

THE NEW COMMANDMENT BY ANTHONY VERRALL

The story of a Kentucky feud hatred transplanted in a desert oasis, where a man and a woman, turned primitive by necessity, come at last to love as intensely as they had hated.

Copyright by Edward J. Childs. CHAPTER IV. (Continued) A Duel of Wills. JUDITH finally arose to her feet, stiffly, and half turned back to her fellow passenger, whom she watched from the corner of her eyes.

There was, however, nothing to be done. Some change in the meteoric conditions of the upper atmosphere occurred with the actual breaking of day. The air became less depressing to the gaze.

Ghent was not aware of the alteration of the altitude till he felt a sense of bodily oppression. He attempted to arouse himself from a species of lethargy stealing insidiously upon him. He realized abruptly how far his physical weakness had proceeded without his knowledge.

He tried to move toward a rope that he hoped might open some orifice in the bag.

He clung to the basket to prevent himself from falling headlong on the floor, he clung there, helplessly awaiting, and saw that Judith Haines was similarly stricken and was well but ready to drop.

A blurring of her vision had been Judith's first intimation of their impending doom. She knew less of aerostation than did Ghent; she remembered accounts she had read of balloons overcome by the rarefied air of lofty altitudes, and of frantic struggles they had made to open an outlet for the gas, but her memory was dim.

Responding to her habit of mind so long fostered by the feud, she underwent a faint sense of exultation. The altitude would kill him first! She should live to see him perish before her very eyes! After that—what matter how soon she might be doomed to follow?

Perhaps some telepathic hint of what was in her mind was vouchsafed to the man. A grim smile played momentarily upon his features, rendering his expression more sinister than before.

It became a duel of wills that vacillating, faded, and returned again to the position as the thin air starved them to nothing. Judith filled her aching lungs with stubborn, mad desire to outlive Ghent, flung with her here by the feud in a realm that was neither heaven nor heaven.

She swam in a haze before her vision. Already she seemed to be slipping as she felt herself slipping from reason. She heard the voice of her mother, praying for strength to sustain the heroes of Ghent. She felt her knees giving way, as if their sinewy muscles had melted. With one tremendous summoning of her strength, she resisted the impulse to wilt upon the floor and beheld John Ghent go down.

He appeared to crumple slowly, and as one whose limbs had softened into putty. Then he lay face upward in a half-sitting posture by the wall of the car, his eyes wide open, his scarred chin buried in his chest.

Judith, stricken down in that second, staggered once, then fell with her head upon one of her arms, and knew no more. Her hair, entangled with a slender cotton rope that went upward to the bar, was held out straight and taut by the weight of her body—and this cord was attached to the valve.

CHAPTER V. The Puppets of Fate. DESPITE the fact that a portion of the gas was at length escaping from a great balloon, there was no immediate descent.

Heard. The valve was immediately closed. Through unmeasured regions of cloud and mist, across vast reaches of space and over unending ridges of the earth's surface, the balloon crept slowly, with its two unconscious passengers. Hour after hour they lay there, unmoving, but alive—helpless drifting over sea and sky and mountains. Thus went the day.

It was late in the night when at length Ghent suddenly started awake and screamed to his feet from some horrible dream. His feet struck the floor as he floundered about in the car to establish his balance, and she was awakened instantly. She too arose in haste, and as she did, she had recollection of their helpless plight came relentlessly surging upon her.

A fresher, more boisterous wind had caught the partly emptied balloon and was driving it ahead by fits and starts, jerking and straining its ropes and fibres for a time, then puffing it more steadily onward. Nevertheless, the great balloon had nearly run its course. It continued to drop toward the great dark earth, over the surface of which the wind was blowing with augmented violence.

Ghent and Judith were greatly weakened. Their bodies were tortured with pains of hunger and physical stress. At midnight they had been conscious of the foot of the basket in sheer exhaustion. Abruptly, without the slightest warning, the car collided with some obstruction. It was crushed and crumpled as the wind drove the gas ship off its course. One of the ropes that supported the car was broken. The basket sagged. Its occupants were all but thrown over its edge. Then the great balloon steadied, as before, and swung along with undiminished velocity.

The balloon had grazed the ridge of a granite mountain. They had crossed a range of mountains. It was not until 2 in the morning that the car struck again. That both by some vicious manoeuvre of the stricken balloon, or by some accident, Ghent realized thoroughly. Judith was no less well aware of the hopelessness of the situation. When at length she fell, with Judith, to the floor, the basket had struck between two post-like objects, short, thick, and not to be torn from their footholds. There the remaining ropes were snared.

The balloon was striking with greater frequency and force. It was bowled along in the path of the wind like a monster toy created for destruction. Ghent and Judith were hurled about and tossed between the shocks and travail for an hour; then in some collision of exceptional might his senses were suddenly blotted out and he fell, with Judith, to the floor.

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When he came there, after half an hour of labored climbing in the heat and rocks, he found it a flat sort of table land, which must still be traversed before he could look up the canyons and rises beyond. He almost surrendered in his disappointment; yet he staggered on, bringing his knees and hands down the runways of blistered sands and rocks beneath his feet, and thus arrived at length upon the further side.

Here, indeed, he beheld a vast panorama of the desert. The waterless valley lay below him, drunken with the heat. Its breath rose in quivering fumes; its sands glared back at the sun. Nearer and more canyonous the hills grew, and the sky, as if by the very mountains had split in the heat, revealing rocks for their mighty bones and sinews, all parched and browned, and as if by the very mountains had split in the heat, revealing rocks for their mighty bones and sinews, all parched and browned, and as if by the very mountains had split in the heat, revealing rocks for their mighty bones and sinews, all parched and browned.

He paused, his eyes abruptly caught by a tint far down below him in a wrinkle of the hill. Then a hoarse cry escaped from his lips. The tips of his fingers, as he stretched out, were fringed by the bill's huge bulk of gray—and excitement sent a flood to his brain and heart. With hope inspired and strength renewed, he hurried down the runways of blistered sands and rocks beneath his feet, and thus arrived at length upon the further side.

He came to the upper limits of a narrow canyon, and as he stepped into it, he crashed his way into the growth of stunted willow, alder and brush, starting a covey of quail from cover, till in whirling wings they scattered in every direction. The growth here was meagre, and closely confined to the bed of a gulch.

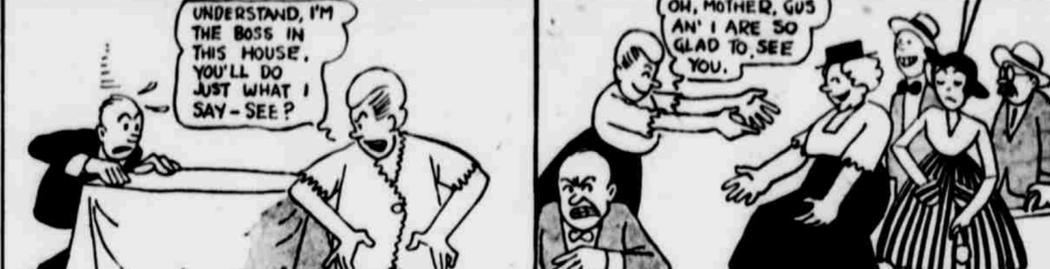
He came to it presently—a hole no more than six inches deep and less than two feet across. It was filled with clear, cold water that flowed a little through the sand and then sank to rise no more.

In his famished condition he did not grow thirsty, but he was thirsty, and a little removed from the spring, but concerned with restraining his natural impulse to drink to satisfaction and doubtless make himself ill, he threw himself down upon the dampened gravel, and filling his mouth, underwent an ecstasy that nearly made him faint. He fairly embraced the earth on which he was stretching, laying his face in the cool damp sand where the outflow disappeared and thrusting his hands in the trickling stream to cool and moisten his flesh. Then he drank again, barely a sip, and rolled on his back to resist the temptation offered by this miracle—a sign of God's mercy in the desert.

At length he had taken a quarter as much of a sound sleep as his famished body demanded, and he rose to look about. He had barely turned, in his rapid survey of the place, when once again he was startled to the depths of his being. There in the shade stood Judith Haines, her eyes fixed defiantly upon him, her aspect

Yes, Where? By Jack Callahan

ON THE LEVEL GUS YOU OUGHTA GET MARRIED, THERE'S NOBODY IN THIS GOIN' AROUND LIKE YOU DO—SETTLE DOWN—GET A NICE SWEET LITTLE WIFE IT'LL MAKE A MAN OF YOU.



very floor of the chasm. The gorge was still slightly cooler than the slopes, however, and for more than an hour he labored up his narrow bed in the hope of discovering a spring. It was Judith who started for the summit, all hope of relief to be found in this ancient channel, he could think of some expedient only—to climb to some height and obtain a wider view of the desert and its ranges, trusting that somewhere the emerald sign of God's indulgence might greet his aching eyes. He started for the summit of the ridge that rose on his right. It was not so steep as the rise on his left, but his whole vast bulk was ailing and ailing.

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His features as he thought of being obliged by circumstance to whitie himself a bow and arrows with which to hunt for the game he would need, and which he would need to defend his life. In the morning, however, he would be required before the weapon, he set to work at once to construct him a house in which to lay his couch.

When he stood there debating and pushing, his attention was attracted by a movement far down on the opposite side of the canyon. Then he discerned the figure of Judith, toiling to the top of the mountain. She was carrying a bundle of sticks and a bundle of grass. She was dressed in a simple, practical, and sturdy outfit. She was looking up at the sky with a look of anxiety.

Her mind reverted to her childhood days—when she had played in the forest with one of her cousins, a boy whose passion had been to imitate the Indians and adventures which she lived by their own clever resources, out in the wild. She remembered the days when she had been a girl, and the days when she had been a woman, and the days when she had been a mother.

She almost smiled as her memory flashed back to the days when she had been a girl, and the days when she had been a woman, and the days when she had been a mother. She remembered the days when she had been a girl, and the days when she had been a woman, and the days when she had been a mother.

Presently, out of the darkness, she emerged in mass on the mountain slope, and walling miles deep in the chasma, a red glow of light made a jeweled spot upon the slope, up the mountain. Ghent had lit a fire for his comfort. It shone out as brightly as a sign of home, and something in Judith's nature was stirred, despite the fact that John Ghent had lit the blaze.

For an hour she sat there, staring, chilling, alone, her nature once more rigid and uncompromising, her desire to see the man who had been her enemy, when she saw the man who had been her enemy, when she saw the man who had been her enemy.

CHAPTER IX. Judith's Feast. Ghent had finally slept. He awoke at daylight, completely rested and refreshed. He was ready to begin the business of the day. Instant upon completing much of the labor he had planned for the day, he concluded his toilet rapidly and returned to cook and devour his second quail for breakfast, after which he meant to cut the material for bow and arrows from a clump of willows he had noted the previous day far down the mountain slope.

Once more the pungent odor of his fire and crude scorching of meat was floated in tantalizing gusts to Judith, who had been baffled in her efforts to slay a wild creature for food.

She had come once more to the ledge of rock beneath which a cottontail had his burrow. There Judith looked at the ugly form attentively, her gaze held, fascinated, by the one spot on the reptile's back where the skin had been broken away, showing clean white meat.

Great hunger had no compunction. Judith passed the stages of delicate demands; she was famished for food; she was savage with the need to eat. In the purely animal mood that possessed her she took up the snake by the tail and carried it away to her cave. There she laid a heavy rock upon its ugly head, and then with a sharper fragment of stone loosened more of the skin on the reptile's back, and presently succeeded in skinning the coil-like body to the tail. With this she was content, and she ate it with, with the other to strike upon, she hacked the clean white meat into pieces a few inches long, then cast an eager scrutiny toward the camp of the man up the canyon.

He was not at home. A thin blue column of smoke arose from the dying embers of his fire, where he had cooked and eaten his bird, but Ghent himself had disappeared.

Judith sped down the hill to the camp, then up the ravine, and so to his camp with all her speed. She had caught up a handful of yellowed grass and a number of dried out twigs as she went. She even tore a shrub from its hold in the sand, and thus was prepared with infinitely fuel before she came upon the dying fire.

Without a look at the structure Ghent had built, about the slightest curiosity as to any possessions he might have gathered, she knelt upon the ground at once, and blowing upon the gray embers, ignited the grass and set it to burning with a crackling flame, and fed with the blazing torch to the natural protection of the trees.

Replenishing her stock of twigs as she hastened along, and pausing from time to time to foster the flames that

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