

The Blenheim Swamp was a name of fear, especially to ingenious girls of sixteen. In the heart of it was the Bottomless Lake, the depths of which no plummet had sounded.

The lake was guarded by a tangle of trees and undergrowth. In summer time the birds and game had it all to themselves. On winter nights, when the moon was up, the whitened trees stood with outstretched boughs, like a convention of ghosts, or of shrouded witches.

A place to frighten children with, this Blenheim Swamp.

"Hush," say the mothers, in these parts, when the children are refractory, "hush, or I will take you to the Swamp, and lose you."

The place had a fascination for Lord Somerset. It could not have been pretty Alice Smith that encouraged him to come there; for Alice knew that he was married, and she was as good as she was pretty. He would spend hours talking with old Rabb, the German, who lived just outside the swamp, and whose habit was to "holler"—as he said—when strangers were lost in its mazes; and then, if they didn't hear him "holler," to take down his ancient fowling-piece and fire it. Rabb knew all about the lake and its terrors. He had heard of dozens of people who had drowned themselves in its muddy waters. Did he know of any murders committed in the swamp? Well, no; but all he could say was that if he, Rabb, were ever tempted to commit murder, here is the place where he would commit it.

Lady Somerset had no desire to visit the swamp. Her husband, indeed, had never mentioned its name to her. But she had longed to pay a good long visit to the Falls ever since she came to the neighborhood of Niagara. And one day, to her surprise, his lordship determined to gratify her.

"Reginald," she said to him softly, as they walked along the trees on Goat Island. "I wish to Heaven you wouldn't call me Reginald," he said, impatiently.

"We are far away from Woodstock," she replied, "and I am so tired of masquerading."

"You can't be more tired than I," said his lordship. "Why don't you go home, persuade your father to make it up with us, and send me money enough to keep up the style befitting my rank in the British aristocracy?"

And Mr. Reginald Birchall laughed, but not as he used to laugh in those by-gone days—before he was metamorphosed into Lord Somerset.

"Reginald, dear," she said, as they came nearer to the torrent, "I know from my sister that papa will not forgive us. He has heard so many things against you. Why can't we go to New York, resume your own name, and get something to do? I would do anything, anything, rather than live this life of deception; and you, with your education, and your drawing, and your knowledge of Greek, could easily get a clerkship somewhere."

"Fine use a clerk would have of Greek," sneered his lordship. "And a fine clerk Lord Somerset would make."

"But we must do something," pleaded the wife. "The little money which has come from your family through the agents will soon be finished. How can we get along then?"

"Sit down," said her husband, gruffly, and if the roar of this contounded water

And she hardly asked the question when she uttered a scream. She had been pushed from behind and felt herself falling into the torrent. Her husband caught her.

"Oh, Reginald, Reginald!" she sobbed, "who did that?"

"I did it, my dear Florence," said his lordship, sardonically. "And I did it just to show you how easily, in this convenient locality, a person who asks inconvenient questions may disappear. There, there, I'm only jesting. But my scheme is serious, horribly serious. And if your nerves are getting calmer, we'll take a carriage and drive to the Rapids, and on the way I'll tell you how I can maintain you in comfort, and live as a gentleman should live, until your pig-headed governor chooses to do the proper thing."

Only half understanding, this poor wife allowed herself to be placed in a carriage. Still only half understanding, she listened to her husband's plans as they drove to the Rapids. He told her of the farm-pupil



ENTERING THE SWAMP.

system in Canada; told her how there was an abundance of wealthy English fathers eager to ship their boys off to Canadian farms, told her how the boys believed that an earthly paradise awaited them on the shores of Lake Ontario; told her how he proposed to secure to each a couple of these youths; told her how he would tempt them with glowing descriptions of horses, stables lighted by electricity, fast trotters, races, and high living; told her, with a chuckle, how disappointed they would be when they arrived.

And still she persisted with her question: "What will you do with them then?"

"They will go elsewhere," said he, turning his black eyes suddenly upon her.

"Oh, Reginald!" she cried, "I entreat you not to commit this fraud. Who can tell what the end of it may be? If you still have a spark of love for me, I implore you not to do it."

"Florence, you're a fool," said his lordship, coolly.

And he looked down fixedly at the Rapids, which went hurrying on, like a soul in torment rushing to its destruction.

II. THE MURDER IN THE SWAMP.

A year has gone. The snow again whitened the boughs in Blenheim Swamp. A

never didn't exist no such person as Mrs. 'Arris."

"Good heavens! man," the landlord broke in, "can you sit joking there while your murdered friend is being shovelled into a pauper's grave?"

"I accept the amendment," said Mr. Birchall. "Poor Benwell! I was really very fond of him. I will run down to Princeton and identify the body. Good-by, Florence."

Mrs. Birchall still sat rigid, white as death, and said not a word. They took her to her room, hardly conscious. When Pelly was left alone with her, he whispered: "I know what is in your mind, Mrs. Birchall; but before Heaven, I believe him innocent; indeed I do."

And with this word of comfort, revealing that the same thought was in the minds of both, the kind-hearted young fellow set off for New York to see if Benwell could be there, as a telegram had led him to suppose.

Mr. Reginald Birchall returned from Princeton, having fully identified the body. He had shown such emotion when it was examined that a constable had to support him.

He went straight to his wife's bedroom. She shrank from his touch.

"Assassin!" she cried.

"You're a fool," said he, repeating the phrase that he uttered when he looked down into the Rapids.

"Reginald," said she, "I have been a true and faithful wife to you. I will be true and faithful to the end. Only let there be no deception between us. Tell me the whole truth."

He muttered, murmured, made two or three vain efforts to speak. Then, turning to see that the door was locked, he made her sit at the foot of the bed, and walking up and down the little room, he told her the story of his journey with Benwell through Blenheim Swamp.

"Florence," said he, with a trace of unwonted tenderness in his voice, "it had to be done. I was in the devil of a hole. My only chance was to get money from Benwell's father; my only hope was to put Benwell out of the way."

Mrs. Birchall covered her face with her hands and sobbed.

"I planned it on the *Britannic*, coming over," he continued. "I thought that Pelly might go over the Falls, and that the swamp would do for Benwell. When Benwell and I started out, a sort of exultation seemed to fill me. Some cruel devil possessed me; and as I went along in the train to Eastwood I could almost hear myself saying: 'Your time has come, friend Benwell; take a last look at the earth.'"

"Oh, horrible, horrible!" moaned the wife.

Birchall appeared to find some strange satisfaction in recounting his crime.

"As soon as we left the road and struck into the swamp," he said, "I took every precaution to see that we were alone. Not a living being was in sight. When we came near the lake, Benwell sat on a log, saying that he was fagged to death. I just made one step to the rear, put my pistol to his forehead, and fired. The body wheeled half round before it fell, and the eyes met mine. For an instant I thought that the bullet had missed him. I nerved myself and fired again. He tumbled like a log at my feet. And as he lay on his back I looked at him again; and once more those gasty eyes gleamed into mine."

The wife sobbed convulsively.

"However," continued Birchall, as though describing an event of no particular moment, "it was now done. I borrowed those scissors of yours before starting. With them I cut all the marks from his clothing. There was nothing to identify him, nothing, nothing—that is," he added, clenching his fist, "but that accursed cigar-case."

"It will convict you," moaned his wife.

"Convict me? Pshaw!" said Birchall. "I have not laid plans so lightly as that. What motive can I have had for killing him? Who saw me enter the swamp with

him? Who saw me come out? It is preposterous. They dare not even arrest me."

As he spoke the door was burst open. Chief Young of the Niagara Falls police, entered the room.

"Reginald Birchall," he said, "I arrest you for the murder of Frederick Cornwallis Benwell."

III. FLY-LEAVES FROM A DIARY.

In prison, Monday, September 22, 1890, A. M. The trial begins today. For the space of nine hours I, John Reginald Birchall, am to quit this art-gallery, decorated with Tritoneque fancies and Rembrandtesque conceits (seriously, they are cuts from the "Pink Tint" and "Police Gazette"), and receive the homage of Woodstock and the attention of the world.

What a magnificent thing it is to be a celebrity! I hear they have arranged telephones round the courtroom, so that everybody in the neighborhood may hear all that is going on. The London *Times* is to take a column of cable matter every day; and the Paris *Figaro* the same. My looks, my gestures, the fit of my trousers, the color of my tie, will be dis-

well refused to go. Hence our journey to the swamp. Up to the last moment, I am really solemnly to swear I was willing to spare him if he had shown the least inclination to further my plans.

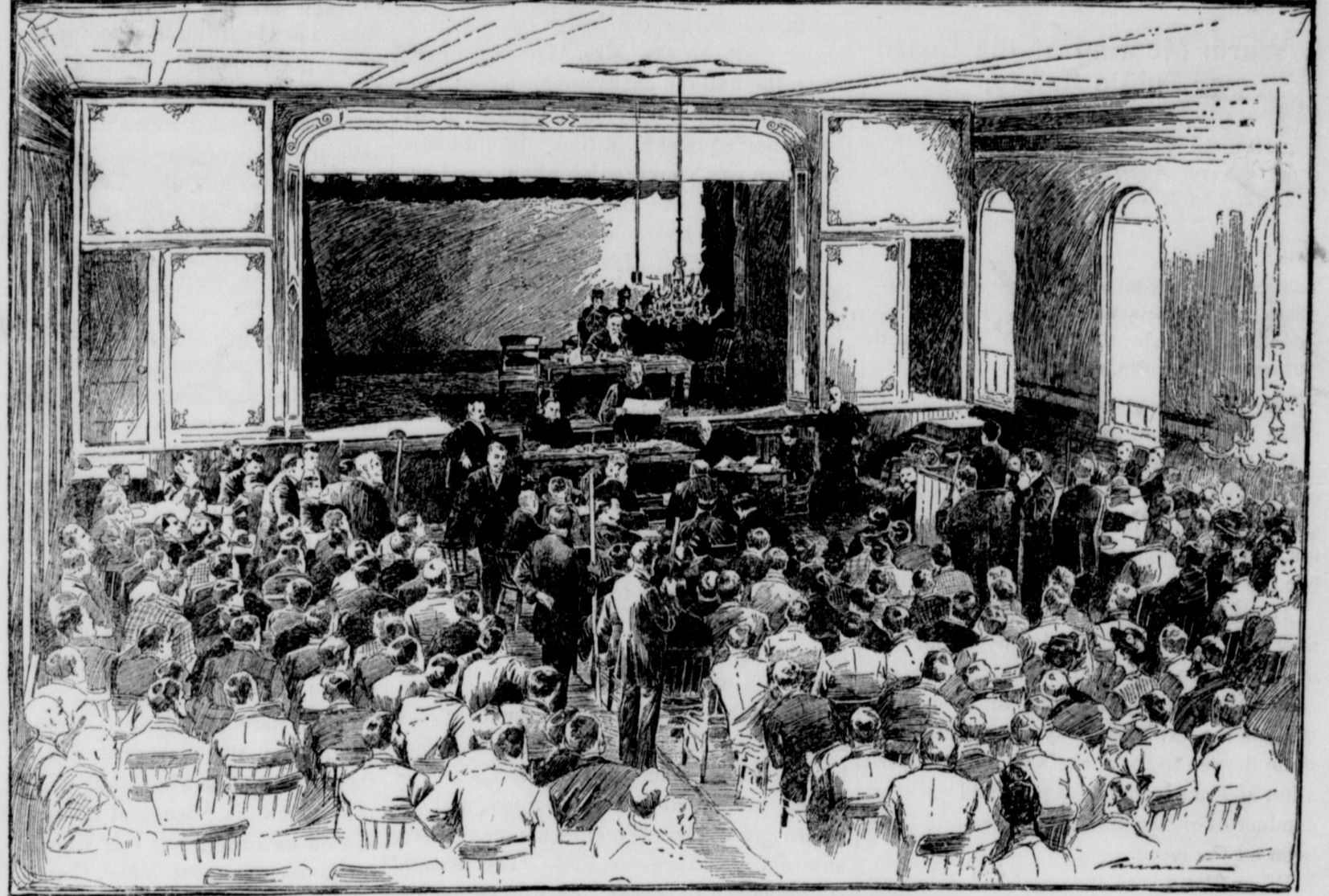
And now? Supposing Osler can prove all he says? I wonder if the jury would think it convincing? They look like a lot of pig-headed farmers, narrow and provincial, and the mere fact that blood has been spilled in this county seems to have sent them against me. But they can't hang me—they aren't. "To be hanged by the neck until you are dead." What a horrible thought! It is to be strangled, choked, cut off in a minute!

Bah! I'm crazy. Blackstock will get me off, and if he can't, Florence will help me.

There are easier modes of death than hanging.

Tuesday, September 23rd, evening.—Another day's agony is done. I must confess that the notoriety of the thing intoxicates me. People are coming from all over the country just to catch a glimpse of me. I wish I could wear the magnificent rig in which I used to drive my four-in-hand. As it is, in these cheap clothes I look positively insignificant. And then the sides of the prisoner's box are so comically high that nothing but the top of my head can be seen. It is hard to be imposing when one can only show the top of his head.

It was Pelly all day, as usual, then Charles Benwell, looking frightfully like his brother; then a



THE TRIAL IN THE TOWN HALL.

surveyor who measured the distance from Eastwood to the swamp—the prosecution are working like demons to convict me; then the men who found the body, and then the men who buried it.

When they first began to go into details about—well, about what they found in the swamp—I confess I felt a kind of sickening; just the feeling that came over me when they examined the body. It isn't half so hard to kill a man as to look at him when he is dead, and if I get clear of this charge, they will glare at me as he lay on his back amongst the tamaracks and cedars will haunt me till I die. One doesn't think of these things at the time. They are the penalty of murder after it is committed.

Be that as it may, everything seems to be going smoothly. Blackstock says that the jury can't convict on evidence so loose as this.

The shadow of the gallows is yet a long way off.

Wednesday, September 24th, evening.—I'm beginning to get despondent. All day long they have been keeping up a fusillade of incriminating facts. One doctor, boarding-house keeper, pay-telegraph operator, postmaster, meteorological expert, and a shoal of people who talked to me at Princeton poured in their evidence. It looks black, black as thunder. Why did I spin so many different yarns about Benwell's whereabouts? If I had kept my mouth closed, they would never have suspected me.

If it all goes against me, Florence won't fall me. She knows where to get just what I want.

But have I the courage, even for that? It's easy, in court, with a multitude of eyes looking on, to show nerve. But here, in this solitude, with no company but the ballet-girls on the walls—that's different, different altogether.

Thursday, September 25th, evening.—The farmers have had their innings. They all remember the day of the murder by the holding of Duke's bail. I ought to have heard of that, had before. Were it not for a solemnity like that, one day so resembles another in the mind of these yokels that they couldn't possibly fix it in their memory.

The hand of destiny would, indeed, be shown if I were condemned to death because Mr. Jerry Duke, an innkeeper, chose to give a dance on a certain night to the lads and lasses of Princeton.

Florence was not in court. Blackstock had no need of her, I suppose. But Alice Smith was there, saucy and pretty as of old. I couldn't resist the temptation of speaking to her at Eastwood. Rex, turns, when could you withstand the attraction of a fair young face? We all have to pay for it, one day or another; and this is, I suppose, my day.

Friday, September 26th, evening.—Thank heaven, the defense has begun. Blackstock's idea, as I understand it, is to before the jury. Those two fellows, Baker and Colwell, were hanging about the swamp and getting drunk. Why shouldn't they have been with me when I shot Duke's bail?

Then there's John Rabb and Rachael Schultz, who swear they heard the shots on Tuesday. It's evident they know nothing of Duke's bail, and had nothing to do with the date by. Lucky for me that they hadn't.

Nothing yet from Florence; not a line; not a word. Though my witnesses are beginning to testify, I feel desperately in the blues.

Saturday, September 27th, 2 p. m.—Half a session; nothing done. Two witnesses swear they saw me at Woodstock on the day of the murder. I doubt if the jury believes them.

Sunday, September 28th, evening.—Day of rest for the lawyers, but no day of rest for me. Every hour of thought convinces me of the impotence of my defence. The jurors have made up their minds; I am satisfied of that. Whenever one of them turns his eyes in my direction, there's a fixed and dogged look in his eye.

They are going to hang me.

If I could only escape. Their bars don't seem so exceptionally strong. Mr. Markey, that clever fellow on the local paper, says that nobody believes I shall die by hanging. And why should I? Why

(Continued on Fourth page.)



WHERE THE MURDERED BENWELL WAS FOUND.

doesn't deafen you, I'll show you how we will get along."

Whereupon, the submissive wife having seated herself, his lordship produced the draft of an advertisement setting forth that a young University man, having a farm in Canada, wished to enter into partnership with a young Englishman of means.

"If that bait doesn't catch a gudgeon," said Mr. Reginald Birchall, "I have studied my countrymen in vain."

"But where is your farm?" asked the wife.

"In my mind's eye, Horatio," replied his lordship.

"But supposing you had persuaded some young man to come, what would you do with him when he was here?"

coating of muddy ice lay on the surface of the Bottomless Lake. Three farmers were trudging among the charred stumps, and pushing the tangled wood aside.

"Who fired?" cried George Fredenburg, suddenly, as two shots, in quick succession, rang out among the trees.

"Not I," cried John Higginson, following the trail just ahead of him.

"Nor I," shouted George Macdonald, from a distance.

"Guess it's John Rabb," said Fredenburg, listening a moment longer. "The old fool thinks we are lost. As though we were going to lose ourselves on the day of Duke's ball, eh, John?"

The thought of the dance that was to take place that night at Jerry Duke's Hotel, in Princeton, and of the pretty girls who

Reginald Birchall, Mrs. Reginald Birchall, Mr. Douglas Pelly, a blond young Englishman, whom they had brought from Liverpool, were discussing trivialities, while Mr. Baldwin was reading the morning paper.

"Well," said Mrs. Baldwin, suddenly, "the body found in Blenheim Swamp has been identified."

Mr. Reginald Birchall, who was raising a teaspoon to his mouth, let it drop with a clatter into his cup.

"What—aw—was the poor devil's name?" asked Mr. Pelly, languidly.

"F. C. Benwell," said Mr. Baldwin.

"Great God!" cried Pelly, rising hastily. "That's terrible," said Mr. Birchall, never budging.

Mrs. Birchall sat white as death.

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