THE BANNER OF BLUE.

The Coat of Many Colors.

By S. R. CROCKETT.

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CHAPTER IX.—CONTINUED.

John Glendonwyn answered readily.

"It is true that in our childhood the parents of Veronica Cæsar and myself agreed together that we should marry. But since no man has a right to arrange the life of his fellow, she and I have long ago decided mutually that we will never fulfil the contract."

"Then there is nae purpose o' marriage between you and Veronica Cæsar?" said the old man, eagerly.

"Nor ever has been," said John, clearly and definitely. "Veronica herself will tell you the same gladly. I never meant to marry any born of woman save little Fairlie, that is, if she would have a fellow like me."

"Ye speak greatly like an honest man, I admit," said David, looking dubiously at him from under his shaggy gray eyebrows, "but I am mair than ever perplexed, nay, even dumfounded and put to confusion. I ken not what to think. My puir innocent lassee."

John sat down and put his hands affectionately on the knees of David's black trousers.

"Tell me all there is to tell," said John. "I will go straight back to Gower with you and we will find Kate and Fairlie, never fear. I know their hearts, believe me, for I have watched them—at least Fairlie, ever since as a child of 8 she rode my pony to school while I ran contentedly by her side."

The father shook his head sadly.

"Ah, would that I could think sae," he said, the tears for the first time trickling down his furrowed cheeks.

"Was there no message?" said John. "Can you tell me how it happened?"

"Tell ye, laddie," said David, "there is no muckle to tell. Mair is the pesty! Ye see, it was this way: Fairlie was lang in comin' hame frae the schule ae nicht, and Kate said to me that she wad pit on her cloak and gang and meet her alang the road."

"'What need?' says I. I was plainin' the lid o' Sanders Dow's stepmither's coffin at the time, and that's the way I mind.

"But she answered that she was anxious and was gang herself. So I didna debar her—indeed, when I did say her nay? And in anither meenit she was back wi' her bonnet on and the muckle dark-blue serge cloak that I coft at Drumfern at Michaelmas aboot her shooders.

"'Guid nicht, faither,' she says, standin' on her tiptaes to gie me a kiss as was aye her heartsome way.

"'Havers, lassie,' says I, 'yin wad think ye war gaun to the mune or to London toon at the least. Ye will meet Fairlie afore ye get to the Brig-end.

"But she only gied a kind o' queer lauch—I mind it noo. It comes back to me as clear as clear. It was like the way she lauched when she had the scarlet fever an' was licht i' the hied!

"But (me no mindin wi' havin' Sanders Dow's coffin to finish that nicht) I bade her be back to mak the tea for the laddies, and she gaed out through the door. An' frae that hour to this I hae ne ver set een on either o' my bairns."

"Had you no letter or news of any kind?"

"Aye—this!" said Davin Glendinning, putting his hand in his breast pocket. He drew out a note folded small as Fairlie was in the habit of doing with her correspondence. John knew the fashion of it at the first glance. The sight of that little oblong of bluish paper on his table had often made his heart leap as he entered his room at nights.

David Glendinning was regarding him fixedly.

"I canna help trustin' ye, laddie," he said, "in spite o' your ain father—aye, in spite o' myself. I canna believe ye ever had cognizance o' any hurt done to my bairns!"

And he stretched out the letter.

"You are quite sure that you wish me to read it?" said John.

With a groan the old man cast his hands out from him, laying his arms abroad the table.

"Read, laddie, read!" he said. "David Glendinning, the Lord hath forgotten to be gracious."

John's hand was shaking and his eyes were dim as he unfolded the note.

This it said in clear, unmistakable characters:

OUR DEAR, VERY DEAR FATHER: This at the first will make you sad, but it is for the best, and there is no other way. Trust your Fairlie and the time will come when we shall creep happily home to your hearth and heart.

All is not well, but this seems the only way to make ill things better. Meantime, God keep you and the boys and all who truly love us. Do not cast us off, for we love you—and that is why we go!

There was no signature but the letter was unmistakably in Fairlie's hand, the characters vivid and distinct, written without haste and without tremulousness. The girl might have been setting one of her copyheads, for all the signs of emotion which the manuscript betrayed.

One thing struck John Glendonwyn as curious. There was no direct mention of Kate, and save in the pronouns "we" and "us" no reference to her.

Yet hitherto it had always been Kate who had taken the lead in everything, and her sister who acquiesced in her decisions, made in many cases without her knowledge. Why so suddenly should the elder sister have abdicated her position and permitted Fairlie to take the lead?

David had lifted his head and now sat earnestly regarding the young man, his eyes fixed in his head as if he desired to read into his very soul.

"Well?" he said, gravely and sternly, "what think ye?"

"On my soul," said John, earnestly, "I think that the matter may not be so serious as it appears at present. I am glad to have read Fairlie's letter. It eases my heart to some extent. She speaks as if a return were not only possible, but certain.

"She looks forward to peace and happiness. Would she write in that strain if any great or fatal peril were hanging over them? Have you ever known Fairlie to tell a lie or to hide anything from you that she ought to have revealed to you?"

"She did not exactly reveal these to me," said David, drily, laying his hand upon the little packet of yellowish letters to John Glendonwyn. "But you forget there is another thing. Be good enough to explain that upon any comfortable and harmless supposition."

And once more he laid before him the crumpled proof of inner which, in his first anger, he had snatched from John's hand and thrown upon the floor.

"Marriage and meetings and secret privileges to carry them free from their father's house, who never yet never required her to do their good. They leave him alone and shamed in his old age—see the words: 'Trust him to care for all—him—how?' Who is 'him'? God, who set his mark on Cain, gie me the yae thing on earth great to thine unworthy servant that while in the flesh these lassie bairns may stand the thrust of him—him who will care for all!"

He said the last words with a concentration of bitter hatred which made John shudder thinking as he did of the evening prayer that first night when Rupert had set by David Glendinning's hearth, with his black eyes glittering and his languidly graceful smile.

"There is much that is mysterious in this disappearance," said John, manfully, "but, on my soul, nothing at all that is hopeless. The solution escapes us, that is all. Tell me, have you inquired at Drumfern as to the arrival of a carriage with two girls? It seems to me that it was impossible that such an equipage could escape remark in a place of the size of Drumfern."

"I have inquired," said David, "and that diligently, going from door to door. No carriage was ever hired there. None ever passed the toll-bars—and none was ever seen on the roads. At least, I have heard of none who met with sicklike. But all admit that the night was stormy, with a driving snow that sent all who could indoors to the friendly inglenook."

John rose and handed the note back to David Glendinning.

"Sir," he said, "after you have satisfied yourself that I have had neither art nor part in the business, I will accompany you to Kilgour, and do my best to unriddle the mystery. But I wish you to be thoroughly satisfied first.

"My landlady here will tell you I have never been away, save at college, and for an afternoon walk like that to Craigmiller to-day. I have dined here alone every night—breakfasted here every morning.

"My professors and fellow students will bear me witness what I did with my mornings, and if further testimony be needed, the quarrymen at Burdiehouse and Eakside, the pitmen of Newbattle and the castle keepers of Craigmiller and Borthwick will declare what days I spent with them."

But David lifted up his hand.

"Nay," he said, "mine own eyes have seen! I do not need landladies and professors to advise me. I am content. Not you—not you, laddie—hath done this. And, O John—whiles—whiles I would to God that it had!"

CHAPTER X.

RECONCILIATION.

John found his brother alone in the great drawing room at Gower Castle. He was smoking a cigar with his legs lying indolently upon another armchair, and gazing out to sea over to the flashing waters of the Solway.

"Well, young scapegrace," he cried removing his cigar and stretching out his hand, "what is this we hear of you—running off a couple of girls from the parish of which you are to be the parson? What will the 'unco guid' say to that as a clerical qualification?

"And how you manage to do it on a hundred a year beats me. I suppose you have brought a little schedule back to the governor of Edinburgh—all for posthorses and marriage lines.

"Though what you wanted with a brace of brides—hang me if I can make out. One to keep the other company when you were off explaining things, I suppose!"

John Glendonwyn, haggard and unkempt after a long night's travel, and the sleepless anxiety which had preyed upon his mind, stood indignantly before his brother.

"Rupert," he said when he had sufficiently commanded himself, "enough of this! Where have you hidden the girls? I have come to find out. For that it was you, and you alone, who planned and carried out the elopement I have not the shadow of a doubt.

"The note which was sent to the school to Fairlie Glendenning has been found. I have seen it, and, though there is an attempt to disguise the hand, I know it to be yours."

As he spoke he took a paper from his pocket and gave it to Rupert. The elder brother swiftly thrust out his hand to take it, but a shade of disappointment crossed his face as his eyes fell upon it.

"My writing!" he cried, and laughed sardonically, "why, that is yours, John. I wonder that you have the face to deny it."

"That is only a copy, as you well know," retorted John, fiercely. "The original is with the girl's father, where it will remain till the appointed time."

"My dear, simple boy," said Rupert, tolerantly, "I have a little elementary advice to give you. Papa is not exactly pleased with you, and he might make things very unpleasant. Do not anger him and I will see you through.

"But even you will admit that I, whom you come here hectoring to accuse—I who have been spending my time in beseeching my father to moderate his anger against you, have an answer worth a hundred alibis! Look there!"

He threw off a light coverlet which had been over his knees and discovered his right leg bound in splints and swathed in bandages. It was on a foot rest and appeared formidable indeed. John stared aghast.

Rupert nodded lightly, almost flippantly.

"Yes," he said, "I broke my anklebone three weeks last Tuesday. Bravo shied at a piece of paper and threw me—a nasty trick of his. He hates to come suddenly on anything white. I think I had stayed too late at the Cross Keys with some men I knew.

"Here comes Grierson and the doctor. Stop and see the dressing, John. It will ease your doubts."

The butler of Castle Gower showed in a tall, slim, dark man with sinister eyes.

"How do, Warner? See here, Grierson, how long is it since I was laid by the heels here? 'Three weeks and two days,' says you.

"Thank you, doctor—all goes well. This is unwrapping day, and you forgotten? My brother wants to stop and see the operation. Not much to see now, is there, Warner? He ought to have been here a week ago, eh, doctor? Then we could have shown him something worth looking at."

At this moment Grierson came in again. He had gone out in the midst of Rupert's chatter.

"If you please, Master John, Mr. Glendonwyn is waiting to see you in the library."

"Whee-ew!" whistled Rupert. "I fear me the rod's in pickle, my son. Headmaster to see you in his room, you know. Gad, how I remember the feeling! And I've not got over it yet, when I have any little hatchmente of wild oats the old man doesn't know about. Deuced sorry for you, dear fellow! Good luck!"

If John had been able to make little of Rupert, still less information did he gain from his father. Small love as there had been between father and son in the past, John had been wholly unprepared for Gregory Glendonwyn's attitude.

"You admit that you have been making love to the girl here in the parish, which was no end to be your own. You tell me plumpy that it was for her sake that you spent your Christmas holidays teaching in that twopenny-half-penny—name's school at Kilgour you are so fond of.

"You have systematically, according to your own showing, kept up a correspondence with the young woman during your absence in Edinburgh, the elder girl being privy to your intrigue.

"These things being so, something like the present comes about as surely as the coming of heavy seed produces heavy. You were not out of Infancy, I take it. You are able to prove the fact, then, prove it.

"For myself I have nothing whatever to do with the final consideration. Only I advise you if you wish to obtain a quiet settlement in your parish to express your will in a way that there is no mistaking to Dr. Cæsar and his daughter Veronica.

"Then, you do not believe me, father?" said John, standing right and angry opposite his father's chair. "Then fellow-disciples, brothers—"

"Whom, indeed?" said Gregory Glendonwyn, turning back his small keen face to the fire.

"The fellow of Baile and Fairlie Glendinning," suggested John with a wince, but still standing motionless.

"Ah," said Gregory, shifting uneasily, "but, you see, my boy, I have studied you from youth and, methinks, the most you refer to is an ignorant country palmer, even if we supposed that his loudly expressed anxiety for his daughters is genuine. On the other hand, I am your father, a Magistrate, and accustomed to weigh evidence."

"Then you do not believe me, sir?" John asked again, in a stifled voice.

"Frankly, I do not."

"Then, sir," said John, "I bid you good-by. I shall never come willingly into your presence again. I care not whether I receive the parish or not. You yourself have placed the greatest barrier in the way of that ever being my lot in life.

"But, thank God, I have still my integrity, my youth, and the portion left to me by my mother. As to the last, I have not claimed it during the last two years, but I shall ask my lawyer to write to yours that the details of the final settlement may be arranged between us."

John did not say this in the least by way of threat. Nothing was further from his thoughts—nevertheless the change which these words produced on his father's countenance was marvellous. His voice, at first clear and resonant in denunciation of his second son, cold and icy in the rejection of his final appeal, became suddenly hoarse.

"No—no," he cried, "your mother's portion is due to you on the day when you are presented to the parish of Gower and settled at the ordained minister thereof. Till then principal and interest both remain in my hands."

"I think not," said John, "both my mother's marriage settlement and will make it perfectly clear that her fortune is mine from my twenty-first birthday. I was at the trouble to obtain a copy of the last-named, and submit it to Mr. McCrosty, who corroborated it from the deeds in his hands with regard to the marriage settlement. I requested and obtained a copy of that also in so far as it concerned myself."

"Then you took an infamous liberty, sir," cried his father, furiously.

"Mr. McCrosty did not seem to think so, sir," said John, now calm with the chill fighting spirit which came to him at such times, "and when I am bidding you what may be a last farewell let me assure you, sir, that Veronica Cæsar and I have never had the least intention of marrying.

"She would not marry me on any terms. I have no desire to marry her. So years ago we mutually agreed that we would remain friends—nothing more!"

"And does Dr. Cæsar know this?" gasped Gregory. "Is your father the only person left in the dark among all these plots and stratagems?"

"That I do not know," answered the son. "Veronica and I, in agreeing to be friends, left each other free to inform the members of our several houses according as necessity should arise."

Then as these two continued to face each other in the library the attitude of Gregory Glendonwyn toward his son seemed to undergo a remarkable change.

The lines of that hard face quivered, yet it did not seem to be with love; rather a kind of fear looked out of the chilly eyes. A cold sweat had broken over his grayish face, on which a fleck of brilliant green from a painted window lay clearly like a scar. Nevertheless Gregory Glendonwyn smiled upon his second son and held out his hand.

"John," he said, "I do believe you. I was only trying you—perhaps too hard and too high. Why should not you and I be friends? There are but Rupert, you and I, left of the Glendonwyns. Why should not the three of us keep the peace?"

The lad's heart leaped within him, yet not altogether with trust. He knew his father for a hard but honorable man. But he had never heard him speak thus before. To the sensitive ear of youth there was a chord that did not ring wholly true.

Still, he could not resist that appeal. His heart was too simple, too eager, too natural, and he stretched out his hand to meet his father's, gladly enough.

"I for one am willing," he said, "you will find me always for peace. I am glad that you believe me."

"I do, my boy," said Gregory, "and for the rest I will see Dr. Cæsar at once as to the date of your induction into the parish. It is high time that we had a strong man able to speak his mind and well affected to the Government.

"When these things are arranged we can have that little settlement I spoke about. As to what you tell me about Veronica Cæsar, you had better leave me to deal with the girl's father."

His father watched John depart with a calm countenance, nodding to him pleasantly till he closed the door. But immediately the door was shut, an astonishing change came over the old man's face.

"So," he muttered between his clenched teeth, "you are working against me, are you? You are sniffing to find out—well, two can play the game. Rupert has nearly ruined me. You, my dear good son John, comfort of my old age, staff of my declining years—you shall help your old father to reestablish himself—or he will know the reason why."

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT WITH PROMISE.

John set off that very afternoon to see Veronica Cæsar. There had always been a special sense of comradeship between him and the girl. She liked John Glendonwyn more than she dared own, even to herself, and John, like a true man, unconsciously traded upon the fact.

On this occasion Veronica was busy and he did not see her at once. It was her duty to prepare half a dozen brothers and sisters, noisy, rackety, knickerbockered, curt-skirted and assorted in various combinations of twinship and friendship, for their afternoon walk. In itself this was a heavy enough task, but Vera Cæsar—tall, athletic and not to be trifled with—made light of it.

Alone in the drawing room sat Mrs. Dr. Augustus Cæsar, languid of body, afflicted with chronic creeps, dizziness, qualms, overcomings, palpitation, indeed all the weaknesses the spirit of woman is heir to. She was a martyr to indigestion, and fainted at the idea of taking a walk in the garden or performing the least domestic duty.

But to make up for all she owned a tongue into which all the superabundant nourishment of her dietary appeared to find its way. With this unruly organ she ruled her husband, made herself the hatred of the few overworked domestics and the aversion of her own children, who were accustomed to crawl past the drawing room as if it had been the lair of a tigress. Only Veronica feared her not, with the obvious consequent that Mrs. Dr. Cæsar feared her daughter, and spake much evil of her behind her back.

To this lady John had in the absence of Veronica, been introduced as she sat with the very silliest last year's novel out of the town circulating library on her knee.

She lifted her up hands at sight of him.

"John Glendonwyn," she cried, "I am surprised that you have the face to appear among decent people, sir. You have broken my poor girl's heart. Is not that enough without harassing it out?

"She has not had the spirit of a worm ever since the vileness of your conduct was broken to her. She cannot even bear to answer me, her own mother, when I speak to her about it, but goes instantly out of the room.

"But you will suffer for all this, sir, bitterly! Heaven will reckon with you and my husband, sir, yes my husband! I have spoken to him, and you will not find him so forgiving as poor, wronged, innocent, trusting girls like my dear Veronica, whose heart you first won when you were both in long frocks, and which you have now broken, yes, and trampled under your feet.

"And all for the sake of what? For the sake of a pair of grisettes that should be whipped at the cart tail through the streets! Aye, and would be if I had my way. I said so only yesterday to my husband.

"My father (the provost of Rupertring Burts) has seen that done in the year to matter is what year, sir! And I could have all such bold women whipped. How would you like that, sir?

"I have no patience with you, none at all. My husband will speak with you. Bring the lad for my husband, Augustus Veronica—with you are your poor mother insulted enough, insulted!

"What can be the matter, mamma?" said Veronica, suddenly opening the drawing room door with a half gallant young gentleman of six feet firmly by the arm in one hand, and in the other the large falling collar which she was about to affix with a pin to his jacket.

Mrs. Doctor Augustus cast up her hands more piteously than before.

"O, my poor girl, my poor, poor deceived, deceived child," she cried. "Behold, prepare yourself. Here is the man, come to insult us, on purpose to glory over the ruin he has made!

"Now, mamma—keep quiet, Bobby, or I will knock your head off you!—what in the world are you talking about now, mamma? Oh, John—I am glad to see you! Come and speak to me when I have got the nurse off with these young Ashodites.

"And, you mother, be good enough to let John and me settle our own affairs. I told you plainly what would happen last night if you did not. I will go to Aunt Fisher, and ask her to let me help in the laundry.

"You know whether she will be glad of me or not. Then you can undertake the management of this household, which you think I look after so badly. Come along, Bobby. You will find me in the nursery, John. Now, mamma, remember what I told you!"

And the energetic young lady vanished, adjusting the Eton collar as she marched her prey upstairs—whereupon at the opening of the door the sound of civil strife ceased and there was a great calm.

John, who, during all this, had not spoken one solitary word, stood uncertainly with his hat in his hand looking with alarm upon the relaxed countenance of Mrs. Dr. Cæsar. At Veronica's departure she had fallen back on her sofa, as an erected bolster subsides when smitten in the middle.

Now she lay back, feebly waggling her hands and calling variously, "Water! Water! My vinaigrette! Augustus!" so that John, to whom these symptoms were new, became seriously alarmed for her safety.

Accordingly, he filled a glass of water and held it to her lips. He dabbled her large, florid face with cologne water. He held a small decanterful of smelling salts to the lady's nostrils, and in a little had the satisfaction of finding the lady come to herself.

"Where am I? What have I been saying? Some folly, I fear me. Dear John, if in my paroxysms I have said or done anything to hurt your feelings I pray you pardon a dying woman—a heartbroken woman—a woman who has suffered in her family more ill treatment and ingratitude than falls to the lot of a score of women.

"You have seen me in the dreadful grasp of one of these attacks which are despised, made light of by my own daughter—nay, too often by my husband also. Oh, I do not say a word against dear Augustus. He is a man of many affairs, but Veronica—it hurts me even to speak the name—oh, sir, have you ever known what it is to be a mother—to have cherished in your bosom the serpent that bit you?

"No, of course not—you, too, are a man and cannot feel for a mother. Yet were I to reveal to you—yes, even to you—one-tenth of the misery, the hapless, hopeless misery, the insults, the slights, the absolute and fiendish tortures that have been inflicted upon me in this my own house—even you would shudder and turn pale.

"Oh, sir, my boy, my son (I must call you so), I feel that you have always been in sympathy with me. You have ever been kind. Never have I permitted any one to speak a word against you in my presence.

"Oh, it is coming again. I feel it. My smelling salts! Water! A little drop of—of that third phial—my medicine—Ah! A-h-h!"

John poured out the "medicine"—which, when decanted, had an odor of—of a certain specific largely used in Scotland—and succeeded in warding off the threatened attack.

She waved John Glendonwyn out of the room with a gesture truly dramatic.

As the girl had said, he found Vera Cæsar putting away the débris of the late general engagement in the nursery. Martha, the single domestic other than the cook, who was kept at the manse of Kilgour, had been despatched in charge of the "Cæsar's army," as they were called throughout the district.

"I fear you have found mother more than ordinarily trying this morning," Veronica began cheerfully, without any other greeting.

"She certainly talked rather wildly," admitted John, "and once or twice seemed so ill that she quite frightened me!"

Veronica's lips, lovely designed and lying upon each other with the large ease of those of Athene Parthenos, were compressed a little more as John spoke.

"Has she been abusing you or me?" she inquired, without the shadow of a smile.

"Both!" said John, equally gravely.

"Ah! When I was 10 I found my mother out. Could any child's reverence have survived such an upbringing? I wonder I am not indeed the perfect tyrant and heartless wretch she tells every one I am.

"Perhaps in some ways she is right. But think how many things I have borne in silence, and how much I know. I don't think these extenuating circumstances are quite adequately provided for in the First Commandment with promise."

"There is no one in the world so kind as you, Vera," said John, soothingly. "You work harder than a whole staff of servants! You are a score of nurses all in one—besides governess, tutor, sewing woman, housekeeper—"

"I am the daughter of a house without a head," said Veronica, without looking up a moment from her work. "What I do is purely selfish—perhaps done to quiet my conscience—that I may render with my hands the service which my heart and my lips refuse!"

"I would give the world if I could help you, Vera!" said John, looking down at her with a great pity in his heart.

The girl looked up with a single swift look of anger, then as quickly dropped her eyes upon her work again, and went on mechanically as before.

"You?" she cried with a little laugh, bitter to hear.

Then a milder look coming gradually into the wide gray eyes, she added:

"Ah, my boy, you have your own troubles I know, and I am sorry. I did wrong to be angry with you when you came here last time. That again was my selfishness.

"They have been telling you tales to my discredit, I hear," said John. "You have been told that I, that I—"

He paused, for the words which ought to have come next seemed to choke him.

"I have been told what I never for a moment believed," said the girl, lightly. "I laughed at those who maligned you, Laddie. I have spoken many edged words to you, but I am your friend.

"I never loved you or any man as a woman ought to love the man she is trusted to marry. But do you think that in all these years I have not seen to the bottom of you—aye, as if you were made of clear glass? I think there are deeps in you which no one has ever fathomed but me, no, not even your little Fairlie?"

"You have heard about her—what does it mean?" said John, grateful for even so dubious a word of encouragement.

"That I have to guess at," she answered, "at least not more than a guess so remote and faint that I dare not put it into words even to myself. But let this abide in your soul, John. Dark things may come to light. Things painful, assuredly will. But they shall not stain little Fairlie any more than the breath I breathe on this mirror. Look it is gone!"

John was immensely touched. His heart kindled with gratitude.

"Vera!" he cried, impulsively, catching the girl in his arms. "You are the noblest woman God ever made."

He would have kissed her on the lips, and for a single quivering moment the girl stood motionless, as if she might have permitted him. Then she coldly shook herself free and turned away.

"No, John," she spoke slowly and distinctly, keeping her back to him, and going in all the time with her polishing of the furniture. "I am not noble or self-sacrificing, or indeed anything admirable. But I happen not to mind work, and to the average mind that covers a multitude of sins.

"And as it ought," cried John. "I have been a base dog, but I will try remain as my lost hope." "You never earned a home feeling for me," cried the girl, stamping her foot in pettish anger and to tease. "And you can do that now as much as ever. As for me, you know that I love you and honor you more than any one in all the world. You have always been our world, our friend, mother, sister and indeed all my universe.

"Fairlie," cried Veronica, quickly stopping a thread her mind, for small excitement, "Well, mammered John, "things what you would not let me be."

"It is certainly more comforting," said Veronica Cæsar, sweetly.

And she rose, holding out a hand to her astonished fiancée.

"Well, John," said your universe speaks! Let her father's hands to take up to him—goodby," she said.

To be continued.

SOLO FABLES.

Fragments of Folklore, Legends, &c., Picked Up in the Philippines and Japan.

By CAPT. CHAWYN B. HAMPTON, U. S. A.

CHAPTER I.

THE PLANDUC TAKES A CLASS IN FISHING.

The Planduc is a small deer of Borneo, and it is well known that he is the possessor of a bright mind. One day he called the other animals, the Horse, the Bull, the Carabao, the Rat, the Cat, the Elephant, the Monkey, the Parrot, the Snake and many others and said to them:

"Provide yourselves with hooks and lines, and I will teach you all how to fish."

Then he got a boat and when they all came with their tackle took them aboard and instructed them in the art of fishing. They made a good catch, and when they returned with it built a kiln in which to dry the fish.

When they made ready for another fishing trip the question at once arose who should watch the drying fish while the rest were gone. The choice finally fell upon the Horse.

They had not been gone long when a great, wild, hairy giant called Agasi, who lived in the mountain forest, came up and said:

"Hello, Horse! What are you doing here?"

"Watching these fish while my friends are gone for more."

"Give them to me," said Agasi; "I am hungry and need them."

"O, no! I can't do that. I must take care of them for my friends, who are not here."

"I don't care what you want," said Agasi, who began helping himself.

The Horse was afraid, and ran off out of reach, while Agasi devoured the fish and went away. When the others returned they cried out:

"Here, Horse, where are the fish?"

"A great, savage giant came and ate them all up," replied the Horse.

"Why did you not drive him away?" they said, all together.

"Oh, he was much too big for me to do anything with."

"Why, how big was he?"

"Two fathoms wide and four high," said the Horse.

The others jeered at him and were much inclined to blame him; especially the Carabao, who made remarks reflecting on the Horse's bravery, saying he would have fought.

"Well," said the Horse, "since you are such a fighter, stay and look after this lot yourself."

This being finally agreed upon, they put their new catch in the oven, the Carabao sat down to watch, and the others went to their fishing. By and by Agasi came and said:

"Well, Carabao, what are you doing?"

"Guarding these fish for my friends, who are away after more."

"Give them to me, for I am hungry and need them."

"No. I shall do nothing of the sort. I am here to keep them until my friends return, and I intend to do so."

"Never mind your intentions. I must have them," said Agasi, beginning to dip in and help himself to handfuls. Whereupon the Carabao flew at him and began to gore his legs.

"Confound these flies, how they annoy me," said Agasi, striking the Carabao's head with his hand, and minding him no more than a fly, until the fish were gone.

When the fishers returned they said:

"Well, Carabao, we thought you were going to keep the fish."

"I did try to keep them, and I did fight the giant, but he was too big for me. I could do nothing with him."

"How big was he?" they asked again.

"Five fathoms high," was the answer.

"You may have fought all right," said the Monkey, "but you are too clumsy. What is wanted is some bright person who will not only fight, but will use some judgment. I will stay the next time, and if he comes and tries to take the fish by force I will scratch his eyes out."

So they all went away, after having placed their fish in the oven, and left the Monkey in charge. When Agasi came, he said:

"Well, Monkey, you are in charge of the fish, I see. I must have them to eat myself."

"Consider," said the Monkey. "You are a Man, and should be too just to rob others of their property. I must live, as well as you."

"Oh, as to that, take what you want. Two or three fish are a meal for you, but I require two or three thousand to fill me."

"But I must keep the others for my friends who helped to catch them and trusted them to me."

"Look out for yourself," said Agasi, beginning to eat.

The Monkey leaped on his head and shoulders and began clawing at his eyes and biting his ears and neck. Agasi brushed about his head as if brushing away flies, and at last, striking the monkey, knocked him a hundred yards away.

The Monkey picked himself up, almost killed, and watched Agasi devour the rest of the fish and go. When the others returned they found the Monkey bruised and beaten, and when questioned he said:

"He made no more of me than a fly. He was too big for me. Why, he was six fathoms high."

"Now," said Bull, "you have tried your different methods of force and finesse. I will stay and see what I can do. I have a fine pair of horns for fighting, and I think my appearance should go for something."

So the Bull was left and the others returned to their fishing.

When Agasi came he said: "What are you doing here, Bull?"

"Guarding these fish," said the Bull.

"But you do not live on fish. You eat grass, and here is plenty of good, fresh grass," said Agasi, who was sufficiently impressed by the Bull's appearance to be willing to talk.

"Not at all. My parents fed on grass, but I have adopted a fish diet, and now I live on them almost entirely."

"Well, at any rate, your wants are small compared with mine. Two or three hundred fish are a meal for you, but that many thousand are scarcely enough for me."

"But these belong to my friends, who are now away fishing."

"Well, I am also your friend, and I need them more than the others," said Agasi, helping himself.

This gave the Bull a new idea, and he asked:

"Where do you live?"

"Alone, four hours' walk from here."

"Well, I will go home with you."

"No, you cannot, for we can come to my house. It is built in a tree and is not like a man's house."

"Do you mean that it is in the top of a tree?"

"Yes, it is inside a big, hollow tree."

"It no matter, I go."

"I may see that place there I will and we."

"But you have just said I am your friend. Surely you would not kill a friend."

"Well, come along if you wish," said Agasi, setting off at a round pace, with the Bull running as hard as he could after him.

After travelling three hours the Bull was exhausted and had to lie down to rest. "Here we are," Agasi was going on to succeed to the fall, when the others returned and asked for the fish. The Bull said:

"The giant was too big for me. Why, he was eight fathoms high. I tried to follow him to his house, so we could go and catch him, but he went so far and so fast I gave out, and had to come back."

"Well," said the Planduc, "you have all tried and failed. Now, since I have taught you how to fish, I will stay and show you how to keep the fish. The Cat also has a good head, and he shall stay with me."

So the Cat and the Planduc staid, and the others went to their fishing again. When Agasi came he saw the Cat, and said:

"Hello, Cat; what are you doing?"

"Helping the Planduc watch the fish," replied the Cat.

"O, yes, there is the Planduc, sure enough. Well, I will just take the fish," said Agasi, beginning to eat, without more words.

"Look here, Agasi," said the Planduc, "do you feel that big wind?"

"Yes, I feel a wind."

"Do you see that big black cloud?" asked the Planduc, pointing to a cloud overhead.

"Yes I see it; but what of it?"

"Well, there is going to be a storm, worse than you ever saw. I know the look of it. A hundred years ago there was one just like this. I ran as hard as I could for three hours, and just managed to get out of it. But all my friends were killed. There is a great whirling wind that will lift you up and dash you to the ground, and the water will wash you away."

"Let us run away then," said Agasi, who was now trembling so that he could hardly stand.

"Impossible. It is now too close upon us."

"What shall we do?" asked Agasi, jumping about.

"If you will keep cool and do as I say, I will save you, although you have stolen our fish so often," said the Planduc.

"Tell me what to do and I will be your friend always."

"Well, the only thing you can do is to let me tie you tight to a big tree that is strong enough to stand the wind and then neither the wind nor the water can carry you away."

Agasi readily agreed, so they hunted a big tree, and he stood with his back against it while the Planduc and the Cat began to tie him to it with a piece of rotan. They tied his legs and body and arms, all the time telling him of the terrors of the coming storm.

"Tie me good and tight," said Agasi, "so I cannot be torn away."

Then they put the rope around his neck, and the Planduc said:

"Now we will give you a tight haul on this, and I am sure you will be safe."

So they put a stick in the loop of the rope and began twisting it to tighten it about his neck, and by swinging on to the end of the stick they made the rope so tight that Agasi was choked to death. When the others came back and found their fish all right, they said:

"Well, the giant didn't come, did he?"

"Oh, yes, he came," said the Planduc.

"But here are the fish. What did you do with him?"

"Oh, he is tied to a tree over there."

"You are lying to us," said the Horse and Carabao and Monkey and Bull, all in one breath.

"Very well, if you do not believe me, come and see," retorted the Planduc.

So they all ran to the tree, and, sure enough, there was the giant, stone dead. Then they cut the rotan and let him fall down. When they measured him they found he was seven fathoms tall.

THOUGHTS OF A FALLING MAN.

What Occupied Zeis's Mind While He Was Dropping 100 Feet.

From the Denver Post.

"Why, I feel bully; I was wishing they would let me go out and roll on the lawn," said the man who fell five stories yesterday.

Falling 100 feet down an elevator shaft is not exactly a pleasant sensation—one has no time for "feeling," and it is not often that after it is over there are pleasant memories of the incident.

Frank G. Zeis of 2033 Gray street is a restless patient at St. Joseph's Hospital to-day. His cheek and lip are scratched and his right little finger is wrapped up. Otherwise there is no evidence of the accident which befell him at the new Adams Hotel, Eighteenth and Welton streets, yesterday, save a little soreness in the back.

"I can't tell just how I fell," said he, laughing, as if he was glad to see a visitor, this morning". I went 'siss-boom' with just a little accent on the siss, and I have been lying here wondering how much brain I have. I didn't think I had much gray matter in my skull until I was being carried to the ambulance. Ordinarily I would not have paid any attention to the shaft sides as I went up—in fact, I didn't, but when I started to fall everything flashed before me; it seemed that I could see every nail, every chip and block on the floors and particularly the boards at the bottom.

"Before I fell I felt the rope on one side of my swing giving way. Then I remembered swinging out of a seven-story building recently with half-a-ton of iron for a fire escape, all hanging on the two ropes that supported me, and I wouldn't believe one of them was breaking. I yelled at the space below to 'let that rope alone,' believing some one was tampering with the free ends by which I had pulled my swing up on the pulleys.

"Then came the horrible jerking, breaking of strand after strand—it seemed to unravel and break by bits. I suppose it took two seconds for me to start, but it seemed like twenty minutes. When I saw the cause of one end of my board sinking I reached for the other rope, but was down I went. As I fell off the board I thought a dozen things. First I realized like a flash of lightning that I was facing death without a chance in my favor. No, I never thought of the mean things I had done—nor the good, nor my friends and relatives. It was death, death sure and swift, coming at me like a cyclone, and I relaxed to die a thousand rushing noises seemed to bewilder me for an instant—a very, very short instant—shorter than a clock can measure, and my mind passed to the bottom of the shaft. My head was pointed down and I turned over and I remember thinking how I would strike, but by some mysterious impulse or action I turned over and prepared to alight in a sitting position.

"Then the sensation grew pleasant. I seemed to be riding on the wind above the earth, while the objects shot by like cannon balls. I seemed to be in a reverie when I reached the third floor. I know it was the third for I remembered later of having seen a stick projecting there and felt a pain in my face. My finger and I had tripped the stick and gave me those scratches and then I thought of the boards at the bottom. I knew they were there about fifteen inches apart, and with the vision of these boards before me forgetful of the flashes of light as I passed the different floors I struck.

"I didn't hurt, I just felt as if a thousand cannon boomed all at once into my ears and then all was black.

"Next I awoke as they carried me to the ambulance. I thought about cursing. Every time an ironworker gets hurt he curses. An ironworker can give a thousand pointers on profanity, but somehow, death came creeping up before me again. I went through it all over in my mind, and I did not curse. I haven't the habit, however. I drew up my arms and legs and began to realize I was alive—that I was not in a new world, and then I felt thankful. The sky seemed bluer and the sun brighter than it ever did and I resolved never to go up to the air again. When an ironworker gets a fall he is no more good at the business. I guess I go up and more up to yesterday I always felt comfortable in the air swinging and trying my nerve.

"Just strange to me I think I heard and snapped it in twain. He here strike the other and we fetched but had it not been for the second board he would have sailed away, according to his own statement.

Successful Anesthetizing of a Monkey.

From the Buffalo Commercial.

The commercial of Saturday told how the constipated looking monkey that belonged to Hot Dogger Hoffman had a fight and had to take to the hospital. Mr. Hoffman had agreed an operation, but hesitated to see that the operating knife, or surgeon's knife, should have to be performed in order to save the monkey's life and restore the world's greatest ironclad physician and surgeon to perfect health.

In the morning of Saturday this gentleman called on a physician the other side of the Niagara River, who promised to meet him at the Hoffman hotel with a hypodermic syringe and a bottle of morphine. Everything was in readiness when the Hot Dogger came to the hotel with his monkey and the operation was performed in the presence of the entire staff of the hotel and a few of the guests and of your and reporter with a scientific eye of experimentation. Your and he and the other dignitary have decided that the monkey should never be anesthetized and must perform their task and live out before Indian corn ripened a garden.

Shotgun Quarantine Against Johnsonia.

From the Atlanta Journal.

Jones, Mac Black, in the outlying city of the Jones Mississippi Valley, is now taken drastic step toward keeping the yellow fever shadows of the surrounding Gum Bottom out the town. They have established a shotgun quarantine against the building and none of the men are allowed to come around as they can make "goo-goo eyes" at the girls.

HERE'S SKIPPER BACK AGAIN.

And Bowery Policemen Are Watching for Practical Jokes by Him.

Skipper of the Bowery disappeared from these parts a year ago, and every policeman along the Bowery heaved a sigh of relief. And now Skipper has come back. So the policemen are worried.

Skipper was born with a keen sense of humor. Everybody laughs when he hears of Skipper's exploits, until Skipper hits him. Then he swears and joins the large and ever-growing army of anti-Skipperites along the Bowery.

Why do the policemen hate Skipper? Listen. Skipper dined late at Mike Lyone's restaurant a year or so ago. He met a party of friends there and it was 2 in the morning when he got ready to go.

Just before he rose from the table he took the tomato ketchup bottle and poured the red contents