

How Balaam Abetted.

BY LYDIA FELICIA PERKINS.

The sunlight lay like a hot, white blanket over everything, and when there was even the excuse of a breeze the powdery dust whirled and settled like sifted flour on the drooping vegetation—the Dog Days had come.

Nancy Banks was sitting in a low rocker under the honey locusts, sewing; her father near at hand was mending harness. He was a big, stout man, and his open collar revealed a sinewy neck streaming with perspiration, but Nancy looked cool in her pale blue gingham. A charming face, Nancy's, but just at present pouting, and her voice was pouting, too—if any one may use the expression—as she exclaimed:

"Pa, I don't know what ails you to be so ridiculous. Looks like," and her eyes flashed as she chuckled, "you want to make yourself the laughing stock of the neighborhood."

Her father's red face grew redder as he tugged at the long needle, finally bringing it through the tough leather with a jerk.

"Well, Nancy," he said slowly, "you know what I've said. I don't know anything against Reub. Martin beside him bein' as poor as turnip greens. Accordin' to my notion, Sam Jackson's as good as he is and a blame sight better chance."

"Better chance," she echoed bitterly, "I can't bear him, Pa. I don't like the set of his mouth. There's a look about it of a man who'd beat a horse or bully a woman."

"Well, I ain't a judge of mouths, an' Reub. has the chance of winnin' or losin' you," her father said, and shook with a laugh. "That is, if he ain't too proud stomached. Not many men who didn't want a son-in-law would give 'im the chance I have." His eyes gleamed with malicious fun.

"Well, if he'd do such a thing I wouldn't let him," she cried with excitement and anger. Her fingers fumbled blindly with the delicate ruffing she hemmed. "Just think of the sport folks would make at you two racin' 'long the road—" she stopped, choked with tears.

Her father looked very implacable, for all of his fat.

"Nancy," he said brusquely, "If a man haint willin' to stand a little foolin' and funnin' to git a gal, he haint any grit, an' tomorry evenin' is Reub's last throw. I'll give him a fair start, seein' that you two have to go in a buggy, but when you've crossed the creek I'll let Balaam have his head, and if I catch up with you, Reub. Martin must stop courtin' you." He got to his feet and wobbled away to the stable, looped about with harness.

Nancy bent smarting eyes over the dainty dress she was making. The reasonless singing of a grasshopper in the scorched field to her left irritated her, but the unlatching of the gate and the coming of Sam Jackson mounted her irritation into inhospitality.

"Good evenin', Miss Nancy; Pa home?"

"Yes he is!" truculently.

"I'll just sit down and wait for him." No answer.

He seated himself in Banks' vacated chair, swung his big, booted right leg over his left and looked under his drooping slouch-hat straight at Nancy. He was thinking.

"What a fine lookin' girl she is! The peartest in the county." His light eyes kindled; then he spoke aloud.

"Say, Miss Nancy, did you ever see my place down near the crick?"

"Yes, and it looks mighty run-down and neglected," she said frankly.

He fingered the strap on his boot-les and dropped his voice.

"It needs a woman in the house," he began, significantly—

"And a man in the field," she ended unkindly.

He bit his lips but tried to laugh. He rose and tok off his hat to brush back his hot hair.

"I won't wait for your pa now, Miss Nancy, but I'll be around tomorrow night." He stood over her, looking down into the flushed, rebellious face. "I want to see you tomorrow, too," he added, with meaning in his voice.

She answered nothing, and he vaulted to the saddle of his horse, giving a last, unreadable look, while the mouth she didn't like twitched disagreeably, then he struck his horse with a sudden, sharp blow and went away at a gallop.

When Reub. Martin came that night, Nancy told him what her father had said. He was a big, lithe fellow, with a curly head like a bed of live coals, and eyes of burning blue. To Nancy's surprise and annoyance he laughed and answered.

"I'll take my chances, sweetheart," "And be the laughin' stock of the county," she sobbed.

"No, shucks, Nancy!" he said heartily, "I guess I can stand a little bit for you. Nobody would laugh at you, Nancy—he bent his face to her tearful one fondly, "and every other fellow in the neighborhood would want to be in my boots so bad they'd be just mad at me."

"Sam Jackson's coming over tomorrow night," she went on gloomily.

Reuben's eyes sparkled.

"Nancy," he said with unsteady lips "promise me you'll take your father at his word and go with me when it comes to the time. Then when Jackson rides up here tomorrow, we'll be to town havin' the knot tied—"

"If pa don't catch us," his sweetheart broke in dolefully. "He's goin' to ride Balaam—" with a fresh burst of woe—"he's the fastest mule pa's got."

And some of Reub's good spirits deserted him, though, apparently, he was stout-hearted as ever.

The next afternoon, promptly at 3 o'clock, Reub. Martin drove up to the Banks' front gate, swung out of his new buggy, and came into the yard. When the gate latch clicked, Nancy, in her pretty white dress, her cheeks as colorless as the lawn, appeared on the front porch. She hesitated there and looked as though she would retreat. But the sound of her father's shout in the horse-lot, where he was saddling Balaam, set her in her resolution.

"Come, dearie," her lover called, gently. He looked tender and trustworthy, and comely in his blue suit—his newly shaven face healthy and attractive.

With a little sob, Nancy ran to him, and he lifted her up in his arms, held her against his breast passionately for a moment, then placed her in the buggy and seated himself beside her.

He turned a smiling, dauntless face to Banks, who stod grinning by the side of the ready-saddle mule.

"Good day, sir!" the young man called, and lifted his straw hat.

Banks shook his whip gayly after the receding buggy, and watched it till he saw the wheels splash up the water in the creek. The horse stopped to drink, then crossed to the other side and began to mount the opposite hill. Now was Banks' turn. He threw himself into the saddle, stuck the spur deep into Balaam's pampered side and loped down the road, a grim mirth in his face.

There seemed to be no question as to the outcome. Banks shouted gleefully to the fugitives, and plowmen following a languid furrow, paused to watch the unique race. The dust spurted up from the hoofs of the mule and he tucked his head down and tucked back his wicked ears and drew a cranky stitch above his twinkling eye, then with a heart-felt snort, plunged into the clear water of the sandy creek, and paused with such abruptness that Banks nearly went over into the water. And there the mule paused, and while the father strove in vain with the obstinate animal, the elopers

looked back at him with childish simplicity, and waving good-bye, hurried on to the next town and were made one.

For awhile anger occupied the mind of Banks, then suddenly amusement took its place, and he turned the head of Balaam, who moved nimbly enough in the direction of home.

He had just turned Balaam into the lot and was making himself comfortable under the honey locusts when Sam Jackson cantered up to the gate, his horse in a lather:

"I want to tell you," he said, breathing fast from hard riding, "that I met Miss Nancy goin' to town with Reub. Martin in his buggy."

Nancy's father looked at the perturbed suitor—at his painfully spruce attire, then a slow, appreciative smile spread over the waves of fat.

"You did? Per'ap's you might have. She and Reub. went to town 'bout a half hour ago. They're married by this time."

"Married! Why in blazes didn't you stop 'em?"

Banks looked thoughtful. "I did allow to, but my mule was dead against it. He balked at the ford. You remember the Bible tells us about a donkey that once stopped because an angel stod in the way? I calculated today Balaam must have had some mighty good reason for stoppin'."

"Oh, go eat grass!" Jackson screamed, whirling about his astonished horse. He struck the unoffending brute several vicious blows over the head, jerked its mouth cruelly when it reared, then dashed away in a cloud of dust.

"Nancy was right," said Banks, looking after the furious rider. A man that lets his spite out on a horse wouldn't treat a woman right. 'A merciful man is merciful to his beast."

Played for a Sucker.

Under this title a correspondent of Farm and Ranch tells of his experience while in a strange city. It is a warning not to give to beggars on the street. There are exceptions but as a rule those who solicit alms on the street are frauds and should not be encouraged.

The average man will unhesitatingly acknowledge to himself that he has acted the fool or played the sucker in more ways than one in his life, but when others begin to look upon him as such then he becomes embarrassed and takes offense at any such liberties on their part. I presume in this matter I am just like the rest of mankind, and while I might by my acts have laid myself open for suspicions along this line by others, it is by no means pleasant to be brought face to face with the fact that not only one, but a whole string of grafters are looking upon you as an easy mark.

It was during my first trip to Houston for Farm and Ranch in 1899, that I had an experience of this kind, which had a tendency at least to take the conceit out of me as to my personally intelligent appearance. If there is one thing in life which I have endeavored to charitably avoid it has been that of giving money to men or women who wanted it for no other purpose than to purchase beer, whiskey, or other intoxicating beverages. So utterly opposed was I to anything of this kind that I thought I could detect a fraud as quickly as anyone. However, I had not been on Market Square very long when I was approached by a young man of pleasant address who first asked me if I could tell him where he could secure employment. He was very solicitous on this subject, and when I told him no, he begged ten cents to get a lunch with. Here was where I thought I was wise and told him I would take him to a restaurant and pay for his lunch, to which he readily consented. However, when we got to the restaurant, in order to avoid embarrassing the young man, I handed him a dime and told him to go in and get his lunch. I loitered on the outside a few minutes, when he came out the door and with the remark that he couldn't

get anything fit to eat in there, made a bee line for a saloon across the street. Of course the dime I gave him went along and I put myself down as sucker No. 1.

I did not have long to wait to find that I was looked upon as an easy mark. Soon a newsboy strolled by and tackled me for the loan of a nickel to buy a supply of evening papers to sell on the streets. This was a bait I took at once, never suspicioning for a moment that such a small boy as he would be a grafter. He got the nickel as a gift instead of a loan and a few minutes afterward I saw him strolling along the street as big as life smoking a cigarette. I took him to task for his deception and he replied that I was "dead easy," and that he wouldn't have to sell papers at all if all the world were as green as I appeared to be.

The next fellow to tackle me failed in his attempts to land me, but the tactics pursued were so amusing as to cause me to give it in this connection. I had just come out of a restaurant and was wiping my bald head with my handkerchief, when a regular street bum approached me and in a friendly manner says: "Howdy do—I'll declare, I thought you was an Odd Fellow, but I see you belong to a fraternal order anyway, and I feel friendly to all such." He was extremely solicitous about my welfare, wanted to know if I had a room, and if I could get out of town or could he help me in any way. I told him I was fixed so far as a place to eat and sleep was concerned, and as I had several thousand miles of railroad transportation in my possession I thought I could get home without assistance, even if I should be so unfortunate as to go broke. This he appeared to be glad to hear and assured me of such, and just to show that he meant what he said asked for friendship's sake if I wouldn't give him a dime to get a drink with. To this I replied that I was not aware of the fact that I owed him anything, and that if I did he had made a mistake in thinking I would pay it off in whisky.

My success in dealing with this fellow restored my confidence in myself for a time, but it was not for long. I was standing almost in the same place when one of the most pitiful looking objects I ever saw in my life came hobbling along the street on crutches. He was the worst crippled up man I ever saw and I learned afterward was an old Federal soldier. He approached me and, without saying a word, made his appeal to me in a stronger manner than he could possibly do in words. He looked down at his decrepit form and then up at me, and it seemed to me that that mute appeal would have touched a heart of stone. Anyway, I soon found a dime in my pocket I had no other use for and I gave it to him, only to see him hobble off a couple of doors and enter a saloon, taking the dime with him. I was told afterward that that old soldier drew \$1.50 per day as a pension, and that that saloon keeper bought it up by the day. Of course I was not to blame for giving the old man the dime, and yet in helping these objects of charity there ought to be some way of ascertaining who is worthy. These experiences of mine were all had in one day, but there have been many occasions of this kind where I have contributed to unworthy subjects and I guess most traveling men have had similar experiences.

Courtenay, Merritt's Island, Fla.,

Dec. 23, 1904.

E. O. Painter Co.,
Jacksonville, Fla.,

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