

No Hand of Man!

(Concluded from page 7.)

a wilted flower in her black hair, and a skin not white or brown or yellow or pink, but only like a few of the Cubans have, so thin and delicate you can see into it the way you can see into a piece of polished shell.

"He's outside, Miss," I said to her, flapping over a jack. "Did you sleep through the storm?"

"Vera leetle, senior," she answered, and looked at me out of her big eyes.

It was just at that second there came the pistol shot. The air was so still that you might say that the noise tore a hole out of the morning. I thought at first he'd put a bullet into Lenora Gonzalez. She jumped like a sandpiper that's been hit and came down on her knees holding onto the edge of the door, frightened and shaking like a palmetto. I picked her up onto her feet. She was a grown girl, but she felt like a child.

"Oh, senior!" she cried. "I do not like! I do not like!"

"I know," said I. "But he hasn't shot himself. Not Joe Kitchell. Don't worry."

WE heard him coming just as he spoke. He came and stood in the door and he held up something and shook it and a drop of blood spattered on the floor. The something he shook, mate, was these rattles that I hold in my hand now. And these rattles belonged to Gus. He'd killed my snake!

"Mr. Rowe," he said. "Come out here! I've just shot the biggest diamond back I ever saw."

"Yes," said I, holding myself back from springing at him. "You killed him. He never did you any harm. But you killed him. He was happy. But you killed him. He was lying asleep there in the coral sand and coconut husks and his back was turned. But you killed him."

The miserable cuss began to laugh and shake the rattles at the little Cuban. She screamed and shrank back. And he laughed again.

"Kitchell," I said. "You were meant to destroy. But, Kitchell, you are marked out. Last night when the wind was ashrieking around this shack you asked me to see letters on the boards. Now, Kitchell, it is bright and sunny. It's not the night. It's the day. Look on the wall there!"

The feller turned. He turned and he dropped the rattles out of his hand. The breath squeaked in his throat.

"What do you see?" I roared.

"Confound it," he whispered, looking around at me. "It was my imagination. I haven't had any sleep."

"What did you see?" I said, for I knew something had come into my shack again.

He laughed then—laughed without any fun in it.

"I didn't see anything," he said. "I thought at first I saw letters—my name. It's my stomach. I'm hungry."

But he never picked up the rattles or stopped to get breakfast. He walked out into the sun and I saw him with his hands behind his back and his head bent down as if he was thinking, walking down onto the beach.

There's plenty of people below here that will tell you that I'm a liar. Plenty of 'em don't believe I steered the tug Moss Rose loaded with guns under the walls of Morro and landed the whole cargo in Havana without showing my papers. But, mate, I say there is strange things among these keys, and what I'm telling is so-hell-me truth, as I saw it. It taught me that no bill of sin goes too long unpaid, nor a poor living creature needing help that isn't seen in its struggles.

And I say Kitchell went off down onto the shore and began picking up those sea-shells and throwing 'em out into the water.

"Do you love that man?" I said to Lenora.

She nodded and began to call to him—like a child. She called to him and when he roared back for her to go ahead and eat her breakfast, she

sat down. She sat down at the table I'd set outside the shack door, as meek and silent as if she'd been punished. I think she was a child and didn't know what love meant.

I sat there drinking my coffee and looking at Gus. Eight feet of him was lying over there in his hollow under the coconut palms. There weren't any life in him any more. The bullet had torn a hole in his neck. His head wasn't raised and it wasn't swaying, and his muscles weren't moving under his skin. His color wasn't bright. Some of his blood was drying on the white sand. He was the most perfect snake I ever saw. And he was dead.

I looked at him and then I saw the grass move beyond where he lay. I could look right over Lenora's shoulder and see the grass move. A head came out of the grass into the sun and then, the body, moving slow like a trickle of hot tar. It was her! It was Bess!

She saw him lying there, then—her mate. And she threw her head back and held it stuck up in the air. She had seen him—seen him dead! She went to him and laid her head across his body and he didn't move. And she darted her tongue out and touched him and he didn't move. And she threw her head up again.

Oh, I tell you, mate, it was cruel to see grief so silent—to see her crawl around him and stop and raise her head and shake along her body and then drop her neck across his. And he never moved, because he was dead and wouldn't ever move again. She was a rattler. She couldn't scream. She couldn't talk. And finally she dropped her head on the sand as if there wasn't any more strength in her body. She half turned over and the sun shone on the white scales of her belly. It was just then that Kitchell, who was down on the beach, stretched his arms and gave a loud yawn.

She heard him and she seemed to know. I saw her coil and raise her neck up and up and up to where she could look over the top of the clumps of grass on the slope. Her head was swaying to and fro like a swinging bracket. And then she rattled.

"What ees that, senior?" asked the little Cuban, catching the folds of her white dress in her little hands.

"Nothing," I said, for I was watching Bess. The snake had seen Kitchell. I knew she'd seen him. He had stuck his hand in those flannel jeans of his and he was still moving off by the water's edge, and Bess uncoiled and began to crawl in the same direction.

"We have lost our boat," said Lenora.

"That so?" I says. I wasn't thinking of what she said at all. I might have answered anything. I was watching for Bess to come out on the other side of that patch of prickly pears.

IN a minute I saw her. She stopped on a bare spot and though she was some distance away by that time, I saw that poor dumb thing coil herself again and curve her neck and raise her head. Then she dropped it and crawled along.

"You, senior, are vera kind," said the girl, then. "You have been kind to us. Pardon, senior—what you look at?"

I was afraid the little Cuban would turn around. I was afraid she'd interfere. I could see how something had mapped out what was to happen. It was working—surer than death! Everything was marked out.

"Miss," I said. "I often look around Spongecake Key."

It seemed to satisfy her, so I took down my glass and wiped the lens and put it to my eye. I could see a heap plainer. I could see Bess crawl out onto that white limestone point that stands up there now over the water. It's white by moonlight now. It was white by sunlight then. She stretched herself right near the crest of it and on that surface she looked

as black as a wriggle of ink on writing paper.

Kitchell was still walking along the shore toward the point. He was still picking up shells and pebbles and throwing 'em into the water. I could see how slick and brown his hair was. I was looking through the glass. He was moving toward the limestone rock. He was being moved there. Something was moving him with its hand.

I saw him when he got to the rock itself. I saw him look up at it and then look out into the channel with the white cranes wading on those yellow sand bars. Then he looked up at the ledge again. It is steep there for six or eight feet, as you can see. But he was moved up.

I saw Bess coil. I watched to see if she'd rattle. But she never used it. She never gave any warning. She was thinking of Gus, maybe. No man can tell.

I tried to keep the glass steady. I reckon I succeeded. I saw her wait till his face showed over the edge of that table of limestone. She never rattled. She waited for his face. Her long body came out of its coil like a steel spring. She went her length—a heavy black streak in the air. She struck him with her head bent back and her jaws wide. She must have driven those two white needles clean through his cheek. She fell back and squirmed on the ground till I could see her white belly.

Kitchell never shouted. He jumped backward. His foot caught. He went head downwards over the rock. I think he struck on his forehead. Because he rolled over and over, then, as if there was no life in him, and fell into the water.

I watched him float off that shallow where I catch mullet. When he was in deeper water, he turned face downward. I saw the tide catch him and then I thought he was going to sink. He didn't just then. An eddy shot him around the point out of sight.

"What you look at now?" asked Lenora with her big eyes on mine.

"Umph," said I. "I was dreaming."

I was planning already how I was going to let her think that Kitchell had gone off with one of my boats and deserted her. These waters and passes never tell what they know. I was planning how I'd let her think he'd run away from her, and how I'd take her back to her home. She was a child. She hadn't learned yet what love meant.

"Senior," said she, with her head on one side and that smile, "you make vera nice—what you call them, senior?"

"Flapjacks," said I.

And then I whistled "The Last Rose of Summer." It's one of my favourite tunes. I always whistle it when I'm a little off my bearings. And I felt just then as if Lenora Gonzalez and Joe Kitchell and I hadn't been alone on Spongecake that night. I felt as though something else—the thing with the long arm—had been there, too.

WILLING WORKER.

An amusing incident is told which took place in one of the occupied districts of Belgium where the German occupier doles out potatoes to such of the starving people as agree to work for him. One recipient presented himself before the German authorities and declared himself quite ready in return for a supply of potatoes to work for the Germans and only for them. He seemed quite decided and genuine in his offer to work.

"Then you are quite willing to sign the declaration?" asked the German officer.

"Yes, quite willing."

"And what is your trade?"

"I am a grave digger," replied the Belgian stolidly.

MODERN PROVERB.

You may drive a horse but you have to coax a motor car.

ENOUGH!

In Korea, we read, a man does not wear pants until he is married. Now, in this country, it is only after—oh, well, we had better change the subject.

THE FOUNDATION OF SUCCESS

"The difference between the clerk who spends all of his salary and the clerk who saves part of it is the difference—in ten years—between the owner of a business and the man out of a job."

—JOHN WANAMAKER.

Most of the fortunes have been accumulated by men who began life without capital. Anyone who is willing to practise a little self-denial for a few years in order to save can eventually have a fund sufficient to invest in a business which will produce a largely increased income.

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