

This Dark Adventure

By
Ellen Hogue

THE STORY TO DATE

Ann Robinson, pretty New York stenographer, is jilted by Joe Marsh, who becomes engaged to Ann's childhood friend, Marcia Emmett, wealthy New England society girl. Marcia asks Ann to be a pre-nuptial house party. There Joe makes violent love to Ann and is caught kissing her by Marcia and Philip Olmstead, a former sweetheart of Marcia's. Early next morning Marcia, on pretense of taking Ann on a picnic, rows her to a lonely deserted island and leaves her there. Ann is about to give up hope when Philip surprisingly appears—another castaway, since his boat has drifted off. There seems to be no escape for either.

INSTALMENT IV.

BEFORE the last dreadful hour of theirs—they were to share its darkness—there was to be rather a lovely interlude for the two of them. A strange interlude. A halcyon time of quick, close friendship and intimacy. She tried not to enjoy it too much, nor to hope for its continuation. It was not as if, she assured herself with a last clutch at the commonplace, Philip could possibly feel the way he was acting. He could not either like her or admire her. He must be secretly scornful of her, doubtless he was deeply angry with her, for Marcia's sake. But for a wonderful little while he was not showing his anger. He was tender and cheerful and kind. He treated her with a delightful camaraderie that made nothing of the jam they were in.

That they were in a jam there was no denying, even before Boston Jim and his men came, bent on murder. After that, jam was a small, weak word for what they faced.

certainly it would never have occurred to Ann or Philip that they would be concerned in a feud that would end in a spatter of bullets and blood against a rocky wall. Or that by any chance they would find themselves in the path of the man who, in his own small territory, wielded the same powers of life and death that were Capone's in Chicago, Boston Jim. That is not his real name, of course. It is an alias. He has numbers of them. He has his finger in every nefarious pie in New England. Opium. Rackets—the slot machines, butter and milk, artichokes, laundry. He has more power than the governor of many a great state. He has his friends, none of whom dies of old age. Some of them came with him to the island—Bones Cooper, thinner than any rail and with a tic that lifted the whole side of his face at spasmodic intervals; Lin the Red, enormous, an ex prize fighter, able to break a man's neck with one twist of his hairy hands; Crybaby, who wept while he did his ugly work and was as dangerous as a rattlesnake; poor tortured Mack.

WHAT place in all the world more suited to their purpose than a lonely beach where boys and girls picknicked and kissed in summer time? It was not summer now, it was April, sweet and chill. The beach was deserted; a covered grave among the pines could be lost forever, blood might be washed away by the sea.

"He knows too much," Boston Jim said in a speakeasy of his own home town at two o'clock of a sunny spring afternoon.

"I hate to do it, boys, as bad as you do. But it's gotta be done. And there's been too much of this buggy ride business around, see? It ain't safe. Well, and he's a good guy. Mack is, but he talks too much to the wrong parties and business is business. We gotta take him some place where he'll squawk to us for a change if we go at it right. We'll take a little sea trip by moonlight."

At five o'clock on the same afternoon Ann Robinson said to Philip Olmstead: "Nobody's going to come for us. We might just as well give up that idea for today, anyway. We'll have to settle down and enjoy home life, you and I."

She was happy. Not that she had any real reason for happiness. She explained her own joyous lift of spirits with some difficulty even to herself. Of course, for one thing, she was no longer alone, and that was a relief. She would have welcomed any one, a Hottentot, to share her solitude! And then, there were other blessings that Philip had brought with him. His knowledge of what to do next, for instance. His precious package of matches. Like the first of the chilled primeval women, Ann wel-

comed fire. And she had her drink of water; they spent a gloriously successful hour at the old well in the clearing. It was a deep, rocky hole, black at the bottom—the problem of using it was solved by the simple process of unraveling Ann's sweater, taken down from the tree where she had tied it, and twisting the yarn into cord.

"This bit of tin and solder is going to be known from now on as the old oaken bucket," Philip said, emptying the can of tomatoes into one of the first inadequate picnic plates that were in the lunch basket. Down, down, down, went the little vessel into the bleak, rocky depths; it dripped when it came up again. Ann, drinking carefully from the clumsily sawed edge of the tin, thought that she had never tasted anything so delicious as the water from that old well, brackish though it was.

"We'd better make up our minds," he said, "to a long, hard winter."

Ann told him gravely that she had made up her mind. "Didn't any one know you were canoeing?" she asked. He shook his head.

"They may have missed me, of course, by now. Or they may have found the boat. If they have they'll be dragging the Atlantic seaboard, I suppose. I wish they'd drag over this way. I could kill myself," he added, "for letting you in on a mess like this."

"We'll have to stick here for days, maybe," Philip told her. "Nobody but a fool would let a canoe drift out paddle and all. If I hadn't been that kind of an idiot you'd have been safe ashore by now."

"And on the train," Ann agreed solemnly, "going back to New York."

SHE had told him, of course, exactly what Marcia had done to her. She had not been able to keep from telling him. She hated disillusioning him, but he questioned her and she was half hysterical when he got the truth out of her. To her amazement he had not seemed greatly astonished nor greatly moved to anger by her story. He merely listened silently, and when she finished he nodded.

"Marcia did that, did she?" he had asked coolly. "The little devil! It's just like her—she goes crazy if she can't have her own way. Always did, as far as I can make out. She's come a cropper this time, though. Spoiled kid! But at that, this is consistent with all the rest of her life."

"Do you mean," Ann asked unbelieving, "that you don't blame her for a thing like this?"

"I blame her, of course," Philip said. "Very handsome and brown eyed and philosophical, he grinned at her.

"But women are like that," he said. "All the women I've ever known. You're savage, you know. The lot of you. Not civilized. You upset her last night, didn't you? Well, today she upset you. That's fair enough. The reason you're kicking is that she came out on top."

"If you think," Ann cried, "that all the women in the world are like Marcia, you're crazy."

But she didn't really defend her sex. She didn't want to quarrel with him, and if he chose to be easy in his judgment of Marcia, well, that was natural enough. Marcia was impulsive and daring and amusing to him—all right! Ann said to herself.

"You don't think, then," she asked doubtfully, "that I ought to . . . ought to do anything about this when I get back? It seems to me she ought to be made to suffer for what she's done to me," she added, resentment in her eyes.

"What good would it do you?" Philip asked. "You could sue her, of course—I don't know anything about the law, but it seems to me you have a case if you ever get back to file it. It would mean a lot of publicity—can't you imagine the story? You know—Prominent Deb Maroons Working Girl, and all that. Marcia was always spectacular. Do you think it's worth it?"

She dropped the subject. She helped Philip to gather driftwood for the glorious fire he built on the little beach.

Delicious, delicious, the good odor of toasting bread and bacon; their supper, eaten primitively without adequate dishes and silver and linen, was the best Ann had ever tasted. Philip told her that

in the morning the two of them would go clamming.

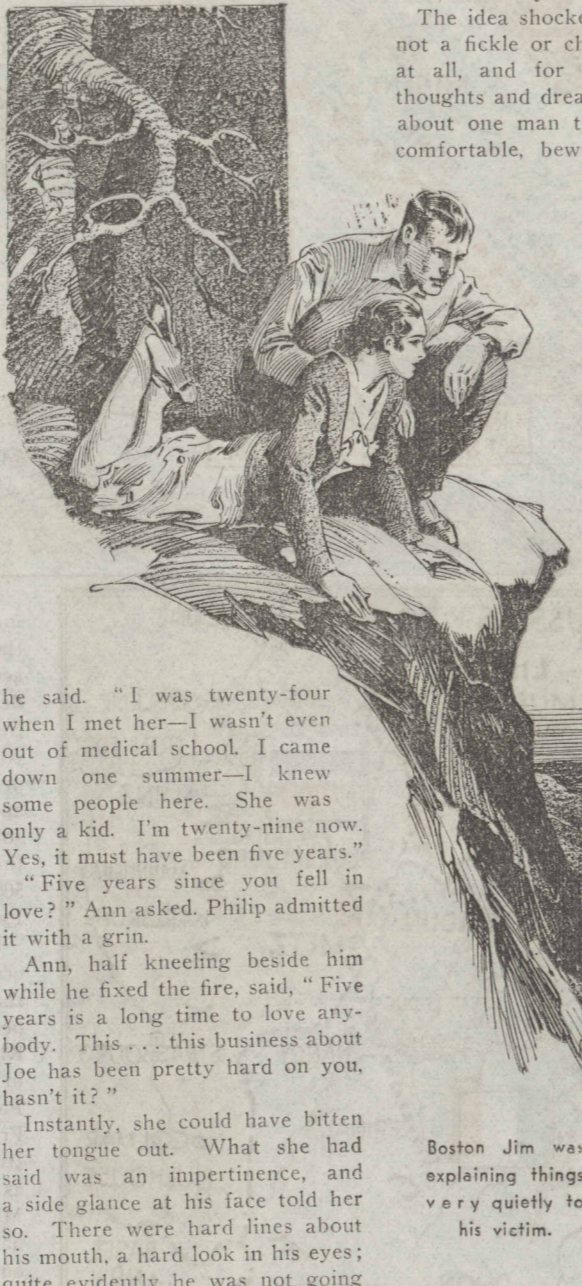
Nothing on the island was new to him; he was entirely at home, Ann saw that. He knew the cave, he knew the hut, he warned her against the beautiful vivid vine that overran the rocks.

"Believe it or not, the very first time I came here with Marcia I got poison ivy. It's no fun. I thought I was too old to get it, but there's no age limit if you walk right through it."

She tried hard, for some obscure reason she did not analyze, not to think of him here in this very lovely place with Marcia. But she could not help questioning him a little.

"How long have you known Marcia?" she asked, determinedly careless.

Philip pondered. "Let me see."



Boston Jim was explaining things very quietly to his victim.

he said. "I was twenty-four when I met her—I wasn't even out of medical school. I came down one summer—I knew some people here. She was only a kid. I'm twenty-nine now. Yes, it must have been five years."

"Five years since you fell in love?" Ann asked. Philip admitted it with a grin.

Ann, half kneeling beside him while he fixed the fire, said, "Five years is a long time to love anybody. This . . . this business about Joe has been pretty hard on you, hasn't it?"

Instantly, she could have bitten her tongue out. What she had said was an impertinence, and a side glance at his face told her so. There were hard lines about his mouth, a hard look in his eyes; quite evidently he was not going to answer her. He went on with his work and for a moment she felt absurdly dashed and snubbed. But not for long. It was impossible for her to be unhappy in this glorious dusk with the fire sending up its scarlet flag into the gathering night. Not since she was a little girl had she been near such a bonfire; the warmth was beautiful and comforting and delightful.

"It's a signal fire as well as a cook fire," Philip explained. "That's why I used up all the wood."

HE DRAGGED out some of the embers so they could broil the bacon without broiling themselves, too.

"Swell of Marcia to be so lavish with her lunch basket!" he commented presently. "It's . . . really, if we weren't in such a . . . a situation, it wouldn't be so bad out here!"

"Not so bad," Ann agreed. Presently, having eaten, they spread the blanket that he had brought down from the cave and lounged upon it. Ann wore the extra coat that Marcia had insisted on her bringing; it was a pretty thing, green leather with a high collar that ruffled black curls into a fan about a flushed, lovely face. She looked like a charming gypsy; her eyes dreamed, the dark marks of weariness and terror were gone from about them. Philip, ruddy in the firelight, leaned beside her, frankly exhausted. He had eaten himself right into apoplexy, he assured her. He didn't know how she felt about it, but he thought that the two of them were excellent camp cooks.

Ann said, "O, we are! That idea of heating the tomatoes in the cup was a stroke of genius."

This was the difficult hour for them both. The fire, leaping and dancing, was nevertheless dying; it was almost certain that no one on the mainland would see it at all. Overhead a thousand thousand

stars glittered and the sea was black ink. It was late, and they were, after all, man and woman as completely alone as if they had been in Eden. Both of them were conscious of it.

"If my mother knew where I was she'd be down on her knees praying for me right now," Ann thought half amusedly. "She'd be worried about the scandal, she'd think I was better off if Philip hadn't come. I believe she'd rather have me die respectfully of fright than be gossiped about." She glanced at the man who sat beside her silent and thoughtful; he was not as good looking as . . . well, as Joe, for instance, but he had a nice face, a charming, humorous, good face. She had liked his face; she felt utterly safe with him. She realized suddenly that she would rather be here with him than . . . well, with any one.

The idea shocked her. She was not a fickle or changeable person at all, and for so long all her thoughts and dreams had centered about one man that she felt uncomfortable, bewildered and distressed at feeling any reaction to any one else. She had never believed in all in love at first, or second, or third sight. Love, she had a l w a y s thought, was something you grew into. This could not be love—this warm new feeling that was about her heart. Yet quite decidedly

she was feeling something more than mere relief from strain because Philip Olmstead was here with her. Any man could have brought her relief . . . a fisherman, bearded and old, Joe, Reddy. She would have been awfully glad to see Joe or Reddy . . .

This was something more than gladness. The knowledge of what was coming, perhaps, had already come to her, shook her to her very soul. She did not quite believe it; she was a little ashamed of feeling it. She wanted to reach over and put her hand into Philip's hand, she wanted to lean against him, close, close against his shoulder. But that was dreadful!

"I've been terribly unhappy over Joe," she thought confusedly. "I've loved him and lost him. I've been lying awake nights worrying over him and wishing things were right between us."

Had things ever been right between them? she wondered with a new sharp, critical judgment that had never been part of her character before. Had she fooled herself about Joe? Had she loved him really, or had she just been beglomed? Joe was handsome and rich and very different from any young man she knew or had ever known—had it been just that? She wondered ashamedly. She had let him kiss her, but she had never been very crazy about his kisses. She had avoided them when she could. She had never felt . . . just this way about Joe. This new feeling, this new dreadful feeling—it was dreadful, really. Sitting beside a man, and . . . well, waiting. Waiting for him to touch you—why, she hardly knew him. Or did she know him with all her heart?

The question still unanswered, she turned her glorious gypsy eyes a little shyly to him, regarding him solemnly; he was watching her, a strange expression in his brown, thin face.

"You've been a hundred miles

from here!" he accused her. "You look as if you were settling all the problems of the universe." And then, instantly, as if something in her had called to something in him, he laid his hand over hers.

Her heart paused in its deep fluttering rhythm; just for a moment an actual dizziness and something that was sweet yet almost pain assailed her. She had never felt it before; it frightened her. And horror at herself seized her. After all, it was Marcia whom he loved; had loved for a long, long time. He was drawn to Ann as any man would have been drawn to any girl under such circumstances. The moonlight, the firelight, the lap of the water, the silence and loneliness had stirred her strangely; why should they not stir him? But he had seen her in Joe Marsh's arms under just such a moon such a little while ago! That had been the darkest and most humiliating moment of her life, and there had been scorn in his eyes watching it. She could not bear for him to kiss her now, although she knew quite definitely and instinctively that he wanted to kiss her.

"Please don't!" she said sharply. "I'm sorry," he said. "I don't know what got into me. It was a crazy thing to do—"

"I feel that I ought to . . . I want to explain something to you," she began slowly, impelled by she knew not what impulse of self-justification.

"Philip, I want to tell you about Joe and me—"

TO HER surprise, his voice was almost savage. He said, "Suppose you don't tell me anything!" She was instantly silent, watching him. Her heart thudded. "I know," he added more gently

after a moment, "that you were . . . well, engaged to Joe, weren't you, before he met Marcia. But I don't see why we should talk it over. I know what you've been up against. I know how you feel, let's let it go at that."

He got to his feet, tall and lithe, and bent over the dying bonfire, stirring it down so that the charred driftwood fell into a thousand crackling sparks.

"This is about through," he said. "I ought to bury the embers, but I don't want to shut off the only light we have until you get up the cliff. Suppose you take the blanket and start. You won't be frightened, will you?"

Ann said, "No, I won't be frightened." She faltered, "I wish you had a blanket, too."

"I'll be all right," he told her almost impatiently. She said good night and started at once for bed, such as it was.

she was nervous and upset. She knew almost at once that in spite of her resolution she was facing a troubled, frightening night. Her mind swam in a dark confusion of many emotions—she thought of Marcia, of Joe, of Reddy, of her own family getting ready to go to bed at this very moment, probably, in the apartment in New York. Resolutely she kept her mind from Philip—tried to keep it from him. She did not at all like the way she felt about him. She was, or until now had always been, rather a reserved and quiet girl. Joe had accused her more than once of being cold.

What had been the matter? She knew now. She no longer blamed Joe for his desertion of her. It really was no wonder that he had fallen in love with some one else. He was not to blame if Marcia had come along and swept him off his feet—there was nothing cold about Marcia, nothing repressed and deep and still.

It was humiliating to discover that what she had felt for Joe had been merely pride and excitement and affection and nothing more. She had been flattered, of course, by his attentions. And she had wept and rebelled and suffered over losing him. But she would not have been cold under his kisses if she had really cared for him. She knew that now. Unbelievably, she knew that she had been, after all, well . . . waiting.

It was beautiful and comforting and reassuring to hear a stir at the mouth of the cave, to hear Philip's voice. She sat up quivering. "Who's there?" she asked, but she knew.

"It's all right," Philip said matter of factly. "I've got the fire smothered. And I thought I'd better stay up here. I'll sleep across the door, and then I'll know you're all right."

"That will be better," Ann agreed in a sensible yet shaken voice. "I've been a little nervous, and that's the truth."

His breathing deepened and steadied; she knew that he was asleep. As if his slumber had been a signal to her, she was aware that she, too, was drifting off. She turned on her side and pillowed her head on her arm, weary and content. Morning would be here, clear and sunny—Philip would awaken her, they would get breakfast together.

It was perhaps two hours later that he woke her. She felt his hand over her mouth, his whisper in her ear. "Don't speak, Ann!" he was saying over and over. "Don't cry out, don't be frightened. Don't speak."

HE HAD lifted her up, carefully, softly, into his arms—he was kneeling beside her, and her head was against his breast. She could hear the strong thumping of his heart—for a moment she lay, dazed and wide-eyed, in the blackness, savoring the feel of this moment. "This is Philip holding me," she thought, unbelieving. "This is Philip . . ."

"I had to call you," he whispered. "I was afraid they'd wake you and you'd cry out and give us away. Ann, there are men on the island. I heard their boat. I looked down at them. They don't look very good to me."

She did not cry out. She followed him on her hands and knees, crawling as he crawled to the mouth of the cave. Together they lay flat on the little cliff looking over the beach bathed in moonlight harder and brighter than the light of day.

Marcia had been right when she had said that a really large vessel could get into the cove. The boat that had come was no skiff nor fishing smack; it was a power launch, and a large one. It had brought half a dozen men—they were tying it up, throwing a slip noose over a big rock for mooring. One of them had a flashlight—he was throwing the round circle of brilliance into the dark shadows under the cliff on the beach.

"Looks like somebody's been here, Jim," he said presently. "Here's a fire, and it's still going some. There's been a picnic."

The big man clambering ponderously from boat to shore laughed. "Kids!" he said. "They come over from the mainland to neck once in a while. They're home in bed by now."

He and a huge creature with a shock of red hair made an immediate but cursory search of the island. They scrambled by not three feet from the spot where

Ann and Philip lay watching, and they reported that everything was "okay" with as complete cheerfulness as if there were nothing sinister in their minds. "Told you so!" the big man who had waited on the beach said with a laugh. He stopped to pluck something, some one very small and quiet, out of the bottom of the boat, lifting him as easily as if he weighed nothing at all. Indeed, he did not weigh much. He was a little man, a decidedly wilted little rat of a man. He stumbled and fell when he was dragged to his feet. He sank down when the strong hand released him into a muddled heap of old clothes at the edge of the tide.

"I've seen his picture in the papers. That's Boston Jim," Philip was whispering in Ann's ear. "The big fellow. I've seen him at the theater, too. He goes to all the openings—takes a whole row and brings his gorillas. I wish now," he added, "we hadn't decided to take this trip!"

HIS words were light enough. Ann did not answer him. Like the rest of her age and generation, she knew a gangster when she saw him, and she knew, too, that three men had not come to the island on . . . well, on an errand of mercy. The man on the sand was gagged and his hands were tied behind him; as one of the others passed he kicked savagely at the prone figure. Ann, with a little gasp, reached a cold hand to Philip, clutched his fingers.

"We've got to keep quiet," he whispered in her ear, "no matter what happens. Remember that."

He put his arm about her shoulders and held her close to him, and so they waited in sick helplessness for what they were to see.

It was not to be a pretty sight. Some one said, "Should we turn the light from the boat on the beach, Chief?" and Boston Jim swore loudly and horribly.

"You wait the coast guard down on us?" he asked.

It was he himself who stooped and with a jerk removed the gag from the prisoner's mouth.

"You're going to talk, Mack," he said, "and you're going to talk quick. We know you double crossed us, you yellow rat, and now we want to hear all about the rest of your little friends."

The huddle of old clothes set up a rather hideous protesting babble. Ann, watching and listening in tranced horror, saw that the embers of the fire she and Philip had left were being stirred to a blaze. "We'll try what a little hot weather'll do," somebody said with a laugh. "Leave Crybaby take a turn at him."

Boston Jim was explaining things very gently to his victim. "You know what Crybaby is, Mack," he said. "He hates to hurt a fly. He's bellerin' right now, he's got big tears in his eyes on account of you. But he's pretty handy to have around on a party like this."

"Philip," Ann whispered, "they are going to torture him. We've got to do something—"

Philip said sharply, "Hush!" "We can't make a move. They've all got guns—it's rotten, it's rotten not to be able to stop it! But I'd rather throw you to a pack of wolves than to that mob. If they got me, what would they do to you?"

It was hideous, but it was common sense. Ann pressed her hand over her mouth, tried not to watch. "I'll talk, I'll talk!" the thing that had been a man was wailing. He did talk, he said names, he gave dates and places. Boston Jim, listening, swore softly.

"Get that!" he said to the others. "Get that! By God, I've got a notion to cut this rat in chunks."

He had his gun in his hand and there was death in the dark passion of his face. Presently, on the ledge, Philip said, "He's going to end it," and put a hand over Ann's eyes.

What is it that tells human beings that they are being watched? Is there a sixth sense that makes the killer start and lift his head and turn to look behind him? They were burying Mack deep under the bushes back against the cliff where the tide would not get at him when one of them said suddenly and loudly, "By God, I got an idea I heard something! There's something phoney in this place—somebody! I got a funny feeling. . . ."

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(To be concluded.)