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POWER LOT

(Continued from page 1115.)

How much was known of his past history, he had never asked. To be sure, he had come to Power Lot, God Help Us, drunk and sodden. To be sure, he was compromised, in Cuby's sense of the term, by certain light and reckless professions of love made to her; but that was within the bounds of gentlemanly conduct, he considered. To be sure, his heart was turning to Mary with love and adoration combined. No one knew it, he believed. The growing realization was a joy and an inspiration to his own consciousness; it flattered his faint moral sense. To love such a woman surely indicated the man of honor. And, some time, he might win her?—that trembling hope shed its far-reaching glow over his sordid labors—his secret.

But the divining instincts of humanity are keen. Bate knew, and bitterly advised Cuby Tee-bo to have an eye on her lover. And Mary knew, to her sorrow. This personal equation was what she determined, particularly, to eliminate from the problem. Rob's mounting blushes when near her, his avid eagerness to anticipate all her small wishes, and the blue eyes falling before hers; these things touched her with shame and indignation. She addressed him seldom, and more shortly, her eyes meeting his frankly with a confirmed indifference—and only so much the more poor Rob adored her.

Then, one morning, as he was hoeing his own potatoes very early, Gar' Tee-bo made a detour across the fields on his way to the woods, and accosted him over the fence.

"I weesh you come down and make play our gemm wiz the gloves again. You too tam stupeed." He smiled fatherly on Rob, with a pleasant duplicity. "Say, you come to-night; we make play our leetle gemm togeezzer, eh?"

"Yes, I will come," said Rob. He went that evening. The wiry Frenchman gave him so clear an insight into some new features of the "gemm" that Rob, sitting on the kitchen floor with his back against the wall, trying to collect his scattered breath, felt that he could have dispensed with such telling proficiency on the part of the doughty Frenchman.

But Cuby laughed. "You naughty man, to make hurt my pretty Daisy," she said.

Rob was up in a twinkling, springing at Tee-bo with savage fury.

Gar' met him. "You t'ink you spill me lak you spill tam fool, Bet' Sting'ree, eh? You t'ink you fall over an' squish me, eh? Feeder-Bed you, take dat."

But Rob, whom excessive passion seemed to imbue with skill, caught the Frenchman's trick, and Gar' went over as the result of a stinging blow in turn; and Cuby, whose hope was secretly with her lover, rushed in between them.

"Do you quit, father. Rob—he play' fair. Let him alone. Quit you both. Hear to me."

The combatants, after surveying each other like two panting dogs, submitted to be led to chairs, each by the hand of Cuby. She, with sparkling eyes, innocent enough in her simple jealousy and folly, by all means to win back her lover, produced a jug of rum and shook it gladly in the faces of the two.

"Where you t'ink I got heem, eh?" said Gar', taking the jug and now beaming cordially on Rob.

Rob saw a vision of green worlds of exceeding brightness and heights of exceeding valor fleeting past him out of his reach; and in their place was a miserable, low room and a dirty eat-table, and on that table had been placed a jug of rum.

"Where you t'ink I got heem, eh?" repeated the Frenchman, pointing to the jug. "I tell you how I got heem. No—I nevaire tell you. You heem. You keep str'et. You ririform an' marry my Cuby an' keep yourself stiddy. I don want no

tam lezzy d'un kard 'roun' here. But, to-night, eh?—because you play good gemm, tam good gemm—you get yourself treat, frien'ly togeezzer, eh?"

Gar' filled a glass and handed it to Rob with beaming confidence, and Cuby's questioning, delighted eyes were on him, too. He drank it eagerly and received another.

Now poor little Cuby's benighted work was all cut out for her, by herself and her less-intelligent father.

While Rob sat up, hilarious and extremely voluble, on the house-bench, Gar', who had not imbibed so freely, went out and sought the local justice of the peace for the purpose of having Rob and Cuby married.

But the same smuggled invoice of rum, a jug of which adorned Gar's table, had laid low the justice of the peace, and his wife, with a cheerful and exculpatory wink, pointed him out, lying half-dressed on his bed, devoting himself to the business of snoring with a vigor which precluded the possibility of his adapting himself to any other pursuit.

Captain Belcher, however, though elated, was in so active a case as to be willing to stick at nothing—not even the hitherto unattempted performance on his part of uniting two people in marriage. With great impressiveness of manner he now conducted this rite, kissed the bride with effusion, and gave Rob a jocose congratulatory push, which, with another glass from the jug, confirmed the latter in the intention which he had been for some time cherishing of disposing himself on the floor for a season of undiverted slumber. This cherished desire he now put into execution. It was morning when he opened his heavy eyelids.

Ah, those hills, of conquest, those fair fields of achievement, which had gone fleeting past him in his vision,—past him, out of sight. He lay on Gar' Tee-bo's floor, and through the open door he saw the gully of the river at low tide. The flats lay cavernous and bare. Despair swept over him; he wished no single thing except that he were dead.

Cuby rose equal to the occasion. She was up early, fresh as the morn, resplendent in a starched pink frock. Steaming hot coffee awaited Rob and her father, and a pan of fried trout, besides some muffins made by her own skillful little hands.

"See what a stupid old man I have," she cried, gayly cuffing Rob on the ear; "he make me ashem", lak we was married to a funeral."

"Married!" exclaimed Rob dully, from his end of the breakfast table.

Gar' laughed boisterously:

"He forgit how he mek you to marry heem, Cuby. He have such tam good time to that weddeen-party, he forgit all what he done. Ha, ha!"

Rob looked at Cuby. She nodded her pretty head at him in confirmation, her bright eyes tender and at the same time challenging him to show a becoming joy. The glory of beauty and health was upon her, and Rob was again, for the time being, mentally and physically a waste. He put his hands up to his head and groaned, very simply.

"I have been a fool—a fool! Oh, why did I touch it?"

Neither Cuby nor her father seemed to resent this unflattering attitude and speech. They applied kindly and soothing words. They affirmed it as their desire that Cuby should remain at present with her father to keep his house, while Rob should continue living at the Stingarees' for convenience to his farm. Later, he might come into the interrupted wealth that was rumored still to be his; or, at least, when his potato crop was sold in the fall, they might rent a barracks of their own.

Gar' even knew of several desirable places of this sort, and indicated their direction through the window with his dirty forefinger. Rob's soul went sick.

"I want to be on the hill," he said, fretfully; "there are places enough up there."

"You use' to that hill, you lak' that hill," replied the Frenchman

genially; "you git use' to the River, you lak' the River—see?"

"No," cried Rob, belligerently. "I tell you I'm going to live on the hill."

"Why, of course," said Cuby soothingly; "me—I wan' to live on the hill, too. We shall live where we make to please ourselves, father."

But there was a little spark of malice in her eye; it was so evident that her presence did not make hills and vales a matter of indifference to Rob. She had caught her handsome man, and lost him—she, the beauty of the River, to whom Rob had made in times past such valorous protestations of love. It was incomprehensible. Sombre, dark "old Mary Stingaree" had bewitched him. But she and her father had outwitted Mary Stingaree, and she could win Rob back; anyway, she had him fast, she could afford to be forbearing and patient.

"See, father," she exclaimed laughingly, "my old man is so stiddy already he weeshes to make up on the hill to work so we shall buy ourselves a home. I knew he was one good man, or I should not marry to him—no." Her teeth shone merrily, and the deep rose glowed in her cheeks.

Rob smiled faint appreciation, perforce—wintry sunshine on the pallid remorse of his features.

"Sure. He is one good stiddy man," said the Frenchman. "He shall have a leetle—jest a leetle—for ze long stip hill, eh?" And he produced the jug, which had been replenished through some dark and mysterious avenue of supply.

"Come, son," he began.

A frenzy of repugnance seized Rob. The familiar mode of address, the sight of the vehicle whose contents had wrought his ruin, as the Frenchman held it out, his low, grimy features condescendingly leering, caused Rob to snatch the jug and hurl it through the open door, out over the ledges, crashing on the bare rocks of the river-bed below.

"Curse the stuff!" he cried.

"Curse the infernal stuff, forever and forever, amen. So help me God! Now I'm going to get out of here."

"You t'rowed heem too fur to smell heem, son—son," repeated Tee-bo hatefully, trembling with anger. But he did not attack Rob, whose fury he had learned to dread. The pupil had proven powerful as well as apt, and had the natural advantage of being twice the size of his antagonist.

Cuby clapped her hands. "He is gran', father. See you how good he is. A girl lak' me knows how to be glad that her husband is ririform'. Me—I think it is good—good."

"Vair' good. He is ririform'," muttered the Frenchman dryly, going out to harness his team for a day of log-hauling.

Cuby lifted her bright face for Rob to kiss. "Good-bye," she said, but added no endearing epithet.

"Good-bye, little girl," said Rob, manfully.

Words pressed to Cuby's lips, but she did not utter them.

"I shall be awfully busy to-day, Cuby," said Rob. "I am to work some for Mrs. Byjo, too. But I shall come down to-morrow to see you, if I have the strength to drag down."

Cuby's brown eyes darkened—with loving tenderness, the soul-sick Rob feared. But she spoke lightly.

"All right, Rober'. You shall not come if you are tired. To come down the hill is easy, but to climb back that is hard: is it not so?"

"Yes, that's the hard part," said Rob grimly, utter woe in his eyes.

Out of sight, he drew a long breath, and, lifting his hat, let the wind blow through his hair.

(To be continued.)

Professional Fester.—I should like to undertake a fast of four weeks in this show of yours. How much will you pay me?

Showman.—I can't give you any salary, but I will pay for your keep.