



DOINGS OF THE DUFFS—



CHAPTER I
The Rumor
MARK BRENDON, at 35, already stood high in the criminal investigation department of the police. He was indeed about to receive an inspectorship.

Mark was taking holiday on Dartmoor, devoting himself to his hobby of trout fishing and accepting the opportunity to survey his own life from a bird's-eye point of view, measure his achievement and consider impartially his future, not only as a detective, but as a man.

He found himself with £5,000 saved as a result of some special grants during the war and a large honorarium from the French government. He was also in possession of a handsome salary and the prospect of promotion, when seen in marked contrast to most other date. Too intelligent to find all that life had to offer in his work alone, he now began to think of culture, of human pleasures, and these added interests and responsibilities that a wife and family would offer.

He was somewhat overworn after a strenuous year, but to Dartmoor he always came for health and rest when opportunity offered, and now he had returned for the third time to the Duchy Hotel at Princetown. Being a good talker, he never failed of an audience there. But better still, he liked an hour sometimes with the prison warden. For the convict prison that dominated that gray smudge in the heart of the moors known as Princetown held many interesting and famous criminals.



THE STRANGER STOPPED AS HE SAW BRENDON.

He had found an unknown spot where some good trout dwelt and on an evening in mid-June he set forth to tempt them. He had discovered certain deep pools in a disused quarry fed by a streamlet.

Fogginton Quarry, wherein lay these preserves, might be approached in two ways. Originally broken into the granite bosom of the moor for stone to build the bygone war prison of Princetown, a road still extended to the deserted spot and joined the main thoroughfare half a mile distant.

Brendon, however, came hither by a direct path over the moors. Leaving Princetown railway station upon his left hand he set his face west where the waste heaved out before him dark against a blaze of light from the sky.

Against the western flame appeared a figure carrying a basket. Mark Brendon, with thoughts on the evening rise of the trout, lifted his face at a light footfall. Whereupon there passed by him the fairest woman he had ever known. She was slim and not very tall. She wore no hat and the auburn of her hair, piled high above her forehead, tangled the warm sunset beams and burned like a halo round her head. And she had blue

eyes—blue as the gentian. Their size impressed Brendon.

She walked quickly with a good stride and her slight, silvery skirts and rosy, silken jumper showed her figure clearly enough—her round hips and firm, girlish bosom.

Her eyes met his for a moment with a frank, trustful expression, then she had passed.

The vision made Mark pensive, as sudden beauty will, and he wondered about the girl.

Tramping forward now the detective came to a great crater that gaped on the hillside and stood above the dead quarry workings of Fogginton. Underneath him opened a cavity with sides 200 feet high.

Mark proceeded to the extreme breadth of the quarry, fifty yards northerly, and stood above two wide, still pools in the midst. Trout moved and here and there circles of light widened on the water and rippled to the cliff beyond.

Mark set up his sport, yet felt that a sort of unfamiliar division had come into his mind and, while he brought two tiny-eyed flies from a box and fastened them to the hair-like leader he always used, there persisted the thought of the auburn girl—her eyes blue as April—her swift, delicate tread.

He began to fish as the light thickened; but he only cast once or twice and then decided to wait half an hour.

He ground his rod and brought briar pipe and a pouch of tobacco from his pocket. The things of day were turning to slumber; but still there persisted a clinking sound, uttered monotonously from time to time, which the sportsman supposed to be a bird. It came from behind the great acciellies that ran opposite his place by the pools. Brendon suddenly perceived that it was no natural noise that arose from some human activity. It was, in fact, the musical note of a mason's trowel, and when presently it ceased, he was annoyed to hear heavy footstep in the quarry.

A big, broad man approached him, clad in a Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers and a red waistcoat and gaudy brass buttons.

The stranger stopped as he saw Brendon, straddled his great legs, took a cigar from his mouth and spoke.

"Ah! You've found 'em, then?"

"Found what?" asked the detective.

"Found these trout. I come here for a swim sometimes. I've wondered why I never saw a rod in this hole. There are a dozen half-pounders there and possibly some bigger ones."

It was Mark's instinctive way to study all fellow creatures with whom he came in contact.

He saw a pair of broad shoulders and a thick neck over which hung a square, hard jaw and a determined chin. Then came a big mouth and the largest pair of mustaches Brendon remembered to have observed on any countenance. They were of a foxy red, and beneath them flashed large, white teeth when the big man talked in rather grating tones. His hair was a fiery red, cut close, and of a hue yet more violent than his mustaches.

The big man appeared friendly, though Brendon heartily wished him away.

"This bally place seems to bewitch people," said the big man.

The other laughed. "There is a magic here. It gets into your blood."

"So it does. A man I know is building himself a bungalow out here. He and his wife will be just as happy as a pair of wood pigeons—at least they think so."

"I heard a trowel clinking."

"Yes, I lend a hand sometimes when the workmen are gone. But think of it—to turn your back on civilization and make yourself a home in a desert!"

"Might do worse—if you've got no ambitions."

"Yes—ambition is not their strong point. They think love's enough—poor souls. Why don't you fish?"

"Waiting for it to get a bit darker."

"Well, so long. Take care you don't catch anything that'll pull you in."

Laughing at his joke the red man strode off through the gap fifty yards distant. Then in the stillness Mark heard the purr of a machine. He had evidently departed upon a motor bicycle to the main road half a mile distant.

When he was gone Brendon rose and strolled down to the other entrance of the quarry that he might see the bungalow of which the stranger had spoken.

The day grew very dim and the fret of light and shadow died off the earth, leaving all vague and vague and featureless.

Brendon returned to his sport and found a small "coachman" fly sufficiently destructive. The two pools yielded a dozen trout, of which he kept six and returned the rest to the water.

Tramping back under the stars, his thoughts drifted to the auburn girl of the moor.

Four evenings after his first fishing expedition to the quarries, Mark devoted a morning to the lower waters of the Meavy River; at the end of that day, not far short of midnight, when glasses were empty and pipes knocked out, half a dozen men, just about to retire, heard a sudden and evil report.

Will Blake, "Boots" at the Duchy Hotel, was waiting to extinguish the lights, and seeing Brendon he said:

"There's something in your line happened, master, but the look of it is a pretty bobber tomorrow."

"A convict escaped. Will?" asked the detective, yawning and longing for bed.

"That's about the only fun you get up here, isn't it?"

"Convict escaped? No—a man done in, seemingly. Mr. Pendean's uncle-in-law have slaughtered Mr. Pendean by the looks of it."

"And who is Mr. Pendean?"

"The gentleman what's building the bungalow down to Fogginton."

Mark started. The big red man had come to his mind complete in every physical feature. He described him and Will Blake replied:

"That's the chap that's done it. That's the gentleman's uncle-in-law."

Tanlac is for sale by all good drugists. Accept no substitute. Over 87 million bottles sold.

Tanlac Vegetable Pills are Nature's own remedy for constipation. For sale everywhere.—Advertisement.

Mrs. Annie Page, highly esteemed resident of 3238 Main Street, Penbrook, Pa., is another who is enjoying splendid health as a result of the Tanlac treatment.

"Whoa! Tanlac has done for me," said Mrs. Page, "is too wonderful for words to express. For six or seven years I had been troubled with rheumatism in my arms. I couldn't even wash the dishes, or peel the potatoes, and, in fact, my arms were just about useless."

"My health was also bad otherwise. My stomach was all out of order. I couldn't get a good night's sleep and often had dizzy headaches. I had just about given up hope of ever getting well."

"But Tanlac helped me from the start and now I haven't a rheumatic pain or an ailment of any kind. I eat and sleep like a child, and while I am 63, I don't feel a bit over 40. Nothing is too good to say for Tanlac."

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Man desired to tell him all they knew, did he show the least interest.

He was just slipping on a raincoat and about to leave the hotel when Will Blake appeared and handed him a letter.

He felt curious and, not associating the incident with the ruined crime, set down his rod and creel, opened the note, and read what was written:

"3 Station Cottages, Princetown.

"Dear Sir: The police have told me

that you are in Princetown, and it seems as though Providence had sent you. I fear that I have no right to seek your services directly, but if you can answer the prayer of a heart-broken woman and give her the benefit of your genius in this dark moment, she would be unspeakably thankful.

"Faithfully yours,

"JENNY PENDEAN."

Mark Brendon murmured "damn" gently under his breath. Then he

DOINGS OF THE DUFFS—

Entertaining Danny

—By ALLMAN



OUT OUR WAY—By WILLIAMS



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