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"Skippers"

"Love in the Wilds"

—OR—

The Romance of a South African Trading Station.

CHAPTER I.
AFTER FORTY YEARS.

"How do you know that, sir?" snarled the squire. "The Dale is not entailed, I'd have you to know."

Hugh's brow darkened and his face flushed.

"Sir," he said, with slow distinctness, "I will not marry Rebecca Goodman for her own fortune nor yours."

"Oh, Mr. Positive, you will not, eh?" said the squire rising and pacing the room. "You give me the plain denial, do you? I suppose you don't care a brass button for either of us—for the Dale or the Hall? By Heaven, sir, you're a pretty fellow to beard your father!"

"What, sir?" roared the squire. "I play the villain? By the heavens above us, I'll teach you to backguard your father! Ay, sir, I'll read you a lesson! Play the villain! Look you! I've borne too much of your insolence! Now, mark: you will ask Rebecca Goodman to be your wife to-night—to-night—or leave my roof forever! Play the villain! You think," he continued, sweeping his hand toward the window, "that this is yours already. You reckon upon your old idiot of a father being underground in a week or two. I'd have you to know that the Hall is mine, that it is not your—nay, never shall be, by Heaven, unless you obey me!"

Hugh stood motionless as a statue, his face very white and his eyes fixed upon the passionate face of his father.

"Well, sir," said the squire, in a suppressed voice, "which is it to be, Rebecca Goodman or turned out? Come, I stand no delay! Play the mule, and I will show you that there is some one else who can take care of the Dale and obey me in the bargain. Come, which is it to be? Will you marry Rebecca Goodman or find another home for yourself?"

Hugh threw his head back.

"Am I to understand that you intend me to leave the house if I still refuse to sell myself to Rebecca Goodman?" he asked, his voice very low but very distinct.

"You are," said the squire, sternly.

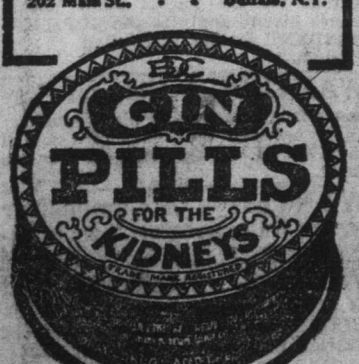
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Hugh inclined his head slightly.

"You spoke of another—some other person who could take my place. May I ask you, sir, whether you have already prepared him for his good fortune?" he asked, as quietly and as distinctly as before.

"What is that to you?" replied the squire.

"Not much, sir," said Hugh, sadly. "But I gather from your refusal to reply that you are expecting my substitute. Believe me, sir, it needed not this prelude to my dismissal. I could have gone with fewer words and less harsh ones. As it is I will lose no time in ridding you and the Dale of my presence."

The squire stood as upright as a stone and as unrelenting.

Hugh, buttoning his coat across his chest as if he suddenly felt a cold blast of wind, walked slowly from the room and up the broad stair-case.

Ten minutes afterward he descended, dressed in one of his oldest and plainest suits, with a thick walking-stick and a soft hat in his hand.

At the dining-room door he paused. Should he go in and wish the stern old man a last farewell? No. And yet he could not go without. Who could tell; it might be the last time.

With a sudden bracing up of his heart and a final blow to his pride he pushed open the door and walking up to the squire, who stood leaning against the massive mantel-shelf, he held out his hand.

"Good-by, sir," he said. "I could not go without wishing you farewell."

The old man's trembling lips wreathed themselves with a sneer, but he refused to see the outstretched hand, and Hugh, with a sigh, dropped it to his side and left the room.

So they parted: the old man stern, unrelenting, the son sad and sick at heart; five minutes before the heir to a large estate and handsome fortune, now disinherited, penniless, without a friend in the world, with nothing save his youth and strength to help him in the battle which all must fight.

At the end of the long avenue that led up to the Dale he stopped for a moment to look round at the old house in which he had first drawn breath and which for all the years of his life had succored him.

How dear it seemed! The very windows seemed eyes; even the very trees voices as well for him.

As he turned away, swallowing the lump that rose in his throat, his two greyhounds bounded along the path and leaped to his side.

These had not cast him off.

Dogs' love was firmer and more abiding than man's. His voice trembled and choked as he bid them go back, and the tears he had managed to keep down until now filled his eyes as the poor hounds, with a startled, bewildered look at the first hard word he had ever spoken to them, crouched down, and with many a backward, wistful glance went slowly back.

Not daring to look back again, he walked past the village, summoning up a smile that nearly broke his heart and, nodding to the respectful greetings of the simple people who crossed

his path, reached the guide-post that pointed, as with the finger of fate, to London.

CHAPTER III.
OFF TO LONDON.

The spirit, Independence, let me share; Lord of the lion heart and eagle eye. Thy steps I follow with my bosom bare. Nor heed the storm that howls along the sky.—SMOLLETT.

It would take three days of good walking to reach London, and how he was to exist those three days was an enigma to Hugh.

He had left his watch, chain, and other jewelry upon the dressing-table of his bedroom, and had emptied his pockets of every copper.

The only thing, indeed, that they contained was a knife—useful piece of cutlery enough, but utterly worthless as an article of food—and a small gold pencil which had been a gift of one of his school-fellows.

At the end of five miles he came upon an outlying farm, where he was well known.

He had hoped to pass unnoticed and unrecognized, but the woman of the house happened to come to the door with a pan of milk, and, seeing him, bid him "Good-evenin'."

Nodding with a smile, he strode on, but she called after him, and when he turned back offered him a drink of milk, saying respectfully that it was a warm night, and he had far to go—thinking he was making a circuit of home.

He was very thirsty, but his pride would not allow him to accept the refreshing draught, for he argued that the milk was offered to Hugh, the heir to Dale House, and not to Hugh the outcast, and walked on thirstier for the sight of it.

At nightfall he had walked twelve miles, and looked round for a resting-place.

In a field there stood a haystack and a tumbled-down barn. Between the two he threw himself down, lying in the shadow of the hay, and though his thirst was heavy and his brain busy with sad thoughts, he soon fell asleep.

He awoke in the morning not very much refreshed, but, finding a stream at the end of the field, threw off his clothes and plunged in.

The bath freshened him, but gave him a tremendous appetite, a most unfortunate gift, considering he had no chance of getting a breakfast.

However, he was young and wonderfully strong, and, feeding on his pride, darted off again.

At noon, when the sun grew boiling hot and he had left the Dale many miles behind him, he felt faint and almost powerless to proceed, and, very sick at heart—for your empty stomach is a dreadful Old Man of the Sea—flung himself down under a tree.

A man's footstep awoke him from an uneasy doze, and, starting to his feet, he saw an old peddler, whose nose proclaimed him an Israelite, standing looking at him.

"Can I sell you a niceish brooch for the young ladies?" he asked, with an insinuating smile.

Hugh shook his head, but the Jew, who never took the first refusal, on



PURE SALT

Windsor Table Salt

principle, unsling his pack, and, kneeling down, displayed his stock in trade.

A metal pencil-case lying among the heap of trinkets gave Hugh an idea.

"Is that silver?" he asked.

The Jew hesitated, and was lost.

"It's ash good ash shilver, my tear," he replied.

"What's the price?" asked Hugh.

"Ten shillings," said the Jew, taking it up and turning it over with a wonderful look of admiration in his blood-shot-eyes.

"Ten shillings?" said Hugh, made sharp already by his poverty—your ablest school-master. "What would a silver one be worth, then?"

"Eh? Oh, fifteen, my tear."

"And a gold one?" continued Hugh.

The Jew lifted his thick eyebrows.

"I'm sorry I haven't got a goldish onesh," he replied, looking heartbroken.

"Yes, but what would it be worth?" said Hugh.

"Twenty shillings," replied the Jew; "a good onesh."

"Ah!" said Hugh, pulling his out of his pocket. "What will you give me for that?"

The Jew's long claws seized it at once, Hugh putting his hands behind him for fear the Jew's dirty talons should touch him, and leaning against the tree.

"It isn't gold," said the Jew, with an affectation of disdain.

"Yes, it is," said Hugh; "and you know it."

The Jew looked at it again more closely.

"It isn't a good one," he said, this time with a decision that nearly deceived Hugh.

"Is it not?" he said. "Well, what will you give me for it?"

The Jew looked at him keenly.

"Where did you get it from?" he said.

"That's no business of yours," retorted Hugh, sternly.

"Well, well, well, don't be in a passion, my tear!" said the peddler. "I'll give you ten shillings for it and ask no questions."

"You said it was worth twenty a minute since," said Hugh, eyeing him sternly.

"Yesh, yesh," whined the Jew; "but wheresh my profit to come from—my leetle profit? Besides, how do I know you didn't steal it, my tear?"

Hugh smiled gayly.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

The Jew pointed with his pencil toward Dale.

"Shall you try and sell it there?" Hugh asked.

The Jew looked at him with a knowing leer.

"No, no," he said. "I understand: that's where you found him—eh, my tear? Well, there, I'll give you half a sovereign, and chance how you came by him."

This was what Hugh wanted.

So, stipulating that the old villain should not show it at Dale, where every soul would recognize it as his—Master Hugh's—he took the ten shillings from the man's dirty claws and went on his way.

Hugh knew that there were no haystacks in London and that lodgings must be paid for, so he determined to proceed economically.

At the next ale-house, which stood on a hill about a mile from his recent resting-place, he had a crust of bread and cheese and a glass of ale.

Until then he had no idea that bread and cheese and ale had such a delicate and delicious flavor.

No emperor's state banquet was ever so much enjoyed.

Another man in spirits and vigor he resumed his march, and—not to weary the reader by a repetition of haystacks and bread and cheese—entered London from the west on the third day.

(To be continued.)

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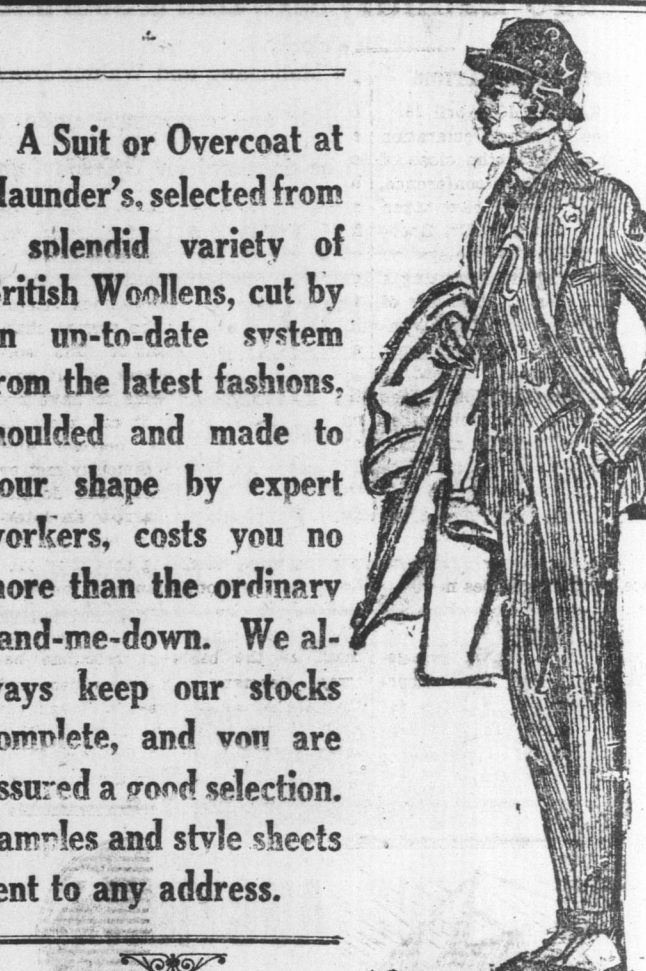


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