DEPUTY OF THE DEVIL

By Ben Ames Williams

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CHAPTER VIII—Continued

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Then Jerrell's bags were in; they were away. Returning along the shore of the island, they saw Dan and Nancy on the court, screened by the intervening trees; and the girl waved to them.

"We're having a shooting-match this afternoon, Ira," Doctor Greeding explained. "Dan says he's a good shot, and Nancy's fair. I know you're rotten, but we'll teach you the rudiments, give you a handicap." And he asked Mary Ann: "Have you ever tried it?"

She shook her head. "Oh, no."

"Mary Ann and I will be the gallery," Jerrell proposed. "You'll never make an Annie Oakley out of me."

"You'll be surprised," Doctor Greeding assured him. "After I've given you a tip or two."

"I'm much more likely to shoot some perfectly innocent bystander," Jerrell demurred.

"No fear," Doctor Greeding promised. "We'll all keep out of the way, keep behind you." He brought the boat to the landing with an expert hand. "Thomas will fetch your bags," he said. "Leave them. We'll go on up to the court."

Jerrell urged: "See here, Ned, you and Dan do the fireworks. Mary Ann and I—"

But the Doctor was so insistent that Jerrell had in the end to submit, or by an outright refusal seem ungracious. "You act as if this were life or death, Ned," he protested, amused and yet annoyed, too.

Doctor Greeding nodded. "It's my hobby," he assented, laughingly. "I suppose I do ride it hard."

There was in fact a strange urgency in the man. He shepherded them up the path to the court like a dog nipping at their heels, and Dan and Nancy met them there.

Doctor Greeding chuckled. "All that I need is some competition," he declared. "You'll be surprised!" Dan had the pistol in his hand, and Doctor Greeding took it from him and turned to Jerrell.

"But first, Ira, you give us a horrible example," he suggested laughingly. "Show us how not to do it!" He looked up the court, and saw that there was a fresh target on the frame; he examined the pistol. "Here," he said. "It's ready. All you have to do is point it at the target and pull the trigger.

There was an unreality about what so swiftly followed. Jerrell was driven like a sheep. Reluctantly he took the weapon in his hands, thoroughly ill at ease, handling it gingerly.

"I don't know anything about these things," he protested.

"You don't need to. Just point and pull," Doctor Greeding insisted. "Go ahead! Aim at the black spot on the target. Hold the pistol so the fore sight is just in the middle of the notch in the rear sight. Then press the trigger slowly, till it fires!"

And Jerrell, after a moment, indifferently obeyed. A splinter flew from the edge of the batter-board. Greeding laughed. "Six feet wide, Ira! Don't you see the target, man?"

Jerrell, hoping to finish this ordeal, hurriedly tried again, and then again. But his shots were wild. Between shots, Doctor Greeding coached him, showing him how to stand, how to hold the pistol, how to press the trigger; but Jerrell at length lowered the weapon, turned aside, shook his head, laughing uncomfortably.

"That's enough," he insisted. "It's not my game."

Doctor Greeding chuckled, and received the weapon from Jerrell's hand. "Wait a minute. Don't give up yet," he persisted. "Let me show you how it's done!"

He fired rapidly, two or three times. "There," he said. "Like that! Now Dan, go put up a fresh target, will you? Ira's got to score one hit, at least, before I let him off." He took the empty magazine out of the pistol and turned to Jerrell. "Try it without actually shooting," he suggested, and pressed the weapon into Jerrell's hands. "Maybe you're flinching, afraid of it. Just aim, and snap the trigger!"

Dan had gone obediently toward the other end of the court to fix a new target on the frame. Jerrell protested half angrily: "Ned, I don't want to shoot, I tell you."

But Doctor Greeding still insisted. "Don't be an ass, Ira. If you can make the stock-market sit up and beg, you ought to be able to point a pistol at a target. I'll stand behind you, see whether you're aiming properly!"

Jerrell was flushed and furious, yet it was impossible to refuse without actual offense. He lifted the weapon and faced the target yonder; and Doctor Greeding said, behind him:

"All right, now go ahead."

Jerrell pointed the pistol in the general direction of the other end of the court; but as he did so, Dan, his task concluded, turned and saw him and cried quickly:

"Hey, don't aim that thing at me!"

Nancy had been watching Jerrell, sorry for him because her father pressed him so tactlessly, but also puzzled by something in his countenance. She saw his lips compress, and veins on his forehead swell as though he were engaged in an actual physical struggle. But when Dan called his protest, she looked that way.

Her father, here at Jerrell's shoulder, said reassuringly:

"Don't worry, Dan! Gun's empty!"

And then—the shot, in the still air of midafternoon, rang loud and startlingly. Nancy saw Dan, in the very act of moving to one side out of line with the pistol's muzzle, clasp his middle with both hands and slump quietly forward on his knees. He bowed down and fell, a little on his side, very quietly.

There was something terrible in that quietness.

Nancy was standing a little to one side, near Mary Ann; and when Dan fell, she remained a moment motionless, all her senses in suspension, unable to think or move, able only to see.

She saw Dan lying there so quiet on the ground and she saw Jerrell staring incredulously at the pistol in his hands. She saw her father turn to Jerrell, leap toward him, snatch the weapon away. He cried out, furiously:

"You clumsy fool! Give me that gun!"

Then some one brushed her shoulder, spinning her half around. It was Mary Ann, darting past her, running to where Dan lay.

Nancy was still too dazed fully to understand. This was one of those occurrences which the mind cannot quickly grasp.

Now Nancy felt at first neither grief nor fear. She knew that Dan lay yonder on the court, but her only emotional reaction to the fact was annoyance. She went toward him, saying aloud:

"Dan, don't pretend! You're scaring me!"

Mary Ann, already by his side, kneeling there, looked up quickly over her shoulder at the girl; she said gently:

"He's shot, Nancy!"

Doctor Greeding and Jerrel came toward them; and Jerrell said hoarsely:

"The gun insisted on pointing at him. I couldn't drag it away—" His tones were hollow and flat. "It was as though some one had hold of it," he insisted, in a stubborn, dazed bewilderment.

Doctor Greeding said icily: "It was pure clumsiness, Ira."

But Mary Ann spoke to him. "Doctor Greeding," she called. She was crisply insistent. "Never mind blaming anyone now. Here, quickly!"

Nancy moved aside to let her father come at Dan. He knelt there, but he shook his head. "He's dead," he said.

Mary Ann said sharply: "He's not, either! See!"

"Not dead?" Doctor Greeding exclaimed. There was in his tone incredulous surprise like dismay. He stared at Mary Ann. "He must be!" he muttered; and his eyes were wide, glassy, staring.

Mary Ann shook his arm. "No! What's the matter with you, Doctor? Quick! He's still alive!"

"But I tell you—" Doctor Greeding insisted.

"Look at him!" she exclaimed. Then, more sharply: "Look at him! Don't stare at me!"

And after a moment he did turn his eyes from her to the man here on the ground.

Then Nancy saw Dan looking up at her, his lids half closed. He grinned. "All right, Nancy," he whispered.

Her heart leaped. She cried: "Father, he's all right. See!"

Doctor Greeding fought back to self-control; he began a swift examination. Nancy's eyes blurred with tears, but she heard buttons yield, and the movement of garments, and saw Dan's white flesh, and saw through misty eyes the wound.

"Does it hurt, darling?" she pleaded. "Does it?"

Dan shook his head, his white lips grinned. "Not a bit," he said weakly. "Tell Mr. Jerrell—it's all right. Accident!"

Jerrell, somewhere above them, standing over them, cried: "Dan, I swear I tried not to. Something—"

Mary Ann flashed one glance toward him, reassuring, comforting. Then she watched Doctor Greeding. He met her eyes and shook his head in negation.

Her cheeks flamed. She cried: "You can help him! You can operate!"

The doctor protested: "Hopeless! I've nothing here to work with."

Mary Ann stood up. "We'll manage," she insisted. "You've got to. Quickly. We can't just—give up!"

He faced her. "Mary Ann," he said gravely. "If we could act instantly, there might be a slim chance; but as it is—to get him to the mainland, to the hospital, to move him. It's hopeless!"

He added: "And even if there were time, it would need a miracle to save him!"

Mary Ann held his eyes with hers. "You can do miracles," she said, her tones vibrant, compelling. "I know. I've seen them. But it wasn't anything I could see. Oh, I've seen what you did with your hands, your instruments. Everything you did! But it wasn't what you did! It was something inside you." She caught his arms, grasped them firmly. "You must do a miracle for Dan," she said.

She spoke quickly to Nancy. "Your father will have to operate, here, at once. In the house. With plenty of light. A table, somewhere."

Nancy caught strength from Mary Ann. She suggested steadily: "The kitchen. There's a big skylight, and a long table."

Mary Ann nodded. "Perfect." She turned to Jerrell. She saw then that he stood white and shamed and sorrowful; and she went to him, and rose on tiptoe to kiss him—touched his cheek reassuringly.

"Don't—worry. You must—help us, Ira," she said. "Get something to carry Dan into the house—something so that he can lie flat. I will telephone the nearest hospital. Where is it, Nancy?"

Nancy told her. Jerrell, instantly galvanized into activity, was already running toward the house. Mary Ann looked at Doctor Greeding. "You will need," she reflected, "these things." And she named them, in a swift catalogue. "Anything else?"

Doctor Greeding said gently: "No, that will do. But—it's no use, Mary Ann!"

The girl ignored his word. "I'll have them send everything," she said, moving toward the path; and then, to Nancy: "While I'm phoning, get water boiling. Get Dan on the table. Find some razor-blades—new ones, if you can—and put them on to boil. And if you've some blunt-ended scissors. Or any scissors will do. And thread, and big needles. And big spoons. Put everything on to boil. But first come show me where the telephone is. I'll call the hospital, and then I'll—search the house, see what I can find. There must be first - aid things—"

They went swiftly together toward the house, and Doctor Greeding was left alone here beside Dan.

The man stood looking down, his eyes brooding. His universe was chaos in this hour. The discovery that Dan was not dead—though his wound must almost certainly prove fatal—had struck Doctor Greeding with a shocking force.

Dan, the rock upon which all his hopes and plans were shattered, Dan

If the Man Were Not Now Dead, Yet He Must Die.

whom he hated and whom he had meant should die—was still alive!

And he had meant that Dan should die by Jerrell's carelessness, so that Mary Ann would abhor the man. Yet—here a moment ago—Mary Ann had kissed Jerrell on the lips. She loved her brother; she should for his carelessness hate Jerrell. But instead, she had kissed him, in comfort and in love.

Doctor Greeding could not recognize the world so long familiar. He felt himself under the glance of a stern, condemning eye; he seemed to hear mockery in the air, and a derisive laughter.

He spoke, without knowing it, aloud. "He must die! He can't live;" he muttered.

Dan on the ground at his feet, said stubbornly, without opening his eyes: "I'm not dead yet, Doctor!"

And the older man said, crushingly: "You're badly hurt! Don't nurse any futile hopes."

But Dan would not by words alone be daunted. His mouth twisted in a grin. "I'll show you something about getting well that you never saw before," he insisted, laboring over his words. "I'm—telling you!"

Doctor Greeding shook with a murderous rage; Dan was like a scotched snake, to be crushed under a grinding heel. The Doctor looked over his shoulder toward the path along which Nancy and Mary Ann had disappeared. There was no one in sight. His eyes searched all around; and then he knelt beside Dan again, his countenance contorted. If the man were not now dead, yet he must die!

But Nancy called, from the path: "I'm coming, Dan." So Doctor Greeding stood up quickly, brushing his hands together, withdrawing from the stricken man.

Yet he took only a grudging and reluctant land in what immediately followed. Thomas and Jerrell and Nancy and her father worked together. Thomas had brought one of the shutters used to seal the windows of the house in winter; and they laid it on the ground, and managed as gently as possible to lift Dan upon it. His breath whistled through dry lips, and his mouth twisted, but he did not speak or complain.

They lifted him, and with Nancy and her father at one end, Jerrell and Thomas at the other, they carried the shutter and its burden across the court and through the gate, and along the path toward the house. They came to the kitchen door. Ruth, and Margaret, the cook, had made all ready there. They bore Dan into the kitchen, and laid the shutter upon which he rested on the table, and Doctor Greeding felt the hurt man's pulse.

Nancy turned quickly to the servants. "Margaret," she directed, "you keep the kettles boiling. Ruth, bring blankets and sheets and pillows. Lots of them. Clean ones. Don't let them touch anything, the wall or anything."

Old Margaret, white-faced but steady, turned to the stove. Ruth, pale as death, departed to do as Nancy bade her. Jerrell stood silent by the kitchen door, waiting for commands; and Thomas went stolidly out of doors, a lumpish man not easily dismayed. Doctor Greeding looked around at them all—saw Margaret, her back turned, busy at the stove, and he said softly:

"Nancy, and you, Ira, you'd better leave me with him." He might even now find the opportunity to do what he intended.

But Nancy answered stoutly: "I'm never going to leave him again. Never!"

Then Mary Ann, her hands full, came through the pantry. "I got the hospital on the phone," she reported. "They're sending everything. Nancy, have some one meet the car at the landing. And I've been rummaging the house for things we could use." She spoke to Doctor Greeding. "You can begin with what I have here. By the time you're ready to close the wound, the things from the hospital will have come."

He said stubbornly: "Dan is sinking, Mary Ann. This is valorous, but it is futile too."

She deposited her burden on the draining-board beside the sink and took Dan's wrist in her hand; and after a moment she said crisply:

"His pulse is not bad!"

Then, almost sternly: "Doctor Greeding, I have seen you do miracles. You didn't do them with instruments, and equipment. You did them with the gift of healing that is in you. You can do one now!"

The man's eyes flickered uncertainly, in a sort of desperation; and beads of perspiration appeared upon his brow. He repeated after her, like a lesson learned by rote: "I can do one now." Then his color flamed, and he seemed about to speak, to refuse. But in the end, as though surrendering, he said decisively: "Quick, then!"

Mary Ann nodded; turned back to the sink. "I found this can of ether, in the bathroom closet upstairs," she reported. "It's never been opened. And here's iodine, and alcohol, and gauze for sponges—"

Mary Ann went to the stove to inspect the things boiling there; she nodded, satisfied. And she turned to Nancy, looked at her appraisingly.

"Do you want to stay, to help?" she asked.

"Yes," said Nancy.

"You will stand up to it,' Mary Ann decided. "But first, send some one to meet the car from the hospital, at the landing."

Jerrell volunteered: "I'll go."

And so, grateful for even this small chance to help, he hurried away, and Mary Ann turned back to Doctor Greeding. The man was still like one dreaming, bewildered, stunned. Mary Ann, because she knew exactly what she wished for, commanded him in his uncertainties. "Go take off your clothes," she directed. "Put on bathing-trunks. We'll have to do without gloves. I'll contrive a mask. Nancy and I will get him ready. You can scrub from the waist up. Come back quickly."

(TO BE CONTINUED)