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PAUNCEFORT'S LAST GAME

BY S. O.

"Didn't know Lan Pouncefort? Strange!
I thought everybody knew Lan, from
Sandy Creek, down in Maine, to the Sand-
wich Islands. You missed a heap of fun
and I reckon, some money, as Lan scat-
tered money right and left. He'd a been
dead sure to stack up your chips if he had
seen you lose your grip, whether he had
known you or not. Lan was a thorough-
bred—a natural born gambler. He'd a
bet on the worms in his own coffin if
there'd been a show of cornering. He had
one peculiarity for a long time, though—
he was dead set against life insurance of all
kinds. He didn't care to 'take up,' he
said, in a game 'where a fellow had to die
to open the pot.' He got over that all at
once, though, and one day walked into the
office of Doc Eford, the examiner for a
high-toned company, and had a policy
made out for ten thousand in favor of a
quar. Little girl he had took a fancy to in
Lancaster. He never went into society reg-
ular like you know, because he was bashful
in the presence of ladies. Fact women
were worse in his eyes than a bug-a-boo.
They scared him like the old boy, but this
girl used to get him his shaving water at
the hotel and fetched his hah to him with-
out slamming it down when Lan had
bucked the wild beast unconsciously all
night. He was the most grateful cuss you
ever saw and thanked a mangy dog for
following him to smelt the grease on his
boots.

"One day little Jule, as the boys called
her, stood behind the door crying in a
quar because some chap had choked her
under the chin in the bar-room. I tell
you Doc Eford was a hard place and don't
you forget it.

"Well, Jule, what do you stay in this
den for? Pouncefort like a father, man;
they always say cause, you know.
"Cause I ain't got no where to go, and
I've got to make my livin', I reckon."

"Why don't you get married, Jule?"

"She glanced down on her face with a
live coal in her black eyes and a quivering
lip.

"Marry! that's good. Who'd marry
me that would be worth havin', I'd like
to know? It ain't human nater, Mr. Lan,
I've got to starve or be cursed and chucked
about all my days."

"Not by a darn sight," said Lan,
swinging on his heel; and, sir, he got
right off to Eford and had himself turned
inside out pretty near, to see if he was
sounded.

"You're good for fifty years, Mr.
Pouncefort," said the doctor, filling out the
documents for Lan. "I never see a tougher
nut than you are in wind and limb."

"So the papers were all tinkered up in
little Doc's water-glass, and they were put
in a lawyer's hands. Poor Jule, it pretty
nigh caused her neck stretched, and she
was mighty glad to get off with a whole
skin, let alone getting the money, I tell
you."

"Why, how was that?"

"Well, you see, a cack-cock
who raised his head over the past-pot
looked at the narrator, and got a mouthful
of dished old Virginia long-cut, right in
his eye, 'you see, folks wouldn't believe
that any sane man would have done such a
benefited no human being but Jule, it must
have been all her doing, but, of course, it
weren't. No such thing. If Jule hadn't
ruined herself for life by proving an alibi
in the nick of time, gentlemen, she'd been
strung up as sure as shooting. It was
awful rough on her, but she had to choose
between trust and hanging. She hung out
well for a scary little thing, but it was
more'n half for the sake of the eastern chap,
who took her buggy riding over by the old
Sarah Grimes' mine. She wanted to save
his reputation, but somebody told how
they had saw both of them down the
canyon, and Jule owned up, crying such a
lot you'd a thought she'd a strangled. She
had regular fits in the court-room."

"Well, Pouncefort died, did he?"

"Died—yes, he died. He died about
a hundred times, I guess, altogether.
I never saw such a dead idiot. One
death is about enough for an average man,
even in a streak of the worst luck that
ever struck a man, and Lan had a hard
muscle before he let out from Deadwood
down the dark gulch, all of us have to lo-
cate sooner or later. I'll be hanged if I
want to take Lan's route, though."

"He butted out his brains, did he?"

"Well, no," said Calaveras Dan, win-
gling very fast. "He didn't have any
brains, the doctor said, but you'll never
guess what he did do all by himself in a
back room in the 'Flying Scud,' the name
of the gambling saloon he tried to run
together, kept by One-eyed Jake from Trin-
idad, Col."

"I'm not a good Yankee in that respect;
I can't guess. Perhaps he cooked a gun-
barrel with his toes, or sat down on a keg
of dynamite with a coal of fire in his
pocket. Something awful, was it?"

Calaveras Dan liked to prolong a story
and get his hearers' patience and curiosity
stretched to the utmost limit before he
reached an end. So he twined off a
knuckle of tobacco and fixed himself com-
fortably, with a retrospective look in his
eye, before continuing the tale of poor Lan
Pouncefort, the gambler, who did what
many a man has done—severed his soul
and body in a den of iniquity, where he had
been flooded out of every cent and made
utterly desperate.

"There were a couple of crack poker
men from San Francisco at the 'Flying
Scud' who tackled Lan and his partner,
Jim Ogleshorpe of Santa Barbara, and
pretty soon all the congregation from other
places stood around watching the witch
play. Ogleshorpe was a big six footer,
with a finger gone from his right hand,
and a heap of white in his left eye, which
were both as big as taw marbles. When
anybody got away with Santa Barbara Jim
they didn't have many more to scold,
Jim wicked with off eye at Lan, and Lan
smiled in with a huge smile. He knew
well enough that things were going over-
board if he didn't catch every wink Jim
sent him with that game swivel eye of
his."

"Lan was nervous as a switch. He wasn't
worth a barbee to play when his hand
shook. He had just missed the jumps for
a week, and the doctor told him if he took
any more brandy he'd see varms as big
as hippopotamuses, and that like enough
it would kill him, as his heart worked like
a churning wheel, whippety-whop, whop,
it went. His father died in a fit in the old
Susanne mine, from an alligator whiskey.
Lan had long ago given up everything but
brandy, and now he had to whoa, or
slide down the dump. He wasn't worth
shucks to play in that fix, but there
wasn't no help for it; Jim kept on
drawing keards and winking at Lan. Fin-
ally Lan got rattled and panicky. It was
Jim's swivel eye and now and then a kick
under the table. The snare from 'Frisco
were cool as a morgue in five time; nary a
sticker or wink passed betwixt 'em. It's
poor," said Lan, laying his hand down,
face upward, as Jim scowled black as

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