

POWER LOT

(Continued from page 1015.)

"Git out o' here!" responded Bate, as if to a dog. "Go and git out o' my sight, Miss Lee."

"See here, you mangy brute, I go where I like," Rob advised him with potent emphasis. "You'd better get over into the pen there with your mates."

Bate ground his teeth.

"Ef you darst come over thar' behind the firs," he suggested, tauntingly, "I'll give you a dose you can chaw on till this time next year. Ef you darst, an' ef you darsent I'll punish ye right here whar' ye be; an' don't cry, I'r perhaps Ma'y 'll come out an' resky ye. She can see ye, ef ye stay right whar' ye be."

Rob, making no pause whatever for contemplation, marched over behind the firs. He towered above Bate, but he was not an athlete, nor had he ever made any practice, directly or indirectly, toward that end. He had eluded skillfully the bore of submitting to a college education; his travels had been performed in the most soft and luxurious fashion.

Bate, in spite of his occasional excesses, had the sturdy muscles indurate through habits of toil and hardship.

"Here I am," sneered Rob, beside himself with passion, "over here behind the firs where Miss Stingaree can't rescue me. Now come on and punish me!"

At the word, Bate sprang toward him, aiming a swift, clean blow that felled him to the earth.

Rob rose staggering—a fiend now, an incarnate fury with but one intent. Life or death, it mattered not; only to reach that sullen, derisive face leering at him through the mist of his pain and frenzy; with fists, with teeth, with tearing fingernails, he cared not how, but he felt that he should reach that black, taunting goal before he died, and his blood surged with a blinding ferocity. Bate, grinning, teased him, affected to play with him, raining down, however, at every opportunity, the sting of malicious blows. Rob reached a point at last where he did not feel these blows, but they fell off from him as from a thing insensate; his working, streaming face had taken on a deadly quiet, his bloodshot eyes a superhuman steadiness and watchfulness. Bate contemptuously interpreted this as the glazing sign of accepted defeat, and at that instant he found himself sprawling on his back under the scintillant glare of two blue eyes that looked as big as suns, modified only by an area of set white teeth that seemed of sufficient purpose to devour him; for, with the intensity of his attack, Rob had fallen with him and upon him.

Thus, fettering his opponent by his unexerted weight, and restraining him with the clutch of desperate arms, Rob gazed down upon him, and the blood from his pink-and-white face dropped down upon Bate's swarthy features.

"H'ist yerself, you mad ox!" said Bate, with the first impulse of his recovered breath. "Heave yerself up, you side-of-a-barn! This ain't no fair play."

Rob tightened the strenuous grip that held his victim.

"This ain't fair play!" he sobbed with spent breath; "guess you'll find I'm in earnest 'fore I get through with you."

"You durn mountain of a fool-baby, let me up, I say."

Rob, a little appeased by the sight of blood on his victim's face, grinned triumphantly in rejoinder.

"Say, 'Mr. Hilton, I've had enough, if you please,' and I'll let you up."

Bate lay smoldering with hate and fury, scornfully silent. Rob's breath began to come less like the gasp of the dying, and he warily strengthened the fastnesses of his position. Bate's very frame began to resent the stricture of those confining arms; moreover, someone might appear on

the scene and find him in this ridiculous and humiliating plight.

"Say, Rob, let me up," he said, in a bitter travesty of a conciliatory tone, "and we'll call it quits."

"Say 'Mr. Hilton, I've had enough, if you please.'"

"Curse ye, ye may stay there till yer arms rot off, then."

But while this disagreeable process was in its merest inception, Mary Stingaree suddenly appeared around the edge of the fir trees.

"You promised me you would not do that," she exclaimed impetuously to Bate; then, realizing the actual situation, and that it was Bate, and not Rob, who lay vanquished, she stood in speechless wonder.

"I was pastin' him blind," Bate made haste to assert, "when the great moon-calf teetered and fell on me. I thought the North mountain had tumbled."

"Say," simply repeated Rob, in Mary's presence, with unctuous accents of politeness, "say 'Mr. Hilton, I've had enough, if you please,' and I'll let you up."

Bate snorted, and spake not.

"Let him up, Robert," said Mary.

At the lady's command Rob rose regretfully. "Which is it," he observed, however, smoothly to Bate, "which is it that Miss Stingaree has 'rescued'?"

Bate made another spring for his adversary, but a new and fresh element entered the arena at this moment, and Bate's truculency wilted down into a faded and surly withdrawal from the scene. It was Mrs. Byjo, calmly and curiously inspecting the situation through her spectacles, her faithful oxwhip at her side.

"Quit fightin'," she remarked, dispassionately.

The sole remaining belligerent, Rob, assented to this behest with a bloody smile.

"Yes 'm," he subjoined softly.

The eyes that gazed through Mrs. Byjo's spectacles were not so very old after all. Rob suspected a twinkle in them, and a twinkle not unfriendly to himself, at that. His torn heart, shattered and left empty by the retreating surges of passion, warmed a little.

"Excuse me, I think I need to go and take a bath," he murmured, spurning from his mouth the warm blood which trickled persistently thither from his nose.

"He had him down," he heard Mary confide to Mrs. Byjo, as he retreated. "Rob had him down!" The wonder in the voice cut him to the quick, and roused his blood again to a vivifying storm. So it was subject only for amazement that he should put anything down? Very well, very well! Having washed himself, he returned to his tub; but, strangely enough, neither blows nor the loss of much crimson gore had weakened him in the least; an apprehension of unmeasured strength confused and at the same time sustained him as he scrubbed at his ignominious task.

Never gleamed clothes whiter from the hand of a fuller. Unconsciously, Rob had put into their cleansing the foretaste and the promise of a consummate physical prowess. The manner in which he hung them on the line, while it portrayed an intense security in the adjustment of the clothespins, indicated, otherwise, some remarkable preoccupation of mind.

Tangled bunches of handkerchiefs and collars waved meekly from their vise-like attachment to the line, no hope of change, no dream of wandering for them. Shirts suspended variously, by the neck, by one arm, by the flap, screamed in the wind as they shook their disordered members menacingly in one another's faces. As twilight advanced—for, by reason of untoward events, Rob's washing had not been finally presented as a spectacle to the world until late in the day—as the shades of evening deepened, and the wind abated not, this ghost-like throng upon the line engaged in wilder antics and drearier

(Continued on next page.)

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