

CHUB.

A Romance of West Virginia.

BY DAVID LOWRY.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIGHT AT THE CORNERS.

"Touch him! Put a finger on him if you dare! I'll put a bullet through the first man who makes a move."

The crowd fell back before Chub's flashing eyes.

Every man there knew she would shoot as quick as she would look or speak.

Chub Dawson held her head erect, defiant; her bosom heaved with emotion. Her hands clutched her rifle with a tense grasp that afforded an outlet for the passion that blazed out in the defiant threat that those nearest her to recoil in dread.

"You are a lot of cowards. A great set of big, hulking loafers, to set on one man. If he had a fair show—as he will have—he'd whip the best man your crowd can pick to set up against him. I want you to leave him. Git, now. If there's any shootin' done now, I'll take a hand in it myself."

"Sho' now, Chub, you'd oughtn't to."

"Steve Tredell, the best thing you can do is to cut sticks. Who made you spokesman for the Corners?"

The crowd laughed, faintly, to be sure, but the contempt in Chub's voice echoed the sentiments of more than one there.

Besides the crowd was ready now to laugh at anything.

They had witnessed enough bloodletting for one day, and Chub's appearance on the scene, unexpected as it was, proved timely in more ways than one.

The crowd looked at each other sheepishly, and slunk off. Soon there was only Chub and Dan Bash left.

"You had to fight, I suppose," said Chub, as she looked, first at the ground, then at Dan's face.

Dan's eye was marked. There was a red gash on one cheek, too, and his clothes were covered with dust—dust that had been lying on the road.

"I couldn't help it."

Dan did not apologize—did not explain. He simply told the truth.

"I suppose I can tell how it happened. You quarreled with Ned Monk."

"No. He quarreled with me."

"Couldn't you get away from him?"

"Why should I try to avoid any man?"

Dan looked at Chub in a way that brought the blood to her cheeks, and knowing it Chub grew, or pretended to grow, very angry again.

"Yes, it is a nice way for men to maul and pound each other—to bite and kick, and—scratch—and—and—gouge, and—"

Chub paused for lack of words to express her disgust.

"I tell you it was no more my fault than it is yours. He crowded me twice. I was here on business. I didn't come of my own choice. I had to talk to the school directors—had to wait here to see two of them, and the crowd was here, shooting at a mark. I was sitting right where you are standing, when first Ned Monk tramped on my foot. I pushed him off, and when he didn't apologize I saw he was half drunk. Then he was beaten—they all beat him shooting—and he wanted to fight, and picked on me. When he said he could whip me, what ought I to have done? Run?"

"No," said Chub in a low tone, with flinching cheeks.

"I didn't. I stood up; they all gathered around, and, before he suspected it, I had him on his back. I knocked him down three times in succession, and then his brother Bill came at me. I knocked him down, too; I had them down, when one of the gang hit me with a stone on the cheek-bone, here."

Dan pointed to his eye.

"That knocked me down—then three of them were on me at one time. That was what made me pull the gun, and shoot Ned Monk. If I had shot him through the heart, I would have served him right, the coward!"

"Yes, you would!" said Chub, admiringly. "Well, I didn't know the ins and outs of it. I believe you, though. I'd sooner take your word, Dan Bash, than the whole crowd's!"

"I'm obliged to you, Miss Dawson."

"Don't 'Miss' me—my name's just Chub."

"Well, Chub, then. I owe you my life."

"Nonsense. Nothing of the kind. I just happened to come over in time—that's all. I thought our Ben was here—and—"

Chub paused. She could not, would not tell a lie, and the truth was she had heard the shouts of the combatants as she stood on her father's back porch.

There was no one in the house, but herself.

To pick up the rifle she was familiar with, and had used for more than a year, and run over the low hill between her father's house and the tavern and smithy occupied less than two minutes.

She burst upon the crowd like an avenging angel.

Her hair, worn in loose curls, was flying over her shoulders, her bonnet had fallen back on her neck, and her face was set with scorn and passion as she aimed her gun at the crowd and commanded them to desist.

Half a dozen had gathered about Dan Bash; they meant murder, but Dan managed to get his back against the smithy, and was striking out right and left when Chub Dawson interposed in the very nick of time.

"You'd maybe best go to our house till pa comes home, Mr. Bash."

Dan Bash meditated.

It was good advice. The chances were that if he made any of the crowd controlled by the Monks they would resume the quarrel, and he would either suffer at their hands or be compelled to kill some of them to save his own life.

But Dan's sober second thought governed him.

"No, I am obliged to you for the offer, but I'll not let anything prevent me from attending to the business that brought me here. I'll go back the way I came."

"You know best," said Chub, stiffly.

Then she looked at him covertly, turned and hastened home, while Dan Bash looked after her.

"She don't think how much I've saved her. What a splendid woman she is!"

Dan added to himself as he sat down again and sighed.

The landlord, who had remained in

his house all this time, looking on, came out now.

Then his wife, an old woman, much older than the landlord (it was said he married her for her property), stood in the doorway, looking at Dan Bash.

"I told you you'd find it rough traveling on the mountains," said the landlord with a cough.

"Yes—and more than me finds it rough," replied Dan, dryly.

"The boys think you are too—too—"

"I know what you would say," interposed Dan. "Too fine. Well, I wear a clean shirt. I keep my face clean—and I mind my own business, Mr. Potts."

"Yes, yes—you do, indeed. Same time, the boys round the creek think you're kind of upset."

"Well, I think an American citizen is entitled to his opinion. I have mine."

"I'm not agreein' with the boys, Mr. Bash. Oh, no! Not at all!"

"Mr. Potts?" Bash spoke sharply.

Mrs. Potts, listening in the doorway, thought he was "awful high-strung." Mr. Potts,

I don't care the price of a pine cone for the opinion of such of the 'boys' as you mean. Respectable people I respect—I don't waste time on any others. I've better things, more important things to occupy my mind, and you are at liberty to say this to the 'boys' when you see them again."

"I—I'd ought to to'd you, Mr. Bash, but they two directors you say you want to see—why, I heard this morning as how they'd changed their mind 'bout comin' over to the Corners."

"What's that, Mr. Potts?"

"Why, they're goin' to 'Squire Meeks' to a plowin' match—some new-fangled plow, I reckon. So, you'll meet 'em here to day."

"Thank you," said Dan Bash, as he started to his feet. "I'll try to see them before night."

As he walked down the road rapidly, the landlord shook his head slowly.

"There'll be trouble grow out o' this day's work, Susan. Mind my words. There'll be trouble grow out of it. That young man's powerful set in his way—powerful headstrong."

Meantime Dan Bash walked rapidly along the road. He was resolved to make up for lost time. It was all important to see the directors. He had much at stake. His pride was involved now. He could not, would not turn back; come what might he would remain in the district until he was compelled to leave it.

A little more than a mile from the corners the road dipped suddenly in a ravine—a cleft between the mountain tops. There was a very large spring in the ravine, and man and beast welcomed the sparkling clear water that challenged them there. Dan Bash had quenched his thirst often on the roadside there, and even now he promised himself a good drink when he reached the spring.

Just beside the spring, concealed by the thick bushes near it, sat the Monk brothers and a crony who was under their control.

Bob Squatty was not a bad man. He was, unfortunately, easily influenced, and when he had a gass of liquor under his vest was as irresponsible as a lunatic.

The Monk brothers were talking in low tones to Bob as they were resting in the shade.

"Squatty," said Ned Monk, "whatever happens, you must be as sly as the grave."

"Or maybe you'll go to an early grave," said Bill Monk, meaningly.

"Exactly," echoed Ned.

"Ch, I'll be mum," said Squatty. "I never told on you yet, did I?"

"No, you never did," Squatty, said Bill.

"Bill," said Ned, looking at his brother, "do you know, I believe Squatty would rather have his tongue cut out or his eyes burned out than give you and me away?"

Squatty shivered and tried to laugh. "Oh, here, now, you fellows know I'm with you. What's the use talkin'?"

"None whatever," said Ned Monk.

He arose, stepped out on the road, crossed it, looked over to the Corners, and even now he promised himself a good drink when he reached the spring.

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As Ned Monk observed him nearing him he drew up his gun. His finger was on the trigger, when a crack of a rifle started the group. A bullet cut a twig just over Ned Monk's head.

Dan Bash halted. He thought the shot was aimed at him.

Ned Monk rose up suddenly. His companions half-rose and peered around, right and left.

Dan Bash walked on, gasping the stain in one hand, concealing it from view, and resolved, in case he was assaulted, to wield his stick to the best advantage.

He was opposite the spring when suddenly Bill Monk and Squatty rushed out on him.

The assassins had changed their plans. They were resolved to carry out the original scheme.

They would kill him, and then take care of the person who had shot at Ned Monk.

Bill Monk had a knife open in his right hand; Squatty had a club. Both were approaching him—the one with upraised knife, the other with upraised club—when a shot was heard; Bill Monk's arm dropped, and the next moment Chub Dawson sprang between Ned Monk and his brother Bill.

At the same instant Dan Bash brought his stick down so hard on Squatty's arm that individual howled with pain.

He thought his arm was broken.

"Murderers!"

Chub Dawson at that moment was the embodiment of vengeance.

Her eyes blazed with passion as she turned, first to Ned, then to Bill Monk.

"You Monks, as sure as you stand there, I'll bore a hole in both of you. You think you are not watched. Well, you had best move on now, or you'll have more than Chub Dawson to deal with. Take my advice. Move! Make yourselves scarce as quick as your feet will let you, because you may come to grief if you don't."

Ned Monk half drew his rifle. He had half a mind to fight the woman, and the man she had defended a second time that day.

"Come, Ned. We'll only make trouble fightin' Chub," said Bill Monk, hastily.

He thought her father was following.

Her language warranted some such inference. As for Squatty, he was already edging away as rapidly from the range of Chub's rifle as he could move without running.

"Curse her! She's wounded my arm," said Bill Monk.

"The next shot will be nearer your heart. Make another move—dare to touch Dan Bash, and one of you dies, if I die the same minute."

"We'll remember you, Chub," said Ned Monk, as he hastily walked after his brother Bill.

"Do," said Chub. Then elevating her voice: "You don't want a lock of my hair, I guess, the way you are moving."

The last thing the cowardly trio heard as they walked on down the dusty road was Chub Dawson's ringing laugh.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Irish Dividends.

The silver mines of Nevada have not been all profit to their shareholders, nor made many of them, comparatively speaking, millionaires. Outside of Consolidated Virginia and California, the Comstock mines represent an actual loss of \$36,000,000 in assessments in twenty years. Sierra Nevada is the banner stock for assessments, having depleted the cash assets of its stockholders by \$6,250,000, and returned dividends in scarcely a sixth of that sum. Of other stocks Union has drawn \$2,310,000 in assessments and never paid a dividend, while Justice has belied its name by taking \$3,500,000 from its stockholders and not returning them a cent.—Portland Oregonian.

Chub looked again.

There was nobody in view.

The assassins had concealed themselves.

It isn't at all hard to be poor; it's devilish easy.

Chub darted onward, forgetting that her rifle was hanging loosely in one hand until it caught on a twig. Then she suddenly stopped, examined it carefully, grasped it tightly, and ran on again.

There was a life at stake now. She could not walk. Over the boulders, over logs, over the clear spots and rough places she knew so well, Chub sped.

"I hope I'll be in time—I hope I'll be in time," she said to herself as she hurried toward the spring in the ravine.

Meantime Dan Bash walked faster and faster toward his fate.

He was resolved now to decide the question whether he would remain in the district, at fair wages for teaching the school on the mountains, or "grub around roots" for such wages as the farmers could afford to pay him.

He had excellent reasons, satisfactory to himself, for carrying out his original plan. There would have been less reason to remain in the district if he had not encountered the ill-will of the young men who assumed the right to control the school and all public affairs, by the exercise of mere brute strength.

The Monks and their associates jeered at reason. Common sense, and fair play, and justice were things they never took account of.

As Dan Bash walked on, swinging at a free independent gait, he remembered the murderous looks Ned and Bill Monk gave him when Chub Dawson interposed in time to save him from being maimed or murdered by the gang.

He realized fully the nature of the contest he had entered upon, but he had not invited it. The quarrel was forced upon him.

But he had a good deal to learn.

He did not know the depth of the meanness to which the Monks would stoop to get the better of an antagonist. He had yet to learn that the Monks and their assistants deemed all means fair that promised them advantage. They never fought on equal terms, or single-handed. There was always somebody in reserve—something that could be counted on with almost "dead certainty," to employ Ned Monk's own words.

The reader has seen how the brothers pressed poor Squatty into their service.

"I hear him comin', now," said Ned Monk to his companions. "Now, Bill—I'll aim at him first. I'll try to make sure, just when he comes level with us on the road. If I don't bring him down, you shoot, then we'll both jump on his back and Squatty here will help the best he knows how."

The little group of assassins held their breath until Dan Bash came within fifty yards of their place of concealment.