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THE STRANGER AND THE PRINCESS

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS

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Buckford ran as be had never run before. He found an easy entrance to the stable. Every employee who slept in or near the stable had rushed to the inn to fight the fire. He had no time to select a horse. He took the one nearest the door. Without saddle or bridle he led it forth, leaped upon its back, and as the glare from the burning building sent a gleam of light around him he dashed away, followed by the hoarse cries of rage and the pistol shots of the enraged Frenchmen and

Robard's son. Vandal, quick to grasp this opportunity, left the Deneslians to fight their own fire and, calling Reber and Robello, ran to the stable and got out horses. "This time that rascal's life!" he "This time, by heaven, I'll growled.

The three, mounted much as Buck-

ford was, dashed after him. Buckford had probably three to five minutes' start, and that start had carried him out of the sight of his pursu ers. But they could hear the sullen pounding of his horse's hoofs on the hard road. They followed the sound. It was not long before Ontro and its burning inn were left far behind. Mile after mile the horses carried their angry riders. Buckford, fleeing for his life, spared not his horse. The others, less skilled horsemen, bobbed and pounded painfully on the bare backs, but clung to the flying steeds with a tenacity that showed how eager they were to overtake and finish this American who balked them at every step.

Vandal alone controlled his horse. The others merely clung round their horses' necks and let the beasts follow in stampede the leader ridden by Van-

They went through little villages, all peacefully asleep. They rode like the wind through farming regions, through valleys and over hills till their overridden beasts nearly fell to the

And now at last it was simply a question of the staying qualities of the horses. Had Buckford in his quick selection of the nearest horse to the door obtained a good one, or had the others, taking horses from more protected places, chanced to get hold of animals of better speed or less weariness than the one he rode?

Buckford's horse was showing signs of exhaustion. He had hoped to gain enough headway to escape from his horse and find a hiding place. But instead the steady and thunderous hoof beats of the pursuing horses grew

louder and nearer. He was now in a rough and hilly country. The road was bad, and the weary horse stumbled constantly. A pistol shot rang out behind him.

The Frenchmen were near enough to shoot at him. He knew that cruelty would not

make his horse go faster. Before him rose trees that obscured the way. He could not see the ground ten feet from his horse.

Three pistol shots rang out together. With a cry almost like that of a human being his horse dropped to the road. For an instant he himself was conscious of a stinging sensation in the side. But this was lost in a greater shock as his horse, as he fell, sent the rider headlong from his back over the brink of a vawning ravine, along which the rough country road had been laid,

CHAPTER XI.

SHEEP AND WOLVES. HOSE pistol shots were heard by three men who were walking slowly along a bypath which led from the main road through a well tilled farm that skirted the opposite side of the ravine fromthat on which the pursuit of Buckford had taken place. His wild ride had ended just too soon, for not more than a hundred yards farther there was a turn in the road and a bridge which would have carried him almost into the very presence of these men and within sight of the lighted windows of the large and comfortable farmhouse

where they dwelt. "Hark!" said one, an elderly appearing man of solid build and undoubted strength of arm. "Shots across the gorge! A cry! What do you make of

"Something wrong, surely," replied a younger man, but one no less muscular. They ran to the edge of the ravine and listened.

"Something crashing through the trees," said the elder. "A man or a horse has fallen. And hear the voices opposite! There seems quite a party of them."

The ravine was not wide, and the voices of the Frenchmen could be plainly heard. "I am sure I shot the devil," Vandal

was saying. "He fell at once." "Well, he found a nice deep place to fall into," said Robello, with a laugh. "How are you ever going to be sure of the result of your shot?"

"Especially when we all fired together?' added Reber. "Oh, as to that, it makes little diff ference who shot him. The thing is to get rid of him. We must find him and

make certain there is no failure this

\$ "Go down!" Of course. Do you think the fool will come up and tell us how

hard he is hit?" "Well," the elderly man across the ravine said to his companions, "it seems to be an uneven fight. Three against one, and the one down in the ditch. Come! Light your lantern, Debbisk, and we will join the search. If mistake not, those fellows are Frenchmen. I trust few of those fellows. I can tell you."

What, therefore, was the surprise of Vandal and his companions to see a bright light not more than 40 feet away from him on the opposite side of the gulf.

"Ho, there!" came the voice of the farmer. "Who are you, and what do you want on my premises?"

"Your premises! Do you call a nest like this a premises?" laughed Vandal. "Well, then, to tell you the truth. we are three traveling gentlemen, and we want a thief. In fact, we want him very much."

"Oh, a thief! What sort of thief? From Prussia?" "I know not whence he is. I know that at Ontro he robbed us."

"At Ontro?" The farmers whispered together. "Can it be Robard who has been bold enough to rob these men and flee to our woods for shelter? No; Robard

never did that." "But he may not have thus intended. Perhaps he was on the way to the Green forest."

"Aye, perhaps. But, after all, how do we know these fellows speak the truth? If 'twas really the rascal Robard down there, I would say to them shoot again and make the shot a good

"True, we cannot be sure."

"As a matter of fact, the more I think of it the less I believe them. It seems more as if they were the thieves. This may have been a traveler who knew where we were and was trying to reach our place for shelter. Ontro is handy enough for robbers whether they be French or Prussian."

"True again," said the man with the lantern. "Let us join in the search." So while Vandal and his two fellow travelers scrambled slowly down their side of the ravine the other three, ac-

idly. And these held still another advantage in the lantern, which aided them greatly in the descent and the subsequent search.

"And I say again, Volner," said the young man with the lantern, "this may be another plot against one we love Is not the prince expected soon? His arrival has been unaccountably delayed. He was not at Trolle yesterday. Could he have come by way of Ontro, think you?"

"He might, he might," said the man called Volner. "He and his lovely princess and the sweet Princess Marie -ah, that Deneslia should hold traitors to these three! But Casparin came yesterday - from Berlin, he told me. He was at me again about the rent money. Heaven! How can I pay what

he demands?" "There is something mysterious late ly about Casparin," said Debbisk. "Think you there is any foundation for

"Hush! You are speaking of the brother of the prince. Here! What have we here? A man, and a young

Vandal, Reber and Robello were still some few feet away as the lantern swung low over the white upturned face of Buckford Wallace, and the three agriculturists bent to examine

the handsome features. "My faith in God!" exclaimed Vol-"That young man looks not like ner. a thief." "Nevertheless such he is, and noth-

ing else. In his pockets you will find nearly a thousand francs he stole from our room at the inn at Ontro." "And did you know the fellow?" ask ed Debbisk.

are simply kidney disorders. The kidneys filter the blood of all that shouldn't be there. The blood passes through the kidneys every three mautes. If the kidneys do their work no impurity or cause of disorder can remain in the circulation longer than that time. Therefore if your blood is out of order your kidneys have failed in their work. They are in need of

Doddis Kidney

"Know him! He is wanted just now by the Paris police. We had, in fact, journeyed from Paris to find him." "Hum! Let me think," said Farm er Volner. "I am not sure of your truth, strangers. Men are often robbed at Ontro; it is a fact. But the rob-

bers are not, as a rule, young and handsome fellows like this. Come. We will examine his wound, and if he is not dead we will take him to the

"For what?" demanded Vandal. "Does he not belong to us?" "Not exactly," said Volner, with a laugh. "Under the wise rule of our beloved prince, that thing is settled. A chase, wounded even in the Green forest, if it runs or flies to occupied ground, belongs to the tenant or owner of that ground. Had this young man been a wild pig or a deer or a goose it would now belong to me. I shall apply the rule to this young man."

"I protest. He robbed us. We are French gentlemen. We claim him." "Gentlemen, if he is dead you may have him. If he is but wounded, he shall have a chance to tell his story as my name is Voluer."

"Volner! Your name Volner?" "My name is Sester Volner, at your

service." This information seemed to disquiet Vandal considerably.

Without noticing the effect of his name on the Frenchman, which, indeed, he could not see without a conspicuous use of the lantern, Volner bent down and lifted the wounded man in his powerful arms.

"We will get him to the top, where we can examine him," he said. To Volner that burden was as nothing. The lantern was carried by Debbisk in such a manner as to throw its gleams ahead. Volner led the way. Then came Debbisk and his partner,

both employees of Volner. Then followed the three discomfited Frenchmen, who had, by the unfortunate claim of Vandal that they had come from Paris to trace Buckford, lost the opportunity of posing as the

invited guests of Casparin. Up the steep bank toiled Volner. Buckford uttered a groan. "Good!" said Debbisk.

dead.. Thank God for that!" "Curse that American!" whispered Vandal to Reber. "He cannot be killed, it seems. If that fool gets him to his house and brings him back to consciousness, he will tell the whole story. Not only will the plot of our friend be defeated, but undoubtedly we shall be pursued and shot."

"Yes. Mon Dieu! Almost anything is better than that!" whispered Reber

in affright. "Then do you and Robello stand by me now! None of your cowardice. Stick to me like men now, and we will get the youngster away and finish him. Now, at the word, fire into the backs of these two fellows. After that the old

man. One, two, three!" Fortunately for Debbisk, Reber, the immortal blunderer, clicked his revolv er a full minute before it was to be time to fire. Like a flash the two young farmers had turned, and two heavy clubs descended with terrific force on the skulls of Reber and Robello. Reber sank to the ground with a gasp, while Robello, less injured, staggered felt his head and then fired at his assailant. At the same moment Vandal

fired into the face of Debbisk. "Heavens! What is this?" roared Farmer Volner, dropping his groaning burden and springing into the fray.

He came none too soon, for Debbisk was lying on the ground, his companion was in the grasp of Robello and the recovered Reber, and Vandal was

drawing a knife to spring upon him. With a mighty oath the enraged farmer hurled his ponderous body on Vandal and sent him headlong to the bottom of the ravine. He then grabbed both Reber and Robello and cracked their heads together till the two skulls almost split from front to rear. Hurling them from him, he quickly made sure his workman was not hurt

and swore lustily again. "Can you manage Debbisk?" he asked. "We must get these two wounded ones to the house and come back for those rascals. Thief! I know who the

thieves are now!" The two men struggled out of the ravine. Buckford was carried easily by Volner. Debbisk, however, who was a heavy man, was half dragged and

half carried by his associate. In this way the party traversed a field, struck again into the farm path they had quit at the sound of the pis-



hurried toward the lights that ed from the windows of the

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