

HUNTER AND SQUIRREL

By Hallie L. Smith

As the ball of amber red,
That's there above my head,
On your swinging maple-bough;
How in swift staccato note,
Leaps the treble from thy throat;
Sire a forest-art thou!

Here thy nimble feet could run,
I could stay these with this gun,
Lay thee prone upon the earth,
Bring thy frolics to an end;
Would I harm thee little friend?

No; prolong thy joyous mirth!

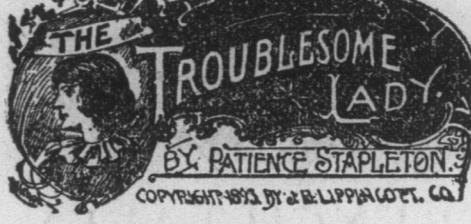
Sing thy song and frisk about,
Through the boughs and out,
Backwards, forwards, here and there,
Peering from those glinting eyes,
With a look of queer surprise,
And a fix'd and silent stare.

Should my foot essay to stir,
Instantly thy chattering chit,
Silenced is, and off you flee,
Up the timber either side,
Caring naught what else betide,
So that thou thyself art free.

Free thou art for me at least—
Innocent and tiny beast.

For this hand shall never draw
Rifle's head on such wee game,
Save when forced in hunger's name,
Drest need that knows no law.

—W. H. Stead, in *Youth's Companion*.



CHAPTER III.—CONTINUED.

The man burst the door open with one powerful thrust, and they entered. The pillow was tumbled, an impress of a head, and there was a crumpled handkerchief, still damp from tears. A little round depression at the foot of the bed showed where the dog had lain. De Restaud looked in her wardrobe. He knew she wore that yellow silk; she persisted in that since the stranger had been there.

Her very small shoes were all in a row—an untidy one at that. She had worn her little bronze slippers. And here, Annette vouches for this, were all her hats and wraps. She had no money, he was sure of that. Did not Hannah Patten tell him she had refused to give Minny money, for fear the child might run away and get into trouble? He hated Hannah Patten, but he knew her to be honest. There was one man who would dare aid her—that stranger, with his cool gray eyes and contemptuous glance. It was all the sense Minny had to go to this entire stranger for help; and he would help her; was she not young and pretty and a fool? De Restaud was very white now, and oddly cool. He went to his room for his pistols. His friends, awakened by Louis, were looking at the loading of theirs. Annette had hurriedly prepared coffee which the men drank standing up. Louis brought the horses around.

"Shall I come, monsieur?" he asked, eagerly.

"No; you would be needed if I did not return. You will tell the general. If my suspicions are true, I shall kill that man or be killed myself. But I will be sure; and all of you wait until I tell you to act. I intend to make no mistakes."

The five men galloped down the road in a haze of golden dust. It was eleven o'clock, and Mme. de Restaud had been gone as many hours. She had a long start on her way, and they might ride fast and fast to find her. Dr. John, in his flowered dressing-gown, but without his embroidered cap, which had mysteriously disappeared, sat before the closed door of the log cabin. He was smoking peacefully, and seemed to regard the five strangely-acting men in the road as a pleasing part of the landscape. De Restaud, leaving his companions some little distance away, rode close to the cabin.

"Mr. Oliver is, of course, within?" he said, politely.

The doctor looked up at the pallid face with its blazing eyes, the working lips, the clinched hand, the frightened controlled passion of the man, and answered, calmly, withdrawing his gaze: "Of course."

"He is alone?"

"I think so. His man is cleaning the guns back of the house."

"Mr. Oliver is sleep very late," hissed the Frenchman, forgetting his English in his wrath and muttering something in his own language.

"He do," said the doctor, ungrammatically, with a twinkle in his eye.

"I must ask you, sir, to wake your friend. I have business with him."

"And I must answer, sir, I am very sorry, but I know his temper, and I do

"THEY HAVE MY PERMISSION," HE SAID, SLEEPILY.

went into the house, but I shall not be responsible for his profanity. Craig, open your door, please."

The doctor rapped, but his heart stood still. If Oliver should not be there! The bolt shot back, and the man, half dressed, with bloodshot eyes, disordered hair, and a dazed sort of manner, appeared in the doorway.

"How far imagination will carry a man—almost to idiocy," murmured Oliver.

"The question," continued the doctor, plaintively, as if he had not heard, "is, what are you going to do? You mean well; I should no doubt have assisted the Troublesome lady—not driving so far or so fast, perhaps. But your honest Mexican accomplice rode his 'goode beast' to Parkville last night, and he and the well-mannered Louis were amiably intoxicated to begin. Monsieur is probably well informed of all that took place."

"Which was little enough. I would have told him; but I had no desire to quarrel with him, or perhaps fight a ridiculous French duel over a young woman I had only seen twice, and both of us duelists possibly landed in jail for breaking the peace by some saucious sheriff."

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"I would not go your bail, either, my friend," smiled Dr. John. "I would like to see you shut up awhile; you've sent enough to prison walls in your time. If I don't mistake—passers are few this lonely way, and his horse was a roan—here comes the Mexican and his 'goode beast' also a nondescript creature following, who I hope is not the Troublesome lady returning."

"Your judgment in matters pertaining to female kind is not accurate," said Oliver, who had jumped up and at the doctor's words. "This is an elderly, gaunt and tall female, and she sits that mule as gingerly as if he were liable to go out from under her any moment. Do you know, I half believe that is Aunt Hannah."

" Didn't know you had relatives," said the doctor, following Oliver to the road.

"I haven't. Mrs. Minny has; and if the old lady is seeking her, where is the young lady, and what kind of a difficulty have I got myself into? She looks warlike enough."

"I have brought ze-a lady from ze railroad," said the Mexican, obsequiously. "She com-a M. de Restaud. He sent here for madame."

"So you told me I had taken her to the train?" Oliver said, quickly, a dangerous light in his gray eyes. "You were a fool. I shall come here again, and I can pay more than the Frenchman. I would even have bought that horse of yours at your most exorbitant price."

"You had not enough mon-nay for to buy my horse, señor. He is one race horse. He haf win grand mon-nay for me. I leaf ze lady with you; my mule he tire, she yell all ze way and bump ze-round."

"I do not come here to quarrel with you," cried the Frenchman, "but with him."

"It would require two to quarrel, Mr. de Restaud, and I am a peaceable man. Therefore I may say I do not wake Mr. Oliver for business."

"It is my belief, old man, you are lying. Oliver is not in your house."

"It is his house; let us at least be correct. Suppose you question his man; he may be willing to wake Mr. Oliver. Or you may settle your business with him. Mike, Mike, I say."

"I have lived long enough on the

frontier, doc, to know that threatened men live long—are safe. I did help Mrs. de Restaud escape; you'd have done the same. She came with great purple marks on her throat, in a piteous state of terror. She is as innocent as a child, utterly ignorant of the world. Only such a woman would have stayed here so long. Any ranchman here with daughters of his own would have helped her. They know what he is, and they are chivalrous men. She came to me because—because—"

"Craig, it's the old story. I don't doubt you're in the right this time—I'd have helped her too—but you had to say sweet things and make love to her. You needn't shake your head; you can't help it."

"On my honor, Dr. John, all that long way I thought of her as of my own little sister sleeping in the old graveyard of the village I left twenty years ago. The man who remembers a child sister would have thought only of her, of the purest things, with little Minny. She has your embroidered cap, old chap, and you will treasure it as a relic of lovely woman if ever she returns the loan."

"But you're not a married man, Craig," said the doctor, plaintively, "and women can be aggravating, especially little ones with red hair, as Mike says she's got. There must be something on the Frenchman's side."

"Lunacy. There is my coffee at last. We'll go for elk to-morrow instead of to-day; I hear there are some on Sisty's peak."

"I know her," hissed De Restaud, "and, if he is your friend, he is a blackguard; he is, as I know, the only one about here who would offer to aid her."

"Not the only one," said the little doctor, rising. "I should have been very glad to have helped the young lady escape from your care; any true man would have been. You are rating the settlers here very low, monsieur. Unfortunately, all we hear of you does not point to your making either a happy or a safe home for a good woman. Put up your revolver; I am not at all afraid; the ranchmen here are friendly to me. Now, if you desire, dismount, and I myself will show you through the house."

"Humph! you've changed all of a sudden," grunted one of the men.

"I have always held," said the doctor, pleasantly, "that a man who could not change an opinion was a bigot. Obstinate is often ignorance. Your errand being such a serious one has quite convinced me that it is not only right but my duty to wake Mr. Oliver."

In his heart the doctor was thinking: "That certainly was Craig I heard in the house; he has got back, and must have heard what I said. His window is open."

"I shall wake Mr. Oliver, then," he said, loudly, as they dismounted and

went into the house, but I shall not be responsible for his profanity. Craig, open your door, please."

The doctor rapped, but his heart stood still. If Oliver should not be there! The bolt shot back, and the man, half dressed, with bloodshot eyes, disordered hair, and a dazed sort of manner, appeared in the doorway.

"What in— is all the row?" he said, angrily. "You must keep me up all night and wake me in an unearthly hour in the morning. What do they want?"

"Mr. de Restaud's wife is missing. They desire to search your house. Here, gentlemen, is a camp-bed, a trunk, and one chair. The lady is not here. Shall we keep on?"

Craig lay back on the bed and drew his traveling-rug over him.

"They have my permission," he said, sleepily. "There's a cellar underneath, and one small barn. Look well under the hay. So your wife has gone, Mr. De Restaud? Perhaps her only relative has had feeling enough to save the poor little thing and has taken her from your guardianship. I fancy you would not care to have that looked into too closely; and if I were you, speaking now as a lawyer, I would not advertise this affair too widely. Your wife might, you know, be persuaded to come back."

The doctor, fearing the consequences, shut the door hastily and led his visitors away. They searched the premises closely, but, not knowing of the buckboard, did not miss it, and the Mexican's good little beast, a lather of foam, was hidden in a grove of pines a quarter of a mile away.

Shortly after his guests had mounted their horses in sulky silence and galloped away, Oliver, newly shaven and carefully dressed, came out in the sunlight. He was ghostly pale, and staggered as he walked.

"I have had Mike make me some coffee," he said, sinking in a chair. "Gad, I'm play out. I wasn't five hours coming back; and I'm a heavy man for the horse. I'd like to owa him. I can't sleep; too tired, I suppose. Besides, I was a little worried. Where is our friend?"

"Gone," said the doctor, laconically. "And now, Craig, as question, are in order, where is the Troublesome lady?"

"On her way to Maine, I hope."

"If you are not honest in the matter that man will kill you."

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"All you'll git," she said, in a high-pitched nasal voice, "if you talk lingo forever. I ain't to home in a kentry where my native tongue is butchered as you do it, and that's all I'll pay you, if you talk balderdash all night."

"Si, señora," gasped the Mexican.

"Yis, I do see; and I've a mind to re-press your insolence to the authorities, for that 'see' is all I've got out of you the whole way. And if we ain't leagued over unprofitable meanders and everlasting hills this day, and barren wastes, to last me till I die. When I git back east I'll hate to look at the settin' sun for getting reminded of this journey an' Minny's misfortunes here. Now, he being gone, mister," she said, abruptly, as Juan rode rapidly

the saddle, straightened her black alpaca skirt, and delivered a five-dollar bill to her guide.

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