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# ABNER DANIEL

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

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"I loved to see William fore went back," said Bishop rather irreverently. Then, seeing that Perkins was staring at him rather fixedly, he said—it was a verbal plunge:

"I bought some more timber land yesterday."

"Oh, you did? That's good." Perkins' eyes fluttered once or twice before his gaze steadied itself on the face of the man before him. "Well, as I told you, Mr. Bishop, that sort of a thing is a good investment. I reckon it's already climbing up a little, ain't it?"

"Not much yet." It struck Bishop that he had given the lawyer a splendid opportunity to speak of the splendid cause for an advance in value, and his heart felt heavier as he finished. "But I took quite a slice the last time—5,000 acres at the old figure, you know—a dollar a acre."

"You don't say! That was a slice." Bishop drew himself up in his chair and inhaled a deep breath. It was as if he took into himself in that way the courage to make his next remark.

"I got it from the Tompkins estate."

"You don't say! I didn't know they had that much on hand."

"Since I bought the land I've accidentally heard that you are some kin o' that family."

Perkins started slightly and raised his brows.

"Oh, yes! On my wife's side, away off, some way or other. I believe the original Tompkins that settled there from Virginia was my wife's grandfather. I never was much of a hand to go into such matters."

"When I heard that, Perkins, it was natural for me to wonder why you, you see—why you didn't tell them about the railroad."

The sallow features of the lawyer seemed to stiffen. He drew himself up coldly and a wicked expression flashed in his eyes.

"Take my advice, old man," he snarled as he threw down his pen and stared doggedly into Bishop's face. "Stick to your farming and don't waste your time asking a professional lawyer questions which have no bearing on your business whatever. Now, really, do I have to explain to you my personal reasons for not favoring the Tompkins people with a—I may say—any piece of information?"

Bishop was now as white as death. His worst suspicions were confirmed—he was a ruined man; there was no further doubt about that. Suddenly he felt unable to bridge the contemptuous frown that rested within him.

"I think I know why you didn't tell 'em," was what he hurled at the lawyer.

"You think you do?"

"Yes; it was because you knew no road was going to be built. You told Pete Mosely the same tale you did me, an' Abe Tompkins unloaded on 'im. That's a way you have o' doin' business."

Perkins stood up. He took his silk hat from the top of his desk and put it on. "Oh, yes, old man," he sneered; "I'm a terribly dishonest fellow, but I've got company in this world. Now, really, the only thing that has worried me has been your un-Christian act in buying all that land from the Tompkins heirs at such a low figure when the railroad will advance its value so greatly. Mr. Bishop, I thought you were a good Methodist."

"Oh, you kin laugh an' jeer all you fer this."

"You are not as well versed in the law as you are in fertilizers, Mr. Bishop," sneered the lawyer. "In order to make a case against me you'd have to publicly betray a matter I told to you

in confidence, and then what would you gain? I doubt if the court would force me to explain a private matter like this where the interests of my clients are concerned, and if the court did I could simply show the letters I have regarding the possible construction of a railroad in your section. If you remember rightly, I did not say the thing was an absolute certainty. On top of all this you'd be obliged to prove collusion between me and the Tompkins heirs over a sale made by their attorney, Mr. Trubue. There is one thing certain, Mr. Bishop, and that is that you have forfeited your right to any further confidence in this matter. If the road is built, you'll find out about it with the rest of your people. You think you acted wisely in attacking me this way, but you have simply cut off your nose to spite your face. Now, I have a long car ride before me, and it's growing late."

Bishop stood up. He was quivering as with palsy. His voice shook and rang like that of a madman.

"You are a scoundrel, Perkins," he said—"a dirty blacksnake in the grass! I want to tell you that!"

"Well, I hope you won't make any charge for it."

"No; it's free." Bishop turned to the door. There was a drop upon his whole body. He dragged his feet as he moved out into the unlighted corridor, where he paused irresolutely. So great was his agony that he almost obeyed an impulse to go back and fall at the feet of Perkins and implore his aid to rescue him and his family from impending ruin. The lawyer was moving about the room, closing his desk and drawing down the window shade.

"It's no use," sighed Bishop as he made his way downstairs. "I'm ruined! Alan an' Adele ain't a cent to their names an' that devil—"

Bishop paused on the first landing like an animal at bay. He heard the steady step of Perkins on the floor above, and for a moment his fingers tingled with the thought of waiting there in the darkness and choking the life out of the subtle scoundrel who had taken advantage of his credulity.

But with a groan that was half a prayer he went on down the steps and out into the lighted streets. At the first corner he saw a car which would take him to his brother's, and he hastened to catch it.

William Bishop's house was a modern brick structure, standing on a well clipped lawn which held a Gothic summer house and two or three marble statues. It was in the best portion of the avenue. Reaching it, the planter left the car and approached the iron gate which opened on to the granite steps leading up the terrace. It was now quite dark. Obeying a sudden impulse, the old man irresolutely passed by the gate and walked farther up the street.

"Somehow I don't feel one bit like it," he mused. "I couldn't tell William. He'd think I wanted to borrow money an' 'ud git skeered right off. He always was afeard I'd mismanage. An' then I'd hate to sp'ile Adele's visit, an' she could tell that was some'n wrong by me bein' heer in sech a hurry. I reckon I do show it. How could a body help it? Oh, my Lord, have mercy! It's all gone, all—me'n Betsy has saved."

He turned at the corner of his brother's property and slowly retraced his halting steps to the gate, but he did not pause, continuing his way back toward the station. A glance at the house showed that all the lower rooms were lighted, as well as the big prismatic lamp that hung over the front porch. Bishop saw forms in light sum-

mer clothing on the wide veranda. "I'll bet that tallest one is Sis," he said pathetically. "I jest wish I could see 'er a little while. Maybe it 'ud stop this awful hurtin' a little jest to look at 'er an' heer 'er laugh like she always did at home. She'd be brave; she wouldn't cry an' take on, but it would hurt 'er away down in 'er heart, especially when she's mixin' with sech high fliers an' money spenders. Lord, what'll I do fer cash to send 'er next month? I'm the land poorest man in my county."

Reaching the station, he inquired about a train to Darley and was told that one left at midnight. He decided to take it and sat in one of the iron armed seats without moving till he heard his train announced. Then he went into the smoking car and sat down in a corner.

He reached Darley at half past 3 in the morning and went to the only hotel in the place. The sleepy night clerk rose from his lounge behind the counter in the office and assigned him to a room, to which a colored boy, vigorously rubbing his eyes, conducted him. Left alone in his room, he sat down on the edge of his bed and started to undress, but with a sigh he stopped.

"What's the use o' me lyin' down almost at daybreak?" he asked himself.

"I mought as well be on the way home. I can't sleep nohow."

Blowing out his lamp, he went downstairs and roused the clerk again. "Will I have to pay for that bed at I don't use it?" he questioned.

"Why, no, Mr. Bishop," said the clerk. "Well, I believe I'll start out home."

"Is your team in town?" asked the clerk.

"The team I'm a-goin' to use is. I'm goin' to foot it. I've done the like before this."

"Well, it's a purty tough stretch," smiled the clerk, "but the roads are good."

### CHAPTER IV.

It was a little after sunrise. The family had just left the breakfast table when Bishop walked in. His shoes and trousers were damp with dew and covered with the dust of the road. His wife saw him entering the gate and called out to him from the hall:

"Well, I declare! Didn't you go to Atlanta?"

He came slowly up the steps, dragging his feet after him. He had the appearance of a man beaten by every storm that could fall upon a human being.

"Yes, I went," he said doggedly. He passed her and went into the sitting room, where his brother-in-law stood at the fireplace lighting his pipe with a live coal of fire on the tip of a stick.

Abner Daniel looked at him critically, his brows raised a little as he puffed, but he said nothing. Mrs. Bishop came in behind her husband, sweeping him from head to foot with her searching eyes.

"You don't mean to tell me you walked out heer this mornin'," she cried. "Lord have mercy!"

"I don't know as I've prepared any speech on the subject," said her husband, testily, "but I walked. I could 'a' gone to a liver an' ordered out a team, but I believe that's more'n one way o' wearin' sackcloth an' ashes, an' the sooner I begin the better I'll feel."

Abner Daniel winked. The Scriptural allusion appealed to his fancy, and he smiled impulsively.

"That thar is," he said. "Thar's a whole way an' a half way. Some folks jest wear it next to the skin whar it don't show, with sackcloth an' alk on the outside. They think of it as scratchin' a little that'll satisfy the Lord an' hoodwink other folks. But I believe he meant it to be the whole hog or none."

Mrs. Bishop was deaf to this philosophy. "I don't see," she said in her own field of reflection—"I don't see, I say, how you got to Atlanta, attended to business, seed Adele an' got back heer at sunrise. Why, Alfred?"

But Bishop interrupted her. "Have you all had prayers yet?"

"No; you know we hain't," said his wife, wondering over his strange manner. "I reckon it can pass jest this once, bein' as you are tired an' hain't had nothin' to eat."

"No; it can't pass, nuther. I don't want to touch a mouthful. Tell the rest of 'em to come in, an' you fetch me the Book."

"Well!" Mrs. Bishop went out and told the negro woman and her daughter to stop washing the dishes and go in to prayer. Then she hurried out to the back porch, where Alan was oiling his gun.

"Some'n's happened to yore pa," she said. "He acts queer an' says sech strange things. He walked all the way from Darley this mornin' an' now wants to have prayers 'fore he touches a bite o' breakfast. I reckon we are ruined."

"I'm afraid that's it," opined her son as he put down his gun and followed her into the sitting room. Here the two negroes stood against the wall. Abner Daniel was smoking, and Bishop held the big family Bible on his quivering knees.

"If you mean to keep it up," Abner was saying argumentatively, "all right an' good, but I don't believe in sudden spurts o' worship. My hosses is hitched up ready to haul a load o' bark to the tannery, an' it may throw me a little late at dinner, but of you are a-goin' to make a daily business of it I'm with you."

"I'm a-goin' to be regular from now on," said Bishop, slowly turning the leaves of the tome. "I forgot whar I read last."

"You didn't finish about Samson tellin' all them foxes' tails together," said Abner Daniel as he knocked the hot ashes from his pipe into the palm of his hand and tossed them into the chimney. "That sorter interested me. I wondered how that was a-goin' to



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end. I'd hate to have a 'passe o' foxes with torches to the'r tails turned loose in my wheat jest 'fore cuttin' time. It must 'a' been a sight. I wondered how that was a-goin' to end."

"You'll wonder how you're a-goin' to end if you don't be more respectful," said his sister.

"Like the foxes, I reckon," grinned Abner—"with a eternal torch tied to me. Well, if I am treated that way I'll go into the business o' destruction an' set fire to everything I run across."

"Ain't you goin' to tell us what you did in Atlanta 'fore you have prayers?" asked Mrs. Bishop, almost resentfully.

"No, I hain't!" Bishop snapped. "I'll tell you soon enough. I reckon I won't read this mornin'. Let's pray."

They all knelt reverently and yet with some curiosity, for Bishop often omitted his prayers to important occasions, and it struck them that he might now allude to the subject bound up within him.

To Be Continued.

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