

Danny's Own Story

By DON MARQUIS

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CHAPTER VII.

Martha.

LOOKS up, and that was how I got acquainted with Martha. She was eating one herself, setting up in the tree like a boy. In her lap was a book she had been reading. She was leaning back into the fork two limbs made so as not to tumble.

"Well," I says, "can I have one?" "You've eaten it already," she says, "so there isn't any use begging for it now."

I seen she was a tense, that girl, and I would of give anything to be able to tease her right back again. But I couldn't think of nothing to say, so I jest stands there kind o' dumblike, thinking what a dern purty girl she was and thinking how dumb I must look, and I felt my face getting red. Dr. Kirby would of thought of something to say right off. And after I got back to camp I would think of something myself. But I couldn't think of nothing bright, so I says:

"Well, then, you give me another one?"

She gives the core of the one she has been eating a toss at me. But I ketched it and made like I was going to throw it back at her real hard. She slung up her arm and dodged back, and she dropped her book.

I thinks to myself I'll learn that girl to get sassy and make me feel like a



She Was Setting Up in the Tree Like a Boy.

dumbhead, even if she is purty. So I don't say a word. I jest picks up that book and sticks it under my arm and walks away slow with it to where they was a stump a little ways off, not fur from the crick, and sets down with my back to her and opens it. And I was trying all the time to think of something smart to say to her. But I couldn't of done it if I was to be shot. Still, I thinks to myself, no girl can sass me and not get sassied back, neither.

I hearn a scramble behind me which I knowed was her getting out of that tree. And in a minute she was in front of me, mad.

"Give me my book," she says.

But I only reads the name of the book out loud, fur to aggravate her. I had on purty good duds, but I kind of wisht I had on my Injun rig then. You take the girls that always comes down to see the passenger train come into the depot in them country towns and that Injun rig of mine and Looney's always made 'em turn around and look at us agin. I never wisht I had on them Injun duds so hard before in my life. But I couldn't think of nothing bright to say, so I jest reads the name of that book over to myself agin, kind o' grinning like I got a good joke I ain't going to tell any one.

"You give me my book," she says agin, red as one of them harvest apples, "or I'll tell Miss Hampton you stole it and she'll have you and your show arrested."

I reads the name agin. It was "The Lost Heir." I seen I had her good and teased now, so I says, "It must be one of these here love stories by the way you take on over it."

"It's not," she says, getting ready to cry. "And what right have you got in our wood lot anyhow?"

"Well," I says, "I was jest about to move on and climb out of it when you hollered to me from that tree."

"I didn't!" she says. But she was mad because she knowed she had spoke to me first, and she was awful sorry she had. She began to walk away and to cry.

I got up and follered her a little piece. And it come to me all to once I had teased her too hard, and I was down on myself fur it.

"Ray," I says, kind of tagging along beside of her, "there's your old book."

But she didn't make no move to take

it, and her hands was over her face, and she wouldn't pull 'em down to even look at it.

So I tried agin.

"Well," I says, feeling real mean, "I wisht you wouldn't cry. I didn't go to make you do that."

She drops her hands and whirls around on me, mad as a wet hen right off.

"I'm not! I'm not!" she sings out, and stamps her feet. "I'm not crying!" But jest then she loses her holt on herself and busts out and jest natchurally bellers. "I hate you!" she says, like she could of killed me.

That made me kind of dumb agin, fur it come to me all to once I liked that girl awful well. And here I'd up and made her hate me. I held the book out to her agin.

Well, sir, she snatches that book and she gives it a sling. I thought it was going kersplash into the crick. But it didn't. It hit right into the fork of a limb that hung down over the crick, and it all spread out when it lit and stuck in that crotch somehow. She couldn't of slung it that way on purpose in a million years. We both stands and looks at it a minute.

"Oh, oh," she says. "What have I done? It's out of the town library, and I'll have to pay for it!"

"I'll get it fur you," I says. But it wasn't no easy job. If I shook that limb it would tumble into the crick. But I clumb the tree and eased out on that limb as fur as I dast to. And, of course, jest as I got holt of the book that limb broke and I fell into the crick. But I had the book. It was some soaked, but I reckoned it could still be read.

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streets, orderly, but looking hard into people's faces, mostly women's faces. Oncet, Looney says, they was big trouble over it. They was in a store in a good sized town, and he took holt of a woman's chin, tilted her face back and looked at her hard and most scared her to death, and they was nearly being a riot there. And he was jailed and had to pay a big fine. Since then Looney always follers him around when he is that-a-way.

The next day he is asleep all morning. But that day he don't drink any more, and Looney says mebbly it ain't going to be one of the reg'lar pifflicated kind. I seen Martha agin that day, too—twice I has talks with her. I told her about the doctor.

"Is he into a quest, do you think?" I asks her.

She says she thinks it is remorse fur some crime he has done. But I couldn't figger Doctor Kirby would of done none. So that night after the show I says to him, innocent-like:

"Doctor Kirby, what is a quest?" He looks at me kind of queer.

"Wherefore," says he, "this sudden thirst for enlightenment?"

"I jest ran across the word accidental like," I told him.

He looks at me awful hard, his eyes jest natchurally digging into me. I felt like he knowed I had set out to pump him. I wisht I hadn't tried it. Then he tells me a quest is a hunt. And I'm glad that's over with. But it ain't, fur purty soon he says:

"Danny, did you ever hear of Lady Clara Vere de Vere?"

"No," I says. "Who is she?"

"A lady friend of Lord Tennyson's," he says, "whose manners were above reproach."

"Well," I says, "she sounds kind o' like a medicine to me."

"Lady Clara," he says, "and all the other Vere de Veres were people with manners we should try to imitate. If Lady Clara had been here last night when I was talking to myself, Danny, her manners wouldn't have let her listen to what I was talking about."

"I didn't listen!" I says. Fur I seen what he was driving at now with them Vere de Veres. Purty soon he says, cheerful-like:

"There was a girl talking to you to-day, Danny."

"Mebby they was," I says, "and mebbly they wasn't." But I felt my face getting red all the same and was mad because it did. He grinned kind o' aggravating at me and says some poetry at me about in the spring a young man's frenzy likely turns to thoughts of love.

"Well," I says, kind of sheepish-like, "this is summer time and purty nigh autumn." Then I seen I'd jest as good as owned up I liked Martha and was kind of mad at myself fur that. But I told him some more about her too. Somehow I jest couldn't help it. He laughs at me and goes on into the tent.

I laid there and looked at the fire fur quite a spell outside the tent. I was thinking, if all them tales wasn't jest dern foolishness, how I wisht I would really find a dad that was a high mucky muck and could come back in an automobile and take her away. I laid there fur a long, long time. It must of been fur a couple of hours. I supposed the doctor had went to sleep.

But all of a sudden I looks up, and he is in the door of the tent staring at me. I seen he had been in there at it hard agin and thinking quietlike all this time. He stood there in the doorway of the tent, with the frelight on his face and his red beard and his arms stretched out, holding to the canvas and looking at me strange and wild. Then he moved his hand up and down at me, and he says:

"If she's fool enough to love you treat her well—treat her well. For if you don't you can never run away from the hell you'll carry in your own heart!"

And he kind of doubled up and pitched forward when he said that, and if I hadn't ketched him he would of fell right across the fire. He was plumb pifflicated.

CHAPTER VIII.

Miss Hampton and Her Secret.

MARTHA wouldn't of took anything fur being around Miss Hampton, she said. Miss Hampton was kind of quiet and sweet and pale looking, and no body ever thought of talking loud or raising any fuss when she was around. She had enough money of her own to run herself on, and she kep' to herself a good deal. She had come to that town from no one knowed where years ago and bought that place. Fur all of her being so gentle and easy and talking with one of them soft, drawly kind of voices, Martha says, no one had ever dared to ast her about herself, though they was a lot of women in that town that was wishful to.

But Martha said she knowed what Miss Hampton's secret was, and she hadn't told no one, neither. Which she told me and all the promising I done about not telling would of made the cold chills run up your back, it was so solemn. Miss Hampton had been jilted years ago, Martha said, and the name of the jilter was David Armstrong. Well, he must of been a low down sort of man. Martha said if things was only fixed in this country like they ought to be she would sent a night to find that David Armstrong. And that would of ended up in a mortal combat, and the night would have cleaved him.

"Yes," says I, "and then you would of married that there night. I suppose."

She says she would of.

"Well," says I, "mebbly you would of, and mebbly you wouldn't of. If he cleaved David Armstrong that night would likely be arrested fur it."

Martha says if he was she would wait outside his dancin' keep fur

years and years till she was a old wo-



She Had Fainted and Keeled Over.

man with gray in her hair, and every day they would give lingering looks at each other through the window bars. And they would be happy that-a-way.

Well, I never took no stock in them mournful ways of being happy. I couldn't of riz up to being a night fur Martha. She expected too much of one. I thought it over fur a little spell without saying anything, and I tried to make myself believe I would of liked all that night business. But it wasn't no use pretending. I knowed I would get tired of it.

So I changed the subject and asts her why I ain't seen Miss Hampton around the place none. Martha says she has a bad sick headache and ain't been outside the house fur four or five days. I asts her why she don't wait on her. But she don't want her to, Martha says. She's been staying in the house ever since we been in town and jest wants to be let alone. I thinks all that is kind of funny, and then I seen from the way Martha is answering my questions that she is holding back something she would like to tell, but don't think she orter tell. I leaves her alone.

When she said it was a secret I knowed she would tell. Martha liked having her friends help her to keep a secret.

"I think Miss Hampton has seen a ghost," she says finally, "and that her staying indoors has something to do with that."

Then she tells me. The night of the day after we camped there her and Miss Hampton was out fur a walk. We didn't have any show that night. They passed right by our camp, and they seen us there by the fire, all three of us. But they was in the road in the dark, and we was all in the light, so none of the three of us seen them. Miss Hampton was kind of scared of us first glance, fur she gasped and grabbed holt of Martha's arm all of a sudden so tight she pinched it. Which it was very natcheral that she would be startled, coming across three strange men all of a sudden at night around a turn in the road. They went along home, and Martha went inside and lighted a lamp, but Miss Hampton lingered on the porch fur a minute. Jest as she lit the lamp Martha hearn another little gasp or kind of sigh from Miss Hampton out there on the porch. Then they was the sound of her falling down. Martha ran out with the lamp, and she was laying there. She had fainted and keeled over. Martha said jest in the minute she had left her alone on the porch was when Miss Hampton must of seen the ghost. Martha bring her to, and she was looking puzzled and wildlike both to oncet. Martha asts her what is the matter.

"Nothing," she says, rubbing her fingers over her forehead in a helpless kind of way, "nothing."

"You look like you had seen a ghost," Martha tells her.

Miss Hampton looks at Martha awful funny, and then she says mebbly she has seen a ghost and goes along upstairs to bed. And since then she ain't been out of the house. She tells Martha it is a sick headache, but Martha says she knows it ain't. She thinks she is scared of something.

"Scared?" I says. "She wouldn't see no more ghosts in the daytime."

Martha says how do I know she wouldn't? She knows a lot about ghosts of all kinds. Martha does. Horses and dogs can see them easier than humans, even in the daytime, and it makes their hair stand up when they do. But some humans that have the gift can see them in the daytime like an animal. And Martha asts me how can I tell but Miss Hampton is like that?

"Well, then," I says, "she must be a witch. And if she is a witch why is she scared of them a-tall?"

But Martha says if you have second sight you don't need to be a witch to see them in the daytime.

Well, with all the talking back and forth we done about them ghosts we couldn't agree. That afternoon it seemed like we couldn't agree about anything. I knowed we would be going away from there before long, and I says to myself before I go I'm going to have that girl fur my girl, or else know the reason why. No matter what I was talking about, that idea was in the back of my head, and somehow it kind of made me want to pick fusses with her, too. We was setting on a log, purty deep into the woods, and there come a time when neither of us had ast nothing fur quite a spell. But after a while I says:

"Martha, we'll be going away from here in two, three days now."

She never said nothing.

"Will you be sorry?" I asts her. She says she will be sorry.

"Well," I says, "why will you be sorry?"

I thought she would say because I was going. And then I would be finding out whether she liked me a lot. But she says the reason she will be sorry is because there will be no one new to talk to about things both has read. I was considerable took down when she said that.

"Martha," I says, "it's more'n likely I won't never see you agin after I go away."

She says that kind of parting comes between the best of friends.

I seen I wasn't getting along very fast nor saying what I wanted to say. I reckon one of them Sir Marmeluke fellows would of knowed what to say or Dr. Kirby would, or mebbly even Looney would of said it better than I could. So I was kind of mad with myself, and I says mean like:

"If you don't care, of course I don't care neither."

She never answered that, so I gets up and makes like I am starting off.

"I was going to give you some of them there Injun feathers of mine to remember me by," I tells her, "but if you don't want 'em there's plenty of others would be glad to take 'em."

But she says she would like to have them.

"Well," I says, "I will bring them to you tomorrow afternoon."

She says, "Thank you."

Finally I couldn't stand it no longer. I got brave all of a sudden and busted out, "Martha, I—I—I—"

But I got to stuttering, and my breathness stuttered itself away, and I finished up by saying:

"I like you a hull lot, Martha."

Which wasn't jest exactly what I had planned fur to say.