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The Bones of a Dinosaur

They Came Very Near Making a Corpse of a Museum Curator

By F. A. MITCHEL

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Diggers in the earth are of various kinds. At one extreme stands the mole, at the other the hunter after buried treasures, such as the bones of extinct animals or the palaces of kings long dead. Professor Tipton belonged to the delvers for fossils. He was barely thirty years old, small of stature, a trifle bald on the forehead and wore glasses. There was nothing beautiful about the professor except his smile, and that was beautiful because it was childlike. One seeing the innocent parting of his lips, accompanied by a soft look that appeared in his eyes, felt immediately like taking up the little man and hugging him.

Now, it having been reported to the directors of the museum of which Professor Tipton was curator that the tip of the tail of some enormous animal had been struck in digging a well in a western territory, the curator was directed to repair to the spot, take a look at the protrusion, determine to what animal it belonged, whether it was worth digging for and the cost of exhumation.

In due time the professor reached a settlement some five or six miles from where the fossilized bones were located and, learning that the only way to reach them would be on horseback, called for a horse, mounted him and proceeded on his way. He had proceeded about half the distance when he saw ahead of him what looked like the dim outline of a cowboy, but as he and the coming object drew nearer he noticed that the rider was feminine.

"How do?" she said as she reined in her steed.

The professor had never heard this form of greeting before and did not understand it. However, he reined in his horse and smiled.

The smile was something very new to the girl. The coarse guffaw of the plainsman or the diabolical grin of the Indian was the only expression of a genial disposition she had ever seen.

"What y' doin' out here, stranger?" she asked.

"I'm goin' to the fork of the river," he replied.

"What y' goin' there for?"

A reply to an uneducated person was difficult, but the professor explained his object as well as he could.

"Y' think it's some kind o' varmint?" she asked.

"I don't know what a varmint is, but I suspect what I'm going to look at will turn out to be either a mastodon or a dinosaur."

"And I don't know what them are. I don't see no shootin' iron about y'."

"I didn't think to bring a weapon. Do I need one?"

"Well, now, y' are the most innocent kid I ever seen. Need a gun? I'll go with y'. It would be a pity to leave a little feller like y' to wander about with not even a toy pistol."

Turning her horse's head, she rode back with Professor Tipton. There was something odd in the defenseless man being under the protection of this armed girl. He found her especially useful as a guide, for she knew the region perfectly and took him to the point he wished to find. There was no one on the ground to locate the exact spot, but the girl told him she had seen some men digging and landed him where they had begun to bore the well. The moment the professor caught sight of a few mammoth vertebrae that had been exposed he clasped his hands, raised his mild eyes to heaven, and his lips moved in thanks.

"It's a dinosaur," said the professor.

"Y' don't mean it?"

"Judging from these few vertebrae, it must be sixty or seventy feet long."

"Gosh!"

"And, judging from the horizontal position of what is exposed, there will be little cost in getting it out."

"Will it pay?"

The professor did not hear this question. He had picked up a stick lying near and was scraping away the dirt.

"How long has it been there?" asked the girl.

"Not less than 10,000 years."

"Don't y' think it's rather late in the day to disturb it?"

At that moment there was a clatter of hoofs in the distance, and a small party of men were seen galloping toward them.

"By gum," exclaimed the girl, "it's Sheriff Clem Barker! I wonder what he's after!"

"Hello, Kate!"

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named Barker as he rode up. "What y' doin' cavortin' around with a hoss thief?"

Now, it is time to explain that the professor, after having left the settlement, stopped at a farmhouse for a drink of buttermilk. He had ridden a gray horse thus far, but when he left the house mounted a roan without noticing the change in color. A man who had stolen the roan, being hard pressed by the sheriff and a posse, seeing a comparatively fresh mount hitched to a post, changed horses.

"He ain't no hoss thief," replied the girl. "He's a— What air y' anyway?"

"I am a—"

"See here," interrupted one of the party, "y' may be anything y' like, but that's no hoss y' been ridin'."

The professor looked at his horse and, not knowing what the man was talking about, just smiled. He couldn't think of anything else to do.

"Y' ain't been stealin' that hoss, have y'?" asked the girl.

"I don't know what you people are all talking about," said the professor.

"I came out here to learn if this fossil is of value, and I find it very valuable indeed. As I have said, it's a dinosaur, must be sixty feet long and doubtless between 10,000 and 20,000 years old."

The sheriff, the owner of the horse and the posse all looked at one another in astonishment. An idea popped into Kate's head. She gave the men a meaning look and drew them away from the professor, who, being more interested in the dinosaur than their talk, forgot all about them in rummaging among the big stone vertebrae.

"Gents," said Kate, "he's a lunatic."

"What makes y' think so?" asked the sheriff.

"Didn't y' hear what he said about them stones? He's got an idee into his head that 10,000 years ago some varmint or other, a dragon maybe, seventy feet long fell down a well. What more do y' want for to make him out a crazy man?"

"Oh, Kate," exclaimed the owner of the horse, "it's you that's gone daff or you're trying to save his neck. I don't know which. He's been caught in the act and is playing it on us."

"Where did he get the talk about dinosaurs?" asked one man, who, being better educated than the rest, had read of extinct mammoths. "Hoss thieves don't know anything about fossils."

"Come on, Clem," said the owner of the stolen horse. "I call upon you as sheriff to arrest the man and take him in for trial."

"Y' won't have much trouble doin' that," remarked Kate, "seem'n he hasn't got no weapon. Does hoss thieves go about without guns?"

This was a staggerer, and the sheriff was debating in his mind what to do when Tipton finished his investigations and said he was going back to the settlement. So they all rode back together, the supposed horse thief being forced to ride ahead. Kate rode beside him. She seemed very much

troubled at the position he occupied with reference to the stolen horse and was revolving in her mind some desperate method of extricating him if she failed to convince others of his lunacy. As for the professor, he was unconscious of his danger. In any event, he never dreamed that the penalty for horse stealing was the same as for murder.

"Now, see here," Kate said to him, "when they get y' back to the settlement they'll take y' before Judge Lynch. Y' mustn't be surprised at any evidence I may give in."

Tipton was so wrapped up in the "dragon that had fallen down the well" that her words made very little impression on him. When they reached the settlement, true enough, he was taken before Judge Lynch, and a number of men, new to the case, were impaneled as a jury, the sheriff regarding those who were with him when he made the arrest as witnesses. The latter were examined in turn and told the same story, which was simply that the horse had been missed, they had lit out on a chase and had come upon the prisoner and the girl, the horse grazing near by. When they had given their testimony Kate took the stand.

"I was ridin' along," she said, "when I seen the little man ahead. From the way he talked I made up my mind from the first that he was weak in the upper story, just the kind of a man to get on a hoss he seen in a stable or hitched to a post without knowin' what he was doin'."

He talked about a varmint 10,000 years old that had fell into a well. He didn't have sense enough not to go around without a gun.

I shot it wouldn't do to let him go about alone, so I went with him.

If he was on a hoss he knowed he'd stolen he'd a ridin' hard. Instead o' that every now and then he'd git off his animal and down on his hands and knees, workin' at the stones.

He brought out a hammer and kept breakin' 'em and puttin' the pieces in his pockets. Y'll find 'em there now."

The prisoner was called upon to empty his pockets and produced some twenty pounds of stone fragments.

"I reckoned," the witness proceeded, "that he suffered some disease when a child that kep' his brain from growin'."

Small boys' pockets are always full of tops and things, and the man's was yet, bein' loaded down with nothin' but stones. Then when we came to the well where the dragon had fell in he looked up and said a pr'ar. Hoss thieves ain't givin' to prayin'. The poor feller needs to be sent back home."

"Will you see that he is taken care of?" said the judge.

"Yes."

"Discharged" was the laconic dismissal of the case, and Kate led the professor away as if he had been a child.

Some months later the professor returned, superintended a gang of laborers engaged in digging up the bones of the dinosaur and shipped them east. When they were mounted in the museum Kate, at the professor's invitation, visited the institution and was surprised at the monster she saw there.

By this time the professor had become cognizant of the fact that by her adroitness in proving him before Judge Lynch to be a lunatic she had saved his life, and he felt duly grateful. He persuaded her to remain in the east, sent her to school, and she learned as much in three years as some girls would in half a dozen. Then the professor married her. She is now almost as enthusiastic over the bones of great monsters that lived in prehistoric times as her husband and assists him in many of his duties.

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For the first time in the history of Hampton Court Palace every lady carrying a muff was obliged to hand it over to the care of an attendant before she was allowed to enter the State apartments the other day. This order was the result of the recent window-smashing operations of militant suffragists in the West End of London, when they carried hammers concealed in their muffs.

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