

"Why didn't you come to the beach, as you said?"

"'Cause I'm 'shamed o' you—that's why."

Rob saw interest and affection still lurking under her forbidding demeanor, and, bravely smiling, he stood and gazed at her, with an expression of ever-increasing fondness.

"Ridin' bumpity-bump like a green-horn down Joggins," she flouted him; "an' gettin' run away with them oxen. And now, look me, at what you are bringin' home. The boys shall make a laugh at you. Already they wait with Bate to help-a you unload. Dump out this minute that so small little mess o' weeds."

"Isn't it better to take home a little than none, Cuby?"

"No, it is not so."

With her lithe brown hands she was already scattering the weeds as indistinguishably as possible into the ditch. Rob, without further question, sprang to aid her in the sacrifice.

"But now I cannot 'dress' my land any," he admonished her.

"I said that to make fool of you—and to have you come to the beach," she admitted; "but I knew not that you was already such a fool as you turn yourself out to be. No, I did not."

Rob bit the lip under his mustache. Had the insult come from a masculine source, he would have darted an impetuous blow at the aggressor. Offense or defense were not to be thought of under the circumstances; indignation quickly faded. Cuby was bewitching, in spite of the fussy Sunday hat which she had donned for the occasion. There were three corners to this hat, and from each corner depended a bunch of artificial flowers. Cuby's face sparkled between lilies of the valley and full-blown red roses, and the roses were wan beside her cheeks, and the lilies were yellow in contrast with her teeth. Added to all this brilliance, there was a provoking and alluring flame in her eyes.

"Bate, he says you have begun to make courtin' at his sister, Ma'y Sting'ree."

"It's a lie—oh, she's a nice girl—woman—enough, for aught I know, but I—I don't want her."

"Bate wants me," said Cuby; "he wishes for to get engage' to me mighty bad, too—that I can tell-a you."

A queenly indecision among suitors hung on her red lips, and she breathed like some wild, sweet thing of the forest. Rob straightway put his arm tenderly over her shoulder.

"I know somebody I do love," he murmured, his winsome face dangerously close to her passionate one.

"Quit you!" cried Cuby imperiously. "We are not yet engage'."

"Well, but why can't we be engaged, Cuby?" suggested desolate Rob, and he held her closer, and his lips pressed hers; and now he was ready to fight for her.

Cuby did not turn pale; she was not so much in love but that she remained complete master of the situation, and deliberately, romantically, and skillfully played her victim still further with the spell of her flashing beauty.

"Oh, but you are so beeg, so gr-r-rand, Rober', when you wish; why do you not knock the stuff's out o' them?"

Rob could have caught her in his arms, so exquisitely beautiful was she in contrast with the virile matter of her speech.

"You shall see," he hissed through his strong white teeth, in a sympathetic ardor of animosity, but, above all, longing to hug Cuby Tee-bo.

"Me—no—I fear you are too sof'," she hesitated sadly; "they make such a laugh, I almost cry, an' am mad; almost they hear me out loud I am so mad, that, after all I tell you, you make yourself so 'sissy.' Ugh! Bah! An' stay not on the board, no, but wriggle yourself, an' go bumpity-bump, bumpity-bump—oh, tam!—an' then make yourself one beeg tumble."

"Very well, Cuby, I was careless, but another time Rob Hilton stays on the board—will you remember that? And right now you've got to beg my pardon for calling me 'Daisy,' a while ago—beg! beg!"

"I think I see myself making baig to such a sof' ninny-sheep like you be."

This, with Cuby's daring nature, was nothing less than an approving challenge, and Rob promptly took advantage of it to imprint another kiss on her tempting mouth; at the same time he squeezed, and roughly, the little hand folded in his.

"Beg," he commanded.

"Wal', then," at last confessed Cuby hopefully, "I baig." She added, however, with great earnestness: "Everything—everything, I think, run away with you. Even a leetle lamb, so weak as nothin', make beeg bluff, maybe, an' run away with you. Everything run away with you."

"Perhaps that is true," said Rob sternly; "anyway, Cuby—sweet—you have run away with me."

CHAPTER VIII.

As a Pugilist.

"Ten dozens of them already; fine linen, shirts, collars, handkerchiefs—what can be done with them, Rober'?"

Mary herself looked as stumped in the matter as did Rob.

"Why, of course," he exclaimed, promptly, "I'll send them out to be laundered—where can I send them?"

"That is just it," Mary replied. "'Echo answers, Where?' There's no such work, in such quantities at least, done anywhere about here; I don't know of any woman who could do it, or would have the time, with her other cares; you see, it would take her days, and the pile constantly increasing."

Rob's head swam and his heart sank as the various pressing necessities of existence, hitherto unconsidered or taken as a matter of course, now stared him in the face—and he with only one dollar left in his pocket, if the truth were known. The woodpile warned him, too, that for his very sustenance he was in arrears. Where, moreover, and from whence, were to come means for the "suckers"—the staple article of Bear River confectionery—with which it had been his pleasure to supply lovely Cuby? Where and from whence were to come those sodden, "plugs" of molasses-and-ginger-to-bacco which he had grown to regard in some sense as a mitigation of his sorrows?

"I've got to get back to New York," he ejaculated. "I have friends there. Isn't there some way I can get back to New York, Miss Sting'ree?" he appealed to her in almost a wheedling tone. "Can't you get Jim to sail me over to Waldeck station? I can manage then, somehow, to get back home. I tell you, I must go. Won't you help me to arrange it, Miss Sting'ree?"

"I wouldn't give up," said Mary, a pride transcending that of Lucifer flaming in her eyes, "not for the sake of some starched shirts and collars. I wouldn't give up any honest work I had begun—to go away and beg, and cling like an infant to others for support, not if I died for it."

Her look was too far above and away from him to flatter him as the probing of any speciousness in his conduct. She was clearly brave and matter-of-fact, and, otherwise, indifferent. But, oh, she was splendid, thought poor Rob, and he bit his lip and turned pitifully pale.

"Well, what—what shall I do, Miss Sting'ree?"

She smiled kindly. She was so radiantly far away, but no shame or contempt attached to her speech.

"Why not do your washing, to begin with? Wash these fine things and put them away. Wear your outing-flannels hereafter; surely you have some? And you can wash

them yourself every week. It is very simple."

Rob stood with his mouth open until this vein of reasoning had pierced his laggard intelligence. Rob Hilton doing his own washing! He advanced by leaps, however, when some rugged pinnacle of attainment appealed to his ever-ready sense of novelty.

"Gee!" he beamed on Mary; and with that mirth-abounding smile he threw to the winds all the hitherto stringent conventions and wearily artificial superfluities of existence; his language became confidently reckless, too, and smacked fearlessly of the Skipper and Belcher vocabulary. "Gee!" he commended Mary, "you're it! I'll do it! What in—Tamarack, do I care?"

Forthwith, then, he brought up the washtubs from the cellar, carried water from the well, tempered it with carefully-prized donations from the teakettle in the kitchen, and proceeded to scrub his fine linen, whistling a jubilant accompaniment as he stood over the wash-bench out of doors.

"How can you turn your back on that view?" cried Mary very pleasantly from the door.

Rob wheeled round. White-capped bay, tumbling basin; to the left, the swelling river, flanked by its tragic hills; he, upon vaster heights; all round him an infinite wild country. There came to him in that instant the thought, that just to live—to live, and stand, and breathe—was inexpressibly dramatic.

"It's great," he admitted with bared head, in a tone of honest solemnity to Mary.

"By the One-eyed Monocle," he murmured later to the sud of the washboard, unconsciously reproducing a phrase of the cosmopolitan Belcher, "but this perch, all round here, is only fit for eagles."

Eagles, indeed, were frequently heard screaming by day, loons wailed by night. Rob fancied that he enjoyed the loons.

"They've probably made fools o' themselves—like me," he consented, drowsily, on those occasions when their forlorn cadences had penetrated to his ear at night.

But the view was beginning to interest him, and the breeze had salty life in it. Work, sweat, were miraculously ridding him of his muscular stiffness and pains. The craving for strong drink was maddening at times, but, after all, what time had he to consider the matter? Sawing and splitting wood in the fierce, silent pride of attempting to maintain his independence, as well as to supply daily sop to an increasingly unappeasable appetite; plowing, planting, and all the rest of it; no more Joggins, but rushing down the steep way, in some brief rest from toil and back again, with sustained breath now, bearing a kiss from Cuby. Altogether, the days were investing Rob with a sort of kaleidoscopic impetuosity of exercise.

Between meals he fed an unstilled inward appeal with unmeasured quantities of water from the spring; and there was still a store of apples in the cellar. Bate's custom was to pick up an armful of apples, retire with them to the pigpen fence, and, munching the sounder specimens himself, to throw over the decayed ones to the pigs, while he observed with meditative interest the lack of courtesy prevailing within the pen, occasionally throwing over for his own entertainment a paring or a core to swell to livelier dimensions the unlovely holocaust of rivalry among the swine.

Rob had sometimes allowed the most unattractive of the fruit, together with discarded cores and skins, to slip heedlessly from his hands to earth; until, on one occasion, he saw Bate thriftily gathering them up and bearing them to the pen for purposes both of utility and mental revelry, as herein before described.

(To be continued.)

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