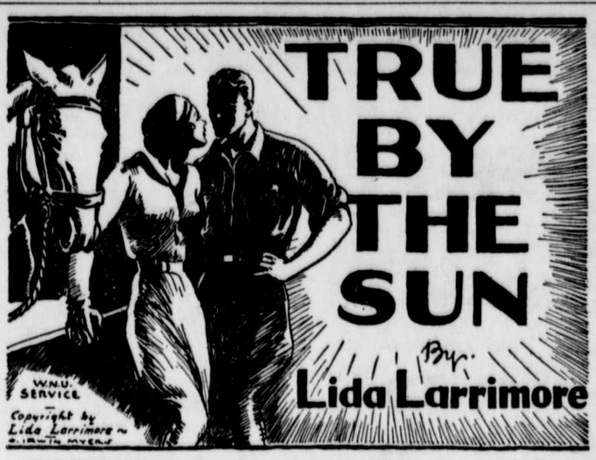

CHAPTER XI—Continued

—15—

"Smash-up—the side road!" Jim, keen enough now, sprinted through shadows to the fence that closed in the stable yard at the rear of the grounds. From there, looking across meadows, he was able to see the side road which joined the Cherry Hollow road a scant quarter of a mile beyond the riding academy.

The side road had a dirt surface. It was one of the many winding byways used by horseback riders, narrow, thinly wooded. Through a fringe of trees Jim saw, in the clear star-light, two discs of light, obviously the head-lights of a car. People parked in the side road, sometimes, kids from the village, young people looking for privacy in romantic surroundings.

Jim had seen headlights in the side road on fine evenings before. The position of these particular headlights, however, caused him to give a sharp exclamation. They were not in horizontal alignment. Even at this distance he could see that one was higher than the other, as though one side of the car had gone off the road into a ditch. Convinced, at last, that something was wrong, Jim vaulted the fence and set off, running, in the direction of the lights.

The distance across the meadows to the side road was not more than quarter of a mile. As he ran through meadow-grass and goldenrod, Jim tried to remember whether or not there was a ditch at the left side of the road. He had ridden along it frequently on horseback but, now, he could not remember. Half way across the fields it occurred to him that he should have driven around in the car. Whoever it was, if they'd gone off the road, might need a tow-line. Well, it wasn't far to go back. Might as well keep on now.

Looking ahead through the fringe of trees, the body of the car was nothing more than a lightish blurr in the shadows. It was a long car, he observed, a roadster with the top folded back. One of the neighborhood debutantes out on a lark. It wasn't late. Half-past twelve. A gentle slope upward. He hadn't remembered that the road was a little higher than the meadows through which it ran.

Jim came out on the road and was gripped for an instant in throttling fear. The car at the side of the road was Cecily's roadster.

He ran to the car, his heart thudding, his breath coming in painful gasps. There was a figure slumped down in the seat, a girl's figure, terrifyingly limp and still, one arm hanging over the door of the car. Jim knew the instant he touched the figure, his hands under the arms to lift it into a less cramped position, that the girl was not Cecily and relief flooded through him. The interval of suspended fear was followed, almost at once, by incredulity and alarm, for when he had lifted the inert figure higher in the seat, and turned on the search-light attached to the windshield, he saw that the girl was Dolly.

She was alive, thank God for that! but she was unconscious. Blood oozed from a cut above her temple where a lock of hair lay in a wet curl against her forehead. Jim wiped away the blood, laid her lengthwise on the seat of the car, rubbed her wrists, took off his coat and folded it under her head. If only he had some water.

Dolly made no response to his efforts to bring her to consciousness. She lay as he had placed her, her eyes closed, her hands with the bright red nails crossed limply over her breast.

Incredulity and alarm receded before the necessity for thought and action. Who had brought Dolly here in Cecily's car? Tommy, of course, Jim thought. Who else but Tommy would have taken Cecily's car? But where was Tommy? He had gone for help, for a doctor, perhaps. Was it Tommy who had knocked at the door? He would return with assistance soon. There was nothing to do but wait.

Or perhaps the roadster was not seriously damaged. Jim examined the position of the car. The left front wheel, sliding into the depression at the side of the road, had crashed against a low line of stonework, the remains of an old wall, Jim judged, noting with the aid of the revolving search-light the moss which covered the stones. Tommy must have been driving at terrific speed to have struck so heavily. The tire was torn off the rim and three or four of the wooden wheel spokes were splintered. Jim realized that it would be impossible to drive the car in that condition even if he could get it back into the road.

Waiting for Tommy to return, he attempted to reconstruct the accident. When the car had hit the stonework, it had sideswiped a tree. The force of the impact had flung Dolly down and to the side. Her head had struck the upper edge of the door or the tree, perhaps. There was no more than a fraction of an inch of space between the car and the tree. Jim saw in a flash of imagination, the car sliding, crashing into the stonework, Dolly flung against the tree.

Tommy, he assumed, had escaped without being hurt. The left side of the car was on the road. There were no signs of an injury to the driver, no bloodstains, no broken glass. He was probably terrified, though, Jim thought grimly. Where was he? Why hadn't he come in when he thumped at the office door? Frightened out of his wits. Off to get a doctor. Perhaps a car had passed and given him a lift. Why didn't he come back?

A car approached along the road. Jim, fuming with helpless inactivity, waited impatiently for it to reach the roadster. If this was Tommy—

It was not Tommy. Both the occupants of the coupe, a boy and a girl, were strangers to Jim.

"Hello!" The boy called, thrusting his head through the opened window. "Have you had an accident?" The girl gave a little scream.

Jim wasted no time on explanations.

"Do you know the riding academy on the Cherry Hollow road?" he asked the boy.

"Sure." The boy's face under the visor of a checkered cap was excited and important.

"There's a telephone in the office," Jim continued. "You'll find it easily. I left the door open and there's a light. Call a doctor. The nearest one. Ask information."

"Okay, buddy" The boy released the brake with a jerk and the girl, leaning out of the window for an interested view of the disaster, fell back into the seat.

Jim waited for help to come, going at intervals to look at Dolly, wiping the blood from the wound above her temple, speaking to her gently, watching with pity and a mounting feeling of alarm her still face, white under the rouge, bending to hear her faint breathing.

The coupe returned after what seemed to Jim an eternity of waiting. The boy got out; the girl followed. Jim was scarcely aware of her.

"Did you get a doctor?" he asked the boy.

"The state troopers are on their way and an ambulance from the hospital at Chestertown."

The boy was obviously proud of his efficiency. The girl's eyes were two round disks in a round white face. Jim swore grimly under his breath. He didn't want the police mixing into this—not, at any rate, until he had talked to Tommy, until he had gotten in touch with Mr. Vaughn.

"Why didn't you call out the marines?" he asked caustically.

The girl giggled in nervous appreciation.

"Shut up, Gladys," the boy said irritably. "I ought to have taken you home. You told me to ask Information," he said to Jim. "I told her it was a pretty bad accident and she 'phoned the police."

"All right. Thanks," Jim said briefly, and realizing that they intended to see the excitement through, he added. "Have a cigarette."

Another eternity of waiting passed, an eternity made more dismal than the preceding one by the boy's eager questions about the accident, the girl's identification of Dolly, her awed and nervous comments, Jim's growing anxiety for Dolly, the fact that Tommy did not appear. He wished he had gone for his own car and taken Dolly to the village. That might have been dangerous, though. He had no idea how badly she was hurt. He'd have to get in touch with Mr. Vaughn. Where was Tommy?

The police car finally arrived, convoying the ambulance from the hospital at Chestertown.

"'Evening, Sergeant McCready," the boy in the checked cap greeted the trooper with swaggering familiarity. "You made pretty good time."

"Good-evening," the tall young man in the uniform returned, scarcely glancing at the boy. "Who's hurt?" he asked addressing Jim.

"She's in the car." Jim led the way. Sergeant McCready followed, accompanied by his companion, a stocky older man. The ambulance driver and an interne came up bearing a stretcher. The boy and the girl with the round white face pressed forward.

Jim watched the interne with strained intently as he bent over Dolly, felt her pulse, examined the cut above her temple.

"Is she badly hurt?" He asked the question in a low shaken voice.

"I can't tell without an examination," the interne said.

Jim moved forward to help the interne place Dolly on the stretcher. Lifting her gently, his throat felt tight.

"You can give me the name of her family, I suppose," the interne said.

Jim supplied the information. She looked so small and so still on the stretcher. He felt as though he had deserted her when the ambulance bore her away.

Sergeant McCready turned to Jim.

"Does this car belong to you?" he asked.

"No," Jim replied.

"Who does it belong to?"

"It belongs to Miss Cecily Vaughn, Officer. T. H. Vaughn 'Meadowbrook.'"

"I thought so," the sergeant's companion cut in. "I've seen this car plenty of times on the road."

"Does Miss Vaughn know you were driving her car?"

The question startled Jim. The sergeant assumed with such casual certainty that he was responsible for the accident. It had not occurred to him that he might be suspected.

"I was not driving the car," he said evenly.

"Who was?"

Jim hesitated for a moment. Then—"I don't know," he said.

"No?" It was the sergeant's companion who spoke. His voice was unpleasantly edged with sarcasm. "Well, buddy, what's your story."

Jim told it briefly. He sketched his position in Mr. Vaughn's employ, told of being awakened, of running across the fields, of finding Dolly alone in the disabled car. He knew, before either of the officers spoke that they did not believe him. His momentary hesitation, circumstantial evidence was all against him.

"That's not an entirely convincing story," the sergeant said when Jim had finished

"It's as full of holes as a sieve," his companion remarked. He turned to the boy and the girl who were

The Sergeant Took the Names and Addresses of the Witnesses.

watching and listening with wide-eyed interest. "You're riding along the road and you find this fellow, here with the car and a girl who's out cold. Did you see anybody else?"

"No, sir." The boy stepped forward eagerly. "It happened like that. We're driving along and we stop and he asks me to go down to his place and call a doctor. When I told Information there'd been an accident she put in a call for you. I didn't see anyone else."

"He might be telling the truth, though," the girl offered, glancing at Jim. "There was a light on in his place. He might have left like he said, when somebody knocked at the door."

The sergeant took the names and addresses of the witnesses—Frank Wilson and Gladys Smith—and sent them reluctantly on their way.

"We'll take you over to headquarters." he said to Jim, leading the way to the police car.

"How long will you keep me there?" Jim asked.

"That depends. We can arrange a preliminary hearing tomorrow. Can you get bail?" he asked, not unkindly.

Bail! Good Lord! He was under arrest!

"I think so," he said. "It will be necessary for me to get in touch with someone at 'Meadowbrook.' Mr. Vaughn is not at home."

"You can call from headquarters," the sergant said.

"Miss Vaughn's car?" Jim asked.

"We'll send a man out here to take care of it. Let's get going, Kelly."

Jim liked the sergeant. He had a clean-cut, intelligent appearance. His manner was neither bullying nor inflated with self-importance. Jim squeezed himself into the police coupe with the two men and resigned himself to the unpleasant aspects of the immediate future.

Chestertown was a sizable borough eight or nine miles from Glendale. Jim's mind was occupied with thoughts and conjectures. It was Tommy, of course. But where had he gone? Even though he'd been frightened out of his wits, Tommy wouldn't have left Dolly, dying perhaps, at the side of the road, and run off to hide.

There was some explanation. He, Jim, would have to keep the kid out of the mess until he could get in touch with Mr. Vaughn. He felt responsible. He shouldn't have let Tommy believe that Dolly might make trouble with the moon-calf, puppy-love letters the boy had written her. He'd probably taken her out tonight in an attempt to get them. Dolly had looked so small and so still on the stretcher. Was it possible that Dolly was going to die . . . ?

When he had gone inside the highway patrol station with the officers, Jim asked if he might make a telephone call.

Jim gave the operator MacPherson's number. After an interval of insistent whirring, he heard MacPherson's voice at the other end of the wire. Feeling grateful that Mrs. MacPherson had not answered the call, Jim sketched his predicament, asked MacPherson to go up to the house and make sure that every member of the family was there and come at once to the troopers' headquarters at Chestertown. MacPherson's voice, controlled, calmly efficient, reassured Jim. There was no cause for alarm, he told himself.

The following hour was unpleasant enough. The sergeant and his associate asked a wearying number of questions. Jim knew that they did not believe his story. Why should they? he thought. The evidence was all against him. He had to keep Tommy out of it. Oh, well, it was only for a time . . .

When the hands of the clock had crept around past half past three, Jim heard in the early morning stillness the sound of a car stopping in front of the house. A moment later, Cecily came into the room, followed by MacPherson. She had not changed her clothes; obviously she had not gone to bed. She still wore the filmy floating dress and the short jacket of brilliant brocade buttoned snugly at her waist. Was it only this evening that he had seen her walking across the side lawn at "Meadowbrook," waiting for her escort to take her to Marjory Patton's party? It seemed an eternity to Jim.

"Jim!" Cecily cried softly, walking toward him. "What have you been doing, Jim?" Her voice was steady, her color was high, her hair was blown into flying tendrils giving her an attractively hoydenish appearance.

"I'm under arrest," he said, with a half smile for Cecily and MacPherson.

"Tell us more of the matter, lad," MacPherson said quietly. His expression was grave and concerned.

Jim told the story again.

"But that's absurd." Cecily turned to the tall young trooper standing beside the desk. "Mr. Fielding couldn't have done a thing like that, Sergeant McCready. It's utterly impossible. There must be some mistake."

The darling! Jim thought, touched and elated by her defense of him, loving her spirit and her gallantry.

"It is your car, isn't it, Miss Vaughn?" Sergeant McCready asked.

"I suppose it is," Cecily replied. "At least my car isn't in the garage. Mr. Fielding is familiar with it."

Sergeant McCready's face was impassive.

"Did you give anyone permission to use the car last night?" he asked.

"No," she answered promptly. "But I know Mr. Fielding didn't take it. One of the men on the place must have decided to go on a spree."

"Is everyone at home?" asked Jim.

"Everyone is there," MacPherson replied.

"We looked into their rooms," Cecily continued. "They were all asleep, Susan, Tommy, Jerry, Miss Parker, the maids. I was just getting home from the party when MacPherson came up to the house. And now you're going home with us, Jim."

"We'll have to hold Fielding," the tall young sergeant said.

Cecily turned swiftly. "Hold him? Why?"

MacPherson glanced at Jim. "I'm afraid that bail can't be arranged tonight," he said. "I am not a property owner and Miss Cecily is a minor."

"But you know us, Sergeant McCready," Cecily appealed to the trooper. "I can assure you that Father would want to do everything possible for Mr. Fielding. I'll make myself personally responsible. Isn't that enough?"

"I'm afraid not," Sergeant McCready replied with a half-smile. "In the matter of speeding or skipping a light we do, occasionally, make an exception. But in a case like this we can't," he sergeant continued. "A girl has been hurt—how badly we don't yet know."

"And you admit you didn't give him permission to drive your car," Officer Kelly added.

"But he wasn't driving the car," Cecily said heatedly. "He has told you exactly what happened."

"It was a good story," Officer Kelly observed laconically.

"I've never heard of anything so ridiculous!" Cecily was angry, a little frightened.

"You'd better go home with MacPherson," Jim said gently. "It's almost morning. I don't mind staying here. There will be a hearing some time tomorrow."

"Will they let you go then?" she asked Jim.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

what Irvin S. Cobb thinks about:

California Condors.

SANTA MONICA, CALIF.—Local naturalists are all agog over the discovery that the California condor is coming back in numbers to his former haunts just up country from here. In fact, they are going out of one violent gog right into another. Because the condor, the mightiest winged creature in all North America, was supposed to be practically extinct, along with such vanished species of native wild life as the great auk, the passenger pigeon and the lightning rod agent.

So now we have set up a new mark for envious Florida to shoot at. For while they may have croupiers at Bradley's in Palm Beach, with eyes as keen and bleak as the condor's are, and real-estate dealers in Miami as greedy as he is, our frustrated rivals will be put to it to dig up a bird with a wing spread of from nine to eleven feet.

Irvin S. Cobb

• • •

Communism's Gallant Foe.

HARDLY a day passes but we read in the paper of an account of individual heroism, of sacrifice, of devotion to duty—something which renews our faith in human beings and makes us realize that scattered through the world are splendid souls of whom we never heard before and probably shall never hear again. When the emergency came he rose to it—and that's enough.

But because, in the last few months, we've learned to expect it of him, I'm thinking many of us fail to appreciate a recurrent act of gallant service by one venerable, enfeebled man whose name is familiar to all Christendom. From time to time, triumphing by sheer will power, by sheer singleness of purpose above his own suffering, Pope Pius XI, speaking from what soon must be his deathbed, sends forth a clarion call for a united front against the growing menace of communism.

• • •

Waning Merchant Marines.

AFTER we've spent billions in government subsidies trying to build up a proper merchant fleet of our own, it's just a trifle disconcerting to read that, among the six nations leading in maritime shipping, the United States still ranks third in gross tonnage, fifth in ships having a speed of twelve knots or better, and last in ships built within the last ten years.

But, although Los Angeles is a great port, we have no time right now to pester about a comparatively trivial thing such as the threatened vanishment of the American flag from the seven seas—not while we're still so uncertain about who will have the leading parts in "Gone With the Wind." To date, nearly every lady in the movie colony has been suggested for Scarlett O'Hara except Mae West and Jane Withers, and as for Rhett Butler—well, it may yet be necessary to cast that role as a whole minstrel first part, with an interlocutor and six end men.

• • •

Italians in Spain.

IT MUST be slightly annoying to those Italian soldiers who were flung headlong upon Spain to fight in a war in which they had no personal interest, when, through mistake, they are mown down in hundreds by their own troops, and then the bewildered remnants find themselves in the hands of the opposing government forces, who have a reputation for sometimes being a trifle rough with prisoners whom they capture.

Still, it must be a great comfort to the confused captives—and to the relatives of the fallen back home as well—to have assurance from Mussolini that they are winning the way for fascist doctrines. Until they heard that cheering message, those battered survivors probably thought that they had been licked.

• • •

The Height of Gall.

AS J. CAESAR remarked at the time, all Gaul was once divided in three parts, but it is obvious that subsequently there was a complete re-consolidation.

When France, already in default to us on one little four-billion debt, starts scheming to peddle her newest issue of government securities over here, that must indeed be regarded as the height of gallishness or Gaulishness—spell it either way, reader, it'll come out the same. Moreover, to evade the Johnson act, she would have American investors send the money to Paris and buy these French bonds there. This sort of smacks of inviting Br'r Rabbit to come into camp to be massacred, instead of hunting him down with the dogs.

IRVIN S. COBB.

©—WNU Service.

My Favorite Recipe

By Helen Twelvetrees

Creamed Eggs With Chili and Rice

To two cupfuls of well-seasoned medium white sauce add one teaspoonful chili powder and six hard-cooked eggs, cut in quarters.

Meanwhile, cook one cupful of rice, season it to suit the taste and arrange in a border around a platter. Pour the egg mixture into the center. Serves six.

Copyright.—WNU Service.

Smiles

A Reminder

"Well, dear," said Blair after tea had been cleared away, "what are you planning to do tonight?"

Mrs. Blair shrugged her shoulders.

"Nothing special," she replied. "I'll probably write a letter or two, read, listen to the wireless, and so on."

"I see," he replied. "And when you come to the 'so on,' don't forget my shirt buttons."

SMART FELLER

Sunday School Teacher—Now children, Samson was safe as long as he kept what?

Bright Pupil—The key to his locks.

How Could It Be?

"Yes, sir, these are the ruins of a building that was in existence 2,500 years ago," declared the guide.

"What rubbish!" one member of the tourist party answered. "Why, it's only 1937 now."

And So He Did

Judge—Why did you steal the woman's carpet?

Tramp—I did not steal it.

Judge—She says you stole it.

Tramp—She said, "Take that carpet and beat it."

Rx Calotabs TRADE MARK REG. for biliousness, sour stomach, bilious indigestion, flatulence and headache, due to constipation.
10c and 25c at dealers

Hasten Early

Hasten in the morning so that by evening thy work for the day be accomplished.

FROM GIRL TO WOMAN

Mrs. J. A. Hagler of 1732 Wilkinson St., Charlotte, N. C., said: "I owe much to Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription for the help it gave me when I was just a girl. I would have a great deal of suffering, due to minor functional disturbances. My mother had me take Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription and its tonic effects proved to be what I needed to stimulate my appetite and to relieve my disturbances." Buy now of your dealer.

THE CHEERFUL CHERUB

I'm studying astronomy.
It rests my mind somehow
To think about those far-off worlds—
Our own's so mussed up now.