

ABNER DANIEL

By... WILL N. HARBEN
Author of "Westerfelt"

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And had she been so spoiled by the "fast set" of Atlanta during her stay there that she would allow it—even if Miller was a friend of the family? He found a negro porter near the heap of luggage that had been piled from the baggage car and ordered his sister's trunks taken to the hotel. Then he followed the couple moodily up to the hotel parlor. He was destined to undergo another shock, for on entering that room he surprised Miller and Adele on a sofa behind the big square piano with their heads suspiciously near together, and so deeply were they engaged in conversation that, although he drew up a chair near them, they paid no heed to him further than to recognize his presence with a frowning of the eyes.

They were talking of social affairs in Atlanta and people whose names were unfamiliar to Alan. He rose and stood before the fireplace, but they did not notice his change of position. Truly it was wonderful. He told himself that Adele's pretty face and far too easy manner had attracted Miller's attention temporarily, and the fellow was daring to enter one of his flirtations right before his eyes. Alan would give him a piece of his mind at the first opportunity, even if he was under obligations to him. Indeed, Miller had greatly disappointed him, and so had Adele. He had always thought she, like Dolly Barclay, was different from other girls; but no, she was like them all. Miller's attention had simply turned her head. Well, as soon as he had a chance he would tell her a few things about Miller and his views of women. That would put her on her guard, but it would not draw out the poisoned sting left by Miller's presumption or indelicacy or whatever it was. Alan rose and stood at the fire unattended for several minutes, and then he showed that he was at least a good chaperon, for he reached out and drew the old-fashioned bell

He went out on the veranda to smoke and enjoy repeating these things over to himself. The tondres in the street were dying down to red embers, around which stood a few stragglers, but there was a blaze of new light over the young man's head. Along his horizon had dawned a glorious reason for his existence, a reason that discolored every reason he had ever entertained. "Adele, Adele," he said to himself, and then his cigar went out. Perhaps, his thoughts ran on in their mad race with happiness—perhaps, with her fair head on her pillow, she was thinking of him as he was of her.

Around the corner came a crowd of young men singing negro songs. They passed under the veranda, and Miller recognized Frank H. home's voice. "That you, Frank?" Miller called out, leaning over the railing.

"Yes. That you, Ray?" Hillhouse stepped out into view. "Come on. We are going to turn the town over. Every sign comes down according to custom, you know. Old 'Tad Moore is drunk in the calaboose. They put him in late this evening. We are going to smash and let him out. It's a dandy racket. We are going to make him think we are White Caps and then set him in the bosom of his family. Come on."

"I can't tonight," declined Miller, with a laugh. "I'm dead tired." "Well, if you hear all the church bells ringing you needn't mind it's fire and jump out of your skin. We ain't going to sleep tonight, and we don't intend to let anybody else do it." "Well, go it while you are young," Miller retorted, with a laugh, and Hillhouse joined his companions in his chief, and they passed on, singing merrily.

Miller threw his cigar away and went to his room. "Perhaps I ought to tell Alan," he mused, "but he'll find it out soon enough; and, hang it all, I can't tell him how I feel about his own sister after all the rot I've stuffed into him."



She gave Miller her hand.

in the chimney corner. The porter came and Alan asked, "Is my sister ready?" "Yes, sir, she's ready and warm now, sah," the negro said. "I started the fire on the stove."

Alan and Adele had paused to listen. "You are going to hurry me off to the girl said, with an audible gasp."

"You must be tired after that ride," he said. "No, fact, you must be," echoed Adele. "Well, if you have to go you can't tell me in the morning."

"You are going to spend the night here, aren't you?" "Yes, sir, I am," she said. "I still have his dogs."

"Dolly is next to the door," she said. "Miller joined in her merriment. "I still have his dogs."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE next morning as soon as he was up Alan went to his sister's room. He found her dressed and ready for him. She was seated before a cheerful grate fire looking over a magazine she had brought to pass the time on the train.

"Come in," she said, pleasantly enough, he reflected, now that Miller was not present to absorb her attention. "I expected you to get up a little earlier. Those guns down at the barroom just about daybreak waked me, and I thought I go to sleep again. There is no use denying it, Al, we have a barbarous way of amusing ourselves up here in north Georgia."

He went on and stood with his back to the fire, still unable to rid his brow of the frown it had worn the night before.

"Oh, I reckon you've got too civilized for us," he said, "along with other accomplishments that fast set down there has taught you."

Adele laid her book open on her lap. "Look here, Alan," she said, quite gravely, "what's the matter with you?" "Nothing that I know of," he said, without meeting her direct gaze.

"Well, there is," she said, as the outcome of her slow inspection of his clouded features.

He shrugged his shoulders and gave her his eyes steadily.

"I don't like the way you and Miller are carrying on," he hurled the words at her sullenly. "You see, I know him through and through."

"Well, that's all right," she replied, not flinching from his indignant stare, "but what's that got to do with my conduct and his?"

"You allow him to be too familiar with you," Alan retorted. "He's not the kind of a man for you to—to act that way with. He has flirted with a dozen women and thrown them over; he doesn't believe in the honest love of a man for a woman or the love of a woman for a man."

"Ah, I am at the first of this!" Adele, instead of being put down by his stormy words, was smiling inwardly. Her lips were rigid, but Alan saw the light of keen amusement in her eyes.

"Is he really so dangerous? That makes him doubly interesting. Most girls love to handle masculine gunpowder. Do you know, if I was Dolly Barclay, for instance, an affair with you would not be much fun, because I'd be so sure of you. The dead level of your past would alarm me."

"Thank heaven, all women are not alike!" was the bolt he hurled at her. "If you knew as much about Ray Miller as I do, you'd act in a more dignified way on a first acquaintance with him."

"On a first—oh, I see what you mean!" Adele put her handkerchief to her face and treated herself to a merry laugh that exasperated him beyond endurance. Then she stood up, smoothing her smile away. "Let's go to breakfast. I'm as hungry as a bear. I told Rayburn—I mean your dangerous friend, Mr. Miller—that we'd meet him in the dining room. He says he's crazy for a cup of coffee with whipped cream in it. I ordered it just now."

"The dev— Alan bit the word in two and strode from the room, she following. The first person they saw in

the big dining room was Miller, standing at the stove in the center of the room warming himself. He scarcely looked at Alan in his eagerness to have a chair placed for Adele at a little table reserved for three in a corner of the room, which was presided over by a sleek looking mulatto waiter whose father had belonged to M. Her's family. "I've been up an hour," he said to her. "I took a stroll down the street to see what damage the gang did last night. Every sign is down or hung where it doesn't belong. To fence the owner, an old negro druggist, whom everybody jokes with, they took his wicker to pieces and put it together again on the roof of Harmon's drugstore. How they got it there is a puzzle that will go down in local history like the building of the pyramids."

"Whip it all!" laughed Adele. "That will be the final explanation." "I think you are right," agreed Miller.

Alan bolted his food in grim silence, unnoticed by the others. Adele's very grace at the table, as she prepared Miller's coffee, and her apt repartee added to his discomfort. He excused himself from the table before they had finished, musing something about sewing if the horses were ready, and went into the office. The last blow to his temper was dealt by Adele as she came from the dining room.

"Mr. Miller wants to drive me out in his buggy to show me his horses," she said, half smiling. "You won't mind, will you? You see, he'll want his team out there to get back in, and—"

"Oh, I don't mind," he told her. "I see you are bent on making a goose of yourself. After what I've told you about Miller if you still—"

But she closed his mouth with her hand. "Leave him to me, brother," she said as she turned away. "I'm old enough to take care of myself, and—and—well, I know men better than you do."

When Alan reached home, he found that Miller and Adele had been there half an hour. His mother met him at the door with a mysterious smile on her sweet old face as she nodded at the closed door of the parlor.

"Don't go in there now," she whispered. "Adele and Mr. Miller have been there ever since they came. I really believe they are in love with each other. I never saw young folks act more like it. When I met 'em it looked



"I've dropped onto a little news."

test like he wanted to kiss me, he was so happy. Now wouldn't it be fine if they was to get married? He's the nicest man in the state and the best catch."

"Oh, mother," said Alan, "you don't understand. Rayburn Miller is—"

"Well, Adele will know how to manage him," broke in the old lady, too full of her view of the romance to harken to his. "She ain't no fool, son. She'll twist him around her finger if she wants to. She's pretty and stylish and as sharp as a brier. Ah, he's just seen it all and wants her. You can't fool me! I know how people act when they are in love. I've seen hundreds, and I never saw a worse case on both sides than this is."

Going around to the stables to see that his horses were properly attended to, Alan met his uncle leaning over the

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well fence looking admiringly at a young colt that was prancing around the lot.

"Christmas gift," said the old man sulkily. "I ketchted you that time when you got ahead of me," Alan admitted.

The old man came nearer to him, nodding his head toward the house. "Heard the news?" he asked, with a broad grin of delight.

"What news is that?" Alan asked dubiously.

"Young Miss"—a name given Adele by the neighbors and sometimes used jestingly by the family—"Young Miss has knocked the props clean from under Miller."

Alan frowned and hung his head for a moment; then he said:

"Uncle Ab, do you remember what I told you about Miller's opinion of love and women in general?"

The old man saw his drift and burst into a full, round laugh.

"I know you told me what he said about love an' women in general, but I don't know as you said what he thought about women in particular. This here's a particular case. I tell you she's fixed 'im. Yore little sis has done the most complete job out o' tough material I ever inspected. He's a gone cone; he'll never make another brag; he's tied hand an' foot."

Alan looked straight into his uncle's eyes. A light was breaking on him. "Uncle Ab," he said, "do you think he is really in love with her?"

"E he ain't an' don't ax yore pa an' ma fer 'er before a month's gone, I'll deed you my farm. Now, look here, A feller knows his own sister less'n he does anybody else; that's been's you never have thought of Adele fellerin' in the trail of womankind. You'd hate fer a brother o' that town gal to be raisin' sand about you, wouldn't you? Well, you go right on an' let them two kill the 'r own rats."

Alan and his uncle were returning to the house when Pole Baker dismounted at the front gate and came into the yard.

"I seed Mr. Miller drive past my house awhile ago with Miss Adele," he said, "an' I come right over. I want to see all of you together."

Just then Miller came out of the parlor and descended the steps to join them.

"Christmas gift, Mr. Miller!" cried Pole. "I ketchted you that time."

"And if I paid up you'd cuss me out," retorted the lawyer, with a laugh. "I don't forget the row you raised about that suit of clothes. Well, what's the news? How's your family?"

"About as common, Mr. Miller," said Pole. "My wife's gittin' younger an' younger ever' day. She she moved in 'er new house an' got to whitewashin' fences an' makin' flower beds an' one thing another she looks like a new person. I'd 'a' bought 'er a horse long ago if I'd a-knowed she wanted it that bad."

"Oh, we put on the lugs now! We wipe with napkins after eatin', an' my littlest un sets in a high chair an' says, 'Please pass the gravy,' like he'd been off to school. Sally says she's a-goin' to send 'em, an' I don't keer of her do; they'll stand head of they go; the'r noggin's look like squashes, but they're full o' seeds, an' don't you forget it!"

"That they are!" intoned Abner Daniel.

"I've dropped onto a little news," said Pole. "You know what a old moonshiner can't pick up in these mountains from old pards ain't with lookin' fer."

"Railroad?" asked Miller interestedly.

"That's fer you us to make out," said Baker. "Now, I ain't a-goin' to give away my authority, but I rid twenty miles yesterday to substantiate what I heard, an' I know it's nothin' but the truth. You all know old Bobby Milburn's been buyin' timber land up about yore property, don't you?"

"I didn't know how much," answered Miller, "but I knew he had secured some."

"Fust and last in the neighborhood o' six thousand acres," affirmed Pole, "an' he's still on the warpath. What fust attracted my notice was findin' out that old Bobby hadn't a dollar to his name. That made me suspicious, an' I went to work to investigate."

"Good boy!" said Uncle Abner in an admiring undertone.

"Well, I found out he was usin' Wilson's money an' secretly buyin' for him, an', what's more, he seems to have pulled out a big haul an' a big bank

account to draw from.

There was a startled pause. It was broken by Miller, whose eyes were gleaming excitedly.

"It's blame good news," he said, cying Alan.

"Do you think so?" said Alan, who was still under his cloud of displeasure with his friend.

"Yes, it simply means that Wilson intends to build that road. He's been quiet and pretending indifference for two reasons—first to bring us to closer terms, and next to secure more land.

Then they all went to find Bishop to tell him the news.

CHAPTER XXVII.
IT was a cold, dry day about the middle of January. They were killing hogs at the farm.

Seven or eight negroes, men and women, had gathered from all about in the neighborhood to assist in the work and get the parts of the meat usually given away in payment for such services.

Abner Daniel and old man Bishop were superintending these preparations when Alan came from the house to say that Rayburn Miller had just ridden out to see them on business. "I think it's the railroad," Alan informed his father, who always displayed signs of almost childish excitement when the subject came up. They found Miller in the parlor being entertained by Adele, who immediately left the room on his arrival. They all sat down before a cheerful fire. Miller showed signs of embarrassment at first, but gradually threw them off and turned to the matter in hand quite as if he were an office man.

"I've got a proposition to make to you, Mr. Bishop," he opened with a slight flush on his face, "making some inquiries about land and am more and more convinced that he intends to buy your land, rather—by holding you obliged to sell your own land at a lower figure than you could get for it."

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