

UP BOBS ZIPPY-ZIP

By GEORGE ROEBUCK

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VI

The Bible—the great Bible to which most of the world turn when trouble crowds them, offered no comfort to Dr. Smith. He tried to read it, but the memory of Suzette's laugh, the picture of Bee-Bee in Pete Perkins' arms and the voice of Allen Grass speaking to Suzette in the bramble briars made reading anything impossible. Therefore Dr. Smith had only his friends of the fields to turn to for advice in his own hour of need. With these he talked daily, and when the winds drifted from the ravine in which Suzette's neat little home stood he always thought he heard her laugh. In every pool of summer shadows her brown eyes swam before him. Always when he dreamed of Suzette the big form of Pete Perkins hovered. He hated the man. When he thought of him he thought of murder trials with himself as the defendant. He wanted to kill Pete—why, he could not explain.

As he lay beneath the friendly shelter of a dwarf cedar, his eyes drifting over the fields and meadows in search of new birds, the slender figure of Harry Morse came rapidly towards him. He ducked lower and waited. His hand fell softly to Fortune's back and held him gently. For seven days he had been waiting for this chance. It was all that had kept him from starting for Africa where no white women could be found to trust. He began to take his shirt and trousers off. In the coming fight he did not want to tear or soil them. When Harry came up whistling Oliver rose with a scowl.

"Hi," he grunted.

"Ho, Dock!" Harry was friendly enough. "Huntin' for snake doctors?"

Dr. Smith regarded him with pity in his eyes. "If you mean dragon flies," he said coldly, "I am. Snake doctor is the nigger and poor white trash name for a harmless insect."

"Excuse me, Dock," Harry grinned broadly. "Saw a peach of a green and black one down in the Bullhella ditch a while ago. I'll bet there's six snakes down in them weeds some place."

Oliver snorted.

"Dragon-flies, or 'Snake doctors' have nothing to do with snakes—unless it is to fool a two-legged snake that hides people's clothes."

The naturalist was belligerent and sarcastic.

"If that's the way you feel about it, Dock, I reckon you can get some relief." He threw his ragged straw hat to the ground. "I say I saw a snake doctor—not a dragon fly. I said he was looking for a sick snake. Get me?"

Harry swelled up and scowled. He knew that Dr. Smith could not fight. He knew that Smith would fight, but he also knew that the boy got a thrashing every time he went into it. He himself had thrashed the learned Dr. Smith three times.

"Harry, take your pants off," Smith said quickly. "You might get 'em torn and the matron would find out we had been fighting."

Harry nodded. He was used to the whims of Oliver. The advice was good and off came his trousers.

"Harry, I'm going to fight some one every day until I can get strong enough to lick Pete Perkins. The bigger they come after this the better I'll like it." He paused, looked squarely in Harry's eyes and said, "There is no such a thing as a snake-doctor. Dragon-flies are commonly called snake doctors by the ignorant. Get me?"

Harry was not sure. Oliver's jaw had squared and his chin was pushed forward, a beautiful target for the uncertain Harry.

"Dock, what's the use of me beating you up?" Harry was not afraid. He knew what he could do, and it was no longer an honor in the home to thrash the "harmless," bug-hunting Dr. Smith.

"That's exactly what I want you to do," he returned earnestly. "I want to get tough. I—I—got to get tough."

Harry regarded him for a second and dropped to the ground.

"How the hell do you expect me to fight when you get to begging me to do it? I got to be mad. You must be crazy."

He regarded the boy hopelessly. As he watched Oliver a huge dragon-fly flashed green and silver before their vision. It was a beautiful specimen, its long silver wings and slender body the finest Oliver had ever seen.

"Why don't you get him, Dock?" Harry demanded. "He'd look good with a lot of pins sticking in him on a card board."

desire to net the beautiful insect. "Harry it seems we can't agree to fight today."

"Looks that way, Dock." Harry sat up straight and smiled suddenly.

"Dock you know a lot about books and flowers and snake—er—dragon-flies. If the muscles in your arms were like them in your head you'd be a hell-cat. But they ain't, and it's a shame to fight you. Now, I love to fight; Miss Mattie claims it was born in me. Maybe that's why I got the belt here in the Home." He was silent for a while. "Now I've been thinking, Dock. You can—can—well, you've got a way with girls. When you look at 'em they start talking about roses and look like they was expecting an angel down from heaven or something. What sort of a chance have I got against you when it comes to—er," his eyes drooped and he bit his lip. "If I don't hide your breeches or something I could never be with her!" He stopped and Oliver carefully lifted his net and with a deft twist of the wrist and the great dragon-fly fluttered a prisoner within.

"The other day when I met her with your pants on she told me you—er—and her were—hell, Dock, I'm getting full of mush, but I simply can't hit anybody she likes. Here," he pitched his trousers to Oliver; "go throw them in the loft or tear 'em up or anything you please."

Oliver paused in his work of transferring the dragon-fly from the net to a bottle.

"Put 'em on, Harry. They'll get full of ants in a minute. One just bit me."

A few expert moves and the dragon-fly lay still within the bottle. Oliver put the bottle carefully away and turned to Harry.

"So you love a woman, too?"

"I reckon that's my trouble, Dock." Harry blushed and Oliver looked pained.

"Women and flowers will drive any man crazy," Oliver said slowly. "There ain't much difference between them. They both make you dream."

"And lose your appetite."

"And your faith in everything."

"Chuh!" Harry nodded. He looked dreamily across the fields. "How do you do it, Oliver?"

"What?"

"Have girls putting locks of your hair in their memory books. Gee! I'd give her my scalp!"

"You can say Bee-Bee, Harry. I know who you refer to when you say 'her.'" He slowly started to pull his trousers on. "Maybe it would be cheerful news for you to learn that Bee-Bee and I have called it a day."

"Quit?"

"The same."

"Well!"

A long silence followed. Dr. Smith broke it at length.

"I'm going to Africa."

"When you graduate from the Home?"

"No, right now." He got to his feet and buttoned his shirt. "I'm leaving two things with you, Harry."

"Two?"

"Yes; Bee-Bee and the secret of my destination. I reckon both are safe."

Harry crossed his heart and held up his right hand. "I wouldn't be surprised," he said simply.

"When they get to hunting for me tonight after taps you will be as surprised as anybody?"

"Sure."

"Well, so long, Harry! See you when I'm famous."

Harry watched Oliver out of sight and put his trousers on. He started back home with a heavy heart.

Oliver plunged into the sweet-smelling thicket in which Suzette's cabin was located. Beyond the dense growth of scrub pines and sickly young oaks, her chickens cackled and clucked in contentment. A rooster lifted his voice in a clarion call, as if to challenge the universe. Oliver pushed on, trying to beat off the desire which rose in him for one more look at the mystery woman before he journeyed onward. He was successful, for he turned sharply to the north and the friendly security of a pine thicket. His route was to the north and James River, where he would get a schooner bound for Hampton Roads. With his eyes on the ground, his encyclopaedia held firmly under one arm, he went forward. Presently he emerged from the pines into a small opening, grass covered and shaded by huge pines.

"Hello, little dreamer!" a voice called.

Dr. Smith stopped dead still. Suzette's voice left him trembling, nerveless. Ten feet away she lay upon the grass, her head resting upon a dark, green pillow. She laid her book down and smiled.

"Hunting for birds, Doctor?"

He turned abruptly and ran for the shelter of the pine thicket. He hated

Suzette unreasonably; the very sight of her filled his heart with the insane desire to kill. As he found himself safely within the thicket her laugh rose like a melody. His book fell from his arm and he clutched a limb. Suzette was the cause of all his troubles, as he saw it. Her husband had met Bee-Bee, and her laugh had made him give Bee-Bee to Harry with a feeling akin to relief. Every thing that was suddenly not because of this woman. She was married. He had heard her talking to Allen Grass secretly, and what he had heard left hatred in his heart for Allen Grass. She was not a good woman as women are judged by convention and society. Of this he was sure. He wanted none of her.

"Why do you hate me, Doctor?"

He jumped. Suzette was looking gravely down into his startled eyes. She had come while he stood lost in his dreams.

"Do—do I displease you so?"

Better men than Oliver have found their hearts melting beneath the undefinable spell of women less beautiful than Suzette. As has been mentioned, Dr. Smith had imagination. The look of distress in the loveliest face he had ever seen set that imagination on fire, and for a moment burned all hatred from his heart. If she was bad—her face belonged in heaven where everything was said to be good. If she was bad, badness was a desirable thing, and all at once he wished to be bad.

"Has the cat got your tongue, Doctor?"

"The cat didn't have it the last time I used it." In spite of his faith in her face, sarcasm seeped from his heart. Causes which drive airplanes to take trips to Africa are not forgotten in a moment.

She picked up his book of knowledge.

"I suppose you understand everything in this book now?"

She was trying to find something to make him talk. Men will talk to their most dangerous enemies upon subjects dear to their hearts.

"Almost," he admitted. "Woman is the only subject it takes up that I do not understand."

Suzette smiled then, he spoke so gravely.

"Is that why you gave Bee-Bee over to the keeping of Harry Morse?"

He looked at her quickly. "How did you know?"

She shook her head. "Don't ask."

(Continued on page six.)



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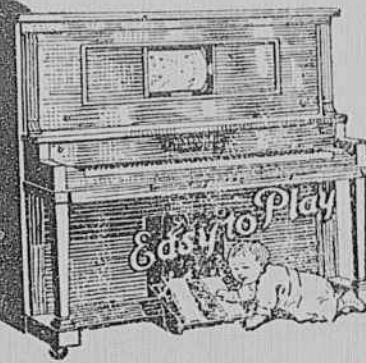
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