

(Continued from First Page.)

that laughing crowd, but Norman Chellis was utterly wretched, the singing master was ill at ease, and even Hetty Dunlap's merriment was a little forced.

The day wore on and it was nearly dusk when Hetty and Mr. Thornell drew away from the merry group and sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree, apart from the others. Norman Chellis watched them moodily. Poor fellow, his heart was sore. He had hardly had a chance to speak to Hetty all day. He could not bear it, and muttering something to Bill Stevens, his "hired man," about going to see if there was any sap left in the buckets, he strode wrathfully away from the camp, over the hill toward the south, even in his pain and soreness choosing instinctively the path that led to his darling's house.

"Land, you needn't do that," called Bill. "I've just been all round and got the hull. Taint more'n an hour ago." But Norman did not seem to hear. He hurried away, out of sight and hearing, and stood disconsolately in the fast deepening twilight, leaning against one of the tall maple trees. He saw a woman running towards him through the path from the dunlap house. He wondered vaguely who she could be, and then, as she drew nearer, he saw that it was Martha Jackson. She came up to him breathless and panting.

"Oh, Mr. Chellis," she gasped. "Sheriff Stebbins is at the house, an' two men. They want Mr. Thornell. He's done something awful, I dunno what, an' they'll be right along to arrest him. An' I run up the back way to tell you 'fore they got here, an' now I must scoot back as fast as I kin, 'fore they mistrust where I've been." She drew her shawl over her head and hurried away, leaving Norman dazed and confused.

Then, as his ideas began to arrange themselves, a fierce joy filled his heart. He should see his rival humbled to the dust. This man, who had stolen his heart's desire from him, was a criminal, a felon, and he had dared to love Hetty. Ah, Hetty! His heart gave a great throb. She loved Thornell. Her life was bound up in his, and now her happiness must be wrecked. Poor little girl. He could not save her from her fate, but perhaps he could warn Thornell in time for him to escape the officers of the law, and so spare her the pain of knowing that the man she loved was occupying a prison cell. All his bitterness had left him. His whole heart seemed full of pity and tenderness for Hetty and his one desire to save Thornell, by means of the information Martha Jackson, in her eagerness to be the first to tell the news he had given him. He raised his eyes and Thornell stood before him.

"I was just going to look for you," he said. "The sheriff is after you. You know best why, and even in the dim light he could see the singing master written to the lips, and he knew it was no false charge that was brought against him." "Listen to me. Follow along this hollow till you come to the big pine. Then cross over to the other side of the camp. You'll be so far up nobody'll see you. Then strike into the footpath that leads down to my house, go into one of the barns when you get there and wait till I come. I'll find a way to help you out."

Without a word Thornell obeyed, and Norman sauntered leisurely back to the camp, coming round the hill just as Farmer Dunlap came up the cart road. He had left the sheriff at a little distance, he too having it in his heart to spare Hetty the sight of the arrest. As carelessly and unconcerned as possible he asked: "Where's the singing master?" and a dozen voices answered at once, "here," "there," "he was over yonder a minute ago," "where did he go?" etc.

"He was sitting by Hetty, the last time I saw him," said some one. "He went from me around the checkerberry knoll," said Hetty. Several ran to call him but came back saying he was nowhere in sight.

"Are you sure he went that way?" asked the farmer. "Oh, very sure," returned Hetty merrily. "I sat right here and watched him out of sight."

"You came from that side, Norman," said the farmer, "did you see anything of him?" "Yes, I saw and spoke with him, but I didn't look to see which way he went," which was literally true.

"Well, mother wants all you young folks to come right down to supper now. I'll see if I can't hunt up Thornell. You run along all of you," and as the young folks trooped off by the footpath, the sheriff and his deputies came by the cart road. A hurried consultation followed. It was evident the bird had flown. A path led from the direction in which Thornell had disappeared to another road, leading to a different part of the town. It was decided that he must have taken the path.

"Maybe he got wind of my coming," said the sheriff, "but I think it's more likely he meant to clear out tonight anyway. We'll follow up his track, much obliged for the help you give us," and the sheriff, who seldom had an arrest to make and didn't half like the business, marched on.

Farmer Dunlap, returning to the camp, found Norman down on hands and knees before the masonry which held up one of the huge pans for boiling sap. "Why, Norman," he exclaimed, "why aint you down to the house with the rest of the young folks?" "I don't see as I can go," answered Norman. "I look here, see how this brickwork is settling. I won't hold up till morning. I've got to go right off and get a mason to see to it. Bill must rake the fire out, and I'll get a man here to-night, if possible. Can't afford to stop boiling when there's such a run of sap as this."

Farmer Dunlap concurred in this. Norman promised to come in by-and-by, and the two separated, leaving the camp alone with Bill Stevens to watch the boiling kettles.

Norman hastened to his own house. He had a deep respect for the majesty of the law, and was by no means sure he was doing right in helping Thornell off, but the thought of Hetty and the misery in store for her, nerved him to push on his undertaking.

He found the singing master waiting in the horse barn. Hurriedly, and in silence the two men fed the stock and put things in order for the night. Norman harnessed Black Bess, his fastest horse, into his most roomy sleigh. "You'd better come into the house and get a bite," he said.

"Thanks, I couldn't eat," was the answer, "but where are you taking me?" "I've got to go toward the Centre to get a mason," answered Norman. "I'll put you in the bottom of the sleigh and cover you up with robes, and I'll leave you at that little way station, near Long Bridge. The train from the south will be along in an hour and you can board it and be half way to Canada before they get back from the Mills, where they are looking for you."

The plan worked well. When Thornell shook himself free from the fur robes he said, "I don't know how to thank you for this. I am bad enough, but not quite lost," then he hurriedly told a tale of temptation and weakness, and how, in an evil hour, he had forged his employer's name to a check to raise money to meet his most pressing liabilities.

"I have never had a happy moment since," he went on, "and I swear to you that, if it were not for my poor mother, I would go back now, give myself up and take the consequences of my crime."

"And Hetty," said Norman involuntarily,

The singing master looked at him curiously. "That's it, is it?" said he. "I wondered what made you so fond of me all at once. It was on Hetty's account it seems. Well, I don't mind telling you that you are all wrong there. I don't suppose you will take me back and deliver me up now, even if you do know that Miss Hetty said 'No' to me, very decidedly, not five minutes before I found you in the woods this evening."

He turned abruptly away and the two men never met again. But Norman found his mason and arranged for the work to be done, feeling as if he trod on air. Black Bess flew over the ground on her homeward way, and it was not late when he reined up before Farmer Dunlap's door. Still, the guests had all gone home, and the farmer had just finished telling Hetty the story of Thornell's disgrace as Norman came in. Hetty looked pale and frightened. She knew no gradations in crime, and it seemed to her she had been polluted by her acquaintance with a man who might have been sent to prison. Some instinct told Mr. and Mrs. Dunlap to leave the two together, so they slipped away, and when Norman sat down by her on the sofa and drew her close to his side, saying, "My poor little girl," Hetty fell to crying on his shoulder as if it were the most natural thing in the world to do. Gently he soothed her and told her the story of Thornell's flight and his own hopes and fears, while she, resting quietly in his arms listened without a word, until she said:

"But it's all right now, isn't it, dear?" Then she raised her head and said: "But I must tell you, Norman, how bad and foolish I have been, for I really thought I cared about him, he was so handsome, you know, and had such pleasant manners." Norman winced a little. "And I meant, I really meant to say yes, when— he asked me. But this afternoon, somehow, I couldn't, and I don't know how it was, only I seemed to understand all at once that I had been all wrong and that—that—I had—loved you all the time."

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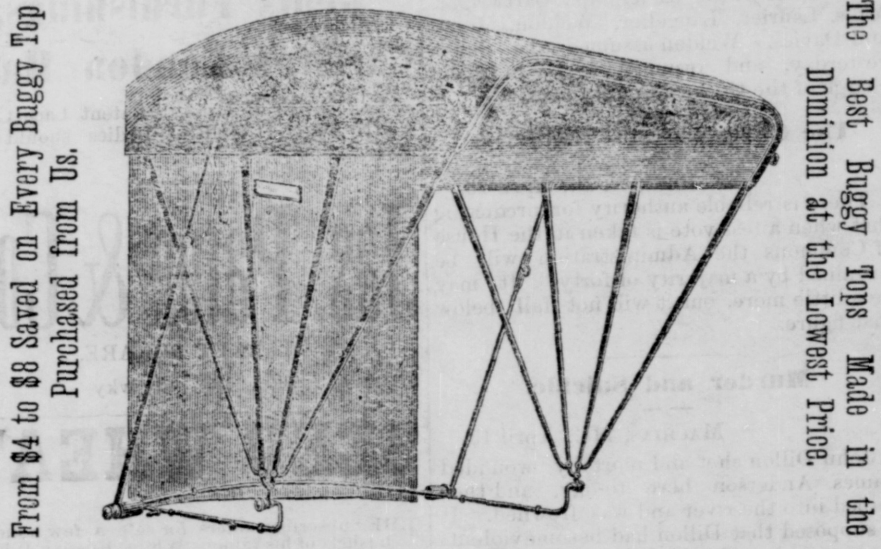
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