

the green color matter that stamps every honest plant. Its seeds germinate in the earth and come up with amazing rapidity in a day or two. Travel, the plant must; and should no foster parent be within reach it will die miserably of sheer loneliness. But watch the little threadlike feelers groping for a foster parent!

The moment the wandering and seeking tip of the dodder's stem touches an innocent young plant, it quickly makes a secure hitch round about it which cannot be shaken off. This vegetable "Old Man of the Sea" clings for dear life, and the tragedy begins. The victim grows rapidly, and its upward movement pulls the young parasite dodder clear out of the soil, so that its tender roots shrivel up and perish. So far all is well from the dodder's point of view. It has the promotion it sought from childhood. Its great ambition was to "get out of the rut" and never again return to it. But observe how the little plant shows its gratitude. Having lost its earth roots, it immediately begins to put forth roots in the air which pierce the skin of its benefactor, ramify and branch this way and that in its delicate flesh, drawing much nutriment from it, and thriving on the life blood of the tender plant thus parasitically fastened upon.

Roping the Sands Together

LAST of all among those plants that walk is one of such utility that it has won back from destruction entire provinces of a nation. I refer to the well known marram grass or sea sedge that

is found on sand dunes by the sea. You remember the old poetic expression typifying a hopeless task,—the weaving of sand into ropes? Well, the marram grass does this and more. It makes ropes of its enormous creeping rootstocks, tying the great shifting sands together and holding them in check. Its rootstocks shoot out with great rapidity, and are tough as wood fiber.

It was the discovery of the possibilities of sea sedge that enabled the Dutch to hold back the sea from their fertile fields, and gave the now fertile Province of the Landes to fair France. A generation ago all the Atlantic coast from Bordeaux almost to the Spanish frontier was threatened by moving sand dunes which overwhelmed forests and villages. But one of the cleverest agricultural engineers suddenly bethought him of marram grass and propagated it wholesale amid the fast advancing dunes. Within a few years their destructive march had been stayed and the soil so altered that it was found possible to plant pines. As a result, where a desert once was we now find the beautiful and thriving health resort of Arcachon, near Bordeaux, whither invalids flock from all parts of the world in search of health amid the vast pine forests. Thus we see that if birds once condemned and despised may save our farmers' millions by destroying insect pests, there are also plants that can save great territories from destruction by "patrolling" for miles and throwing out root ropes more efficacious than mighty machinery.

Uncle Tom Andy Bill

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bear spring into the air and fall back on Mab. My bullet had penetrated its brain. I also remember tossing the great five hundred-pound brute to one side as if it had been a fox, and I remember snatching Mab from the ground and running back down the path with my unconscious burden in my arms to where the girls were standing. I was as strong as an ox.

"See if she lives!" I cried, laying Mab gently on the ground.

"Nan felt her hands and said, 'I don't know. I cannot tell.'"

"Then I fell on my knees and placed my ear over her heart. I distinctly heard its beating, and sprang to my feet, crying excitedly:

"She lives! She lives! See if she is shot, Nan!"

"Shot?" asked Nan in surprise.

"Yes," I answered. "Shot! Shot! Don't you understand? Remove her clothing and see if she is shot!"

"I walked away, and met Balsar coming down the path. I stopped him and said, 'Nan is trying to see if she is shot.'"

"Shot?" asked Balsar. "Who shot her?"

"You, if anyone," I answered. "She fell when you fired."

"Merciful God!" cried Balsar. "Did I miss the bear and hit her? Let us examine the bear."

"We ran to the dead bear, and I found the wound of Balsar's bullet in its neck, and discovered my shot in its head. Then I ran back to the girls, shouting:

"She is not shot! She is not shot! We found both bullets in the bear!"

"No, she is not shot," answered Nan calmly; "but I fear she is dying."

WITHOUT another word, I took Mab in my arms and started home, wild with grief and strong with despair. Balsar went back to fetch Solomon and the sleigh; but I went on toward home carrying Mab in my arms. I had been walking perhaps ten minutes, when a sigh came from her lips. She lifted her arm, twined it about my neck, and whispered my name, "Tom Andy Bill!" I was wild with joy; but I did not speak. In a moment she said:

"You saved my life. I saw you lift your gun; then I heard the bullet strike the bear's head within six inches of my face, and I knew your aim had been true."

"She said she was not hurt, and wanted me to put her down; but I begged her to remain where she was, and she whispered:

"We'll let the others think I haven't awakened."

"Then she closed her eyes again, and I marched proudly through the snow, as strong as Sampson, and the happiest boy in the world.

When we reached the wagon road we halted to wait for Balsar, and soon Solomon greeted us with a song of welcome.

she jumped out, and, despite the girls' entreaties and my commands, she walked home with us, and was none the worse for her terrible adventure.

THE two horses had run home after dumping the girls in the snow, and our folks were greatly alarmed.

"We found awaiting us, besides father and mother, two strange gentlemen and a lady. They were elegantly dressed city folks, and when we entered the room where they were sitting, the lady at once ran to Mab, saying:

"It is she! It is she! She is the very image of my sister!"

"Mab stepped back from the lady in surprise, and asked, 'What is the matter? What do you want?'"

"I at once knew that they wanted Mab, and was not surprised when the lady said:

"We want you, my dear. We want to take you with us. I am your mother's sister. This gentleman is your uncle; and the other gentleman is my husband. We learned from an old woman named Polly Wolf, who died in a Cincinnati jail, that you had been stolen by a band of robbers that plundered a stagecoach a few years ago and killed your father and mother. The old woman said you had run away from her house with two boys who lived farther west near the Michigan road. We began our search for you at once, and at last have found you. We will give you a home, and will care for you as if you were our daughter."

"But I have a good home," said Mab.

"Yes, yes, we know," interrupted one of the gentlemen. Turning to the lady, he said, "Sit down, Eliza, and let me question the girl."

"Then the gentleman asked, 'Your name is Mab, is it not?'"

"Mab answered, 'It is.'"

"Do you know your father's name?"

"No," responded Mab. "At Polly's I went by the name of Mab Wolf. But I knew that Granny and Grandpap Wolf were no kin to me."

"It is as I expected," said the gentleman. "Do you remember when you first came to Granny Wolf's?" he asked.

"Yes. I was taken from a stagecoach. I was perhaps five years old."

"There is no further doubt," said the gentleman, turning to my father. "We thank you for your kindness to the girl. We will pay you for your trouble, and will relieve you of her care."

"You owe me nothing," said father. "Mab has been no trouble to us. She has been a delight and a comfort; hasn't she, wife?"

"Indeed she has," answered mother.

"We can at least give you our gratitude," said the gentleman, "and I am sure you will be glad that the girl has found her people, or that her people have found her."

"I'm not so sure that I am glad,"

answered father. "Do you want to leave us, Mab?"

"No, no, daddy!" cried Mab, running to father's side and grasping his arm. "I don't want to go! I want to stay with you!"

"But this is not your home," interrupted the gentleman. "Your aunt and I are your natural guardians, and our home is the proper place for you."

"What you say may all be true," said father; "but how am I to know it?"

"Haven't I just told you all the circumstances of the case?" answered the gentleman. "The girl is the image of her mother, and anyone who knew my sister would know that this girl is her child."

"Yes; but you see I didn't know your sister," answered father.

"Then the gentleman grew angry and said, 'My good man, your intentions are all right; but you are much too officious in this matter, and we shall have to insist that the girl prepare to come with us at once.'"

"Again I ask you, Do you want to go with these folks, Mab?" asked father.

"No, no! A thousand times no!" cried the girl, clinging to father and beginning to weep.

"Then," said father, addressing the gentleman and the lady, "I shall have to ask you to go outside the house and do your insisting; for the girl shall not go with you against her will."

"I'll bring the sheriff and take her!" answered the gentleman angrily. "I will not be bullied by an old fool like you!"

"Go and get the sheriff if you wish," said father; "but go quickly, or I'll start you on your way with my boot. I reckon you'll have to get a writ from the court—a writ of habeas corpus—before the sheriff will interfere. The sheriff happens to be my brother. I should like to call your attention to the door. You can get out one at a time, I reckon, and that'll be fast enough for me, if you hurry."

"The strangers left the house, declaring that they would soon return, armed by the law, and would 'show us.'"

"What they intended to show us, we did not know; but in a general way we supposed that they meant they would take Mab away from us."

"That was a sad day at our house. Mab wept nearly all the afternoon, and clung to mother, father, and my sisters with a piteous appeal for protection."

"Balsar went home for the night, and next day we went back to the cabin, loaded our furs on the sleigh, and abandoned our quarters for the winter. If the strangers were coming to take Mab, I wanted to be at home when they arrived."

"We lived that winter in constant dread of losing Mab; but when winter turned to spring, and spring to summer, we began to lose our fear, and by fall we had settled down to the glad belief that she would not be taken from us."

DID you go back to get the bear?" asked a small boy.

"Indeed we did," answered Uncle Tom Andy Bill. "It weighed nearly five hundred pounds, and was as fat as butter."

"Did you get his hide?" asked the same boy.

"Yes," answered Uncle Tom Andy Bill, "and we gave it to Mab."

All the older members of Tom Andy Bill's audience knew that Mab had been his one and only sweetheart, and there was not one among us whose heart did not beat in sorrow and throbb with love for grand old Tom Andy Bill, who had lived his long life true to his one love, and would die with her image and hers alone nesting in his heart of hearts.

Amid the pictures of bears, robbers, swamps, and caves that he had drawn for our entertainment, I could see towering above them all the tall, strong figure, the black, waving hair, the dark, grave eyes, glowing with the light of a great soul, of our friend and protector, Tom Andy Bill. He had missed the best thing in life,—the love of the woman he loved,—but he had known plentifully the next best thing the world has to offer; that is, the happiness one gives to others.

"Wasn't it funny, Uncle Tom Andy Bill," said Mab, "that her name was the same as mine?"

"No, it was not funny, sweetheart. It was just sad." Tears sprang to the old man's eyes, and they came to other eyes too as he walked off to bed with Baby Mab clinging to his finger.

The next Uncle Tom Andy Bill story, "Wyan-dotte Appears Once More," will be published August 23.

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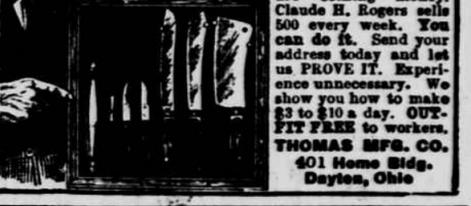
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