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QUIMBY'S BONANZA

By EDGAR MAYHEW BACON,

Author of "The Fugitives of Tezco," etc.

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SYNOPSIS.

Nathaniel Quimby, a bachelor of 40, having unexpectedly come into a little money, fulfills the desire of his life, and visits the seashore for the first time. He goes to Taggert's station, on the New England coast, and while there is induced to buy a barren neck of land, jutting out into the sea. A storm arising the next night, he leaves the tavern, and spends the night on his trip of land enjoying the war of the elements. As day breaks, he observes a wreck near the shore. He starts for the village to secure help, and on the way meets one Moses Larkin, an ex-sailorman, whose acquaintance he had previously made. They return to the wreck, and discover that it is a water-logged derelict, a lumber schooner. Larkin proposes that Quimby take possession of her, and secure salvage, and employ him to conduct the business on shares. Quimby agrees. Larkin goes out as the tide falls, and discovers that the schooner is loaded with mahogany—that she is a regular "bonanza." Among other things on board, they find the ship's papers, giving the name of the ship's agent in New York. Larkin goes to that city and learns that the captain was the owner, one Henry Martling, undoubtedly lost at sea, and with no relatives. Larkin arranges for salvage on the cargo, and Quimbo buys the vessel for her frame and copper. Quimby then announces his intention to dray the schooner up on his land and build her into a house. The whole village takes a hand at dragging her ashore. Just as this is completed a strange young lady comes up to Quimby, announces herself as Martling's daughter, and orders him to take the vessel back to the water. He refuses to do this, and she threatens him with a lawsuit. Meanwhile he recognizes her as the orignal of a photograph which he had found on the vessel, and which had much impressed him by its attractive face, but he sticks to what he believes are his rights, nevertheless.

PART III.

The captain's daughter brought suit against the owner of Flack's Neck as she said that she would. She was careful to explain to the lawyer whom she retained that the bargain made by Dunn & Dunn was probably a very good one and she had no quarrel personally with Mr. Quimby, who seemed to be a very estimable sort of a man, but that being a New England woman she hoped that she would never allow feeling to stand in the way of principle and duty. Clearly, she argued, to sell her property without her knowledge or consent was an infringement of her rights, and if she, a lone woman, did not stand up for her own rights she would feel somehow unworthy of Bunker Hill and the Declaration of Independence.

The lawyer twiddled his thumbs and contracted his brows and tried to look as though he was giving serious attention to what his client was saying, but in reality he was listening only to her voice, and for that, being a very young man, he would have undertaken to litigate for the moon if she had happened to claim it. It did occur to him to ask a question or two which seemed to have an indirect bearing upon the case. When the wreck had been restored to the beach what did Miss Martlign propose to do with it?

She had not considered that matter at all. It would be time enough when the suit was won.

In the meantime Quimby and Moses were disturbed by an unthought of contingency. Just when they had completed the plans for the doors and partitions; after consultations that were always earnest and sometimes warm; and Moses had "got out the stuff" for these architectural changes and improvements, the proprietor was served with an injunction, restraining him from cutting, sawing, or removing any portoin of the woodwork of the Molly B, of Bangor, or making any addition thereto of any character whatsoever.

"Look a-here," said Moses. "I ain't been injuncted and what's to prevent my doin' the work on my own responsibility?"

"That wouldn't do," said Nathaniel. "Law is law, and I'm going to abide by it. But it looks like hard luck all the same."

"I see that woman in the village, an' she asked me to say to you that ef you ain't no objection she calc'lated to come down an' look over what truck her pa lef' onto the derelick."

Moses paused and Nathaniel turned with a livelier interest than he had shown in anything since the lawyer's clerk had brought the restraining injunction.

"What did you tell her?"

"Waal," drawled Moses, "I told her that I reckoned you had no objections enough to havin' anybody what was lawin' you a prowlin' about your property." As the sailor finished this speech he looked serenely conscious of having done his whole duty in a manner that was above criticism, so that the vehemence of Nathaniel's rejoinder startled him. "You go up to the village and tell that lady that you made the biggest mistake you ever made in your life. Tell her—no, hold on. I'll write her a note." Full of this purpose he rose and started for the village, leaving his henchman in a state of bewilderment that could find no expression.

This was the note that Quimby wrote after an afternoon of laborious thought:

"Miss Martling, Dear Madam: I have just been informed that a certain person that did not know what he was talking about, and taking a good deal upon himself, which I never authorized him to do, and which I have been very much put out about, and wish to offer you an apology for the same, told you that I didn't want that you should come to the wreck, which is in perfectly natural you should want to come seeing that it was your pa's ship, and he having, as it were, spent his last days on board her (all excepting the very final sad scene of all, when I don't doubt he wished he was back on the ship), I want you to know that you are perfectly welcome at all times to come and go as you please, and as for my caring because you are lawing me about the wreck, it don't make any difference about your coming there. I mean because I judge you are just standing up for what you think is your rights, same as I am standing up for mine. Yours, respectfully, Nathaniel Quimby."

Her Feelings Toward the Writer Softened Wonderfully.

Miss Martling was nettled at Moses' blunt rejection of her overture, and did not doubt that it echoed the sentiments of his master. So it was with a harder feeling than she had yet cherished towards her legal adversary that she went to the village postoffice the next morning. When she received Quimby's letter and had read it, her feelings toward the writer softened wonderfully. "Why," she said to herself, "he's just as sweet and kind as he can be. I wish it was the other nasty old thing I was fighting."

Of course, she accepted the invitation and went to the Neck; and, equally of course, being a woman, she was looking her prettiest. When Moses saw her coming, he merely remarked: "There's a woman;" and took himself out of the way, going to the extreme end of the Neck, where he sat in the sand and contemplated the ruined timbers of the Phoebe. Nathaniel rose and advanced to meet his visitor, conscious of her grace and beauty, and his awkwardness and freckled homeliness, conscious of the fact that they were adversaries at law, conscious of everything except that she was looking at him with very kindly interest.

"Mr. Quimby, I got your letter, and I couldn't do anything else till I had come down to thank you."

"Now, don't say anything about that. You're more than welcome, ma'am, I'm sure," he interrupted. "Of course I know how you must feel about it, and it's proper." As he spoke he led the way to the wreck. Passing under the stern of the vessel, Miss Martling looked up at the name, not quite as bright as when painted, but still clearly legible, on the stern. "That looks very natural," she said. "Poor father; nothing would suit him but to have that name, though I didn't want him to."

"It's a very pretty name, I'm sure," responded her companion, rather from a desire to say something agreeable than from any deep conviction.

"Do you think so?" she turned toward him with a smile. "I'm afraid you just say that to be flattering, Mr. Quimby."

"Why, no, ma'am," answered honest Quimby. "I am not a good judge of names—women's names, I mean, but I thought that name had a sort of pleasant sound, as if it was the name of somebody that the captain cared considerably about."

"I thought you knew," she repeated (though why she thought so was a mystery), "that is my name."

Quimby's heart inside of him gave a decided jump, and to the very center of it he rejoiced that he had praised the name. Molly—Molly B— Molly B Martling—suddenly it occurred to him that she had been an unobservant fool not to have discovered long ago that it was not only a very pretty, but an entirely fascinating name. "Molly B., of Bangor," he read again, in a voice that unconsciously tried to pronounce the words so as to bring out all their latent music, and the effort must have been partly successful, for the real Molly at his side blushed, and then Quimby blushed between all his freckles, and thought that she must think him a very rude and familiar fellow.

Silence between them now till they reached the cabin hatch. Quimby stopped there and pointed down. "I guess you'll find everything below 'bout as we found it. I'm afraid you'll be disappointed some, for the things were rattled around a good deal. I don't think you can make much out of the papers, but I had 'em out in the sun to kind of dry them. You don't want that I should go down with you I judge, but if you need anything or want to know about anything, just call out and I'll be around here somewhere."

With a look of gratitude for this delicate courtesy, Miss Martling went below and Quimby took up his station on the sunny sand beside the hull. But there was no call for him and an hour went by, during which the young woman was having a quiet cry over the wreck of those simple things which had once been her father's and Nathaniel was having a somewhat stormy session with his own conscience. He had told his guest that everything in the cabin was about as they found it, but there had been a mental reservation, for the portrait that was even now reposing in his inner coat pocket. He had sorrowfully resolved to make a clean breast of it when Miss Martling came out, a little red about the eyes, and, after a few additional words of thanks, started villageward. He had not found an opportunity to tell her.

She came again—to look at some papers, she said, and yet again, upon an equally important errand. Each time the litigants became better acquainted and a mutual esteem and liking developed, which in no way checked the progress of the suit which Miss Martling had brought "for the principle of the thing."

In all their conversations there was a tacit understanding that this subject should not be discussed. There was something entirely impersonal about the litigation. It was simply a question of rights which was to be decided.

At last the day of the trial arrived, when the momentous question of the ownership of the schooner should be settled by the court. Popular interest in the matter did not extend to Middletown, the county seat, but most of the inhabitants of Taggert's Station, especially those who had lent a hand at moving the hull, felt a personal concern in the decision.

Quimby came, attended by Moses. Miss Martling was there in company with her lawyer, but she sat apart from her adversary, and, beyond a friendly nod, they held no intercourse together.

One case in court is very much like another, and the case of Martling versus Quimby did not offer any remarkable features til the very end, when a decision in favor of the plaintiff was given and Nathaniel's counsel asked, in an audible whisper, if he should give notice of appeal.

"It Was in the Cabin, and I—"

"No," answered the client. "I won't fight it. She can have the ship." Then, without waiting for the commiseration of the landlord of the tavern or any of his Taggert Station friends, he set off for the Neck, attended, as usual, by the faithful Moses.

Miss Martling was congratulated, but she was not satisfied. She had won and was not triumphant. She tried to tell herself that justice had been done, but al the time she seemed to see Nathanil Quimby sitting disconsolate under the crooked tree, and looking at the house he had moved with such labor and would have to move back. Then, too, she considered the expense it was going to be to him. It did seem a shame that he sould be put to that cost.

Nathaniel and Moses were deep in consultation over their defeat and its consequences, when the latter arose with an expression of disgust on his weatherbeaten face.

"There's that woman again. Looky here, cap'n, 'tain't none o' my business, but if I was you I'd be tarred if I'd let her set a foot on the wreck." He stumped away in a huff, but Nathaniel, looking after him, said to himself: "Well, I guess if you were me, Moses, you would.

The interview at the start bid fair to be embarrassing. At last the visitor managed to say something about making an arrangement, being satisfied now that the right had been established, hoping that Mr. Quimby would not think hard of her, and more to the same purpose. After that Nathaniel plucked up heart of grace and told her that there was one thing he had held back, always intending to return it to her, but always finding it impossible to do so. With some such words he carefully took the photograph from the wrapping in which he had kept it, and handed it to her.

"Why!" she exclaimed; then stopped.

"It was in the cabin, and I—I thought at first it was no harm to keep it to look at it, and then—after you came, it was not—it was not easy to say anything." Then he turned and faced her with the energy of a sudden resolution.

"Miss Martling, you've got the ship and everything there is in her; let me have this picture."

Miss Martling looked down, at her dress, at her hands, at the photograph—at everything except Nathaniel's anxious eyes. But there was not a line of displeasure in her face as she replied, irrelevantly:

"Why, Mr. Quimby, that was one thing I wanted to talk with you about. You might just as well keep the Molly B. as not, now that the principle of the thing is established."

But Nathaniel got hold of her hand, photograph and all, and cried: "Miss Martling, don't you know—that is not the Molly B. I want!"

* * * * * *

An hour afterwards Moses, thinking she had gone, came to find Quimby. Then he went away again.

(The End.)

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