unfortunate that it's not pirate gold to give zest to your enterprise."

"Oh, the pirate in the story is a cousin of mine, who inherited the land up near the St. Lawrence and has dug all over it without results. My father gave the Michigan scenery to me, but this cousin has been digging on my land, most unwarrantably! He's rather a dashing young person!"

Archie was so enthralled that he forgot the typewritten dietary he always carried in his pocket and ate most of his portion of beef tenderloin before he remembered that red meats were denied him. He laid down his fork so abruptly that she asked him what was the matter.

"Nothing; only you've interested me so much that I've eaten a whole lot of stuff that's positively forbidden. You've already scored a victory over my specialists!"

"Splendid!" she cried. "Eat when you're hungry and never think about your food. Don't let a mere piece of beef know that you're a coward. Have you ever committed murder? You pale at the suggestion and yet a pleasant little murder might be the very thing to set you on your feet again!"

From time to time he caught Mrs. Featherstone's eyes fixed upon him approvingly, and he knew that she was thinking that at last he had met a girl who interested him. The impression that he was an invalid in imminent peril of death caused his friends and acquaintances to talk to him as though he were a sick child, and it was refreshing to find a girl who openly chaffed him about his health and went the length of prescribing a career of riotous crime as a cure for his ills. This was enormously amusing for in prep school and college he had been guiltless of the traditional pranks and in the six years that had elapsed since he emerged into the world he had walked circumspectly in the eyes of all men.

Isabel Perry was not afraid of him and she didn't treat him as girls did who had an idea that if they talked to him very long he might faint or even die on their hands. He noted her fine rounded arms and supple fingers that spoke for strength, reflecting that very likely she could pick him up and pitch him through the window. He had always disliked athletic girls, fancying that they nodded to him patronizingly as they passed him on country club verandas

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