Tip Tressell, the Flatboat Boy.

BY EDWARD WILLETT.

THE FIRST BLOW HAD HARDLY TOUCHED THE BOY'S BACK WHEN SINDALS SPRUNG FROM THE STEERING-BENCH.
Tip Tressell, the Floater.

Tip Tressell,
THE FLATBOAT BOY;
OR,
BILLY KEHOE'S REVENGE.

BY EDWARD WILLET,
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BOY PIONEER," "SHARP SIM, THE
LAD WITH A LEVEL HEAD,"
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
AFLOAT ON THE MISSISSIPPI.

A log was floating on the muddy water of the Mississippi, some distance below the mouth of the Ohio.

It was evidently a saw-log, the product of some Wisconsin pinery, that had been lost from a raft many miles up the river, and it had not yet become sufficiently water-soaked to lose its buoyancy.

In itself it would not have been an attractive object, except to some stray boatman with a grapple and a tow rope, if there had not been a bit of human life associated with it.

This bit of human life was a boy, some fifteen or sixteen years of age, who sat astride the log as it floated, and partly controlled its course with a piece of board that he used as a paddle.

He was a bright young fellow to look at, and the expression of daring and resolution that he carried in his face added interest to his sunbrownred features. His tattered straw hat covered a head of raven black hair, which fell over his forehead, but did not conceal his large, dark eyes. The rest of his apparel, as far as it could be seen out of the water, was scanty and not a little ragged.

But the matter of clothes was one that interested him very little at that moment, as he was mainly occupied in sticking to his log and directing its movements.

How did he happen to be there?

To explain that point the reader must travel backward a couple of weeks or so, and to a point near the head-waters of the Ohio.

The boy and the log represented the upper portions of two great rivers, widely separated at their sources, and they had come together, as the waters of the two rivers do, after a long journey.

On the West Virginia side of the upper Ohio, and scarcely more than a rod from the crumbling bank of the river, stands a cabin. It is a mere shanty, containing but one small room, rudely built of logs, and nearly in ruins at that. The door hardly hangs on its hinges, and the one shutter has been boarded up, as the easiest way of mending it.

The proprietor, a fair sample of the genus squatter, is seated on a block in front of the shanty, cleaning an old-fashioned rifle.

By name he is Abe Trotter, and by profession, when he deigns to do anything but haunt the cross-roads "doggeries" and drink "blaze face," he is a hunter and a fisherman. The rifle indicates the one occupation, and a long "trot line," stretched between two trees, and with large hooks dangling at regular intervals, speaks of the other.

As for farming, that is beneath the notice of Abe Trotter. He cultivates a few "truck patches," such as he can easily manage without the use of a horse, and it is precious little care that they get.

Lying in the sun near the cabin are two tall and gaunt dogs, of no recognized breed except the "yaller dog" variety, but they are Abe Trotter's special pets, as one of them is a "heavy coon dog," and the other has the reputation of being the best woodchuck dog in the district.

They are of far more importance in Abe's eyes than a human specimen, in the shape of a boy, who is seated on the grass, fondling a hound puppy.

But the boy attracts his attention after a while, the rifle having been put in order, and he looks up and speaks to him, bending his shaggy eyebrows.

"Tip, my boy, it's played out."
"What's played out, Abe?" asks the boy, lifting his big, bold, black eyes.
"You an' me, Tip. I've took good keer of you, now, gwine on these many years—hain't I?"
"Tol'able," briefly replied the boy.
"Wal, I don't pretend to be the Emp'r'or of Rooshy, nor even a hotel-keeper to Wheelin', but I've gi'n yer a shelter an' fodder an' suth'in' to wear, as long as the money held out, an' now it's gone, and I mean to send you adrift."
"Who paid the money?" quickly demanded Tip.
"Why, yer dad. Leastways, I reckon he was yer dad."
"What came of him? Where is he now?"
"Durned if I know. He lit out. It ain't likely that you or I will ever set eyes on him ag'in."

The boy looked down moodily, and it was a few minutes before he spoke again.

"Reckon he was ashamed o' me," he said. "But I tell you, Abe, he can't be a bit more ashamed o' me than I am o' him. How do you allow to send me adrift, old man?"
Abe Trotter looked out on the smooth and shining river. The "spring rise" was coming on, and the Ohio was nearly bank full and rising; a fleet of coal boats was coming down, and the "broadhorns," with their cargoes of hay, pottery, staves, and other up-country merchandise, were beginning to float out from the Alleghany and Mononga-hela.

"That's the river," he said, "an' that's boats on it. It's easier to go down than to go up, an' that's as good a way to start as any."

The boy said nothing. Evidently he had become accustomed to taking life as he found it.

"That's all fur now," continued Abe, as he rose and shouldered his rifle. "I'm gwine over to the cross-roads a bit. You stay yeer, Tip, an' look arter the dorgs.

"Look out that you don't git b'lin' full, old man," was Tip's parting admonition.

About two miles from the cabin at the river was a cross-roads "doggery," kept by Garret Dyckman, a descendant of the old Holland emigrants, who had "scooped in" many an acre and dollar from the other inhabitants by a process of slow poisoning. But his establishment was still only a rough board shanty, with a small house at the rear.

Abe Trotter was a well-known customer, if not a regular one, at Dyckman's place, and when he entered the shanty the landlord stepped to the bar to supply his wants.

"Gimme a stiff horn o' applejack, Garret," said the squatter, "an' hang it up for a day or so."

Dyckman's face expressed a positive refusal of this request, and he informed Trotter that he could "hang up" nothing more there until he paid what he owed.

"Just one horn," pleaded Abe. "I'm kinder shaky to-day, an' I've got a big matter to think about."

"That's played out, Abe Trotter."

A man who had been sitting in a corner of the room rose and approached the bar, gazing intently at Trotter, and stepping forward briskly when the name of the latter was spoken.

He was a tall and muscular man, with black hair and eyes and a swarthy complexion. His apparel was unusually fine for that region, and a broad hat had added picturesqueness to his appearance.

"Let him have what he wants, landlord, and I will pay for it," said this man.

Dyckman set out glasses, and Abe Trotter fell back to stare at this welcome intruder. His stare was followed by a look of recognition.

"Is it really you?" he exclaimed. "Who'd ha' thought o' comin' up on you, of all men in the world?"

"Drink your liquor and haul in the slack of your jaw," replied the stranger. "I want to have a little talk with you."

Trotter gulped down his applejack and followed his liberal friend out of the shanty. They crossed the road and sat down on a log in the shade.

"Jest the werry man I was a-studyin' about," remarked Abe.

"Never mind that. How is the boy?"

"Oh, he's all right, an' it was him I was worryin' about. I told him this mornin' that I'd kop' him as long as I could an' meant to send him adrift."

"Where would you send him, and how?"

"Down the river, I reckon. Thar's plenty of boats runnin' now, an' it's a long v'ge.

"He would be likely, then, to bring up many miles from here?"

"Down to Orleans, I should say, or tharabouts."

"That's the best thing you can do, Abe Trotter. Send him adrift as soon as you please, and then forget him."

The squatter looked up at the stranger with a knowing twist in his eye.

"That's a hoss of another color," he remarked. "I ain't a good hand at forgittin', and I ought to worry me to forget suthin' that has took a strong hold onto me."

"Perhaps it might, and the worry would be worth something. I will give you fifty dollars in cash to close out the business, and you are to ship off the boy and forget him."

"It's a barg in. But I want yer to understand, mister, that I've done the best I could by the boy. He'd ha' had a better show if my old woman had lived. But she dropped off so suddent and queer-like that it upset things. It was some three year arter you left the boy with us that she went down to the river to git a bucket o' water, an' she never come back. I went down to look arter her, an' the bucket was settin' thar full, but no Nancy. I reckon she must ha' tumbled into the river, an' the current carried her off, an' that was the last of Nancy Trotter. That upset things a heap."

"It was a bad job for you, I suppose," replied the stranger. "But it was no fault of mine, and you needn't drag up that sort of thing now. Here is your money, Abe."

He counted out five crisp ten-dollar bills, and rose from the log.

"We are quits now, Abe Trotter," he said. "Forget the boy, and forget me."

He crossed the road, unhitched a fine bay horse, and rode away.

Abe Trotter stuffed the bills into his pocket, and returned to Dyckman's doggery.
CHAPTER II.

LIFE AND DEATH ON A BROADHORN.

It was late at night when Abe Trotter got back to the cabin by the river, the moon giving him scarcely light enough to pick his uncertain way.

Late as it was, Tip and the dogs were there waiting for him, and the boy helped him into the cabin.

"So, old man, you did go and git b'lin' full," remarked Tip, as he steadied his guardian's steps. "Now you got to turn in and sleep it off."

But Abe Trotter had not yet reached the stupid stage of intoxication.

"Hold a bit, Tippy, my boy," said he. "Gimme my pipe, an' lemme take a smoke fast."

As he smoked he talked in a maudlin manner, leering at the boy with half-closed eyes.

"I've been a great friend to you, Tip," he said. "If my old woman hadn't dropped off you mought ha' had a better time; but I've done my best. I've taught yer to swim, an' shoot, an' fish, an' hunt coons an' woodchucks, an' make yerself useful. Yes, Tip, I've done the fa'r thing by yer, an' have took a big likin' to yer, an' it'll be powerful lonesome when you's gone. But I've got to ship yer off an' forget yer. Them's his orders, an' wot he paid me fur."

"Whose orders? Who paid you?" eagerly demanded the boy.

"Why, the man who brought you here—your dad, I reckon."

"When did you see him? Where did you see him?"

"This mornin', at Dyckman's."

"He is alive and about, then. What does he look like?"

"A big, tall man. Black haired and dark faced, like you."

"And he paid you to ship me off? What more did he have to say?"

Abe Trotter half-closed his eyes, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and rolled over into his bunk.

"You don't git nothin' more out o' me, Tip," said he. "I've told yer all that is to tell, an' it's enough fur yer to know."

"I don't care," replied the boy. "Them as don't like me can leave me alone, and I won't worry 'em."

In spite of his heavy drinking Abe Trotter was up at daylight the next morning. After refreshing himself by a plunge in the cool water of the Ohio, he took his rifle, and sallied out into the forest, returning shortly with a buck that he had killed.

Tip had prepared breakfast, which was soon eaten, and the buck was carried down to the river and placed in the skiff.

Then Abe sat on the bank and watched the big flatboats that occasionally came floating down the river, singly or in groups, until he fixed his eye on a broadhorn that suited his purpose, and he made Tip pull the skiff out to her.

She was loaded with staves, and seemed to be fully manned; but Abe did not hesitate to propose an addition to her crew in the person of Tip.

The commander of the broadhorn refused the offer. He had plenty of men, and did not wish to be bothered with boys.

"But this is a fine boy," Abe insisted. "He kin cook an' make hisself the usefulest kind. He wants to go on the river to hunt his fortun', and you may have this deer-meat, and I've got a few dollars to throw in the barg'in."

The result of the negotiations was that Abe Trotter returned to his cabin alone, and Tip floated down the Ohio on the stave boat.

At first the boy found his new life quite a pleasant one, mainly because it was new. There was not much adventure or excitement in floating down the placid Ohio, and his duties—he had been appointed cook of the craft—were rather monotonous; but it was better than living alone with Abe Trotter in that lonesome cabin.

But the disagreeable side of flatboating soon made itself manifest to the lad. As a boy, and among strangers, he was not treated too well by any of the crew, and the evident desire of Abe Trotter to get rid of him made them look down upon him as a person who was only fit to be ordered around and knocked about.

There were two of the crew who seemed to have a special spite against him—two rough fellows, named Merch and Spriggs, who had been picked up at Alleghany City.

As these two brutes had been under the feet of the world the most of their lives, they were naturally glad of a chance to tyrannize over somebody, and made the most of the opportunity which Abe Trotter had thrown in their way. They set themselves at work to persecute poor Tip and to give him a dog's life to lead. They compelled him to do a large share of their work in addition to his own, and curses and kicks and blows were his lot when he dared to object to this injustice.

Tip complained to "Captain" Dawson as the commander of the broadhorn was styled, but found no sympathy in that quarter.

"I guess you'll have to stand it and try to make the best of it, young chap," replied Dawson. "You're a sort of a byblow, you see, and the men know it, and that makes a difference."
"What is a byblow?" asked Tip.
"I thought everybody knew that. You don't know your father, and your father don't want to know you, and nobody is willing to own you, and that makes you a cut-rate sort of a character."

Tip understood that he was something that everybody had a right to despise, and was humiliated by the thought, but was not any more reconciled to the increasing persecutions of Merch and Spriggs.
The fourth man of the crew was Jesse Siddals, a tall lumberman from the interior of Pennsylvania, who did not seem to be an ill-natured sort of a fellow, though he was in the habit of treating Tip contemptuously.

As the persecutions of the two brutes increased Jesse Siddals began to frown upon them, and one night, shortly after the flatboat had floated into the swift current of the Mississippi, there was a quarrel between him and Merch.

Merch had Tip by the collar and was cussing him for no cause, when Siddals, who was on the steering bench, ordered him to leave the boy alone.
The brute looked up in amazement, his surprise at first exceeding his anger, and Tip wriggled out of his grasp and ran away.
"You have abused that boy too much already, Dan Merch, and you've got to quit it," said the tall lumberman.
"When did you git to be my boss, you big scarecrow?"

"I don't pretend to be a boss, but I say you've got to quit abusin' that boy. I won't stand by and see it done any longer."
"You may sit down, then, or lie down, or take it in any shape you want to, but I mean to give that young scalawag a bastin' whenever I feel like it."

"Not when I am around, Dan Merch."
"That is the very time I shall pick to do it, and it won't be safe for you to meddle with me."

Merch was as good as his word. The next night he dragged Tip up on the roof of the boat and prepared to flail him with a cruel-looking leather strap.

Siddals stood on the steering-bench and Spriggs lay on the roof, ready to watch "the fun."
The first blow had hardly touched the boy's back when Siddals sprung from the steering-bench, seized the brute by the collar, jerked him loose from Tip and threw him violently down.

But Merch was instantly on his feet, with a dangerous knife gleaming in his hand.

Siddals was just as quick with his knife, and after a few passes he struck the other's weapon from his grasp, knocking it into the river.

Apparently he did not care to follow up his advantage, and ran to regain the steering-wheel, the head of which had veered to the edge of the boat.
As he did this Tip saw something that sharply attracted his attention.

Dan Merch was standing up, and something gleamed in his right hand. It was not a knife, and it was pointed toward Siddals.
Tip sprung forward with a cry, hoping to protect his friend and champion, but he was too late. There was a flash and a report, and Siddals, without a word, fell over into the river.
The boy ran up on the steering-bench and looked over the side of the flatboat, but he saw only the dark and eddying water. The suddenness of the disappearance of Siddals shocked him so that he could scarcely stir.

As it happened the scuffle on the roof and the report of the pistol had not awakened "Cap" Dawson, and Merch and his comrade perceived that if they should close Tip's mouth they might account for the loss of Siddals in their own way.

They told the boy that he must hold his tongue about the matter, or sudden death would be his portion.

Tip said nothing; but he had already determined upon the course he should pursue.
He climbed down off the roof and kept quiet.

At the darkest hour of the night he slipped from the stern of the broadhorn into the river, and silently swam to an island near by, trusting to luck and his swimming ability to take him to a place of safety.

CHAPTER III.
FOUND, A GRANDMOTHER.

A FLATBOAT that was pretty widely known on the lower Mississippi as "The Search" was in some respects a very peculiar craft.
The flatboats mostly in use on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers were of three descriptions—coal flats, broadhorns and store boats. The coal flats were large open boxes. The broadhorns were also large, but were inclosed and roofed in, to give shelter to cargoes of staves, hay, earthenware and the like. The store boat was much smaller than these, but was more carefully constructed. It was a one-story house set upon a flatboat, arranged for living purposes as well as for the display and sale of merchandise. It was usually whitewashed, and had a name suggestive of the business for which it was used.

The "Search" was built in the store-boat style, but of better material and in a more costly manner than was customary with such a craft. The house on the flatboat was painted white and supplied with windows, and its interior arrangements were far more
elaborate and expensive than those of any store boat. This mud-turtle craft was, in fact, a floating dwelling, whose owner preferred to live upon the water, and had it fitted up for that purpose.

As day was breaking in the eastern sky, the "Search" was floating down the Mississippi, between an island and the west bank.

She had a steering-bench across the roof, and a long steering-oar, similar to those of other such craft, and on the steering-bench stood a tall and powerful man, with a German cast of features. Near him lounged a boy, nearly grown, whose face was unmistakably Irish.

The intense stillness of the early morning, before the woods had awoke, was broken by a cry which came from the direction of the island at the left.

"Hello-o-o, the boat!"

The tall man looked toward the island, and saw a dark object emerging from the shadow. It was floating with the current, and at the same time appeared to be propelled more or less in the direction of the flatboat.

"Phwat's that, Adam?" asked the lad.

"Dot vas somebody or somet'ings," slowly replied the other.

"If it ain't somebody, yez may call Mike Rafferty a Dutchman, and sure it's a lighthanded compliment that would be."

"Dot vas besser for you if you could been born a Dutchman, my boy."

"It's a man, Adam, or a boy. Look at it now!"

The dark object had cleared the shadow of the island, and was clearly seen to be a log with a person astride of it, and again the hall came across the water.

"It's a boy's voice," said Mike. "Phwat are yez goin' to do about this, Adam?"

"You gets in dot skiff, Mike, und brings dot boy here."

"What will she say, Adam?"

"You makes dot boy safe, und der she will say vot she will say."

Mike Rafferty jumped into the skiff, and pulled for the log with a will. In a few minutes he returned, bringing a boy somewhat younger and smaller than himself, and who was very wet.

He shook himself like a dog, and began to give an explanation of his position.

"Don't you talk, sonny," said Adam, laying a heavy hand on his shoulder. "Talk is cheap, aber it dakes gelt for buyin' dot visky. Shqueeze dot vasser out, und come mit me. Maybe she pitch you oberboard some more, hey?"

The boy could not understand this at all; but he silently obeyed orders, and followed his conductor into what may be called the cabin of the boat.

They passed through a room that was neatly fitted up with sleeping berths, chairs, a table, and other appliances of comfort. Then they entered a kitchen, amply and even elegantly supplied with everything necessary for the culinary department of the craft. Here a fat black boy, with a shining face, had just lighted a fire in a handsome stove.

The boy quietly seated himself in a chair which the large man pointed out to him, and the latter passed into another apartment, closing the door behind him.

In a few minutes he returned, beckoned to the boy, and led him into the third room, where the lad was so astonished by what he saw that he could do nothing but stand and stare.

This room was as large as both the others, occupying about half the boat, and was sumptuously fitted up and furnished. The floor was covered with a carpet in which the feet seemed to sink, the walls were hung with elegant paintings and engravings, and the wooden ceiling was finely frescoed. There was a costly center table, with several luxurious chairs and a book-case full of books, and on a cushioned lounge at one side was seated an elderly lady, richly if not elegantly dressed, with large diamonds in her ears, and a profusion of jewelry upon her person.

On the other side of the room was a very comfortable-looking bed; but the black boy came in, removed the bed-clothes, and turned it up, so that it presented the appearance of a handsome piece of stationary furniture.

The old lady was inclined to be portly, and her hair was gray, and her face, though not unkindly, was rather severe, like that of a person who was accustomed to having her own way.

"And this is the boy, Adam Stocker," said she.

The tall German nodded.

"Well, boy, you have been picked upadrift in the Mississippi, a strange position for a boy to be placed in. You must tell me how it happened, and satisfy me that you mean no harm, or overboard you go again. What is your name?"

"Tip," replied the waif.

"But that is not your full name. There must be more of it. Tip who?"

"Tip Tressell," said the boy, who doubted whether he really owned any name.

The old lady, who had been reclining on her cushions, started up suddenly. Her pale face flushed, and her bright black eyes gazed at Tip as if they would read his inmost thoughts.
Tip Tressell, the Floater.

“Wha’s that?” she exclaimed. “Is that your real name? Are you sure of it? Tip Tressell? Does the Tip stand for Tipton?”

“Dunno, mum. I wasn’t never called nothin’ but Tip, though Abe Trotter told me that Tressell went with the name.”

“Look at me, boy! Do you know that I am Eliza Tressell; that this boat is my house, and that I am traveling up and down the river, looking for my son who ran away from me years ago?”

“Dunno nothin’ about that, mum.”

“There are many people who know it. Did any of them put you up to the game of going adrift on the Mississippi, getting picked up by this boat, and trying to pass yourself off on me as some sort of a relative?”

“You are too much for me, mum,” replied Tip. “I can’t see what you are tryin’ to git hold of.”

“Adam Stocker, take this boy away, and give him some dry clothes. Some of Mike’s ought to do. Then bring him back to me.”

Tip was led away, wondering what sort of a craft it was that he had happened upon, and what was the matter with the old lady who had questioned him so sharply.

“Is she crazy?” he asked, when Adam Stocker and Mike Rafferty were providing him with the garments he needed.

“Grazy!” exclaimed the big German.

“Dat woman grazy? Mine goodness cray-shus! Vas you grazy yourselves? Dot woman vas got more sense as a shichemboat pilot.”

“Be jubes, me boy,” remarked Mike, “if you pick the missus up for a crazy woman, you’ll drop her like a hot petty.”

Tip was convinced that she was not crazy when he was taken back to her. She gave him a seat in an easy-chair, and encouraged him to tell his story.

He told it as well as he could. He only knew that he had always lived, as long as he could remember, away up there with Abe Trotter; that he had always been known as Tip; that Abe had told him that his name was Tressell; that hints had been thrown out of a man who had left him there and paid money for his support; and that the man had lately been inquiring about him and prompting Abe to turn him adrift. His adventures since he left his rough guardian were fresh in his memory, and he related them fully and graphically.

“Adam Stocker,” said Mrs. Tressell, “I believe the boy speaks the truth. It is a strange story that he tells, but he tells it in a straightforward and honest manner. What do you think?”

“I dink so, too, neider.”

“If his story is true,” continued the old lady, speaking to herself, rather than to either of the others, “the chances are that he is my grandson, the son of my lost son Martin. I never heard that Martin had married; but that is not at all strange, and he would be just the man to desert wife and son as he deserted his mother. Tressell is an unusual name, and Tipton Tressell is yet more unusual. Tip stands for Tipton, of course. My husband’s name was Tipton Tressell, and Martin must have named the boy after his father. That shows that he had some filial feeling left.”

She looked again at Tip, who was taking all this in with his eyes wide open, wondering whether he had really found a grandmother. He had heard of grandmothers, and envied boys who had them, but had never thought it possible that he could acquire such a treasure.

“He has Martin’s hair and eyes,” said the old lady, “and he has Martin’s free, bold look. Adam Stocker, I will take him on trial as a grandson, I am not sure, but I think he is mine. Martin may have half a dozen wives and a dozen children, for all I know. It would be just like him. Adam, we will land at Memphis, and we will get some clothes for Tip. It can do no harm, anyhow, to take care of him. I have not too many good deeds to bless myself for.”

CHAPTER IV.
MORE OF TIP’S RELATIVES.
In a front room on the second floor of a dingy house in the business part of Memphis two men were seated.

The suit of rooms was reached by a narrow staircase, which was none too clean, giving them an unpromising approach, but when the door was opened the visitor would naturally be surprised to find himself in such handsome apartments.

There were two rooms, both nicely furnished and neatly kept. The back room contained a well-fitted bar and the appliances of a keno “dead-fall.” In the front room were a faro “lay-out” and tables for other games. Evidently a gambling den, of neither the highest nor the lowest class.

As the hour was early the two men who have been mentioned were the only occupants of the apartments, with the exception of a colored man, who was lazily handling a dust brush.

These two were seated at a table, playing cards, without manifesting much interest in the game, and it was apparent that they were playing with each other merely to pass the time while waiting for victims.

One of them was a tall, stalwart, swarthy man of thirty-five or forty, with “sporting
man" plainly written in his features and in the cut of his clothes. He was known in the towns along the river as Sam Martin.

The other was "Billy" Kehoe, the proprietor of the place, a somewhat younger man than the other, chiefly distinguished by his heavy watch-chain and immense diamond pin.

As they listlessly handled the cards, betting small sums "to make the game interesting," the door opened and a young man stepped into the room.

Both the players looked up as he entered, but took no further notice of him than a quick, scrutinizing glance. It was not at once apparent whether he was a "sucker" or a "sharp."

He was a well-dressed young man, of light but active build, with an open and fearless expression of countenance. One would say that he was calculated to make his way in the world, and that no slight obstacles could stand in his path.

This young man moved a chair to the card-table, and seated himself there.

"You are the man I have been looking for," he said, fixing his gaze upon Sam Martin.

"It is your deal, Billy," said Martin, as he bestowed a supercilious stare upon the intruder.

"Perhaps you don't know me," remarked the young man.

"Can't say that I do," replied Martin.

"But I know you. You are Martin Tressell."

Billy Kehoe started, and looked at his companion curiously.

"And I am George Aglar."

"Still I don't know you," said Martin, moving his chair so that he squarely faced the young man.

"I am the brother of Minnie Aglar, whom you married."

"I never married any person of that name."

Perhaps you have since married so many that you have forgotten her."

"Perhaps you mean that remark for an insult, but I am not in a quarrelsome mood just now. I remember the girl well enough; but I never married her."

"You lie!"

Sam Martin jumped up, and his pistol was out in an instant; but the other was quite as quick as he.

Shots would have followed, if Billy Kehoe had not rushed between them, pushing each back.

"Please, gentlemen, don't do that!" he exclaimed. "If you make a fuss here, you will bring the police into my place, and that will ruin me. Put up your pistols, for my sake, and be quiet! If you must fight, there is plenty of room outside."

"I don't care to fight," replied Martin; "but can I allow that young fellow to call me a liar?"

"I will take back that word," said Aglar to Kehoe, "if your friend will sit down and talk to me reasonably. I only want to ask him a question or two."

The difficulty was settled in that way, and the belligerents resumed their seats.

"What do you want to know?" gruffly asked Martin.

"I want to say in the first place," replied his late antagonist, "that I had no right to call you a liar. You may believe that you were not legally married to my sister, but had swindled her. If so, you are greatly mistaken. I have taken pains to look into that matter carefully, and I have proof that the marriage was a real and legal one, and that my sister was and is your lawful wife."

"I suppose you have a right to your opinion on that point," said Martin, with a sneer. "I have my opinion, also. But, supposing the case to be as you put it, what of it? Does your sister want money of me?"

"No, indeed. If she needed money, you are the last person in the world she would apply to. She only asks you to tell the truth about one matter. Where is her boy?"

"Her boy?"

"Yes, your son and hers—the child you stole from her when you deserted her. What has become of him?"

"I believe he is dead," quietly replied Martin.

George Aglar made a gesture of impatience, but repressed his rising anger.

"I must say, Martin Tressell, that you are even more heartless than I had supposed you to be. How can you speak so indifferently on such a subject?"

"Do you fancy, young man, that I am going to bother myself about a brat, whether it is mine or anybody's else? I left that kid in good hands up the river, and a heavy sum it cost me for his keep, too. He ran away, as I understand, and shipped on a flatboat bound for New Orleans. Lately I heard that he had tumbled overboard in the night, and was drowned."

"How did you learn that?"

"I got it by accident from one of the men on the flatboat, who stopped off here a while ago."

"Did you inquire into the matter no further?"

"Why should I? Dead people are dead. Would you expect me to drag the river?"

"I would expect you to do nothing that
A decent white man might do," angrily replied George Aglar.

"Take care, young fellow. You have about worn out my patience."

"I care nothing about your patience," said the young man, as he rose from his seat. "I will not trouble you any more at present; but I am not through with you."

"You had better make an end of it now. If you bother me again, you will be likely to get hurt."

"You can't scare me, Martin Tressell. I will report to my sister what you have said, and I know how to take up your trail if I want to find you."

The young man left the room, and Sam Martin settled back in his chair. There was a shade of annoyance on his swarthy face; but no trace of a deeper feeling was visible.

His companion sat shuffling the cards in an absent-minded manner, and made no offer to renew the game.

"It is your deal, Billy," said Martin, a little impatiently.

"Yes, Sam, it is my deal, but not in this game—some other game. Boys, bring us that black bottle of mine and some glasses."

Martin looked suspiciously at Kehoe, and Kehoe looked down at the cards as if he thought he might extract an idea from them.

"What's the matter with you?" inquired the former.

"So you are Martin Tressell, and I had never guessed it."

"Why should you guess it? Do you believe what that fellow said?"

"You didn't deny it, and there is good reason to believe that it is true. Then you must be the son of the Begum."

"The Begum? What's that?"

"You know well enough who I mean. The cranky old woman who goes up and down the river in a flatboat. She floats down, then hitchs onto a tow and goes back, and then floats down again. She says she is looking for her lost son, whose name is Martin Tressell."

"Mighty small chance to find him in that style. I should say," sneered Martin.

"Not a bit of a chance, if he wants to keep out of her way. Why don't you hitch onto her, old man?"

"She and I could never get on together."

"But she is rich, they say, and I know that you often go broke, as you come up here and get me to stake you. You might have all the money you want, if you would make up with her."

"You don't understand the matter at all," replied Martin. "She would want to keep me tied to her with a string, and would dribble out the money to me as if I was a boy. My father, who was the best poker-player in Mississippi, wasn't that style. If he had left me his money, I would have seen that she was well fixed and wanted for nothing. But he chose to leave it to her, and her notion was that I must be kept under. I couldn't stand that, and split off from her. I prefer to be independent, and I have found it easy enough to get hold of money. The trouble is that I can't keep it. But I don't see what business this is of yours, Billy Kehoe."

"It is only for your good that I am speaking, Sam. Don't you think there might be a way to get hold of the money without knocking under to the old woman?"

"Ah! now you are talking. I have a scheme that is sure to fetch it, or a big part of it. Do you want to go in with me and make a strike?"

"Yes, if it is a soft and safe thing. But I don't mean to run my neck into a noose for any man or any amount of money."

"This is safe and easy enough," said Martin, as he looked at his watch. "I must go to the post-office just now. I will come back soon and talk the business over."

"I will walk with you, Sam."

CHAPTER V.

SAM MARTIN'S LITTLE GAME.

As Billy Kehoe and his friend passed out upon the sidewalk, a tall and large man came down the street, accompanied by a bright-faced boy who was shining in new clothes.

The man was Adam Stocker, and the boy was Tip Tressell.

The two parties stared at each other as they met, and went their several ways.

"Mighty nice looking boy, that," said Kehoe.

"What of it?" asked Martin. "There are plenty such."

"I don't know when I have seen such a bright lad to look at. If I had a young chap like that, I could train him up to be the smartest man along the river. I say, Sam, there was a look of you in his face."

"Quite likely. Mine is not an uncommon style of beauty."

When the two got back to Kehoe's rooms, they found nobody there but the colored man, as it was yet too early in the day for "business," and they resumed their seats, and proceeded to discuss Martin's project.

"This scheme of mine," said that individual, "is as safe as you please, and as easy as rolling off a log, and you won't have anything to do in the matter to speak of, except to furnish a stake. Do you know where Tunison's Bayou is, down on the Louisiana side?"
"No."
"Well, it is easy enough to find. I have got a—what I call a place, down there."
"What sort of a place, Sam?"
"Well, it is not a camp-meeting, nor yet a Sunday-school. It is not a plantation, either: Some folks say that whisky has been made there that never paid any tax to the Government. There are some men about that place who look up to me as a sort of a boss; and we have ways of our own of getting hold of money and property."
"Without asking leave of the owners, hey? I had a notion, Sam, that you were on some such lay. Yes, I catch on to the style of place you mean."
"Sometimes, Billy, I call it a fort. I have another place near it, in the heart of a cypress swamp, to retreat to in time of trouble, where it would puzzle the devil to track me, or to get at me if he should find me."
"Well, and what has that to do with the Begum business?"
"Everything. You must write to her an anonymous letter, and get it to her somehow, telling her that her son Martin is at that place, and that he is sick and wants to make friends with her. She will float her ark down there, and work it up the bayou, and when I get her there I will capture her and keep her until she ladies out the ducats. Then I will pay you all I owe you, and give you a big bonus besides."
"How will she find the place?"
"Tell her that about two miles up Tunison Bayou is a cypress swamp and just beyond that she will find her sick son."
"Is that all you want me to do, besides furnishing the stake?"
"That is all. You can go down there, if you choose, to see how things are getting on and to make sure that I give you a square deal."
"All right, Sam—if you don't want too much money from me."
"Oh, I won't break you. I have a couple of men here that I am going to take down with me, and I must go and look after them. I will come back here this evening to get the money, and then will take the first boat down the river."

As Sam Martin left the room he did not see the malevolent look with which his crony followed him.

"I have found you out now, you cursed scoundrel!" muttered Kehoe. "If I don't get even with you this time it will be my own fault. You think I don't know that it was you who persuaded my wife to run away from me, and that you have got her hid somewhere—probably at that infernal den of yours down yonder. I will stake you in this business, Sam Martin, and will see you through it, and when I get even with you in money matters I will have another account to settle."
"Marcus," he said aloud, "there is nothing doing, and you may go out and take a run if you want to; but be back in an hour."
"Thank you, Massa Kehoe."

The colored man, moving noiselessly about on slippers feet, had hovered near the front room while George Aglar was there. He had ranged in the same region when Sam Martin was disclosing his Tunison Bayou plot. On each occasion he had listened eagerly to what was said, and at times his eyes glistened, and the hand that held the dustbrush twitched nervously.

He hastened to get ready, and left the house, walking rapidly up the street toward the bluffs.

When he had gone about half a dozen blocks, he quickened his steps, and hastened to overtake a young man who came out of a gun-store ahead of him, accosting him when he reached him:

"Massa George! George Aglar!"

The young man turned around, and hesitated, as if not sure that he recognized the speaker.

"Don't you know me, Massa George? Ise Marcus."

George Aglar clasped his hand, and shook it heartily.

"Why, Marcus, I am ever so glad to meet you. I ought to have known you; but it is so long since I have seen you. I am glad to find you looking so well and so prosperous."

"Yes, Massa George, Ise prosp'rous; but I neber forget de ole times befo' de wah. Ole Massa William was allus mighty good to me, and you and I was boys togedder, and I neber mean to go back on de ole stock. I knowed you, Massa George, as soon as I set eyes on you."

"What! 'behind my back'?"
"No, sah—to yo' face. I saw you to-day in Billy Kehoe's gamblin' shop."

"What were you doing there, Marcus?"
"Dat's my business, sah. I ain't one ob de gamblers; but I 'tends de bah and works, around. I listened to w'ot you and Sam Martin was sayin', and when I heerd about Miss Minnie it made me feel alloverish. I was mad enough to shoot dat black-faced white man right onto de spot."

"You heard it all, then, Marcus?"
"Mos' ob it, sah, and since den I se heerd somefin' more. Dat's w'ot I want to tell you about. It's somefin' mighty particular."

"Come with me to my office, Marcus, where we will be quiet and out of the way." George Aglar led the way up a side street
to a building that bore the sign of "Simon & Aglar, Cotton Brokers." It was closed, as business hours were over; but he opened the door with his key, lighted the gas, and gave the colored man a seat.

Marcus proceeded to relate the particulars of the interview between Billy Kehoe and Sam Martin, and gave a fair idea of Martin's plot to capture his mother and her money.

"This is a very serious matter," said George Aglar. "I don't know that it is any of my business, and if my sister's son is really dead she can take no more interest in that man or his people. But something ought to be done by somebody to prevent him from carrying out his villainous scheme. I will think of the matter, and will speak to Minnie about it, and I am much obliged to you for bringing me this information."

"Ef I catch hold ob anyfin' mo', Massa George, I'll fetch it to you jest as soon as ef I ken."

"That is right, Marcus. Here is my mother's address. Minnie and I are living with her, and we will all be glad to see you whenever you can get a chance to call on us."

CHAPTER VI.
THE DEAD ALIVE.

Tip Tressell made friends with the crew of the "Search," as he would have said, "without half trying." Adam Stocker fell in love with the lad at once, Mike Rafferty adopted him as a comrade, and the colored cook "cottoned" to him. These friendships might partly be accounted for by the fact that Tip was the grandson by brevet, if not the actual grandson, of the owner of the flatboat; but they were mainly due to his good qualities and "tacking" ways.

He had some difficulty in getting hold of the name of the colored boy, who was known on the boat as Ganymede. Ganymede was a puzzler to Tip, who twisted it about in various shapes, and finally "tackled" the darky on the subject.

"That's a queer name of yours," said he.

"I knew a Silas Mead up the river, who had a boy named Jim Mead, and another named Joe; but I never heard of a Ganny Mead before."

"Dat ain't my real name," replied the boy, with a grin. "My sure 'nuff name is Jawg Washin'ton Linkin Grant Muffin. Wen I was a leetle chap de wite folks usened to call me Rag Muffin fur short. Ole Missus Tressell, she calls me Ganymede, an' says it means a waiter. I specks it's French. She says it's Greek; but Mike Rafferty says he ort to know a Greek name, an' dar ain't no Greek about it."

"It is a better name than the long one, anyhow," remarked Tip.

"Mebbe 'tis; but my mudder orted knowed wo't she was doin'. My mudder was a queen."

"A queen!" exclaimed Tip.

"A Vaudoo queen, an' one ob de biggest kine. My fahter wuz one ob de common stock ob niggers, I reckon; but my mudder was jest ole pecoo. Eberybody wuz feared ob her, an' so was I. Dat's wot made me run away. She usened to hab queer fits, and once she built a big fish, an' was gwine to roast me so's to fix t'ings up wid de debl. but I slipped outen her grip, an' den I cut an' run."

"You got out of that scrape well, Ganny."

"I'se a powerful hand to git out o'scrapes. Ef you eubber git inter one, Mass' Tip, jest you call on Jawg Washin'ton Linkin Grant Muffin, an' I'll gib you a starter."

Mrs. Tressell, having settled upon Tip as a grandson, whether provisionally or otherwise, was not one to make a half-way business of it, and she at once set herself at work to educate him.

She was thorough in everything she undertook, and in this she was a little too thorough to please the lad. The book lessons were well enough, though there was rather too much of them; but her continual corrections of his speech and manners worried him no little, and he would greatly have preferred a free and easy time outside with Adam Stocker and Mike Rafferty, or even in the kitchen with Ganymede.

There was a break in this monotony when the ark was brought to the bank at Memphis, and was made fast to the landing at the lower end of the city.

The first thing Mrs. Tressell did was to direct Adam to take Tip ashore and buy him an outfit of clothing. With her usual thoroughness she had prepared a memorandum of everything the lad was to have, including the price that was to be paid for each article.

To Tip this was the biggest kind of a holiday, far beyond anything he had ever experienced or imagined. It was the first time he had seen a city, and Memphis was a wonder to him.

The clothing stores dizzled him, and the articles that were purchased for him made him open his eyes wide and regard himself as a pig in clover.

When he was fully arrayed in a nice new suit, Adam Stocker said that he was fully an inch taller than when he stepped ashore at Memphis.

Dressed in his new suit, and with his old
Tip Tressell, the Floater.

clothes and his other purchases in bundles, he and Adam Stocker set out to return to the "Search.

As they walked down the street they met two well-dressed but flash-d-looking men, who had just emerged from a house. These men stared at them, and were stared at in turn.

"Those men looked at us mighty straight, Adam," said Tip, when they had passed on.

"Dot vas so. Von of dem look so like he vant to eat us oop. Dose fellers vas no goot peoples, Tip. Dey vas gay gamboliars. Dot tall man mit black hair look so like you as nefer vas. Aber dey makes notting mit us."

"I guess if they see us again they will know us," remarked Tip. "I will be likely to know them, too."

The boy and his big friend were destined to have a more startling adventure before they got back to the "Search."

They had reached the levee, and were going southward, when Tip suddenly dropped the bundle he was carrying, and uttered a cry of astonishment, if not of terror.

"Vas machst du?" exclaimed the astonished Adam.

At the same time a rough-looking man who was approaching them stopped and stared.

"It's him!" shouted Tip, in utter disregard of Mrs. Tressell's grammatical instructions. "It's him, and he's alive!"

The rough-looking man stood and stared, while the boy ran toward him.

"Oh, Mr. Siddals! Jesse Siddals! You ain't a ghost, are you?"

Then the rough-looking man took Tip by both hands, and held him there while he examined him from head to foot.

"Durned if it ain't little Tip!" said he, as a smile spread over his sunburned face.

"Why, Tip, how did you ever get here?"

"How did you ever get here?" replied the boy. "Adam Stocker, this is Jesse Siddals, the man I told you about, who stood up for me on that big flatboat, and was shot and knocked overboard and drowned."

"So?" remarked the stolid German.

"Aber he vas so mooch besser as a dead man already."

Then he deliberately laid down his bundles, and shook hands with Siddals.

"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Siddals," said Tip. "I thought sure that you were dead, and was sorrier than I can tell you, because you were killed when you were standing up for me."

"Do I look like a dead man?" asked Siddals.

"No. You are all right, I should say. How did it happen?"

"The fact is, bub, that I wasn't killed at all. When that scamp shot at me, I was standing just at the edge of the boat. The bullet struck this tough old nut of mine, and glanced off; but that was enough to tumble me over. I was more startled than hurt, I reckon, and I had my wits about me when I dropped into the water. I then thought that the dogs would make a finish of me if I showed up, as they were just that murderous sort, and that I had better get out of their way. So I dived up-stream, and when I bobbed up, the boat was 'way below me. Then I swam ashore, and in one way and another I have worked down as far as this."

"What are you doing here, Mr. Siddals?" asked Tip, who felt bound to show respect to the tall lumberman.

"I've been looking for a job; but jobs in my line seem to be mighty scarce."

"Come with me and I'll get you a job. I am so glad that you are alive, and that I ran across you. I'll get you a job right away. Won't I, Adam?"

"Seems like you've got into a pretty good job yourself, young chap," remarked Siddals, as he suffered Tip to lead him away.

On his way to the "Search" Tip told the story of his adventures since he fled from the broadhorn, and Siddals congratulated him on his good fortune.

When they reached the flatboat Tip ran back to Mrs. Tressell's room, and entered it without any ceremony.

She put up her glasses to examine him in his new rig.

"This is what I may call a transformation scene," said she. "I must say, Tip, that your new clothes have made a great change in your looks. Adam has done well; but he always does well."

"Oh, the clothes are all right, and I am ever so much obliged to you for them," replied the impatient lad. "But something has happened that I want to speak to you about. Jesse Siddals is alive. I found him in the city, and have brought him down here, and I want you to give him a job."

"What is that, Tip? I don't understand you at all."

"I mean that I want you to give him a job on this flatboat. He is a splendid boatman."

"But I have no need of a man. My crew is big enough, and there is no room for more."

"There ought to be room for him, grandma. It is Jesse Siddals, who stood up for me when I was abused on that big flatboat, and was shot and drowned. But he swam ashore, and he has been looking for a job in Memphis, and he can't find one."

"Oh, that man? I had forgotten the name. I must see what can be done for
him. But your story is badly mixed up, Tip. Sit down and try to tell it to me plainly, and be careful how you talk."

Tip told the story of Jesse Siddals's adventure, and managed to make it intelligible.

Mrs. Tressell requested him to bring in his friend, and she was much pleased with the honest face and straightforward ways of the tall lumberman.

So Jesse Siddals was engaged as one of the crew of the "Search," and, as he was a friend of Tip's, he was at once adopted as a comrade by the others.

The next morning Mrs. Tressell received a letter, which was brought to the boat by a messenger, and which threw her into a state of high excitement.

She sent for Tip and Adam Stocker and Jesse Siddals, and when they were gathered in her cabin she read this to them:

"MRS. ELIZA TRESSELL:—

"If you still want to find your son, Martin Tressell, this is to tell you that you have gone to work in the wrong way, and that you are looking in the wrong part of the country.

"He is now in Louisiana, and is very sick there, and I am sure that he would be glad to have you go and bring him away and take care of him.

"If you wish to do so, let your flatboat drop down to Tunison Bayou. About two miles from the mouth of the bayou, on the south side is a cypress swamp. Just beyond the cypress swamp is the place where your son lies sick.

"I saw him a few days ago, and did not tell him that I meant to communicate with you. I write this merely as a favor to you."

Mrs. Tressell, having called a council of war to consider this letter, asked the opinion of the council, though it was evident that she had made up her mind.

"We must start at once," she said, "and must get there as soon as possible."

"Yoost so vell go by dot bayou like any other place," remarked Adam.

Jesse Siddals had no opinion to express, and Tip was pleased by the prospect of something in the shape of an adventure.

"It is settled, then," said the old lady.

"Adam, do you think you can find Tunison Bayou?"

The German shook his head. He had not the remotest idea of the locality.

"I know it, mum, if you please," said Siddals. "I am a tolerable good pilot for the lower river, so far as flatboating goes."

"Very well. I will rely upon you to take the 'Search' there."

The energetic and impatient old lady could hardly wait for necessary supplies, and the flatboat was soon cast loose, and was again floating on the swift and turbid current of the Mississippi.

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNEXPECTED ATTACK.

The shades of evening were slowly but surely covering a broad stretch of the lower Mississippi when Jesse Siddals, acting as pilot of the "Search," called all hands to duty.

It was not to tack ship, or to reef or furl sails, as the ark was by no means that kind of a craft, but to work her in to the Louisiana shore.

"The fact is," said Jesse, "that the bayou we want to reach ain't easy to find in the daylight, and I doubt if it could be struck at all in the dark. I reckon we must be nigh it now, and we don't want to run by it at night. So we'll take to the shore, and lay by till morning, if it's agreeable to all."

It was agreeable to all, and the two men manned the sweeps, and Mike Rafferty managed the steering-oar, and soon the ark was moored against the low-lying bank, under the shadow of immense trees that made her look very small.

When everything had been made ready for the night Jesse and Tip stepped ashore, and strolled into the forest, to stretch their legs, and take a look at the locality.

They soon returned with a rather startling tale. They had seen a man with a gun lurking in the forest, and he had dodged out of sight and disappeared when they advanced toward him and hailed him.

A council of war was called, and the circumstance was considered a serious one.

The man might have been a hunter, who was looking for coons or some other night game; but in that case he would probably have had a dog, and would not have sneaked away as he did.

His presence there and his actions were regarded as highly suspicious.

"This is a queer country, mum," said Siddals, "and there's no telling what may turn up about here. We ought to be ready for anything."

"Had we not better leave this place, and go further down the river?" asked Mrs. Tressell.

"I am afraid that would be a bad scheme, mum. We might miss the bayou, and then it would be a hard job to work up."

"Very well. We can fight if we must. Adam, open the long chest, and examine the arms."

The "Search" proved to be well provided with weapons and munitions of war. There were three breech-loading rifles, four revolvers, and plenty of cartridges. She needed only to be "tin clad" to take rank as a naval vessel.

Adam Stocker took one of the rifles, and Jesse Siddals took another. The Irish lad possessed himself of the third, but handled it so gingerly and awkwardly that it was
easy to see that he was unaccustomed to the use of fire-arms.

"Tip was brought up in the woods," suggested Mrs. Tressell. "Perhaps he knows how to use a rifle."

"You can just bet I do," replied Tip. "I can shoot as straight as most folks."

So Tip was given one of the rifles, and Mike contented himself with a revolver.

The arrangements for the defense of the ark having been completed, it was decided that it was not necessary for the entire crew to keep awake, as the danger might be merely imaginary. Siddals and Mike were detailed to keep watch, and the others laid down to sleep.

It was not until three hours after midnight that the sleepers were aroused.

The watchers had seen more than one dark object moving about in the forest, and it was believed that a crisis was at hand.

The river was at such a high stage that the water was nearly level with the top of the bank, and the body of the ark overlooked the flat land that was covered by the virgin forest.

There was a bit of a moon shining, enough to distribute streaks of uncertain light among the trees, and all was quiet, except for the rippling of the water and the hum of insects.

Mrs. Tressell, who was in all respects and on all occasions the commander of the craft, assigned the crew to their stations, placing Jesse Siddals at the upper end of the boat, and Adam Stocker at the lower end, and Mike and Tip at the two windows in the men’s sleeping-room and the kitchen.

For her part she stationed herself, with a revolver in her hand, near the window of her cabin, although strongly entreated to allow herself to be protected by a barricade.

As Tip entered the kitchen to take his station, he perceived that Ganymede had on the fire a large boiler full of water, which was already bubbling and steaming.

He did not stop to ask the meaning of this preparation, as his attention was immediately absorbed by the events outside.

From his window he could see several dark forms in the forest, skulking from tree to tree, and gradually approaching the ark.

Then he heard the stentorian voice of Jesse Siddals, ringing far into the depths of the forest.

"Who goes there?" shouted the tall lumberman.

The skulking ceased, and there was silence for a minute or so before an answering hail came back.

"Hello, the boat!"

"Hello yourself!" replied Siddals. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"We want that boat and what’s aboard of it. Let the men-folks come ashore and throw up their hands, and they won’t be hurt. If they don’t do it, they’ll be apt to come up missin’.

Jesse Siddals shouted back his defiance.

"If you want anything on this boat, you dirty rascals, you’ll have to come and take it."

There was silence again, and after a few minutes the skulking recommenced.

Then there was a shot from the shore, evidently fired at Siddals’ end of the boat, and he quickly answered it with his rifle.

Then Stocker fired from his end, and several shots came from behind the two, the bullets crashing into and through the woodwork of the ark.

Tip, resting his rifle on the sill of his window, drew a bead on one of the skulkers, and fired.

As he paused to watch the effect of his shot, Jesse Siddals again shouted:

"Look out! They’re coming!"

Tip was about to fire another shot, when Mrs. Tressell called him.

He turned, and saw that energetic old lady standing near the stove, with a revolver in her right hand.

On the floor was a queer-looking machine, with two long handles, from which projected a piece of hose, and Mike Rafferty was approaching the window with a brass pipe attached to the hose.

"Take hold of the pump with Ganymede, while Mike works the nozzle," ordered the old lady. "Be quick, now!"

Tip jumped to the work, and hastened to imitate the action of the colored boy. They moved the handles rapidly up and down, encouraged by the sharp yells of Mike Rafferty, who was holding a rubber stopper at the nozzle of the pipe.

"Jerk her down, boys! Jump her, now! Ah, the dirty reptiles, the salvages! Be jabers, won’t they ketch it, though!"

Tip heard the reports of Siddals’ and Stocker’s rifles, mingled with a general volley from the shore, and then a chorus of shouts that seemed to sound at the very edge of the bank.

The two boys worked the pump more vigorously than ever, Mike jerked the stopper from the end of the pipe, and the hissing of a stream of boiling water followed.

The next moment the shouts without were changed to screams of pain and yells of dismay. Siddals and Stocker shouted in triumph and derision, and fired their rifles at an evidently retreating foe.

"That will do, boys—stop pumping!" ordered Mrs. Tressell. "How is it, Mike?"
"All right, mum. Be jabers, it stopped just in time. This blissid pip was nigh burnin' the fingers off of me."

As a matter of fact the coast was clear. The enemy had decamped, and Stocker and Siddals came in to receive the congratulations of the commander on the successful defense of the ark.

It was the hot weather that did it," insisted Mike.

"Yes, it was the hot weather that did it," said Siddals, as he proceeded to give an account of the discomfiture of their assailants.

About a dozen men, as well as he could judge, had come running out of the woods, and had nearly reached the boat when Mike turned on them a stream of boiling water, directing his pipe all along their line.

The effect was instantaneous. Blinded and scalded by this unexpected style of attack, they had turned and fled, tumbling over each other in their haste to get out of the way.

It was not expected that they would return; but the crew kept an armed watch until daylight, when they went ashore to examine the scene of the assault.

They found the foliage of the trees and shrubs withered by the stream of boiling water, and found a few spots and patches of blood on the ground; but if there were any killed or wounded, they had been carried away by their friends.

"Faith, now," said Mike, "if we come across any min about here that's scalded, we'll know what's the matter wid them."

Mrs. Tressell smiled a grim smile, and gave orders for continuing the voyage.

As soon as breakfast was over the ark was unmoored, and proceeded to drop down the river.

CHAPTER VIII.
The Voudoo Queen.

Jesse Siddals had no difficulty in locating Tunison's Bayou in the daylight. It proved to be about a mile below the spot where the attack was made upon the ark, and it was a narrow inlet, though sufficiently wide for the "Search" to use her sweeps. At places it broadened out into quite a lake, and there was no current, the usually sluggish water of the bayou being backed up by the river.

As the ark entered this inlet Siddals made Tip take him into Mrs. Tressell's cabin, as he wished to have a serious talk with her.

"I am willing to go anywhere you want me to go, mum," said he, "and to do the best I can in any kind of a scrape; but I am afraid that there is a game in this business."

"What do you mean by a game?" asked the old lady.

"I've a notion that somebody has been putting up a job against you. You are said to be rich, mum, and of course plenty of people would be glad to get hold of your money. The letter you got at Memphis, which sent you down here, may have been part of the game."

"I fail to see what reason you have for this suspicion," remarked Mrs. Tressell.

"This is a queer country, mum; but the queerest thing I know about it is what happened to us last night. It just gets me for all I am worth to think that those scamps should have been on hand in that lonesome place, and in the night time, ready to snap us up when we struck the shore. Another pint, if you please, mum. When they hailed the boat they told us that if the men-folks would come ashore and throw up their hands they wouldn't be hurt. Why did they speak of men-folks unless they had women-folks in their thoughts? And the women-folks means you, mum. They must have known that you were there."

"That is quite likely, Mr. Siddals. The 'Search' is pretty well known along the river, and perhaps those soundrels saw her as she floated down, and got ready for an attempt to capture and rob her. But I see no reason to suppose that the job was put up, as you say, in advance of our appearance in this part of the river."

"I can't get it out of my head, mum, that it was you they meant to go for."

"Very well; I must take some risks. One thing is certain, that I can afford to miss no chance of finding my son. If he is here, and especially if he is sick, I must see him, and nothing shall stand in my way. If any man wants to back out, well and good. Those who stand by me will lose nothing by it."

Jesse Siddals returned to the roof of the ark, and he and Adam Stocker worked the sweeps, while Mike Rafferty managed the steering-oar, and Tip, proud of the possession of a repeating-rifle, stationed himself at the forward part of the craft, to look out for foes.

But no foes were encountered, and the "Search" had a quiet and uneventful passage up the bayou.

About two miles from the mouth, as the anonymous letter to Mrs. Tressell had stated, a large cypress swamp was passed. The tall and dark trees, heavily draped with Spanish moss, presented a weird and funereal appearance, and the land which the forest occupied was at that stage of the river nearly covered with water.

Beyond the cypress swamp the land was
somewhat higher, and a considerable portion of it was cleared, and had once been cultivated, but at the time of the ark's visit it was mostly overgrown with weeds and sedge-grass and bushes. About half a mile from the shore a dilapidated log-house was visible.

Mrs. Tressell was anxious to send out scouts at once to search for her son, but as night was coming on the others objected, and she consented to wait until morning.

The boat was moored against the low bank, and all retired to rest except Adam Stocker, who kept guard with his rifle.

Early the next morning Tip was in the kitchen, where Ganymede was starting the fire for breakfast.

The black boy was unusually quiet, and had such a serious and scared look on his face that Tip asked him what was the matter.

"Dis is a mighty skerry place, Mass' Tip," he replied. "I know dis place just as well as I wanter. Do ole home w'ot I runned away from w'en my mudder was gwine to roast me was nigh yar. I wish de missus would hurry an' git away from dis place. Please dror dat curtain, Mass' Tip. I can't b'ar to look out dar."

Tip began to believe that this voyage in the "Search" would be productive of some lively adventures; but his further reflections on that subject were interrupted by a call from Mrs. Tressell's cabin.

Mike Rafferty had found, fastened to the wood at the forward end of the ark, a letter addressed to Mrs. Tressell. She had opened and read it, and had called a council of war to consider it.

Adam Stocker declared that he had kept a careful watch through the night, without once closing his eyes, and that no person could have approached the boat near enough to leave such a missile; but it was there, however it got there.

The old lady, who had her full share of acuteness as well as of energy, said that it was written in a disguised hand; but that did not appear to be a point of any real importance.

It was in these words:

"MRS. ELIZA TRESSELL:
"If you wish to see your sick son, Martin Tressell, apply to Rose Michon, the Voodoo Queen, a mile up the old Woodville road, and you will learn where to find him."

There was no signature, and the writer was as much a mystery as the means by which the letter had reached the boat.

"I don't like the looks of it, mum," said Jesse Siddals. "If the man who wrote that was an honest man, why didn't he sign his name to it?"

"There is nothing in that," replied the old lady. "As the writer is probably a person with whom I am unacquainted, his name would be of no use to me. I must send a messenger to that woman, and who will go?"

"I will!" eagerly exclaimed Tip, excited at the prospect of an adventure.

"You will? Well, Tip, I don't know why you should not go, if you want to. You are big enough and smart enough to take care of yourself. But can you find the place?"

"I will take Ganymede to help me find it. He knows the country about here."

"He does? That is queer. He shall go with you, then. You may take a pistol if you choose, Tip. Tell the woman to come down to the boat, and that I will pay her well for her time."

Tip hastened to the kitchen, and explained to Ganymede what was required of him.

The cook was quite dismayed at being called upon for such a mission.

"You ortn't to do that, Mass' Tip," he protested. "You know how deadly skeered I am o' this place."

"Oh, there is nothing to be afraid of. Nobody will hurt you. I will take care of you."

"Specks I'll hab to take keer o' myself some, too. But I s'pose I'se got to go, an' that's no use waitin'."

When they were ashore and on the way the colored boy went forward briskly enough, though he was evidently keeping a sharp lookout for danger.

"If you are so afraid of this place, Gan, why did you come with me?" asked Tip.

"Oh, I'se bound to go wher'ever ole missus says, eben if it's to go an' git roasd. But I don't allow to git roasd. Mass' Tip. I'll show you de house, an' den I'll hide till you comes back."

"All right. I ain't afraid."

They easily found the "old Woodville road," though it was scarcely entitled any longer to be called a road. It led from what had once been a landing back into the country, but was so grown up with weeds and bushes that wagons would have difficulty in traversing it, if any should stray that way.

About a mile up this road they came in sight of a dilapidated frame house, and there Ganymede stopped.

"Dar's de house, Mass' Tip," said he. "You ken jess go right on, an' I'll hide yer in de bushes."

He hastened to conceal himself in a thicket at the right, and Tip, not a bit dismayed, trudged on until he reached the house.

In the palmy days "befo' de wah" it must have been the farm-house that controlled all the cultivated land in that vicinity; but there was no longer any cultivated land,
and there was nothing about the premises to suggest farming. It was, indeed, as dilapidated, gone-to-seed, shiftless and woebegone a tenement as could be imagined. The front porch had fallen in, the windows were stuffed with rags and old hats, and the only sign of life was a forlorn yellow dog, which set up a howl as Tip approached the door.

He knocked vigorously, but no one came to let him in.

At last a harsh and snarling voice hailed him from within.

"Come in, then! Why don't you come in, 'stead o' knockin' thar like a burned fool?"

He pushed open the door, and entered, finding himself in a large room whose slovenly appearance well suited the dilapidated house.

In one corner was a tumble-down bed. In the center was a rickety table on which were a greasy pack of cards and a battered coffee-pot. A slow fire was burning on the hearth, over which a pot was simmering full of something that gave out a strange and unpleasant odor.

Near the fire was seated a mulatto woman, neither young nor old, dressed in a faded calico of the Dolly Varden pattern, and in a corner was a man with his back to the door, who seemed to be figuring in a blank book.

An enormous black cat sat on its haunches near the woman, and on the other side of the fire-place was a large and ugly snake, lapping with its forked tongue in a basin of milk.

As soon as Tip saw the snake he jumped up on the only chair in the room that had four legs.

"What's the matter wid you?" snarled the woman.

"I don't like snakes," replied Tip.

"That shows how little sense yo' got," said she, as she rose and picked up the reptile. She resumed her seat, and the snake coiled up contentedly on her lap, while she smoothed and patted it.

Tip, who wanted to get away from the snake, hastened to deliver his message, saying that he had come from Mrs. Tressell, who was in a boat down yonder, and who had received a letter telling her to apply to Rose Michon, the Voodoo Queen, for news of her son, Martin Tressell.

As he said this, the man in the corner looked around quickly, and Tip was sure that he had seen that long black hair and that swarthy face before. Yes, he remembered the very spot in Memphis where he had seen that man.

"What does she want me to do?" snarled the woman.

"She wants you to come down to the boat, and she will pay you well for your time and trouble."

The woman sneered, and there was a wild, malevolent look in her face that made the lad shudder.

"Tell that white woman," said she, "that Rose Michon never stirs out of her tracks for any man or woman, rich or poor. If she wants to see me, she must come here."

Tip backed out of the door, glad to get away from that nightmare of a place; but he was followed by the man who had been seated in the corner, who laid a hand on his shoulder as he stepped outside.

"I say, young chap," said this individual, "what might your name be?"

"Beeswax," shortly replied Tip.

"It seems to me, Beeswax, that I've seen you somewhere before."

"Like enough. I've been there."

"I've a notion, Beeswax, that you are just a little bit too sharp."

"My name ain't Beeswax," said Tip, edging away.

"You told me it was Beeswax."

"I didn't. You asked me what my name might be, and it might be Beeswax, but it ain't."

By this time he was well out of the reach of his questioner, and he walked briskly away, with an air of perfect independence.

CHAPTER IX.

MARTIN TRESSELL'S TRAP.

When Tip reached the thicket, Ganymede crawled out and joined him.

"Golly, Mass' Tip," said the colored lad, "I'm mighty glad you got out o' dat place widout gittin' roostid."

"They didn't roast me, and they didn't eat me," replied Tip; "but I was worried a few."

Then he related his adventures, not forgetting the snake that was so much at home in the house.

"Dat's jess like my mudder," said Ganymede. "She was allus habbin' snakes an' skeery things about. She calls herself Rose Michon; but her sure 'nuff name is Phoebe Muffin. Ise mighty glad, Mass' Tip, dat you didn't git roostid."

"I ain't afraid of that. But it made me mad when she said that grandma must come and see her."

"Dar ain't no fun in dat, sho'; but ole missus 'll be mighty apt to do it."

Ganymede was right in his conjecture. As soon as Tip had reached the ark and told his story, Mrs. Tressell declared her intention of going to visit the Voodoo Queen.
"We must not be afraid of snakes, Tip," she said. "The snake you saw was a harmless one, no doubt, or the woman would not have kept it there. I see no danger, and I am bound to go wherever there is a chance of finding my son."

Jesse Siddals, the chronic objector, objected strongly to this determination, saying that the fact that Tip had seen at Rose Michon's house a man whom he had met at Memphis was a suspicious circumstance, indicating a put-up job.

"Don man was vat you call a bad sort too," said Adam, who remembered the Memphis encounter.

"You are too full of your suspicions, friend Siddals," she replied. "I am searching for my son, and must leave no means untried that may help me to find him."

She put on her hat, placed a revolver in her pocket, and sallied forth with Tip, after directing the others to remain and guard the boat.

All was silent at the old house occupied by the Voodoo Queen, except the doleful howl of the lean yellow dog.

"This looks like the last days of a played-out plantation," said Mrs. Tressell, as they approached the door.

Tip knocked at the door again, and again a harsh and snarling voice bade him enter.

He pushed the door open and they stepped into the slovenly, dirty room.

The pot had been removed from the fireplace and was simmering over a furnace in the middle of the floor, sending forth the same strange and unpleasant odor that had disgusted the lad in the morning.

A young alligator, stuffed, was on the dirty mantle, and about the walls were several hideous objects which Tip had not previously seen there.

The man who had been seated in a corner in the morning, with his back to the door, was not in the room, and Tip did not regret his absence. The mulatto woman was there, though, and coiled in her lap was the same ugly snake, and her hair was arranged more fantastically than before, and there was a yet wilder gleam in her wicked eyes.

"You are here, then," she said, as the old lady seated herself on a rickety chair. "If you had not come my charms would have brought you."

"It is enough that I am here," quietly replied Mrs. Tressell. "I received a note this morning saying that you can tell me where to find my son, Martin Tressell. If you will give me that information I will pay you well for it."

"I can show him to you," replied the priestess of the Voodoo rites.

"How's that? Is he here?"

"No; but I can show him to you, if you will pay for the sight."

The mulatto woman rose from her seat, placed the snake on some rats at the side of the fireplace, where it coiled up quietly, stepped to the furnace and threw a powder on the coals.

A dense smoke rose up, diffusing through the room a fragrance that overcame the unpleasant odor of the pot.

"What do you mean by that?" sharply asked Mrs. Tressell.

"I must call up Nyunga, and then I will show you Martin Tressell, just where he is and as he is."

"Bah!" exclaimed the fearless old lady. "I want none of your mummeries, do not believe in your witchcraft, and am not afraid of any charms you can work. If you know where my son is tell me and I will pay you. That is all I have to do with you."

Rose Michon darted a spiteful glance at Mrs. Tressell.

"You had better not laugh at me," she said. "I can do you more harm than you think."

"I am not laughing at you. I have come here on business, and have nothing to do with anything outside of the business that brought me here. Tell me where I am to find my son, and I will pay you for that."

"Go on, then, if you will. I wanted to show him to you as he is, and then you might have been satisfied; but you are too hard-headed. Go back down the road until you come in sight of the old log house that you can see from your boat. Then cross the old field to that house. You will find Martin Tressell there."

"Now I understand you. What shall I pay you for this?"

"Ten dollars," replied the woman, holding out her hand.

"I will give you five dollars now, and will send you more if I find that you have told me the truth. Come, Tip."

Mrs. Tressell walked to the door, followed by Tip, but had no sooner stepped outside than she was confronted by four men, who had evidently been lying in wait at the side of the house.

One of the four was the tall and swarthy man whom Tip had seen at Memphis, and had again met that morning.

At sight of this man the old lady uttered a cry; but one of his comrades threw a cloth over her head, and two others seized and held her.

Tip understood the trap at a glance, and perceived that flight was his only chance.

Turning quickly he saw that the back
Tip Tressell, the Floater.

Finding nothing in the shape of a stone the man picked up a heavy fragment of wood, and dropped it into the well.

It struck the water with a big splash, near the boy's head.

"He ain't thar," said the man who had thrown it. "If he went in thar, he's drown-
ad afore now. Come along, Dave."

Tip raised his head out of the water, and rejoiced in a long breath; but he waited twenty minutes or more before he climbed to the mouth of the well.

It was then near the end of twilight, and the darkness was falling rapidly.

Seeing nobody about, he crawled out of the bushes, and ran as fast as his dripping clothes would allow him to run to the thicket down the road.

CHAPTER X.

BILLY KEHOE DISCOMFITED.

"Martin! my son Martin!" was the ex-
clamtion that was stifled on Mrs. Tressell's lips as the cloth was thrown over her head.

She was so nearly smothered that it was with difficulty she could breathe. Much less could she speak, and she kept silence, held by two of the men, while two went in pursuit of Tip.

She heard their shouts and curses as they followed and searched for the boy, and she trembled with fear for what might happen to him.

After a while they returned, and her fears were not allayed by the report they made.

"I reckon that youngster has gone under," said one of them. "It seems like he jumped out of a window and into an old well, and he must ha' drowned that."

"We needn't worry about him," said the swarthy man. "We will be safely out of the way pretty soon. Come along, boys."

But they could not come just then.

Mrs. Tressell, stout and fearless as she was, had fainted when she heard of Tip's disaster, and was a dead weight on their hands.

Their leader uttered an angry oath as they lowered her to the ground, and called for water, and sent one of the men running up the road.

The old lady had hardly been brought to her senses when the man returned with a wagon drawn by two mules, and a led saddle horse.

Still scarcely conscious, she was lifted into the wagon, which was driven away, preceded by the leader of her captors on horseback.

Mrs. Tressell was held and supported by two of the men, while another drove the
team up the road until it reached an old
farm road, where it turned off to the left,
following the horseman.
Carefully the saddle horse and the mules
picked their way through the somewhat
swampy ground, down to the old log-house
that was visible from the arbor in the bayou.
Night had been coming on since they left
the house of the Voodoo Queen, and it was
dark when they got to the old log-house.
Mrs. Tressell had quite recovered her
senses, if not her strength, by this time. She
was assisted to alight from the wagon, and
was led into the house.
She found herself in a large room, unfur-
nished, unless a rude bench, and a few
blankets in one corner, might be called fur-
niture.
Three of her captors accompanied her into
this room, and one of them was the tall and
swarthy man who had acted as leader. As
the room was quite dark, he struck a match,
and lighted a wick that was floating in a
gourd cup full of grease.
Up to this time the old lady had not
spoken. The three separate shocks of her
aparite, of the recognition of her son, and
of the report of Tip’s death in the well, had
confused and almost stunned her, and she
did not attempt to struggle against the
destiny which was carrying her on to a fate
that she could not guess at.
But now she steadied herself against the
log wall of the room, and fixed her piercing
eyes upon the man who had just lighted the
grease lamp.
“Martin Tressell,” she said, solemnly and
impressively, “what does this mean?”
“It means business, old lady, and nothing
but business.”
“Have I sought for you all these years, to
be treated in this way? Have I been de-
ceived by a false report of your sickness, to
be led into a trap? Why have you brought
me here?”
“Don’t you worry about that. You will
find out soon enough. I mean business, I
tell you.”
“You had better be careful, Martin Tres-
sell. You are committing a crime, and one
crime leads to another.”
“It may, if I am worried. Look after
her, boys. I can’t stay here and listen to
that racket.”
Martin Tressell hurried out of the room,
and passed into another apartment. The
log-house was what is known as a double
house, with two rooms on the ground floor
separated by a wide and open passage, and
two rooms above.
In the room across the passage a man was
impatiently pacing the rough floor, frown-
ing and muttering to himself. It was Billy
Kehoe, the Memphis gambler.
He looked up quickly as Martin Tressell
entered, and forced a smile into his frowning
face.
“Well, Tressell, have you got her?” he
asked.
“Yes, she is here, safe enough.”
“What are you going to do with her? Do
you mean to keep her in this house?”
“No. I don’t want to keep her even to-
night, as it is too near that cursed flatboat.
But it is as dark as pitch, and I don’t believe
anybody will try to worry us just yet. But
a boy who was with her got away, if he
wasn’t killed; and anyhow they will be likely
to bring the country down on us to-morrow.
So I must slip her off into the swamp as soon
as there is light enough. What do you think,
Billy?—the boy was the same fellow I met
in Memphis—the one you stared at so, and
spoke of as having such a bright face.”
“That’s queer. How does the old lady
take it, Martin? Is she at all docile?”
“Not much. She is going to cut up rusty
and will give me all the trouble she can.
But I will bring her to terms before I get
through with her.”
“Of course, you must get her away from
here as soon as you can. I will go to the
swamp with you in the morning, Martin.”
Martin Tressell’s face changed, and the
look that came into it boded no good to his
companion.
“You will?” he replied, with a sneer. “I
guess not.”
“What do you mean by ‘guess not’?”
“I mean that you won’t do anything of the
sort. I am not going to give away the secret
of my place to anybody outside of my own
crowd, who know better than to betray me.”
“Am I not a partner in this business?”
“A sort of a partner. I told you that
when I brought the old lady to terms I would
pay you all I owe you, and give you a big
bonus besides. That is all you have to do
with the matter. You may go back to Mem-
phis, or go where you please, but you don’t
go with me. You were considerable of a
circumstance in Memphis, but down here you
don’t amount to a row of pins. I am the
boss here, and my word is law.”
“So you say; but I am going to the swamp
with you when you go.”
“You are just as much mistaken, Billy
Kehoe, as if you had cut off your toe for a
soft corn.”
Martin Tressell left the room. In each
part of the house he had been met by words
that worried him, and he objected to being
worried.
After ascertaining that his mother was well
guarded and cared for he wrapped himself in a blanket and laid down in a passage, with a rifle by his side.

He was as soon as the gray light of dawn was seen in the sky, and ordered the mules to be hitched to the wagon.

This was soon done, and Mrs. Tressell, who refused to enter the vehicle, was lifted in, silent but stubborn, her very silence portending a tough resistance to the plans of her lawless son.

Martin Tressell was about to mount his horse when Kehoe came out from the house.

"Can you make room for me in the wagon?" he asked, "or will I have to go afoot?"

"You don't go with this party, either in the wagon or afoot," replied Martin. "I told you last night that you couldn't do that."

"But I mean to go with you, all the same."

"I see that you want to make trouble, and that I can't allow."

As Martin spoke, he drew nearer to the man from Memphis.

Suddenly he seized him by the collar, and with a jerk and a dexterous trip threw him on the ground.

He spoke to one of his comrades, who came to his assistance, and the two bound the prostrate man's hands behind his back, and his feet at the ankles.

"Take him inside," ordered the leader, and he was carried into the house and deposited on the pile of blankets in the room that Mrs. Tressell had occupied.

"You will have to admit that I am the boss here," said Martin, surveying his helpless captive.

"I'll get even with you for this, you scoundrel!" exclaimed Kehoe, gritting his teeth.

"Get even with your grandmother! Take it as easy as you can, Billy. Some of us will turn you loose after a while, if nobody else comes along to do it."

Martin Tressell mounted his horse and rode away, followed by the wagon.

They went direct to the cypress swamp, reaching its somber shade just as dawn was beginning to break in the eastern sky.

The leader directed one of the men to drive off with the wagon and the saddle horse, and with the other three he proposed to penetrate the swamp.

Mrs. Tressell refused to stir a step; but this contingency had been provided against. With two stout poles and a blanket a stretcher was quickly made. On this the old lady was placed, and was carried by two men.

The son whom she had so long sought, and had found to her sorrow, led the way into the depths of the swamp.

CHAPTER XI.
FINDING AN UNCLE.

It was quite dark when Tip reached the flatboat, tired, wet, bruised, and disconsolate; but all the crew were watching and waiting for him, and they came forward to meet him.

"What's the matter, Tip?" asked Jesse Siddals. "What kept you so long? Why, boy, you are all wet. Where is Mrs. Tressell?"

"She's been carried off," sadly replied Tip.

"Carried off? What do you mean? Tell us all about it."

But the lad was nearly used up. He was taken into the boat, where he was supplied with dry clothes, and Ganymede gave him a cup of coffee, and he told his story by snatches.

"That is just what I was afraid of, and just what I warned the old lady against," said Siddals. "But she is so hard-headed that she won't take advice. It is plain enough now that the job was put up in Memphis, and I reckon that the son she has been lookin' for, was the man who had put it up."

"That tall man with the dark face and black hair was the boss of the gang," remarked Tip. "He was the same man that I saw there in the morning, and the same man that Adam and I met in Memphis. I wonder if he is my dad?"

"It is quite likely that he is, Tip, and you have no cause to be proud of him."

"I don't seem to be fretting after him; but I am badly worried about grandma."

What should be done to get Mrs. Tressell out of the trap into which she had fallen, was the immediate question at issue, and it puzzled the wits of the crew of the "Search."

It was agreed that nothing could be accomplished that night, as it was so dark that they could hardly see their hands before them, and they could only discuss plans of action for the morning.

Tip could give no idea of the manner in which the old lady had been carried away, or of the direction which her captors had taken, as he was at the bottom of the well when they left the house.

"But that yellow woman knows," said he, "and we must make her tell us."

This suited Jesse Siddals exactly, and he proposed that they should "string up" Rose Michon until they extorted a confession from her.
“No, no!” exclaimed Ganymede. “Yo’ mustn’ do dat. She’s my mudder. She was gwine to roast me, but she’s my mudder. Sides dat, she’s got de debbil to help her.”

Tip declared that he had no fear of her snakes and witch stuff, but was of the opinion that the truth could be got out of her without resorting to violence.

“Dere was a besser way as dot,” observed Adam Stocker, who had been ruminating in silence. “You see dot house o’fer dere? You don’t see it now; aber you see it ven day makes. Dose schoundrels belong by dot house, I bets you. Ven dey takes der long vay ’round, ve takes der short vay across, oond ve goes by dot house ven it makes day.”

“That’s the ticket for soup!” shouted Mike Rafferty. “We will cut across lots, and shtorm the fort, and it’ll be quare if we don’t ketch somethin’.”

Adam Stocker’s plan was finally approved of, and the ark prepared to make an early start in the search for Mrs. Tressell.

At daybreak the next morning they had their breakfast, and Ganymede put up a cold lunch for each of them. He was persuaded to remain and watch the boat, but with difficulty, as he had serious fears that the Voodoo Queen might find him and roast him.

The others went ashore and struck out for the old log-house, armed with three rifles and a pistol, the last named weapon forming the armament of Mike Rafferty.

“We don’t seem to have any notion how many of the scamps there are in that gang,” observed Jesse Siddals. “Tip says there were only four who sprung the trap on the old lady, but it was considerable of a crowd that tackled us up the river, and I reckon these are some of the same. But we must chance them, and play our hand for all it is worth.”

“Dot vos so,” sententiously remarked Adam Stocker. “Aber ve finds dem first.”

When they came near to the log-house Siddals took command of the party, and under his directions they separated and approached the building on each of its four sides, advancing skirmisher fashion and concealing their movements as well as they could.

Thus they got within a few rods of the house without being hailed or fired upon.

Tip was the first to storm the fort.

Judging that if there were any enemies in the house they would have made their presence known, he made a rush and reached the open hall, and his example was quickly followed by the others.

They found the house deserted, with the exception of one room, in which a bound and helpless man was seated on a pile of blankets.

This was something unexpected and altogether surprising, and they hastened to untie him and ask him who he was and how he came there.

When he was loose he broke out into such a furious storm of oaths and denunciations of Martin Tressell that it was some time before he became calm enough to make a statement of his case.

“My name is Kehoe, and I belong in Memphis,” he said.

“Dot was so,” observed Adam. “Tip, ve recombers dot man. Vot makes you here, hey?”

“That infernal scoundrel, Martin Tressell, stole my wife. She ran away with him, and I came down here to look for her. He caught me, and tied me up as you found me, and left me here to starve.”

The man’s story might be true. The fact that he was found tied gave it at least a color of truth. But before he could be questioned any further, all were startled by a shout from Mike Rafferty, who was outside.

“Here comes the inimy! Bring out the guns, b’yes! Right-shoulder shift! Forrud, by file left! Give ’em fits!”

All ran out, and saw two men riding across the old field toward the house. They were well mounted, and appeared to be peacefully inclined, though each of them carried a rifle.

“We can take care of them easy enough, whoever they are,” said Siddals. “Stop your howlin’, Mike, and let them come on.”

The two strangers hesitated, and seemed to be in doubt as to what they should do. But the friendly gestures of Jesse Siddals, and the absence of all warlike demonstrations, caused them to ride warily on, until they reached the group at the house.

One of them, who was dark-skinned and coarsely dressed, was evidently a native of the region and a resident. The other, a young man who wore a business suit and a Derby hat, was as evidently more at home in the city than in the country.

He was the spokesman of the strangers, and addressed himself to Jesse Siddals.

“I see a flatboat down yonder,” said he. “Do any of you happen to belong to it?”

“All of us but one,” replied Siddals.

“I am glad to meet you, then. If that boat is called the ‘Search,’ I am looking for its owner, Mrs. Eliza Tressell.”

“That is just what we are lookin’ for, sir. The old lady has been gobbled up and carried off by a gang of scoundrels.”

“Indeed! That is precisely what I had feared, and I came here to try to prevent it.”

“You are a leetle bit too late, sir. But light down and come in, and let us talk the matter over.”
The two strangers hitched their horses, and all entered the house, including Billy Rehoe.

"My name is George Aglar, and I live in Memphis," said the young gentleman. "I am a sort of left-handed relative of Mrs. Tressell's. In fact, my sister married her son; but the less said of that the better."

Tip opened his eyes wide, and Billy Rehoe looked closely at the young man.

"I happened to hear in Memphis," he said, "of a plot to capture Mrs. Tressell, which was to be carried into effect at Bayou Tunison, and I thought it my duty to come down here and try to defeat it. But I grieve to learn that I am too late. Please tell me when and how she was taken away."

"You ain't too late to be of use," said Jesse Siddals, and he proceeded to tell what had happened to the ark until she reached her moorings in Bayou Tunison.

Then Tip took up the story.

"Grandma sent me—" he began.

"What do you mean by 'grandma'?" quickly asked George Aglar. "Who is your grandma?"

"Why, Mrs. Tressell. At least, she says she is."

"Is it possible that you are Martin Tressell's son?"

"Grandma says so."

"Did you live up the Ohio? Did you ship on a flatboat to go south?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, Martin Tressell told me that you were drowned. He said that he had that news from one of the crew of the flatboat."

"I reckon he believed it. I slipped overboard at night, and swam ashore; but I didn't get drowned."

"Thank God! What glorious news this will be for my sister! Your mother is living, my boy, and I am your uncle George!"

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CHAPTER XII.

AT THE SWAMP ISLAND.

The route which Mrs. Tressell's captors followed into the swamp was a very difficult one, and it would have been impossible to traverse it at night, as in places there was no path at all, and the men who carried the stretcher had no little difficulty in making their way, stepping from hummock to hummock, or from one bunch of cypress "knees" to another.

The swampy forest was gloomy in the extreme, the tall and dark cypresses standing closely together, heavily clothed with hanging moss, and the black and stagnant water spread out on each side of the path. Water snakes coursed here and there, moccasin snakes were stretched on logs and hummocks, and the croaking of frogs and the harsh cries of waterfowl sounded strange and weird enough.

There was no chance for the old lady to escape, and she made no attempt to do so, but lay quietly on the stretcher, giving no heed to the oaths and grumbling of the men who were carrying her. She was being taken into the swamp against her will, and would not move a finger to help her captors to gain their ends.

At last they reached their destination, an island in the midst of the swamp, about an acre in extent.

Here were two rude log-houses, and a tent made of blankets, shaded and partly concealed by the trees.

In an open space a bright fire was burning, and over it was a pot, hanging from a cross-piece supported by two crotched poles.

When the stretcher was set down, Mrs. Tressell arose and walked to the fire to warm herself, not that the weather was at all cold, but because the damp air of the swamp had affected her unpleasantly.

As she did so she came face to face with a woman who was approaching the fire with an armful of wood.

This was not an ill-looking woman. In fact, it was easy to see that she could once have boasted of being pretty. But her face then had what may be called a hard look, apart from the tan which had been caused by exposure to the weather, and which was not sufficient to conceal the sallow and unhealthy look of her skin.

Mrs. Tressell looked inquiringly at this woman, who stared at her in turn; but neither of them spoke.

Martin Tressell had been giving directions to two of the men who came with him, and they now stepped up to the old lady, took her by the arm, and led her away to one of the log-houses.

She was ushered into a small room, which was roughly and scantily furnished. There was a rude bed, a table made of a split log, and some blocks for seats.

Breakfast was soon brought in to her, and a good breakfast it was. She ate it with relish, and felt stronger to meet the trials that awaited her.

Shortly after she had finished her breakfast Martin Tressell came in, lighted a pipe, and seated himself on one of the blocks.

"Now, old lady," said he, "we will proceed to business."

She looked at him sorrowfully and severely.

"Is this my son?" she asked. "Is this the boy I loved so well, and hoped would grow up to be my pride and joy?"

"Yes, I am your son, and you needn't ge
Tip Tressell, the Floater.

to preaching about it. I am the son you
tried to treat as a baby or a girl when he was
a man grown. No man of spirit could stand
that sort of thing, and I quit off.

"Martin, I was only acting for your good,
not to please myself. I saw that you had a
passion for gambling—it was born in you—
and I wanted to save you from the fate of
your father."

"The fate of my father?" he replied, with
a sneer. "I know something about that my-
self. My father was the best poker-player in
Mississippi. He followed the game as a
business, and made a fortune at it. You in-
duced him to leave you all his money, when it
should have been left to me, and now I
mean to come in for my share."

"If that is your opinion, Martin, you
know nothing about the matter. You have
been wrongly informed. Your father had
some property when I married him, but lost it
all by gambling, and my money would have
been swept away if I had not kept it
out of his reach. All the property I have is
mine in my own right. It is true that his
will was in my favor, but he had nothing
left to will."

"That won't do, old lady. I don't like to
dispute your word, but that won't go down
at all. My father would never have made a
will if he had had no property. He wasn't
that kind of a man. You have got it all, and
I mean to have my share, and the big-
gest share at that. You will have to make
me sure of two-thirds of it before you leave
this place."

"My son, I have sought you for years,
hoping to help you to lead a better life. At
Memphis I was informed that you were sick
down here, and I came at once to aid you.
Is it possible that you sent me that false
report for the base purpose which you now
express?"

"Yes, I did, and the little game has work-
ed well, too."

"You are a worse man than I had feared
you were. You have sunk very low, Martin
Tressell."

"You are right, old lady. I am a gam-
bler, and I drink hard, and I have been a
horse-thief. There are men here in Louisi-
a who would string me up to the nearest
tree if they could catch me. So you see that
I am a desperate man, and that I mean busi-
ness. If I have sunk low, I must have
money to rise on."

"Money to squander. You shall have
none of mine while you continue your pres-
cent courses. My will is made, and I defy
you to touch any of my property."

"We will see about that."

"Martin Tressell," said the old lady, as
she pointed her forefinger at him, "do you
know that you killed your son yesterday?"

"My son? What son?"

"Tipton Tressell, your own son—the boy
you left with a man up the Ohio. He died
shipped on a flatboat, and jumped overboard
in the Mississippi, and I found him floating
in the river. He was with me yesterday,
and one of your rascals said that he had
jumped into a well and drowned. If that is
the case, his blood is on your head."

"I don't feel it there," rudely replied
Martin, "and I don't believe a word you
say. That boy was drowned some time ago.
Anyhow, you don't leave this place until
you come to my terms."

He rose from his seat, and went to the
door.

"Can I walk out?" she asked. "I need
exercise."

"Yes, if you choose. I am not afraid of
your getting away from this island."

She laid down on the bed, to take the rest
that she needed quite as much as she needed
exercise, and it was not until she had eaten
her dinner that she sallied out to walk.

The fire was out, and there were but a few
men visible on the swamp island, who took
no notice of her.

She peered into the other log-cabin, and
there she saw two men lying on the floor,
and a third was applying oil and flour to
their faces and hands.

"Ah!" she muttered, "now I know who
it was that attacked the 'Search' up the
river, and those are victims of the hot water
engine."

She started to circumnavigate the island,
which was an easy thing to do, and under a
thick clump of bushes she suddenly came upon
the woman whom she had met at the
fire.

The woman was seated on the turf, lean-
ing her head on her hand, and seemed to be
meditating sorrowfully. She was startled
by Mrs. Tressell's approach, and looked up
quickly. The old lady, with a kindly smile,
took a seat on the grass at her side.

"Are you his mother?" she asked.

"I am the mother of Martin Tressell."

"I thought so. He said he was going to
bring you here. I reckon he means to give
you a hard time."

"I suppose he will try to. He is a bad
man. Who are you?"

"Who am I?" replied the woman, forcing
a laugh. "I have had so many names that I
scarcely know what to call myself now.
My name was Nancy Rains before I married
a man up the Ohio. I got tired of livin' with
him—it was so lonesome there—and I
wanted to see somethin' of the world. So I
Tip Tressell, the Floater.

left him, and after a time I got as far down as Memphis, where I married another man."

"While your first husband was living?"

"What of that? He didn't know, and I had left him for good. I got on pretty well with Billy Kehoe until Martin Tressell came along—he was called Sam Martin up there. I fell in love with him, and he coaxed me off and brought me down here, and I've been here a long time. Don't you think I'm a devil?"

"I think you have been a very reckless woman, and an unhappy one, I'm afraid. So you are now Mrs. Tressell?"

"No, not that. He never married me. You may call me Nancy, if you choose."

"Are you fond of my son, Nancy?"

"Sometimes I am, and sometimes I hate him. Just now I hate him like p'is'n. He knocked me down and kicked me this morning."

"He is a terrible man, Nancy. Do you know that yesterday he caused the death of his son?"

"His son? Who's that?"

"His own son, Tipton Tressell?"

"Not little Tip, who was raised up the Ohio with Abe Trotter? Did he have black hair and eyes and a queer little mole on his right cheek—a regular beauty spot?"

"Yes."

"That's little Tip, Martin Tressell's son."

"What do you know about him, Nancy?"

"Why, I was Abe Trotter's wife. Martin Tressell left Tip with us when he was a bit of a thing, and I would have run away from Abe Trotter sooner than I did if I hadn't hated to leave the young one. Is he dead, poor Tip?"

Mrs. Tressell told the story of her visit to the Voodoo Queen and her capture there, and Nancy Trotter was greatly moved by the recital.

"Do you want to stay here with my son, Nancy?" asked the old lady.

"Do I want to be a drudge and a slave, to be cussed and kicked about? No, you bet don't!"

"You must know this country well, and the ins and outs of this swamp. If you will help me to get away from here I will take you up the river, and will help you to lead a better and pleasanter life. I will reward you well for all you do for me."

Nancy hesitated a moment. Then she grasped the old lady's hand.

"I'll do it!" she exclaimed.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BATTLE IN A SWAMP.

When Tim had discovered his Uncle George Aglar, he took a long look at him, and scratched his head vigorously, to make sure that he was not dreaming.

Then he recommended his story, and brought it down to the capture of the log-house.

"I reckon that man yonder can give us the rest of the yarn, as far as anybody here knows it," remarked Jesse Siddis, pointing to Billy Kehoe.

"I have no doubt that he can," said Aglar.

"I have seen him before this. You remember me, I suppose, Mr. Kehoe?"

"I believe I met you in Memphis. Well, gentlemen, I will give you the whole thing, fair and square, as far as I know anything about it; but that isn't very far. Martin Tressell ran away with my wife, and I came down here to look her up. He caught me, and tied me and left me here, as you found me. As for his carrying off Mrs. Tressell, that is a scheme which I had nothing in the world to do with."

"Stop right there, Billy Kehoe!" said George Aglar. "That won't do at all. I happen to know that the plot for her capture was formed in your rooms. Martin Tressell invented it, and you assented to it. You were to furnish him with money to carry it out, and he promised that in the event of success he would pay you all he owed you and give you a bonus."

Billy Kehoe stared at the young gentleman, and there could be no doubt that his amazement was genuine.

"How in —- did you find that out?" he asked.

"It was my business to look after Martin Tressell, as you know, and that plot is what brought me here. You had better tell us the truth, plainly and fully."

"You have got me there, Mr. Aglar, for a fact; but that was all I had to do with the job. I meant to tell you all I knew, outside of that point. My real object was to get even with Tressell for stealing my wife, and that is what brought me here. Martin Tressell and three other men came here last evening, in a wagon, bringing the old lady. They stopped here last night, and this morning early they took her into the swamp. I wanted to go with them; but I suppose Tressell guessed what I was after, and he swore I should not. When I started to go in spite of him, they piled on me, and tied me, and left me here. That, gentlemen, is as square as a die, and is all I know about the matter, except that they went off in a wagon, and we ought to be able to track them."

"It seems so," said Aglar. "Well, Billy Kehoe, how do you feel toward Martin Tressell now?"

"I hate him like a rattlesnake, and I wish I had him tied to a tree, so that I could shoot him full of lead."

"We are not quite so savage as that; but we must find him. Are you willing to help us?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Can we trust you?"

"You can bet on me, gentlemen, as you would on a straight flush."

"Are you armed?"

"They left me my revolver."

"All right. We will give you a chance to get even. Now, my friends, the day is advancing, and we have no time to lose. We must go into
that swamp, and strike the scoundrels on their own ground. I will warrant that my guide, Charley Beale, can follow their trail.”

The wagon tracks were easy enough to follow over the soft ground, and the party soon reached the edge of the swamp.

There the marks of the wagon turned, and pointed in a southerly direction; but it was plain, from the tracks of the horses and men, that Martin Tressell’s people had stopped there for some time, and it was easy to conjecture that the team had been sent away, while the party had entered the swamp.

Charley Beale studied the track, and soon found the trail that led into the swamp.

“Come on, fellers!” he ordered. “If we can’t follow a trail that a woman has gone on, we had better go home and soak our heads.”

He started in, and the others followed.

The party then numbered five men and two boys, five of them armed with rifles, and they considered themselves quite a formidable force.

They had got well into the forest, but had not yet reached the swamp, when a word from Mike Rafferty, who was in the rear, brought them to a halt.

“Hould on, b’yeast! There’s a chap comin’ down the trail!”

“Hide, every one of you!” ordered Jesse Siddals. “If it’s one of the gang we must git him.”

Instantly they scattered, and took cover under bushes and at the trunks of trees, the tall lumberman concealing himself behind a big cypress that grew at the side of the trail.

As Siddals conjectured, the man who was approaching them was the one who had been sent away with the wagon, and who was then returning to his comrades.

He came on briskly, unconscious of danger, whistling as he walked, and turned into the path that led to the swamp.

As he passed the big cypress, Siddals quietly stepped out, seized him by the collar, and with a jerk threw him backward on the ground.

He was disarmed of his revolver, and was stood up on his feet, while the others came out and gathered around him.

“Let me have him,” said Charley Beale. “I know the rascal. Look here, you infernal horse-thief! We know who you are, and what you’re goin’ at. We’re goin’ thar, too, and you’ve got to show us the way. Lead on, now, and if you try to cut and run, or to swindle us in any way, I will blow a hole through you!”

The guide’s determined tone and cocked revolver left the fellow no choice. He turned without a word and led the way into the swamp, closely followed by Beale.

The trail was a blind and difficult one; but it was clear that the man in the lead knew it well enough. Occasionally, when there seemed to be no longer a path, Beale suspected that the forced guide was leading the party astray; but, when he was halted and confronted with a leveled pistol, he protested his good faith so earnestly that he was allowed to proceed.

As they proceeded, the funereal darkness of the dense forest, the black water stretching out under the overhanging trees, and the numerous forms of reptile life that pervaded the swamp, were disagreeably strange to those who had never before witnessed such a scene, and were almost terrifying to Mike Rafferty.

“Howly St. Patrick!” groaned the Irish lad.

“Sure ye was dead an’ buried afore iver this bloody country was made, and the divil got hold av it from the start. Och! wirra, wirra! I wish I’d gone to be a saint in glory afore I stuck me fut in it at all at all!”

“Hush your howling, and come on!” ordered Jesse Siddals. “There’s nothin’ here that’ll hurt you if you mind your footin’ and keep your eyes peeled.”

Finally the forced guide stopped suddenly, and pointed ahead.

“There’s the island,” he said, almost in a whisper.

The men behind him could plainly see a piece of ground considerably higher than the swamp, and covered with trees and bushes of a different character from the usual swamp growth.

“Tell him to go on,” ordered Jesse Siddals, and Charley Beale leveled his revolver and repeated the order.

“I can’t do that,” protested the man. “They will shoot me the first one. Please don’t make me do that!”

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when a rifle cracked on the island, and a bullet struck him in the breast. He fell backward on the narrow path, and rolled over into the water.

“Scatter!” shouted Siddals, and they did scatter with amazing suddenness.

The leader and Charley Beale jumped upon hummocks, and sheltered themselves behind cypress trunks. Tip caught the low branch of a live oak, and swung himself up into the tree, and his example was followed by George Agiar. Adam Stocker, after floundering in a bog, found a refuge at the foot of the same tree. Billy Kahoe lay flat on the path, and Mike Rafferty stepped quickly to the rear.

Shouts were heard on the island; but the man who fired the fatal shot was the only one who had yet seen the advancing party, and there was no further demonstration from that quarter until their assailants had got into cover.

Tip brought his rifle to his shoulder as soon as he had planted himself securely in a fork of the live oak, and looked for a victim.

He soon found one, and took a deliberate aim.

His rifle cracked, and a yell followed the report.

Then there was close and rapid firing on both sides.

The defenders of the island hurried to the threatened point, and from the cover of logs and trees endeavored to pick off their enemies who were scattered about the swamp.

Thus each side was well protected, and the contest became a game of marksmanship. Whenever a head or an arm was exposed a bullet whizzed toward it, and whenever a flash was seen it was at once fired at.

After nearly an hour of this exercise no casualties worth mentioning had been sustained by Siddals’s party, and it was impossible for them to judge how much injury they had inflicted upon their foes.

They judged that there were but few of the marauders on the island, from the weakness of their fire; but the trouble was to get at them.
Advancing on the path in single file was out of the question, and it seemed to be impossible to attack them by crossing the swamp.

Jesse Siddals made the attempt, leaping from hummock to hummock and from tree to tree; but he slipped into the marsh, and had great difficulty in extricating himself. Before he regained his shelter he received a severe wound in the arm.

Then the fire from the island slackened, as if its defenders had come to the conclusion that they were wasting ammunition.

Siddals passed the word to retire out of range, keeping in cover as much as possible, and set the example, which was speedily followed by the others.

A few shots hastened their steps; but they were soon out of the reach of bullets, and safe on a dry spot which Mike Rafferty had occupied during the engagement.

The leader's arm was dressed as well as it could be, and George Aglar asked him the reason of the order to retreat.

"We can't do anythin' more here to-day," he replied, "'Night is comin' on, and we must get out of this."

"That's so," said Charley Beale. "I wouldn't be here after dark for any money. All hell's awake in this swamp when night comes."

"I don't like to leave that poor devil who was shot in front of us," remarked Aglar.

"Why, he's dead enough," replied Siddals.

"Yes, but we ought to bring him away and bury him."

"Not if we know ourselves, said Beale. "The dirty horse-thief has got as good a burial as he deserves, and he had an easier death than he ought to have expected. It won't do for honest live men to risk their skins for a dead rascal."

So the dead rascal was left in the swamp, and the honest live men picked their way out of it.

CHAPTER XIV.

ESCAPE AND PURSUIT.

MRS. TRESSELL was rejoiced when her companion uttered the welcome words "I will!"

She had already half believed that she was safe, that she would escape from the clutches of her son.

"What shall we do?" she asked.

"I know a way out of this swamp," replied Nancy Trotter. "But it is a hard road to travel, and we may have to hide out over night. You had better go back to the house, or loot about the island, so that Martin shan't suspect. I will go and get ready something for us to eat on the way, as we can't afford to go hungry. Come back here in about half an hour and we will start when I see a good chance."

Nancy walked back to the camp, as the little settlement in the center of the island was called, and went direct to the tent which she then inhabited.

There she found Martin Tressell, and found him in an ill-humor.

"Where have you been?" he demanded.

"Just loafing about," she answered.

"You musn't loaf about too much, as you have work to do. Who is the boss here, you or I?"

"I suppose you are," she sullenly replied.

"You suppose so? Don't you know yet?" He emphasized this question by a blow in her face with the flat of his hand, which nearly knocked the woman down.

"Give in, Martin," she said, with a hysterical laugh. "You are the boss."

"See that you remember that."

"Say, Martin, mayn't I have a little of your whisky?"

"Whisky! What do you want of whisky?"

"To take my quinine with."

"Yes. As you are docile now, you may take the bottle in there and fill it from my cask. But if you ever touch a drop without asking me, you will be sorry for it."

As she turned to go into the tent, he stopped her.

"Nancy, have you seen the old lady?" he asked.

"I suppose it was her that I saw walking about a bit ago."

"She is getting to be an old woman. Do you think she can stand it to stay in this swamp?"

"I don't believe she will stay here long," replied Nancy.

"I reckon I had better hurry up things."

He walked away, and Nancy Trotter entered the tent, where she got the liquor she had asked for, and placed the bottle in her bosom.

Then she cut some bread and meat, which she put in the pocket of her dress, and sauntered off as if with no definite object.

Mrs. Tressell had walked back to the log-house, but the place gave her the horrors and she did not enter it.

She peered in at the other log-cabin, looking closely at the scalded men on the floor, and then wandered aimlessly about the island.

She saw her son walking away from Nancy's tent, but she did not care to meet him, and he was not yet ready to "hurry up things."

When the allotted half hour was up, she circled around until she reached the clump of bushes where she was to meet Nancy.

She found her new friend waiting for her there, and learned that she had brought, besides the promised provisions, two heavy blankets, which she had concealed under her clothing.

"I saw Martin, and he hit me again," she said. "But he won't be likely to do it any more."

"He is a brute, Nancy. I hate to say it of my own son; but he is the meanest kind of a brute."

"When can we start?"

"Pretty soon, I hope. Do you feel strong enough for a real rough tramp over the worst kind of a soft and slippery track?"

"I feel strong enough to do anything but stay here—anything that will take me away from this place and out of this swamp."

"I will hide these things, then, and will look around a bit to see if anybody is watching us. Hark! What's that?"

It was the report of a rifle, sounding from another part of the island, and was followed by shouts and other noises that spoke of great excitement.

The solitary report was soon succeeded by other shots, and then there was rapid and continuous firing.
"It's a fight!" exclaimed Nancy. "It can't be that Martin's men have got into a quarrel."

"It must be my friends who are attacking the island," said Mrs. Tressell. "Perhaps, Nancy, Tip is not dead."

"I hope not. Dear little Tip!"

"Humph! He is not so very little. If he is alive, you may be sure that one of those rifles is his. He was smart enough to get away, and how else could the people on my boat have found out so soon what had happened to me and where I had been taken to? Nancy, Tip must be alive."

"Well, Mrs. Tressell, while the men are busy over there we have a good chance to get away without being seen. Come, let's go!"

"Not yet. My friends may win the fight and take the island, and then they will come and help us."

"Don't you bet a cent on that. They can't set foot on this island, whoever they are. It has been tried by bigger crowds than they've got. Come, let's start while we can!"

Mrs. Tressell was unwilling then to leave the island, but yielded to the arguments and persuasions of Nancy, who led the way upon a narrow path that started out from that point.

This path was nearly similar to that by which Mrs. Tressell had been brought to the island, though it was considerably longer and more circuitous, and Nancy assured her companion that it issued from the swamp by the side at which she had entered it.

Their progress was slow enough, but soon the dense and dark masses of trees shut the island from their view. The firing continued, but gradually weakened, and finally ceased altogether.

"Perhaps my friends have won the fight and taken the island," said Mrs. Tressell."

"Not a bit of it," replied Nancy. "That don't lie in their boots, I tell you. More likely they have got tired and quit the job."

"Then the drooping shots told of the end of the engagement."

"Yes, that's just the way of it, and I'll bet on it," said Nancy. "Now we must get on as fast as we can, as I am afraid that Martin will miss us and come hot foot on our trail!"

The old lady did her best, and stood up to the work bravely; but the somber gloom of the cypress forest, and the other horrors of the swamp, added to the difficulties of the narrow and uncertain pathway, were too much for her physical strength.

Her will kept her up when her bodily endurance was almost at an end, and she tottered on, holding Nancy Trotter's hand, until she was scarcely able to put one foot before another.

She was on the verge of fainting, when her companion revived her with a drink of the liquor which she had begged from Martin Tressell.

"Try to hold up just a few minutes longer," urged Nancy. "Only a little bit further, and we will reach a dry spot where we can pass the night. I thought of that before we left the island, as I didn't believe that you could go through without resting, even if we should have daylight enough to reach the main land."

Indeed, the darkness of the cypress forest was increasing, as night was coming on rapidly and it was not very easily that they could see their way when they reached the "dry spot" of which Nancy had spoken. It was a little oasis in the desert of swamp, so thickly covered with trees and bushes as to be almost impenetrable.

Into this jungle Nancy pushed her way, dragging the old lady after her, until they found an open spot where they could sit down.

Then she made Mrs. Tressell taste the liquor and eat some bread and meat, not forgetting to do the same herself.

"I wish I dared to light a fire," she said; "but I don't, as I am every minute afraid that Martin Tressell is on our track. Look! What's that?"

A light was moving rapidly toward them, across the swamp, from the direction of the island.

"Perhaps it is a Will-o'-the-wisp," suggested Mrs. Tressell."

"Will-o'-nothin'! It is Martin Tressell with a lantern. Wait a bit. Yes, I am sure now. It is a man, and of course it is Martin. He may look in here, and we must hide close. Come with me."

Across a corner of the little island a large tree had fallen, and behind this the two women concealed themselves, creeping close to the trunk, and preserving absolute silence.

After awhile they heard a trampling among the bushes, and saw the light of a lantern. They also recognized the voice of Martin Tressell and his favorite oaths.

"They ain't here," he said at last. "If they have gone on I will be sure to overhaul them. It would be a fine joke on me if they haven't left the island."

Nancy watched the lantern until it was out of sight, and then the two women wrapped themselves in their blankets, and slept behind the fallen tree until daybreak.

After breaking their fast they set out again.

"I suppose he has given us up and gone back," said Nancy. "Anyhow, we must risk it."

After a toilsome tramp they reached the firm land, and rejoiced that they were clear of the swamp.

"Thank God that we are safe at last!" exclaimed the old lady.

She heard a low laugh near her, looked around, and found herself face to face with Martin Tressell.

CHAPTER XV.

BILLY KEHOE'S REVENGE.

It was nearly dark when Jesse Siddals and his party got out the swamp, and they were all pretty much dissatisfied with the result of their endeavors.

"What is going to be the next move?" asked George Agar.

"We must camp out here in the old field tonight," replied Siddals. "There ain't any snakes about here except water moccasins, and they won't be likely to come out of the swamp to bother us."

"But what shall we do in the morning?"

"In the morning, if you folks agree to it, we
Tip Tressell, the Floater.

will go into the swamp and have another shy at those scoundrels. We know where they are now, and can find some way to get at them. I can’t use my left arm, but I can manage a rifle well enough with my right hand and shoulder.”

The leader’s arm was dressed and put in a sling, and then the party, after doing justice to a portion of the provisions that Ganymede had prepared for them, laid down in the old field to sleep, with the exception of a guard at the camp, and a picket down the path at the edge of the camp.

All were awake at an early hour in the morning; but Tip was ahead of the rest.

He had taken his rifle and gone on a scout, skirting the edge of the forest in a southerly direction, hoping to find some other route by which they could cross the swamp and reach the island.

He returned while the others were eating their breakfast, and had a strange and startling story to tell.

About half a mile from their camp he had seen Martin Tressell—if the tall and dark man whom he had met before was Martin Tressell; and of that there seemed to be no doubt.

Tip had come upon him unawares, and would have been discovered by him if he had not dodged out of sight.

Martin Tressell was standing where there was a sort of break in the timber, and seemed to be watching for something or waiting for somebody.

Of course the lad did not care to “tackle” him; so he hastened back to his companions and reported what he had seen.

The camp was at once broken up, and all marched away with Tip to hunt the chief of the marauders. If they could capture him, they might count upon effecting the release of Mrs. Tressell.

Silently and cautiously they followed Tip, until he motioned to them to halt, as they were near the break in the timber of which he had spoken.

Charley Beale, who was supposed to be better acquainted with the nature of the ground than the others, was sent on to reconnoiter, and he moved through the forest as quietly as a ghost, keeping himself carefully covered, until he came within view of the spot which Tip had described.

He returned in the same style.

“That’s more’n we bargained for,” he reported—“a man and two women.”

Jesse Siddals took command of the party, and led them around under cover of the trees until they reached the break in the timber of which Tip had spoken.

Then they advanced cautiously until they came in sight of the scene which Beale had already witnessed.

Mrs. Tressell lay on the ground, apparently in a faint, with her head in the lap of another woman, and Martin was bending over her.

At a signal from their leader the five riflemen covered Martin Tressell with their loaded weapons.

He heard the rustling of the leaves and the clicking of the locks, and rose quickly.

As he rose he drew a revolver.

“Drop that pistol, and throw up your hands!” ordered Siddals. “You see that we’ve got the dead wood on you.”

There could be no question of that. One man with a revolver could not think of contending against five men with rifles, and Martin Tressell saw that his game was up.

His revolver fell to the ground, and his hands were raised above his head.

Charley Beale stepped forward and tied his hands behind his back, and the crew of the “Search” went to the assistance of Mrs. Tressell, who looked like a dead woman.

Nancy Trotter gave them her whisky bottle, and the old lady’s face and hands were rubbed with the strong stimulant, and a few drops were forced into her mouth. Gradually she revived, and after a while was able to sit up.

“What does this mean?” she asked. “Adam Stocker, is that you! And you, too, Siddals? Why, Tip is really alive. Thank goodness for that!”

“Is that little Tip?” exclaimed Nancy. “Yes, it is. I know him by his hair and eyes, and by that funny little mole on his cheek. Yes, that is Martin Tressell’s son, that was left with us when he was such a little chap.”

“You see, Martin, that you did not cause the death of your son,” said the old lady. “You ought at least to be thankful for that.”

“I see nothing to be thankful for,” he roughly replied. “I don’t care a straw for the brat.”

Tip took no more notice of his alleged father than if he had not been there.

Billy Kehoe had recognized Nancy, and now he proceeded to put in his claim.

“I am so glad that I have found you, Nancy,” said he. “Now you will leave that man and go home with me, won’t you?”

“I won’t go with you, whatever I do,” she coldly replied. “I have made other arrangements.”

“Yes, you will have to do it, I say. You can’t stay with that scoundrel any longer.”

“Suppose, Mr. Kehoe,” suggested Agiar, “that you let your private affairs stand over for a while. We have other matters to attend to, and can’t allow any disturbance.”

“That’s so,” declared Jesse Siddals. “It is clear that Mrs. Tressell won’t be able to walk to the boat, and we must fix some way to carry her. If Mr. Agiar and Tip will follow up these wagon-tracks, they may find that team and bring it to us. For fear they shouldn’t light on it, I will try another scheme. Adam Stocker can go to the old house and get a couple of blankets, and Mr. Beale and I will cut some poles. The other two may stay here and watch the prisoners.”

This arrangement was agreed to, and all set off to perform the tasks allotted to them.

Billy Kehoe watched them until they were out of sight, and then began to pace the ground rapidly, showing that he was under the influence of strong excitement.

Martin Tressell, his hands tied behind him, stood with his back against the trunk of a large tree. Nancy Trotter was seated at the base of another tree, partly supporting Mrs. Tressell.

She paid no attention to the furious glances
the man from Memphis occasionally shot at her, but looked up when he addressed her.

"I want you to go home with me, Nancy," he said, in a voice full of suppressed passion. "Will you do it?"

"I told you that I would not," she quietly replied.

"You are my wife, and you must leave that man."

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Kehoe," said Martin Tressell, with a sneer. "She belonged to another man before either of us got hold of her. She was the wife of Abe Trotter before you saw her."

"She was my wife when you stole her from me, you scoundrel, and I mean to have your heart's blood for the wrong you did me."

"None of that, now!" exclaimed Nancy, rising as Kehoe drew his revolver.

"Come away from that horse-thief and villain, then."

"He is a better man than you ever dared to be."

"Will you go home with me?"

"No!"

"Then he is a dead man."

"Quit that, ye bloody spalpeen!" shouted Mike Rafferty. "Would ye shoot the poor prisoner?"

"You sha'n't kill him!" cried Nancy, as she ran to Tressell and threw her arms around him. But Kehoe's finger pressed the trigger, and the bullet from his pistol had a double death errand. It passed through Nancy Trotter's neck and into the breast of Martin Tressell. The man wavered for a moment: then blood burst from his mouth, and he and the woman fell heavily to the ground.

Kehoe put up his pistol, and ran across the old field at the top of his speed.

"Murder! Murder!" shouted Mike Rafferty.

CHAPTER XVI.

FINDING A MOURNER.

The yells of the Irish lad brought forward Jesse Siddals and Charley Beale, who hurried back from their pole cutting, and were astonished and shocked by the sight that awaited them.

The others were far beyond the reach of a shout; but Adam Stocker soon came back with the blankets he had been sent for, and after awhile George Aglar and Tip drove up with a wagon and horses, which they had found at a negro cabin not far away.

By this time both of Kehoe's victims were dead, and Mrs. Tressell, who had again fainted, had been with difficulty revived.

"Who has done this?" demanded Aglar, and the circumstances that led to the shooting were explained to him as Mike Rafferty had detailed them.

"Perhaps it is better so," he said. "The man was sure to die a violent death, and the only wonder is that he had not met his fate before this."

Billy Kehoe was then beyond pursuit, if anybody had cared to pursue him. But there was no disposition to do so. As Jesse Siddals said, if they caught him they would have to kill him, and there had been enough of that sort of thing.

Mrs. Tressell asked for a lock of her dead son's hair, which was given her, and she was placed in the wagon with Siddals and Tip, and was driven away to the Search.

The others remained to give a decent burial to the victims of the Memphis man's revenge.

With their knives and hands they dug a grave in the soft alluvial soil, and the bodies were wrapped in the blankets which Stocker had brought, and were laid away together. The grave was filled up and marked, and that was the last of Martin Tressell and Nancy Trotter.

The old lady was joyfully welcomed back to the ark by Ganymeede, and it was a great relief to her to find herself in her comfortable cabin, after the toilsome and painful scenes through which she had lately passed.

When George Aglar arrived with the rest of the crew of the Search, he was brought into the cabin and formally presented to her by Tip as his mother.

"So Tip is the son of your sister as well as of my son," she said. "I beg your pardon for asking the question; but were they really married?"

"There is no doubt of that," replied Aglar. "He has denied the marriage, but I have secured the proofs, and my sister has them."

"That is joyful news to me, Mr. Aglar. I have taken a great fancy to Tip, and I am glad to learn that I am not the only relative he has left. You are a very fortunate young fellow, Tip, and you must forget your father, as I shall try to."

"I don't see that I have much to forget," answered the lad. "He never cared a straw for me, and I ain't likely to fret about him."

The next morning the Search was unmoored, and Adam Stocker and Mike Rafferty manned the sweeps, while Tip proudly controlled the steering-ear, and the ark drifted down the bayou.

As she approached the Mississippi, George Aglar was seated on the steering-bench, conversing with his newly-found nephew, and congratulating him on his good fortune.

"So I have really got a mother, and she is alive," said the lad. "Where she is now, and when do you think I shall see her?"

"She went to New Orleans a while ago, but promised to return very soon, and I hope we will find her in Memphis when we get there."

Jesse Siddals was seated on the roof, his feet dangling over the forward end. It was necessary for the "Search" to get a tow up the river, and this was the business that was occupying his mind.

"Let her swing well out into the stream, Tip," he ordered. "We may as well drift down the river until we meet a steamboat that will give us a tow. Hello! there's one already!"

Around a bend below was heard the heavy puffing of exhaust pipes, and soon a large steamboat came into view, battling her way with tremendous power against the swift current of the mighty river.

Siddals brought out a signal flag and set it, and the ark was urged by her sweeps out into the stream, so that she might intercept the steamboat.
She was in a fair way to do so, and Siddals was waving his hat and shouting for a tow, when there was a dull and heavy explosion on board of the big boat, followed by the rending and shattering of wood, and clouds of steam arose from the midship and forward parts.

Then there were cries and screams of fear and pain, and almost instantly flames broke out and spread with great rapidity.

"Sweep her up, boys, for all you're worth!" shouted Siddals. "There's work for us here. Get out the boat, somebody!"

Tip had already loosed and jumped into the skiff, and was pulling away with swift strokes. George Aglar and Siddals hastened to help the men at the sweeps to drive the ark toward the burning boat, which was then drifting helplessly down-stream.

Fortunately there were but few passengers on the steamboat. Fortunately, too, another steamboat appeared on the scene, and joined in the work of saving life. But the ark which was the first on the spot, rendered excellent service.

As Tip drew near the steamboat he saw a woman jump from the after guard into the water, and he pulled in that direction.

She was struggling in the stream as he approached her, and he saw her sink.

Instantly he dropped his oars, dived after her and brought her to the surface.

A man who had been swimming to the skiff climbed in and took the oars. He rowed to Tip, and helped him to lift the nearly drowned woman into the boat.

Then the lad took the oars, and pulled to the ark.

"My God! it is my sister!" exclaimed George Aglar, who had come forward to help take her aboard. "Tip, it is your mother that you have saved, if she really is saved."

She was carried into the cabin, and the efforts that were made to restore her to life were soon successful.

"Don't say anything to her about Tip until she is fully recovered," said Aglar. "We must not give her any kind of a shock just yet."

When all had been done in the life saving business that could be done, George Aglar took the skiff and rowed to the steamboat which had come to the assistance of the burning boat, and which had drifted down the river with the wreck.

He made a contract with the captain of the steamboat for towing the "Search" up to Memphis, and the ark was brought alongside the boat, to which the people she had saved were transferred, with the exception of Tip's mother.

That lady had by this time regained her strength, and her brother gave her a brief account of his expedition to Bayou Tunison, leading up to the information of the discovery of her boy.

"My son alive!" she exclaimed. "You told me that he was dead."

"That was what Martin Tressell said, and he may have believed it; but he was mistaken. Tip is alive, and he is on this boat, and it was he who saved your life when you jumped overboard."

"Bring him to me at once!"

The meeting of the mother and the son, as the story writers say, can be better imagined than described. Tip found a handsome and young-looking lady, whom he was proud to call mother, and she declared that the recovery of her boy had repaid her for years of sorrow.

When the ark reached Memphis, Mrs. Tressell had determined to change her mode of life, as she no longer had a son to search for. She sold her flatboat, liberally rewarded all who had aided her, and hired a house in the city, where she lived with her daughter-in-law and grandson.

A teacher was procured for Tip, who learned rapidly, and in the course of time he entered the business house of Simon & Aglar.

He is now an enterprising and successful merchant in New Orleans.

THE END.
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