



# The SCALAWAG of SCOW FALLS

By Wm. Hamilton Osborne

AS luck—my usual good luck—would have it, the Hermes caved in, almost directly in front of a village blacksmith shop. All the way down the long stretch from the top of High Boy mountain, the death gurgle had been rattling in her throat, and I had been afraid; but my fears were groundless. In the showdown, she had the good sense to die in the right place.

The blacksmith sauntered out. "Repair shop?" I queried.

"Nothing but," replied he, easily.

I peered toward the west. The dusk was settling down. "How long?" I asked.

The blacksmith, pipe in mouth, bent over and, in his dignified and deliberate way, pretended to survey the bottom of the Hermes.

"Long enough to make the old tub over into new," he said.

"Which means," I retorted, growing hot under the collar, for the Hermes really is the quintessence of all cars, "that you purpose to spend three hours tightening a nut."

He grinned again. "Maybe so," he ventured, leaning negligently against the hood, "and if so, stranger, what are you going to do about it?"

He had me—distinctly had me. That was the way to talk to a chap like me, and he knew it and I knew it, too. Following the example of the Hermes, I caved in too.

"While you're pottering over that," I asked him, "what is there for me to do?"

He expectorated over the Hermes—its entire length, and then considerably some, and his eye brightened in the gathering dusk. "Now you're talking," he returned, "pretty quiet here in town most of the time. But lively doings now." He jerked a thumb over his right shoulder. "See that there mob back there at the corners?" he inquired.

I glanced back toward the tavern. About twenty men were standing about loosely in groups—the mob.

"Lynching?" I queried, with quickening hopes.

"Nop," he drawled, "election."

"Town crier?" I ventured.

He grinned, "Got plenty of them, without electin' them," he said, "nop. This is mainly sheriff." Suddenly he developed amazing energy. He shaded his mouth with his hand and bellowed up the road.

"Hey, Bill," he cried, "polls closed yet?"

"Sure," answered half a dozen voices all at once, "quarter of an hour ago."

"By hick," said the blacksmith, disappointedly, "why didn't you roll in here a mite sooner—you could a-voted for the Scalawag."

"The Scalawag?" I exclaimed, ignoring the suggested breach of the election laws that his remark implied, "who is the Scalawag?"

His heavy arm stretched itself out toward the mountain. "The Scalawag's from Scow Falls," he said, "ain't you ever heard of him?"

"What's he running for?" I asked.

"Sheriff."

"Who's against him—anybody?"

"The Devil, mainly," he returned grimly.

"The Scalawag against the Devil," I mused, "must be a hot campaign. What's the Devil's name?"

"Name's Angelman," he said.

"Queer name for the Devil," I opined. I drew forth a cigar and passed him one. "Tell me all about it?" I requested.

Immediately he became busy. "Stranger," he returned, "I've got a job ahead of me re-foundering this heap of scrap iron here. You'd better talk to someone else."

I did. Before doing so, I asked him for the cigar back again, on the principle that the consideration therefor had failed. But he was already smoking it and said genially, that he'd be d—d if he liked these here Indian givers, and if I'd get out and leave him alone with this here junk for about a week, he'd show me a car as was a car.

The first man I ran into on the outskirts of the mob was a long, lanky individual with a shock of tawny hair and a fine, expressive—and somewhat plaintive—blue eye.

"How's the Scalawag making out?" I asked him.

"Can't tell, stranger," he returned, with a bit of anxiety in his voice, and with a gesture toward the tavern, "until the returns come in over the 'phone."

"I hope he wins," I said fervently, "give me the Scalawag from Scow Falls every time, in preference to the Devil."

He held out his hand. "Put it there, stranger," he exclaimed. Something gave him pause, however. "You know the Devil, then?" he queried.

"Only a speaking acquaintance," I hastened to assure him, for I'm not proud of my familiarity with his Satanic majesty, "but, if you don't mind, I'll ask you to do me a favor—tell me something about this Scalawag of Scow Falls."

"Don't mind if I do," he answered, taking my proffered cigar.

"Will you venture to the tavern?" I went on, spider like.

"Nop," he answered shortly, "I don't drink. But, as you were saying—we're all so fidgetty, waiting for these here returns, that I'd just as leave give you the facts in the case of the Scalawag. The Devil—the real one I mean—and this other imitation proposition, too—is pretty much mixed up in the history at that." He backed up to a straight rail fence and sat upon it. I did the like.

"This here Scalawag of Scow Falls," he proceeded—"nobody knows how he got the name, but it fitted him O.K.—well, he was a good-for-nothing scamp—sowed his wild oats—raised Cain—did those things he ought not to have done, and left a mighty sight of things undid that he ought not to have left undid—you understand. Nobody knows where he'd have landed save for a girl." His voice lowered to a respectful pitch, as though it were not fair to talk of the Scalawag and the girl in the same tone.

"This girl, you understand—was rich. She was something else—anyways, she was to the Scalawag. She was the prettiest, rightest, tightest little proposition in petticoats that Scow Falls—or even New York—ever had. There was just one thing in this here Scalawag's favor—he was head over heels in love with this here little girl, and he didn't love her for her money, either. No doubt about that."

"How rich was she?" I queried.

"She wasn't rich at all," he corrected himself, "but her old man—Mitcheltree was the name—he had a couple of the likeliest farms a man could have in this God-forsaken country. She was his only daughter. His wife was dead. Well, this here girl of his—do you s'pose old man Mitcheltree was anxious to marry her off? Stranger, he'd have shot the first chap that attempted it. And that as you may say was just what the Scalawag was looking for. Beside loving the girl, he was all fired fond of excitement—and when he wasn't raising Cain right here intown, he was out to Mitcheltree's making love to the girl. The only trouble was, she didn't make love back to the Scalawag. Now, mind what I'm sayin'. She loved him, all right. But she wouldn't make love to him—not so

long as he was a Scalawag. But she kept meeting him down by the pasture lot—lots of times they sat there on the bars, in the moonlight while she was supposed to be sewing fixin's up in her attic room—and there was only one thing she pumped into Scalawag. Religion—she give it to him, so they say from away back. She told him how the devil certainly had him, and how it was up to this here Scalawag to be convicted. Gosh, he came near being convicted of a mighty big crime, later on. But she said—convicted of sin. And he must repent. Gee, but he repented later, to his cost, I tell you, stranger. But that's neither here nor there.

"It was after the biggest hurrah time—all but one that I'm going to tell you about, that ruined Scalawag—that she got him dead to rights. There was a big revival down here in the grove—and she told Scalawag he'd got to come. She had to steal out of the house without the old man Mitcheltree knowin' it, too—which shows what women'll do for religion. Every time she wanted to be real religious, she had to lie to old Mitcheltree. Fact. If she wanted to go to prayer-meeting, the old man would hold up his hands in despair and say: 'Well, my darter kin go to perdition if she wants to; I've did all I could.' Not that he had anything agin prayer-meeting, but he figured out that any place where young ones went was a sort of hell in itself, he was so afraid of losing her.

"And one night, she stole out soft—an' met Scalawag by the pasture lot—an' pretty shaky this here Scalawag was, too, they said—or rather, he did—from his big hurrah. An' she took him by the hand, an' she says—'Scalawag,' she says—I don't know whether she called him that, maybe not, but anyhow—she says: 'you're comin' down with me to the revival in the Valley.'"

"All right," says Scalawag, pickin' her up and landin' her in his ramshackle buggy—Scalawag always had a good horse when he could, but his wagons was awful; mostly he didn't have either—"I'm game," he says, "for anything." He tried to kiss her, but she wouldn't stand for it—at least so he said afterward. And they landed at the grove and tied and slipped into a seat on the planks by the big tree over yonder, just as the crowd was singin'. And they was singin' that old rouser—maybe you know it, stranger—

Throw out the life line,

Throw out the life line—

Some one is drifting awa-a-a-y

"Well, anyhow, somehow, between the glory of the singing and the shouting, and her warm little hand, somethin' kind of hit this here Scalawag, it seems—and when she slips her other little hand to him, he's all in.

"Scalawag," she whispers to him—so he says later—"you come with me."

"An' Scalawag, he went with her, up through all the crowd, up—to the anxious seat. Everybody lookin' on—some of them gloryin' an' some of 'em jeerin'. But everybody's eyes bulges clean out of their heads. 'There goes Scalawag,' they says, and nudges each other. 'An', look who's with him,' says another. You know what that meant, don't you, stranger—that brave little proposition marching up through that crowd with that dare devil at her side—it meant only one thing—that she was as good as engaged to him.

"MAYBE it was that, that got into Scalawag's blood—maybe it was genuine religion. But he did what she did. He knelt right down at that there anxious seat—an' he got religion, then and there—or thought he did, anyhow. An' in the middle of it, he leaned over to her and whispered:

"I'll stick, girlie—if you'll stick to me."

"Well, there was some heard this—especially another chap, who, when he'd seen Evangeline Mitcheltree making for the anxious seat—thought he'd make for it, too, to keep in with her. This other chap was the Devil."

"Angelman?" I asked.

"Ah," returned my informant, "and this Devil—nobody knew he was that, then—he heard the Scalawag's remark—and he had to lean over to her, too and he says—'I come up 'cause you did.'"