

The Red Lock

A Tale of the Flatwoods

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THE FOOTPRINT

SYNOPSIS.—On the banks of the Wabash stand Texie Collin and Jack Warhope, young and very much in love. Texie is the only daughter of old Pap Simon, rich man and money-lender. Jack is the orphan boy of Pap Simon who had foreclosed a mortgage on the Warhopes estate. At first Texie and Jack talk sadly of Ken Collin, the girl's missing brother. Then Jack says that in ten days his servitude will be over, that he will ride out into the big world to seek his fortune. Both know what that will mean to them. Texie and Jack talk of the red lock of "Red Collin," inherited by Ken. And Jack says he's coming back as soon as he finds gold in California. Then arrives the new preacher, Rev. Caleb Hopkins. Pap Simon introduces the villagers to the new preacher, who was a college mate of Ken. At supper at the Collin home the preacher tells how the boy killed a gambler and disappeared. His father attributes Ken's fall from grace to his red lock of hair. Then Pap Simon has a sort of stroke, brought on by reading a letter from Ken, "somewhere in New York," who curses his father as his death bed. A postscript by another hand says he is dead. At the village store and post office Loge Reiden, a newcomer, says he saw the new parson with his arm around Texie. Jack licks him, shoots a pistol from his hand and makes him say he was mistaken. The preacher and the villagers go fishing. Jack discovers the preacher carries a six-gun.

CHAPTER V—Continued.

"Mud haul—" he muttered; "is it far?"

"Mile 'r so," grunted Uncle Nick, as he stooped over the seine, helping spread the meshes straight.

"I really should not remain away from the study so long," the preacher pursued. "I must have time to collect my thoughts somewhat, as I understand I shall be expected to make a few remarks at the festival tonight."

Uncle Nick leered around at him.

"An' them remarks will be few, parson. I 'low y'u needn' t' worry y'r head about them remarks none. Ther'll be another scent in the air 't'night."

The old man winked at Counterman, nudged off down the sandbar to the live box, dragged it up along the edge of the stream and hitched it to the stern of the skiff. He had hardly finished when Jack and Counterman came with the seine.

The preacher came last, his eyes still drawn irresistibly up the river.

"Is there not some—other place?" he asked, reluctantly taking his seat in the bow, "some—nearer place?"

Uncle Nick studied him out of his deep-set eyes. He was a guest, in a



Guest and Preacher Though He Was, He Was Still a Tenderfoot.

sense, and he was—the preacher. The old man's face became thoughtful; he glanced at Counterman.

"Thar's Grassy bar," he muttered; half questioned, "an' thar's Yaller branch—"

Counterman spit out into the river—a preliminary that usually had to be attended to before he spoke.

"Grassy bar," he repeated thoughtfully, peering over his shoulder at the preacher in the bow, as if he too had caught something of Uncle Nick's considerations. "Hit's better 'r spearin'. An' Yaller branch"—he glanced up at the sun; swept sky and river with his puckered one eye—"t'day's too glary. Hit ain't deep enough. No, I'm fr Mud haul. They'll be scrooched in thar thick as bees around a haw tree."

The decision seemed final. The

preacher glanced again up the river, and pulled the faded straw hat farther down over his head as if afraid of sunburn.

"Is it dreadfully—muddy?" he mumbled.

Guest and preacher though he was, he was still a tenderfoot. Counterman's raucous laugh exposed the huge wad of tobacco between his jaws. Nick took the unlighted pipe from between his lips, and his roar wheeled a wisp of sand snipe that happened at the moment to be glancing up the bar.

"Not as muddy as it—sounds," he chuckled, grabbing a match out of his trousers pocket.

That settled it. The preacher, apparently resigned to whatever further hardships fate might have in store for him, sat watching the shore line, with its witchery of lapping water, its bordering fringe of pebbles and white shells, draw slowly by.

The fishermen landed. The live box was hitched to a stake as before, the half-reluctant preacher left to hold the brail stick, while the others rowed out and around the fifty yards or more of murky water that lay between the point and the shore.

Hardly had the circuit been completed when it began to be apparent that Counterman's judgment would be amply justified.

The final haul proved to be much the best of the day. The good fish were dropped into the live box, the others tossed back into the river, and the fishermen set about preparing to return to the village. The brail sticks were united, the seine rolled up, and the woodman walked up the bar for the boat.

He stooped over the craft, possibly recalling the circumstance of the six-gun concealed in the frock coat; laid his hand to the bow to push it off; straightened after a moment, walked some distance farther up the bar and stood gazing intently toward the narrow upper end of the arm of water where it disappeared under the overlapping branches of trees and tangled vines. Snuggled away under the tangle, in a manner that must have made it practically invisible, except from that one point, lay a small houseboat.

A trifling circumstance enough—houseboats were common on the Wabash—but why there? The place was dark and dank, the bank boggy, and there was no spring short of Alpine island. The woodman turned and motioned to his companions.

They had been watching him and at his sign came trooping up the bar—the preacher fagged and lagging behind—and gathered around him. Following the direction of his finger, they peered in under the overlapping trees.

Counterman grinned around at the others after a moment and jerked his thumb back toward the skiff.

"S'posin' we row up an' pay 'im a visit? I'd like t' see a man with sich an eye 'r a campin' place."

Uncle Nick tossed up his chin, grunted, and led the way down the bar to where he had beached the boat.

The preacher appeared to be considerably vexed at the further prolongation of a trip that was growing more and more irksome to him. It might almost have been imagined that a frown ruffled the studious primness of his brow. But as the skiff glided up the narrowing arm of dead water, he appeared to get himself in hand again. The frown disappeared and his air became that of a man only mildly interested in what went on about him.

There is little formality among men of the river and the woods—a fine enough delicacy, though, when big moments come. They brought the bow of the skiff up under the stern of the secluded little craft and climbed aboard.

There was both a fore and an aft door to the tiny cabin that occupied the whole mid-section of the deck, but no windows on either side. Both doors were heavily padlocked—a further proof of the owner's exclusiveness. On the dusty boards there were a number of footprints, some of them—curiously enough—made by a boot that must have been stylish, even dainty.

Uncle Nick leaned upon the railing of the forward deck and prodded his pipe, while the one-eyed fisherman gnawed himself a fresh chew from a sweaty plug that he claved up out of his overalls pocket, the two of them generalizing on the circumstance of stylish boot tracks, no windows and padlocked doors.

The preacher had joined in the discussion and was just telling them, in his half-bored drawl, that it might be some naturalist taking unusual pains to preserve his specimens, when Jack Warhope, still standing in the skiff and holding it to the stern of the houseboat, picked up one of the shiny boots from the preacher's stack of clothes in the bow, and, hidden from the others by the cabin, pressed the heel of it down hard beside one of the heel-prints on the dusty after-deck.

The two prints coincided perfectly.

CHAPTER VI

Mettle of the Minister.

The Buckeye schoolhouse stood on the extreme west side of the village. A plain one-room building of the general type of the period—paint gone; weather-beaten; no belfry; no ornamentation; three windows on each side; a chimney at the back; a out-ter door in front.

The "festival" in celebration of the close of school was a distinct event at Buckeye.

The pupils' desks had been removed and placed around the walls. A long table extended across the rear. The rest of the room was clear, except for the great box stove that stood in the center of the floor, rusty red, and huge enough and deep enough to swallow a stick of cord-wood whole.

Everything was free, each family that sent children to school bringing a well-filled basket. And such a feast as the housewives of the neighborhood furnished forth could have been found nowhere else in the land except there in the great Flatwoods that lay, warped and wild, along the north bank of the upper Wabash.

Uncle Nick was there—which meant that things were not likely to drag, for he was the wisest, wittiest, and, as he himself said, "the no-accountest" man in the Flatwoods—a free-and-easy, happy-go-lucky, catch-as-catch-can sort of man.

He had been a great hunter and border ranger in his time, having come to the Wabash country when it was still the frontier and the Indians made it dangerous. Nearly forty years before, a man in his pride and prime, he had been one of Harrison's most trusted scouts, and had borne an honorable part in the grim and deadly struggle that took place in the early dawn upon that swamp-bound point of woodland on the Tippecanoe.

Aunt Lisa, the "other half" of Uncle Nick, was there too. But if he had an oversupply of jollity in his disposition, she had a far greater oversupply of grimness. Aunt Lisa was the one person in the world on whom Uncle Nick's wit fell flat.

In all matters pertaining to their few acres of bottom land, and in their cabin home a little way up Eagle Hollow road, her word was law.

Uncle Nick was perched upon one of the deaks, his back to the wall, his eyes twinkling merrily, already an in-



He Was Raking Over His Scant Stock of Words for One That Would Fit the Occasion.

terested audience around him roared at his drollery, when Jack Warhope pushed his way through the jam of men and boys at the door and joined the aimlessly sauntering crowd in the schoolhouse.

The Reverend Caleb Hopkins arrived, as he had promised—he and Texie and Mrs. Mason. He had been anxiously awaited, since it had long been the custom to have the minister sit at the first table and launch the "festival" with a blessing.

Zake Pollock—likewise by ancient custom, a sort of self-appointed master of ceremonies—his sharp hatched face scrubbed shiny with home-made soap perfumed with sassafras, pounced on the preacher and hurried him to the head of the table, with Widow Mason on his right, Miss Martin, the teacher, on his left, and as many pupils as possible lined up along the sides of the bounteous board.

The preacher's remarks were short—simple; concise; every sentence packed with thought; every gesture alive with grace. No speaker could have asked a better audience. He had been well heralded and expectation was at keener pitch. And no speaker ever better improved his opportunity. The speech ended while the audience was still hungry to hear more—a trick that many a less brilliant speaker might well copy. He turned back to the table and raised his hand. The two long rows of youngsters stood in awkwardly decorous expectancy. The low tones of the solemn grace fell softly impressive; the minister resumed his seat; a deep breath swept down the two rows of hungry urchins; and—the "festival" was on.

A good length of the candles in the windows had burned away when Jack, sauntering aimlessly in the crowd, found himself, for the first time that evening, face to face with Texie, where she leaned over Mrs. Mason's chair.

The girl looked up and smiled. He was raking over his scant stock of words for one that would fit the occasion—words being about the hardest things he had to reckon with—when the young preacher, suave and affable, by odds the most popular man in the house, joined the group.

Through the mind of Jack Warhope flashed a comparison between the preacher and himself. The comparison showed dead against him. For the first time in his life he was half ashamed of his ungainly clothes, of the great limbs, the massive chest and shoulders—the "six-foot-three" of bone and brawn upon which the Flatwoods had exhausted its utmost imagination, its ultimate romance, when it bestowed the title: Big Jack.

"The preacher slowly raised an arm and pointed toward the open door.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

The TWO CHRISTMAS PRESENTS



The Mourlines

No; this Christmas story from the New York Tribune was not written to the order of the Spurge Society for the Prevention of Useless Giving. It is a story from far-away France, translated from the French of Frederic Boutet by William L. McPherson. Nevertheless, the Mourlines are to be found in every American city and their name is legion. May they come to a better understanding of the Christmas spirit.—John Dickinson Sherman.

By FREDERIC BOUTET

MAID Mme. Mourline: "And the Jullins—we must think of them. What are we going to give them this year?"

Mme. Mourline's question put a damper on the gaiety of her husband and her daughter.

A chill seemed to settle down in the dining room, where they were all three still sitting about the table and talking. M. Mourline had just promised his wife an umbrella with an ivory handle and his daughter a coral necklace. He was pleased with himself. Now he looked worried. Simone Mourline, who was eighteen and had set her heart on the necklace, also became uneasy.

"Yes," Mme. Mourline repeated with emphasis, "what are we going to give the Jullins?"

"That's right! That's right! What are we going to give them?" M. Mourline murmured.

"You understand it must be something nice this year. We'll have to stand the extra cost somehow. I know it is a nuisance. This Christmas season is abominable. We have all sorts of additional expenses!"

"But, mamma, we never spent much on presents for the Jullins," Simone interrupted. "Last year their little basket cost only eighteen francs, and it was perfectly good enough."

"I don't see it that way, Simone! You don't take into account that formerly, when the Jullins were no better off than we are, we could make them gifts without any particular value, any little trifles such as they gave us. But that isn't possible now, when they have an income of 150,000 francs."

As if to render homage to that sum she had involuntarily raised her voice. The Jullins, whose fortune dated back only a few months, were the Mourlines' best friends. Jullin and Mourline, fellow students at law school and afterward employees in the same government department, had met at the same entertainment the two young women, well brought up but without dowries, whom they had made their wives. The two households—each had



The Jullins

a single daughter—possessed about the same resources and lived in a similar manner. For years they enjoyed a tranquil intimacy, sharing the same modest pleasures and striving to be mutually sympathetic and agreeable.

An unexpected event had shattered this intimacy. M. Jullin's brother, considered up to then a black sheep, had suddenly acquired a fortune through some risky operations which had succeeded beyond all expectation. Intoxicated by his wealth, so miraculously attained, he wanted, as he said, to make up for lost time. After two years of excesses he died. The Jullins, his only heirs, found themselves millionaires. Certainly they had remained the same to their dear friends, the Mourlines. M. Jullin exhibited no pride because he was able to quit the government's service and spend his days driving an automobile. Mme. Jullin avoided all ostentation in wearing her collar of pearls and Mme. Mourline always found Simone's simple dresses charming. But the Mourlines without wishing to show it or even to admit it, suffered all the same from a feeling of inequality. They no longer took any pleasure in associating with their old friends. Money had come between the two families, like a barrier which neither could ignore.

"Come," Mme. Mourline began again, addressing her husband, "you know I am right. It is a question of dignity. We have had to endure a good deal since they became rich. I don't envy them or criticize them, but you must admit that it isn't agreeable to entertain them here in this little apartment, with a single maid of all work, and afterward to dine with them at their home, where everything is in grand style, with a butler and valet de chambre. They do put on airs. They lack tact. It amuses them, after having been with us, to overwhelm us with

chased was a handsome jardiniere. It cost 340 francs. It put a great strain on the family budget. But the Mourlines had the consciousness of having done the proper thing, and on Christmas morning they awaited with perfect security the arrival of the present from the Jullins.

There was a ring at the doorbell. It was a message from the Jullins, with a package and a letter.

The letter read:

"Dear Friends—We send you only a little souvenir. Nothing at all! We are sure that we shall give you pleasure in offering you, as in the past, a knickknack which has no value except that it represents an old and faithful friendship."

In the package was a miserable little bonbonniere in painted porcelain, worth about twelve and a half francs.

There was a silence charged with astonishment and indignation.

"Is that the Jullins' magnificent present?" said Simone at last.

Mme. Mourline trembled with anger. She seized the bonbonniere and dashed it to pieces on the marble hearth.

"That's what I care for their old friendship!"

M. Mourline made an ironic gesture. "Meanwhile they have your jardiniere at 340 francs!"

M. Jullin, in fact, was unwrapping the jardiniere at that very moment. Seeing it, he gave a start and called his wife.

"Look at the present the Mourlines have sent us. They certainly are fools!"

"Poor people," murmured Mme. Jullin, "they bled themselves white for this! Isn't it pitiful, in their situation? I tell you again, Adrien, we can't associate with them any longer. Merely as a matter of consideration for them we can't. Out of sheer vanity they would impoverish themselves."

How Is It With Us at Christmas Time?

SOFTLY, I think, at first, then swelling louder, clearer, more triumphantly, the first Christmas song rang over the waiting earth as The Child was laid in a manger on that night so long ago; the child who, whatever view is taken of Him and His miraculous birth, is Master of the world.

For unto you is born this day, in the City of David, A Saviour, which is Christ, the Lord.—North-south-east-west. There was no room for Him that night, except in a manger bed. How is it in this year? Is there room for Him in your home—your heart? As we celebrate His birth with song and story today, with lighted candles, fragrant greens, a warmer surge of love for home and friends, are we

membering His quiet, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me?" Are our thoughts occupied entirely with the celebration we are preparing, the friends we are expecting, the gifts we plan to purchase and receive? Or are we listening that we may perchance, catch once more a note of angel wings sweeping over the earth, leaving behind an echo of that first night, "Christ the Lord"—P. H. Sweet.

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