

A BICYCLE EPISODE. A STORY OF THE PALISADES.

BY ALFRED R. CALHOUN.

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PART I.

Mr. Van Cortland-Brown was rich, middle-aged, and a widower. In addition to these great advantages, Mr. Van Cortland-Brown had other qualifications, which, if not particular to himself, he firmly believed had given him a great lead in life's race over ordinary mortals.

He was convinced that there was not a man in the United States who had such very blue Kniekerbocker blood in his veins as himself. His intelligence was not of the highest order, nor his information the most extensive, yet he had sufficient of both to know that the name Brown was English.

Instead, he recognized the musical voice of Mrs. Floyd-Floyd Jones. The girl was his beautiful and accomplished daughter, Florence, as this time just twenty-one, and legally her own mistress.

Miss Florence Van Cortland-Brown presided over her father's beautiful summer home, at Eagle's Nest on the Palisades, overlooking what some one has called the "Lordly Hudson."

Eagle's Nest was the center of hospitality. Its doors were always open to the blue-blooded friends of Mr. Van Cortland-Brown and his daughter. The most frequent visitor during the summer of 895, was Commodore Blakely Horton-Smith, a prosperous, fine-looking young broker whose title was given him by the nearly unanimous vote of the St. George Canoe Club.

A glance to the south would have revealed the upper bay and the water-front to the attention of the group of cities by which it is surrounded. To his right the verdant hills of Westchester swept down till they knelt by the waters of the Hudson.

Yonkers, Irvington and Tarrytown, with the splendid clusters of villas on their heights above, looked more like cities of the mirage than centers of human habitation.

Mr. Van Cortland-Brown saw the tiny row-boat of the fishermen, like animated specks on the broad breast of the mighty river. He saw yachts and other sailing craft, the sails glowing like luminous opals in the storm light; and he saw the beflagged excursion steamers hastening southward from the picnic grounds up the river.

Cortland-Brown called his daughter up on the telephone to tell her not to wait lunch, as he would not be home till three o'clock. It had been raining, and the wires along the Palisades must have been crossed; but he, be that as it may, Mr. Van Cortland-Brown, instead of hearing from Miss Florence, recognized the musical voice of Mrs. Maj. Floyd-Floyd Jones, demanding: "Is that you, Col. Johnson?"

Before Mr. Van Cortland-Brown could reply, he heard the colonel saying: "Yes, my dear Mrs. Jones, I want to talk with you."

"Oh, I shall be delighted!" came the widow's exclamation over the wire. Mr. Van Cortland-Brown's face grew purple, and he stood as if paralyzed with the receiver to his ear, while this conversation took place:

Col. Johnson—Are you aware, my dear Mrs. Jones, that tomorrow is the Fourth of July?

Mrs. Floyd-Floyd Jones—The explosion of firecrackers has kept me aware of that fact for a week.

Col. Johnson—Have you an engagement for about sunset tomorrow evening?

Mrs. Floyd-Floyd Jones (sweetly)—I have not.

Col. Johnson—Then will you meet me on your wheel at the Lookout, and we can come home by the palisade road? Mrs. Floyd-Floyd Jones—With pleasure, Col. Johnson—Then it's a bargain! Mrs. Floyd-Floyd Jones—Yes; good-by.

sky along the palisades, as soon as the rain had ceased; and the horror of his awful position was intensified by the knowledge that not far away thousands of happy people were enjoying the holiday, all unmindful of the danger and the terrible anxiety to which a neighbor was being subjected.



THE CEDAR TREE HAD BEEN TORN FROM ITS MOORINGS.

visit his sweetheart at Mrs. Major Floyd-Floyd Jones's villa; and the master envied the man. Indeed, so far had Mr. Van Cortland-Brown's pride vanished that at that instant he would gladly have exchanged fortune, family and complexion with his servant.

Resembling the lines of quick, pallid lights that penciled their course on the clouds, there shot across Mr. Brown's mind green flashes of jealousy as he gave sudden and momentary thought to Col. Johnson and the beautiful widow whom he imagined riding lustily home through the storm on their wheels and now enjoying a tea-tete in the drawing-room of the latter.

If Mr. Brown had not strengthened his muscles by months of bicycle effort he could not have retained his position astride the stunted cedar for twenty minutes, but he was in no mood for congratulating himself on his ability to defer for a few black hours what seemed to him inevitable death.

Now and then Mr. Brown gave a thought to his daughter, and he felt a pang of remorse as he recalled his opposition to the attentions of Commodore Blakely Horton-Smith, and he promised himself that if by any chance he should survive long enough to see the young people he would give them his consent and his blessing.

How long the minutes seemed! Each hour was a eternity of indescribable suffering. Although riding lustily home the cedar tree was much like that in the saddle of a bicycle, there was no correspondence in the comfort. By midnight he began to feel that if the tree did not give way and send him to the bottom he would soon split in two and the halves would be crashing down the jagged sides of the palisades!

An appalling silence came to the heights above, but the wind coming down the river and the murmur of the water in the black depths beneath struck his strained ears like the saddest dirge ever heard by mortal. It was like the march played in advance to the condemned soldier as he is carried blindfolded to the place of execution.

Mr. Browne succeeded in changing his position, and he enjoyed a few seconds of indescribable relief; but the weight of his body on his arms, which were not those of a trained athlete, soon gave him a sense of pulling himself up to his hands and shoulders. His mind up to his ears with the position astride the tree was better, as a permanent thing than to cling suspended.

Even if Mr. Browne had not been exhausted by his efforts so far, he could never have performed successfully the turn-verein act of pulling himself up to a horizontal bar and sitting astride the same, and this was practically what he had now to do. In his wild struggle he drove his toes into the crevices, but could gain no foothold.

He heard the groaning of the roots above him, and he felt the cedar bending down under his weight and efforts. At length there came a crash. The cedar tree had been torn from its moorings in the crevice of the Palisades wall, and the unfortunate man fell.

Nature may seem cruel at times, but she does have her mercies. She is ever kindly. She closes the eyes to surrounding dangers, and deadens the brain with an oblivion that blots out the past and makes us indifferent to the future. Mr. Van Cortland-Brown knew no more.

The gray dawn gradually flushing with a roseate light the Westchester hills beyond the Hudson. A silvery mist curtained the waters of the river, and the few white clouds in the zenith, already catching the rays of the rising sun, gave promise of a beautiful day, when Mr. Van Cortland-Brown regained consciousness, and looked about him. His first impression was that he was at the bottom of the Palisades and that every bone in his body must have been broken.

When he had gained sufficient presence of mind he began to take an inventory of his anatomy. He moved and felt his arms, and rejoiced to find them unbroken, though decidedly stiff. He investigated his legs in the same way, and despair gave place to hope in his heart when he found them practically uninjured.

Mr. Van Cortland-Brown rose and looked about him. He was on a little plateau just six feet below the point to which the tree had been clinging the day before. He could not have fallen more than eighteen inches, so that his unconsciousness was due to mental shock rather than physical injury.

The plateau had an area of about ten by twenty feet, and below this was a sheer wall of three hundred feet dropping down to the waters of the Hudson. Although there was no danger Mr. Van Cortland-Brown in his nervousness drew away from the edge. He was about to shout for help, when, to his surprise and horror, he discovered that his voice had deserted him and that what he intended for a cry for aid died away in a gurgle in his throat.

Again despair rose in the ascendancy, for he saw that if he could not raise his voice, to indicate to searchers his whereabouts, that he must die in this horrible place of hunger and thirst. The sun rose higher and higher, and the ill-starred man's throat and lips were so parched that he would have given half his fortune for a drink of water. Gradually he began to think that he was not of so much importance to the people of the upper world as he had imagined, for though his voice was gone his hearing was intensified, and strain his ears as he would, he detected no sound of searchers or rescuers.

two women about him, and with cries of delight they were kissing his cheeks and wetting them with their tears. The commodore came up the ropes hand over hand without assistance, and Miss Florence, regarding him as her father's deliverer, threatened to swoon again in his arms.

It is a little more than a year since Mr. Van Cortland-Brown's adventure, and if anyone thinks that this episode had been in any way exaggerated he can find that it has really been subdued and toned down from the reality by visiting Eagle's Nest on the palisades and hearing it from the lips of Mr. and Mrs. Van Cortland-Brown, who daily make a visit on their wheels to the scene of what threatened to be an awful catastrophe.

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