

Power Lot == God Help Us

By Sarah McLean Greene

Copyrighted by the Publishers, Musson Book Co.

Serial rights in Canada secured by the Farmer's Advocate and Home Journal

CHAPPER XX

SIDE-SADDLING THE LOG

Of the diplomacy of Captain Stu Belcher there had never been any doubt.

With a hail and a roar he brought his oxen up past Mrs. Byjo's, and when he discovered Doctor Margate taking a stroll farther down the road he drove his chariot of four wheels and a log in that direction with a mighty rattling and a swifter advance than usually appertains to such a vehicle.

"Git on, sir. Git on. Lemme give ye a lift. You're young enough ter side-saddle on a log, by Humfrey, an' will be fr twenty years to come. Whoa, you got durn wireless telegraphers, you," he bellowed at his oxen, who found it as difficult to stay their pace as it had been in the first place to acquire it. "Git right up—call it side-saddlin', tho' we ain't got no saddles! Jest the other side o' that knot, unless ye want ter put a skylight though yer trouse's. You ain't got nobody ter mend 'em for ye. I have, an' I done well, too, Doctor Margerit—I done well."

"That's good," said the doctor, riding the log skillfully, and enjoying a most unaccountable elation therefore; it may have been the atmosphere, it may have been the world around him, but the cushions of his victoria and the padding of his electric cab as his mind reverted to them, seemed base and discommodious in comparison. "I'm glad you found a good mate. I hope you deserve her. And now look here, Captain Belcher, don't you let Robert Hilton bring Cuby Tee-bo up here on the hills and carry out that fake marriage to her. I expect you to look out for that, or there'll be sad consequences for you. Mind what I say—that must not be done."

"Why, now, what have you got ag'in that pretty little Kanuck?"

"Nothing whatever; she's a treasure, she's a beauty, with the man of her heart to guide her along; but Rob Hilton's not that man, and she is not the girl of his heart. That was a little escapade; they have never really chosen each other; the marriage was a fake, and they've both got a haunting suspicion of that fact, too."

The great Belcher looked stoutly, boldly, at the doctor; the doctor's keen eyes did not flinch.

"Look a what your Rob Hilton was when he come here," at last spoke Belcher, in a tone of unappreciated merit that could not help but thrill his listener with its wonder and reproach, "an' then look a' what I've made of him."

"You made of him?"

"Sure as herrin' for breakfast. Sure. He come here, out o' the booze settlements thar' to his native town, a natterally struttin' Shang-hi rooster with Bantam lightness o' disposition an' a goose giggle. An' me, or somebody else—call it me—tied him down to this dull 'arth with a sense o' responsibilities an' duties an' sorrows, an' all sech drippin's from the mother cow necessary ter raise up a healthy calf. Ain't that so?" The doctor bit his lip, and briefly nodded.

"He was a derelict," he was," continued Belcher, "on the drift, ef ever the was one; an' somebody—call it me—took an' anchored o' 'im so tight he's been grubbin' away contented ever since, sweatin' all the microbes an' tomfoolery out er his system, an' raisin' pertaters three dozen ter the hill. An' now you come over from New York an' want ter heave over all his ballas' an' lighten up on his moorin's an' send him bumpin' an' careenin' like a durn tramp o' the seas ag'in. My humphrey, but you got a gall on ye."

Doctor Margate laughed hilariously, but Belcher regarded him with a steady reprobation and made not the slightest acknowledgement of the ring of sympathy in his tones.

"The Senate misses you, Captain Belcher—you don't miss the Senate any."

As a matter of fact, though, it was I who sent Robert Hilton grubbing in the earth, and a certain Captain Jim—a—Jim Turbine has been a sort of hovering—a—decent fellow, with a weather eye out for poor Rob and Mary in this Beulah land to see that the wolves did not get them quite; and you, Captain Belcher, you, being in a humorous mood, practised some of your tremendous pleasantries on poor Rob, putting him in an insufferably false position. It was what I call a dastardly piece of work."

"Git out," said Belcher coolly; "you a man o' science, by Tamarack, and don't know what the ropes is that fa'rly cows a man an' knocks all the gale out er him so's what friskiness he has left is no more 'n a sucklin' lamb, jumpin' on all fours an' kickin' out his hin' legs at nothin'. You don't know—that your kentry air an' your honest t'il an' all yer cornmeal mush an' moonshine wouldn't 'a' proved a rope ter holt that derelict, no more 'n a strand o' knittin' cotton. No sir, it was me done it. Joke or 'arnest, it was me hove out the right size o' cable—it was that thar' marriage-tie done the job."

The broad smile on Doctor Margate's hypnotized countenance again culminated in explosive laughter.

"The World of political rivalry, of commercial activity misses you, Captain Belcher—but you do not miss it. How admirably, for instance, you ride on a log. The pounding over rocks and ruts seems to give you only a firmer seat and a more graceful carriage, while I joggle about like a cork, in comparison, and am sometimes compelled to clutch out wildly. Well, what shall we do about Rob? Will you see to it—will you aid Captain Jim Turbine in seeing to it (for I regret to say that I am called away, and must leave Power Lot to-morrow)—that housekeeping for Rob and Cuby on the hill shall never begin? Will you step in at the needful moment and in full good season, and deliver Rob of the false burden he is bearing? I could make you considerable trouble if I chose to do so. I shall be proud to be your friend and act in unison with you if you will engage fairly to do what I ask."

Captain Belcher glowered severely at the doctor, then looked off to the fir trees and sniffed a sniff of scorn.

"Ye couldn't drag Cuby Tee-bo up to the hill to housekeep along o' Rob. The' ain't no kind o' hawser ye could fashion 'd hault that gal up thar' ter wash out er fryin'-pan an' hang out er clo's accordin' as Rob Hilton an' Ma'y Sting'ree an' Widder Treet an' the rest o' 'em thinks fryin'-pans ought ter be washed an' clo's hung. No, sir. An' I don't blame 'er. She'd fling 'er fryin'-pan an' 'er suds straight inter the faces o' the whole caboodle o' 'em. An' I'd do the same ef I was her. Don't you worry. Cuby Tee-bo ain't ketched yet."

"Well, well!" "You know some things thar' whar' you come from, an' you been roun' the worl' eatin' yer iysters on the harf-shell an' smokin' yer Havanas down in the cabin's loon, but I been roun' the worl' watchin' out from the herri'n deck, with the rain hiss'n at me an' the salt bitin' me, until I know purty well what's up in any 'arthly latitute whar' I happen ter be drivin' my craft fr the time bein'. That's me."

"I believe you."

"Now the' ain't no harm goin' ter happen ter Rob Hilton by way of bindin' of him ter anybody 't 'ain't best p'rhaps fr him ter be boun' to, an' that anyways don't want him. Meanwhiles you let him dig his crap o' pertaters. That's my 'dvice. Fr though he don't reckon on it, mebbe he's a-workin' in a holt on the proud sperrit o' that ar high-toned, scholarly Ma'y Sting'ree, that 'ud sure make him toe the mark to every spellin' match thar's comin' to him in this worl'. The' ain't nothin' tunes up the melody of love in a case like hern, like a big, slow-ponderin', easy-laughin',

slap-the-whole-menagery-in-the-mouth and die-for-ye cuss like Rob Hilton."

"Impossible."

"Nothin' ain't impossible from the herri'n deck. This 'ere old worl' c'n kick up more cyclones to the squar' inch an' s'prise more folks to the squar' minute than any other worl' I ever see."

"True."

"An' ef the' is anythin' drorin' her towards him, it's jest that good, set-up-straight-in-meetin', none-o'-the-preserves-thank-ye, small-piece-o'-pie-fr-me-please way in which he is a-regardin' his obligations to Cuby Tee-bo. See? As fr Cuby, she's a good gal, though she's a wild one and a gay one, she is, an' her mettle is up ter somethin' tough 't knows how ter sail a boat. D' ye ketch on?"

"No."

"Wal', she wants Jim, that's who she wants."

"He seems a decent sort of fellow."

"Decent sort o' feller?" Why, by the Great Nor'easter, what are you a-lookin' fr? Why, Jim Turbine an' me c'd run this whole contentment ef we was only giv' a fa'r post o' observation an' c'd find some chairs our size to sit in. I reckon you don't know all the' is ter be knowned about Jim Turbine an' me."

The doctor was silent.

"Jim Turbine c'n go out on a sea 't spells dead-man to ary other mortal, an' beat in home through the hell-racket o' the elements smokin' his pipe at sundown, wishin, the wind 'ud breeze so 't there'd be somethin' doin'. That's me an' Jim. He c'n make a fool o' himself ev'ry day in the week, like he's been a-doin' readin' books an' drulin' at the mouth about the 'beauties o' natur', an' all sech, tell he's got a notion he wants somethin' high-toneder 'n what his bringin' up 'll allow him; but jest wait tell the gale strikes him fa'r abeam an' he'll reel right 'round an' right up on an even keel ev'ry time. Ef he ever does get drowned he won't git drowned—he'll show up somewhar."

Captain Belcher refilled his pipe, his cowlid boots swaying freely in sympathy with the perils of his present method of transit; a jolt of unusual violence, over a stump, separated him for a space from his affinity with the log; he descended, however, precisely in his former chosen seat, uninterrupted in his attentions to his pipe and wholly unperturbed. But the doctor, as a result of the catastrophe, sat down abruptly in the road, where he contemplated in some bewilderment for the moment his unexpected change of base.

"Shall I stop 'em?" Captain Belcher called back to him cheerfully, "or c'n ye jump on while the train's movin'?"

"I won't board the train again, thank you. I need exercise," replied Doctor Margate dryly, as he rose. "I'll walk back home."

"Hold on," yelled the captain, himself descending and shouting and belaboring a halt on his oxen; "I want a word with ye 'fore ye go. Ye're a man o' straight good sense, an' I respec' ye. I've been hove off myself by a stump lesser size 'n that."

"I haven't been in training, you see," replied the doctor, with no trace of vexation in his manner or in his tone.

"No, ye ain't had the 'dvantages a man like you ought ter had," said Belcher, standing regally thoughtful, the veteran of many scars, of well-sustained shipwreck, and of hide seemingly impregnable at last to all save added windburn. "Ye'd rate along o' me an' Jim ef ye 'd had harf a chance in the worl'." He meditated, and in spite of the dictates of sound reason and common sense against such unconscionable boasting, the doctor admired him and was more than half inclined to take him at his own estimation.

"The question is," said Belcher at last, withdrawing his gaze from the profound contemplation of the distant Bay of Fundy, "be you a-goin' ter keep yer mouth shet?"

"Not in the least, if I see fit to open it," replied Doctor Margate.

"That's the talk," exclaimed Belcher approvingly; "but ye goin' ter see fit ter keep it shet—that's the question. Come now, as the gospil says, an' le's figger this out together. Do ye want ter tell Rob Hilton—ter-morrer, fr instance—that the' 's nothin' bindin' of him here? Fr he ain't got no notion 't thar' 's any chance for him along a' Ma'y Sting'ree,

no more 'n I have of ailyenatin' the 'flections o' the wife o' the Old Man in the Moon."

"That settles it."

"An' I doubt ef Ma'y Sting'ree has took the idee inter her head one bit yit either. No sir—it's me 't has figgered out this match."

"Not you and Jim?"

"Jim's sore—sore as a bile. He wussships the groun' Ma'y treads on. But he ain't fr her. Jim's got many a wil' sea yit ter sail afore he dies. Ef Jim goes ter homin', it had ought ter be with some mid-ocean bird o' his own breed. Jim thinks he'd like ter git civerlized and live ashore, but he wouldn't—them ol' whitecaps out thar' 'ud call him, an' he'd ruffle his feathers an' stretch his neck, an' off he'd go. Ho-hum, it's tough on Jim; but he won't go under; ye needn't ter werry 'bout Jim."

"I won't. I am more concerned about the match you propose to make between Miss Stingaree and Rob Hilton."

"Easy, easy! Whar' thar' 's a woman in the' calkerlation the' 's no knowin' when you may look out an' find yer weather-vane's clean blowed off the barn. Easy now. But you let Rob bide an' keep on workin' fr a while. He couldn't git Cuby ef he tried. An' he won't git put in no box, now I promise ye, ef that'll do. I promise ye."

"Well."

"An' you'll keep yer mouth shet about any little frolick anybody mon't 'a' played? I ain't sayin' who. You'll lay low tell the storm's over, an' the flyin' jib's run up, an' all's well some way 'r another, won't ye? That's what I want ter know."

"Why yes, under the circumstances, and considering that you promise to make it all clear as daylight at the auspicious moment, I think I may safely say I will leave that for the present to your judgment—and your conscience. But the tme must come soon, Captain Belcher."

"Easy! easy! This is goin' ter be a tejus mess o' ropes, mebbay, an' we've got ter keep both eyes shet whilst we squint with one and wink with t'other. Wal', I'm sorry ye ain't goin' ter stay long enough ter come 'round an' git acquainted with my folks, Doctor."

"But at least I congratulate myself, Captain Belcher, on having become acquainted with you."

"Wal', I won't deny that ye'll find me thirty-six inches ter the yard with plenty over ter 'low fr shrinkage, ev'ry time. Come 'n see us ag'in. Do. Sorry our ways in this worl' did n' lie par'lel, Doctor," concluded Captain Belcher with a splendid dismissing, commiserating wave of the hand.

(To be continued)

CANADIAN BORN.

We first saw the light in Canada, the land beloved of God,
We are the pulse of Canada, its marrow and its blood.
And we, the men of Canada, can face the world and brag
That we were born in Canada beneath the British flag.
Few of us have the blood of kings, few are of courtly birth,
But few are vagabonds or rogues of doubtful name and worth,
And all have one credential that entitles us to brag
That we were born in Canada beneath the British flag.
We've yet to make our money, we've yet to make our fame,
But we have gold and glory in our clean colonial name,
And every man's a millionaire if he can only brag
That he was born in Canada beneath the British flag.
No title and no coronet is half as proudly worn,
As that which we inherited as men Canadian born;
We count no man so noble as the one who makes the brag
That he was born in Canada beneath the British flag.
The Dutch may have his Holland, the Spaniard have his Spain,
The Yankee to the south of us must south of us remain,
For not a man dare lift a hand against the men who brag
That they were born in Canada beneath the British flag.

—E. PAULINE JOHNSON.