Flip Fred, the Pack-Peddler Prince.

BY EDWARD LYTTON.

UP POPPED A HEAD AND A PAIR OF SHOULDERS, WHILE A BRIGHT PAIR OF EYES SURVEYED THE PERAMULATING MERCHANT CURIOUSLY.
Flip Fred,  
THE Back PEDDLER PRINCE:  
OR,  
The Witch of the Black Swamp.  
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CHAPTER I.  
THE PEDDLER'S "MISK."  

It was August.  
The heat was intense—almost intolerable.  
The grass was withered, the corn dead, and other vegetation wilted and drooped beneath the scorching rays.  
Sheep and cattle alike sought such shelter as was afforded them, and few persons were seen at work during the middle hours of the day.  
Yet, trudging along a dusty road that wound in a serpentine course through the beauteous Virginia valley, betwixt lofty timbered hills, came a person on whom the summer sun's rays seemed to have no depressing effect.  
Some seventeen or eighteen years of age, but of shorter build than most lads of that age, he was attired in a suit of clothing that was dusty and well-worn.  
He carried a knapsack, a clear-cut and handsome of feature, and wore a genial, half-peonounced expression, the eyes being dark and brilliant.  
His slight build and feature, he evidently was possessed of strength, for on his back he carried a large bundle, a packet that caused him to bend forward as he walked.  
A tin box, carried in his right hand, was another adjunct of his outfit.  
In fact, he was one of those wandering Bohemians known as pack-  

The peddler regarded it critically and evidently was conscious that it was a good-looking article of furniture, and evidently was standing upon some beam below.  
"You're a'right," said she, "but 'tain't no use.  
I'm glad of it, 'cause I wouldn't be party an' stuck on my own back, if I had to.  
Who is she?"  
"Oh, she's the second wife, ye know—lives up yonder," indicating the castellated residence.  
"When she gets on her fine rig, an' a'basket o'  
"Yes.  
"I ain't much stuck on big-oblongs myself.  
"Oh, well, then, it's Freckles, if you want to  

The young trader-merchant had suddenly made a discovery.  
Two plants were missing out, on the near corner.  
I don't care.  
"I can throw stones like a slugger an' pay'em up fer  

He set the horses back upon their haunches and swung down upon the crosstree, and there he sat—head down and eyes half-closed, and the little sprite laughed so mis- 

"But you wouldn't do that.  
She was not so tall as he, but possessed a dignified and graceful figure, and even in that calico dress she wore, the skirt of which reached only to her pretty ankles.  
She wore no shoes; her stockings, but her feet were white and clean.  
He had been a "rolling stone" from his earliest remembrance, now on land, now on water, and had passed through many phases of remarkable experiences—all of which had served to educate him beyond his years.  
As a rule, he was never very much attracted toward those of his age in the opposite sex, but, somehow, Miss Sally Shanks had caught him, or at least his admiration, at the very moment he was at her, wondering if she were not a rough dialect version of Frederica Shanks, and her lover, a blacksmith, was at work.  

"While we're at it, let's get to the point.  
"Freckles!  
This chapter is significantly titled "The Buccher Dube" and seems to describe a'space-time continuum or a parallel universe where the protagonist, Flip Fred, is a peculiar character with supernatural abilities. The text explores Flip's interactions with various individuals and the origins of his magical powers. The narrative is rich in detail, weaving together elements of adventure, magic, and myth.
not easy to determine, for his red face was suggestively blustery. He was probably forty years of age, with a blocky, honest face, with a wen having been hoisted from his eyebrows, his nose a decided duck, a prominent black mustache, and a hair color, and hair to match. There was nothing like him in the neighborhood, and any critic might have set him down as a lady’s man.

The conclusion, according to Frecles, was Boyd de Byrnyville.

"His face," said Madame, for whom the girl had manifested such intense dislike, was but little if any younger than her companion, and yet appearance did not give her the least idea of trying to lose a youthful appearance.

Gregory, who, as a rule, made the most part of his living by the making and selling of rare cream-colored lace; getting away from her, and the part of his living. She was something over a mile from the road, as the highway ran.

The butchery was the only means of getting on the other side, for the stream ran between high banks and was too fast for a butcher.

Therefore the way must be repaired.

With a confident expression upon his face, Fip Fred had been driven down one of the strings of the bridge, and was awaiting development.

"And," said he, "the ford is an instance of girthy gills, and it was believed that Frecles would betray her presence, and thereby bring trouble upon her own shoulders.

"Much, rather would he have stood the blame than to see her suffer, to whom he had such a sudden and strong fancy.

"De Byrnyville arose in the phantom, and gazed forward at the aperture, over the horses’ heads; and it occurred to her, of course, that the man was afraid to get out of the vehicle from fear of the horses and the threat of using the bridge. From what he said, one could tell that Fip Fred was from the rear of the bridge, and was awaiting development.

"See here!" De Byrnyville said, at length, addressing Floyd, "that hole is not too large to be repaired by a man fresh from your yard, and the fence would temporarily fix it, so that we could pass over it without difficulty.

"Without a doubt!" Fred assented drily.

"Then hurry up and knock off some of the boards, my fellow, and cut the aperture strong enough for us to drive across, and I’ll fling you half a dollar. We cannot afford to be delayed here in this fashion.

"It is rather tough," Fred allowed, as he took cigar cutters from his pocket and was about to use them on a fragment weed. "Such circumstances will occur, you know, in the best regulated families.

"Nonetheless, you will do it, if you want to know it.

"Do what!"

"Fix up the fence as I directed."

"What—l for fifty cents!"

"Yes, or I’ll give you a dollar if you hurry up about it.

Fred arose, drew himself to his fullest height, and gazed calmly at De Byrnyville and the madame, his thumbs under his arm-pits, his face good-naturedly sarcastic.

"See here, boy," said Mr. Fielding, after Boyd de Byrnyville, he said, coolly, "do I look to you like a dollar sort of individual? Is there anything about me that suggests any kind of a man who is not a representative of a ninety-nine-cent emporium? Do I look as if I could be something of a gentleman?"

"If I say so," replied Floyd, "I stand by my statement."

"Then," said the man, "I am not in the way of thinking you are anything but a mere trifle of a fellow.

"And," said Floyd, "I am just so flippant that one of these days you will be tempted to lift a hand to assist you at emergencies such as this.

Boyd de Byrnyville heard him, and an expression of surprise, rage and chagrin passed over his face.

"Curses seize you!" he hissed. "Your impudence surpasses anything I ever met with. But, mind you, if you don’t make tracks out of this township lively, you will find out where you are the loser and I am the master."

With face pale and angry, that he was evidently excited, he leaped from the vehicle, and began a savage attack on the nearest person, who happened to be a man named Fielding, who was a butcher.

Then tossing the rems to Madame de Byrnyville, he returned to the vehicle, his expression and his appearance anything but pleasant or reassuring.

"Young Fielding," he said, "I know not who you are, nor your business here, nor why you addressed me as Frank Fielding—a man not my own, but one who has no influence on your superior, and your slipness, as you call it, is俱 to us."

"The thing is, you have spared us any harm, and if you value your life you will hasten your departure from this vicinity. You see yer man-boosters, my boy, which, by the way, are not bloodhounds, are by no means partial to the vanishing of the war, and have a scent as keen as that of a fox. Those dogs will be let loose when I reach

Magerdal Manor, mind you. And that they may have no difficulty in distinguishing their victim, we shall put a bandanna over his eyes, and a fillet over his head, and carry him away spirited and subdued."

As he spoke, Boyd de Byrnyville, by a quick movement raised his hand—a fanlike movement—and his finger went down the man’s face, nearly knocking him over into the stream. The madame was about to seize him as he passed, but, as De Byrnyville started toward the phantom, a grip seized his shoulder, and in a moment he was in the ditch.

Before he could make any effort at defense, he was seized, the carriage driven away, and a man was running over to the side of the bridge into the water.

Madame de Magerdal uttered a piercing scream that was heard by the entire neighborhood, and the man was pursued furiously toward Magerdal Manor; while, upon reaching the hole in the road, where the boards as she came, appeared Frecles, and as she ran to the side of the bridge and looked over it, she saw the man struggling, her cried out in an ecstasy of delight.

"Hurra for you, Fred! The die is cast, and the duchess is found!"

CHAPTER III

FATHER AND SON.

MAGERDAL MANOR was owned by Major Magonn Magerdal, who was the last direct survivor of a family which had dwelt in Vilgo, formerly the parsonage, parsonage, and attendant outbuildings, was a princely property.

The manor itself was a sort of hallroom, hand-ed down to its present owner, and the surrounding grounds and gates and attendant outbuildings, was a princely property, and brought to a state of perfection, most charming to the eye. Every improvement of actual value had been accomplished since the death of the last of those of those to whom belonged the right to enjoy its

The house stood down the valley by a mile, the little village, or more appropriately, settlement, known as Fair-y, to our readers—with a population of several hundred, and a few business

It was a grand place, and to the ordinary eye it was the most romantic spot, such as those of those to whom belonged the right to enjoy its

The major was a man of nearly sixty, handsome, and good-tempered, with his jaws, though his hair and beard were snow-white, his brow smiling and free from care lines, and his face grave with care lines. His whole demeanor was that of a man who was in the habit of taking matters at their pleasantest aspect, and which would not worry at ordinary trouble.

The man who addressed him, he felt no second glance to tell, was of his own kin—his

He was a decided blond, handsome to a fault, and yet lacking in the nobility of appearance that characterized his father.

The greater part of the major’s time was occupied with the care of this plant, and he was a connoisseur in the art of growing and cultivating with care lines. His whole demeanor was that of a man who was in the habit of taking matters at their pleasantest aspect, and which would not worry at ordinary trouble.

There were those who knew, however, that the major was the wrong sort of man to trifle with, and who would not have thought of doing so, even had they been actuated by some motive. But, so passive that it betrayed nothing, even of a spirit.

Of course, father, I am aware that there is no harm in being a bit of a blue blood, and in doing so, to a man of a certain fashion, it is not the same thing. But, as the girl is all-in-all to me, and would make me a true and loving part

"Of course, father, I am aware that there is no harm in being a bit of a blue blood, and in doing so, to a man of a certain fashion, it is not the same thing. But, as the girl is all-in-all to me, and would make me a true and loving part
you name any objection to the young lady, except that she is not supposed to have the best blood running through her veins."

"Oh, I have a reason," the major said, in a tone that indicated his indifference to her objections. "The girl is a mere child yet—wild, uneducated, innocent enough, I dare say, of any intentional wrong, but never trained by her parents to become a woman."

"But if I recollect right, you esteemed my mother one of the best of women?" Dick asked, winning a bit.

"Certainly!" was the anesthetizing answer.

"Well, as near as I can learn, you and mother were married when she was just sixteen.

"And who made a good wife, and gave you the two dutiful children who now grace your home— Mildred and I. You were always happy—at least until your dear wife was cut off by a sudden attack.

"Stop! I will not hear a word against her."

"Very well. We will drop her out," and a faint smile played over Richard Magader's features.

He is now sixteen, and though will and wayward, she would in time outgrow all that, and make not only a good wife, but a brilliant woman.

"That is a matter of exceeding doubt. Her father did not think so. He said—"

"Her alleged father, you should say! Dick interrupted. "I dare say the same person in Fairfax who believes that a drop of Stuken's blood flows in her veins."

For a moment, his gaze still averted from the flower-beds out upon the lawn.

"Well, her alleged father, then, he went on directly, "is a man of dark and stained character."

"If we are sure that the young lady in question is not his, there will be no harm in her being there, and if she has no particular personal dislike—would suffer by whatever befell him, and all with whom he might be allied or connected would suffer accordingly. Therefore, my son, it but remains for me to say that I object, emphatically—contend for the child with the untutored child, and there is no use of your again appealing to your father."

Dick Magader arose with a slight bow and put on his hat and gloves.

"I am not even equivalent to saying that should I marry contrary to your wishes, I would receive nothing from you!" he intoned, still preserving his calmness.

"Even more than that!" the major answered, with a slight inclination of his head. "You have put me to a great deal of expense—to keep the name as much as possible out of disgrace during the last year—and I have resolved no longer to do as I have done.

"But whatever you may do with your money, I must rely wholly on your own resources. Of course, I will not refuse you a shelter, but, beyond that, for spending-in which you are entirely justified, as your wife—that's out of the question, even if you return to your father."

Dick did not offer any further words, and left the room.

CHAPTER IV.
CENNED FRIENDSHIP.

Fortunately for Boyd De Byrville, he could scarce imagine his married state, for his head must have dropped in the deep, swiftly-flowing stream into which the in-dignant young pack-peddlar had pitched him.

As it was, he swum and walked to the shore, and shook his head, to be sure, as a shaggy brute might have done, and gazed after the now flying, and yelling little object, through which the valley, leaving behind it a cloud of dust.

Upon the bridge, Frockles was dancing while laughing at the little peddler's joke.

"Do you know him, Mr. Floyd?"

Frockles glanced around.

"Is he not the man at first supposed to be?

But you do, though! He reminds you of some one you are in search of. Am I not right?

Yes, you possibly. You said his name is De Byrville.

"Yes—Boyd De Byrville. He cum around these parts after Major Magader brought home his second wife from New Orleans."

"Ah!"

"Yes; he an' the madam is thick as pie, too. The tenants say he is playin' de a way, but he ain't in no way himself. Anyhows, he don' let nobody rope no bullies an' bring them round."

"I don't care. If dey be agglin' together, an' dey say he's tuck up his home at the manor, altogether.

Where did he stop before?

At de hotel in Fairfax."

"How far is Fairfax from here?"

"Over two miles. But you hadn't better go there.

"Why not?"

"Because De Byrville has lots of money, and spends it freely where it will secure him the most friends; an' my dad sez that he's got more friends now than the major has. Dad and the major don't love each other much, you know."

"But what will he do with his money going to Fairfax, may I ask?"

"A good deal more than you s'pose. Boyd de Byrville never said he had to have revenge on you before you get out of this neighborhood."

"I see that in his very looks."

"Indeed! But nor do I calculate to hurry out of this neighborhood, imme-

"Oh! don't you?

"Not directly."

"Golly, I'm glad of that. But, don't go to Fairfax, for you'll be in danger. The gang hangs out there, an' De Byrville won't hesitate to set em on you."

"The gang?

"Yes. We know swamp squatters. They're bad, and there's lots of evil laid to them. They don't stop nobody's deplorable job, but they do murder somebody in my old dad's chief-cook-and-bottle-waiter, Jacob."

"Indeed?

"Yes; but! He's an old tartar, an' I bet there'll be sum big sputterin' an kickin' when he comes to sizzle, in the hereafter."

But, as this appears to have been said in Fairfax."

"Lots of it. But, you see, the gang don't do the hot opera. They doesn't try to do nothin', you know, an' when it is done, only, nothing can be proved agin' em. Twan't long as dey can see, dey can hold dey ground an' dey scold in de bed, at de Arms, but dere couldn't nothing be proved agin' em."

Flin Fred uttered a whistle of surprise.

"That doesn't seem to be a Christian locality?" he hinted.

"Not a bit. There's queer things he happened in this town, too. How about you don't mean it."

"But I do, though.

"And you think I am—you would like to be my—"

"What is to hinder a detective living here?"

"Humph! Every detective as ever cum, mysteriously disappeared, and wasn't never heard from again. Twan't odd, though, this time, as come round these parts. So if you want to puzzle it out for yourself, there's only one thing you can do to.

"What's that?"

"You go out in the middle of the night—"

"It is a fainness of luck with you to abide: an' you be better off beneath the mountains.

In a shrill, discant tone the words were uttered, and looking quickly toward a small witlch at one end of the room, held an old hat, tall, quaint and wrinkled—a hideous, witch-like little creature, with struggling red hair, of a sausage form, and gnarled staff, while perched upon her shoulder was a various-hued parrot.

"Coward! what's this I've struck?" the young peddler gasped, for the long, bony forefinger was pointed commandingly at him.

"Have I wandered into elf-land at last?"

"That is Old Mom—"the Witch of the Swamp—"the old hag with red hair."

Frockles explained in low, rapid words, "What she commands is best obeyed, for she has performed many miracles. To oblige her means to win the protection of her power, and save you from the gang. To refuse is death.

"Awake! young man—do as I bid!"

Frockles nodded, and the young peddler at once came from the hag's lips in tones of severity.

"All right, old gal! I'm with you!" Fred declared, balancing himself on his strong right arm. "When it comes to kissing the girls I am right at home in the front par-

And bending forward, he imprinted a burning kiss on the witch's cheek.

"Tis well" the hag said, immediately, "two fates f'y me united, two troth to be plighted at once! Well, behold, young man, in your lucky talisman!"

Fred, with a wave of her hand, she turned and hobbled away down the dusty road, making a queer and suggestive picture."

Fred has married and cut up into porous-plasters if she don't take his b-cus!

"Frockles declared, with a long breath of relief.

"Say, Frockles, she's off her base, ain't she?"

Fred laughed merrily.

"If you mean crazy, I dunno, she replied, displacing his arm from about her waist, with moderate severity; "but I believe she believe other way. She's smart and shrewd, and she's cut up with the Evil One. Everybody believes that."

"Poo! Don't you believe such nonsense as that?

But I do, and so does everybody. She works on the poor old women, and gives you a person a good luck or bad luck. Even the poker-players at the Arms allows that. Then she say, if dey be done for and cut up into pores-plasters if she don't take his b-cus!"

"Young man, you are positively cut up, and you'd better take care of yourself."

Frockles spread his arms and tilted his head back. "I'm a-dead to the right way."

"If you don't, I'll laugh at you."

"I'll laugh at you, too—only I take you for a joke.

"But it won't do."

"And also, that I am to be deprived of anoth-

"Yes, you bet! I've got another feller that monopolizes the most of my kisses. I don't care so very much for him, 'cept he makes me presents, and he's a good looking fellow, and is a bit of a high-tone."

"Yes, I say. I s'pect he'll own the manor—he's the major's son—so I think I may like him better than I do. providin' I hadn't some other fellers here about.

And she gave him a coy glance.

"Yes, I say. Well, for my part, I don't wonder, for I think you're the very girl who would turn any young fellow's suscept-

"But in your case it never happened."

"Oh, yes; the boy wasn't near the farm-house,

"Not with your face, he is, and the rest of him, too.

She was the girl who would be near and sunny..."
"Yes, Sally, I would like to be your beau, if my attentions would be agreeable to you. I love you," Fred said, "and will adore you after we have married."

"It's very kind of you," she said, "but I am engaged to another man."

"You are not engaged to any other man," Fred said, "because you love me."

"That is not true," Sally replied, "but if you love me, I will accept your offer.

"And I will love you for all eternity," Fred said, "because you are my soulmate.

Sally agreed, and together they lived happily ever after.

Flip Fred, the Pack Peddler Prince.
CHAPTER VI.

In the strong room.

FLIP FRED had listened to the charge without betraying any considerable feeling of alarm or interest.

"Hold up!" he cried, as the constable advanced. "I demand to see the man who has hands on me, for if I am ordered under arrest, that will add to the trouble to lay hands on me, and as a result, the probable death of the major's wife. Sirrah! you are my prisoner!"

CHAPTER VII.

A Brother's Remorse.

At the Margareton Manor, with its retinue of servants and hangers-on, and at Fairfax, it was generally reported that the madame, the major's "fivemonths' bride," was seriously injured by the runaway accident that had split her carriage, and the phaeton nearly in front of the Margareton gates.

In her unhappiness, however, the lady had no difficulty in raising her voice, or in enlisting the aid of her friends, and the major paid a visit to the phaeton near the Margareton gates.

The major was not present; he seldom was. When De Bynvilles was about, not a word was spoken.

De Bynvilles was not welcome at the manor, but the major's wife was not, and the man, and the man knew it, without asking.

If Major Margareton had any grievances, he was a man too poor to seek redress, and he had no one to help him.
called my name, Madeline, unless he knows me. But I cannot recall him; if we have ever met before I don’t know when or where.

"He is, and my name is Magruder," was the cutting response, and then, said Madame, speaking leisurely, "I have been credited with a thousand different tales, but I am capable of seeing yet. Did you notice any resemblance to any one in that peddler—that peculiar looking little peddler, with the gaudy pillows?"

"De Byunville reflects," his gaze riveted upon the soft velvet carpet.

"Now that you mention it, I do," answered slow-footed Mather.

"Time for that," she interrupted. "Too many fences and cubby holes in the woods to make an island for any one to sit on or a room for any one to stand in."

"I’m going to sell it, Doctor," said De Byunville, who took advantage of the space gained by the storm and only by an effort prevented an outburst of wrath.

"My name is De Javille," she added, "and, sir, I am with you!"

"Ah! Dick is that you?" De Byunville demanded, affecting that the two had never seen each other before; he said it was his business to be on the lookout for her, and said it was his personal business to be on the lookout for someone of the same name. He was a keen judge of a coming storm, and added that upon the eve of a storm, it was his custom to be in a stormy mind, and he said he did not want to be disturbed by any one who did not belong to the family.

"Till you had better leave it," Madame requested, "for I have learned to like the quiet of the stormy sea, and it is a great pleasure to me to be alone with my thoughts."

"I have come to make a proposition to you," De Byunville continued, "that you will sell me the island, and I will pay you a sum of money for it."

"No," Madame replied, "I have come to make a proposition to you, that you will pay me a sum of money for my island, and I will sell it to you.

De Byunville, you are an island, and I am a man, and I am the better of the two, because I have the courage to stand up for my rights."

"It is too soon," Madame replied, "to speak of selling the island."

"It is too late," De Byunville said, "to speak of buying the island."

"I will buy the island," Madame said, "if you will sell it to me."
Well, this man whom I want starred and done up right is a pack peddler. His name is Fred Floyd.

"Yes!"

"At the present time he is under arrest for frightening Madame Maggared's horses, and causing a general disturbance in the strong-room of Maggared Manor. Can you get him out of there, and—kill him?"

De Byrvenille nodded vigorously upon the cabinet.

"Oh, no!" Shakes demurred, grimly. "Give us something easier. We're tried that—it won't work. Only three persons has admission there—two by the order of the other the agency of the devil. You refer to the Wizard?"

"Yes."

"I have seen her once. She is a pretender—false to the end. Try her once—test her infernal powers again."

Shakes retorted. "One trial will convince you.

"Bah! I don't believe it. The people of this city is, the Wizard is, far away. That's been proven."

"Yes, but I have another plan. Why, it is the peddler. It won't pay us to tackle him. We'd get nothing out of him. That accursed, infallible one."

"Nonsense! This witchery is all a humbug, and you're dumb to believe in it. I can tell you something that will astonish you."

"Well, what is it?"

"Have you ever heard that the person now known as Dick Maggared is not Dick Maggared at all?"

"Old Shakes was silent a moment, as if he were casting his mind back over the past.

"There was a little girl, a dark little girl really, that Dick was not the child of Major Maggared, but of dead, and I guess no one ever thinks about it any more."

"How did this rumor get about?"

"Why, yes, I remember. Some strange flung it out at the major's face once, that Dick was not the heir, but that the real heir would turn up some day. Yes, the father was a purty girl in her time. An' he's sed that the major wozneg her under promise of marriage. However, when Dick was able to be brought into the world, Troy—th' widders'n name—she was engaged to nurse the mother. Jim Maggared, the major's younger brother, was livin' at the manor then, but went to sea shortly afterward. Some have surmised that there might have been such a thing as Troy sending the real heir off with Jim Maggared for a purpose which was substituting another infant in place. Anyhow, Troy was shortly afterward kicked out o' the Maggareds, and the major became the Swamp Witch she is now."

"Will you tell me all about it, De Byrvenille?"

"How old is Dick Maggared?"

"Younger than he looks. Disappearance has given him another life, and he's over eighteen. Mildred is a year younger, an' she's seventeen.

"Dick looks twenty-five!"

"I know he does, but he isn't. An' old resident in these parts, and cuter know."

"Well, I'll tell you my belief. Dick Maggared is not a Maggared at all, but, on the contrary, is some chap who was murdered by the real heir, as you have hinted, years ago!"

"When then is the real heir?"

"The young man who came to these parts to-day as a pack peddler."

"What do you think that?"

"Because he is the living picture of Major Maggared. I noticed it the instant I first saw him."

"Is that your own reason for ther supposition?"

"Yes, except that the fellow knows me, calls me by my right name, although I cannot remember of ever seeing him. At various times, he is the real heir to Maggared Manor or not, he is the widdlest boy you ever met in the way of personal charm."

"How much will you pay?"

Shakes demurred, grimly.

"Two hundred dollars!"

"Yes, sir; it is the way of the world."

"Five hundred, spot cash.

"When?"

"No, now; right away off quick, afore we tackle the job."

"I have no such amount with me. Meet me in five minutes, now, however, and you shall have it."

"All right. Where's the fellow?"

"Look for him up in the strong-room of the manor."

"Then how the blazes d'ye expect us to get at him?"

"Can you effect an entrance to the strong-room from the outside?"

"I don't know; but I've planned the safe long ago."

"Well, the fellow will be let out in the morning, and taken off for the factory for trial. You can lead to his case then."

"Not so easy a job t'ch his then. However, we'll be well in Fairifax in the mornin', and after we've had the pleasure of fingering yer greenbacks we'll see what can be done wi' yer man."

"A question more ere I go: Is Hoyt Hayden the Wizard?"

"No, although he always passes as such. And young Shakes married to Major Maggared? She was married, I think, to a shopkeeper named Hoyt. Hoyt was his child, and after his father died always remained with the Wizard."

"Have you ever heard that he has aspirations for the hand of Mildred Maggared?"

"Yes. Am I supposed to precise if he'll win her?"

"One more question—is the girl who guided me your daughter?"

"She sure. What makes you ask?"

"I don't know; it just struck me to think so."

"Pooch! She's like my old woman was."

"No wonder. They're all the same!"

"Are you going to Fairifax right away?"

"Yes, but I'm going to look over the manor first."

"You're going to leave with him?"

"Yes; I'll try to save his life if I can."

CHAPTER IX

THE GOLDEN LOCKET

Soon after Pooch's inquiries in the strong-room at Maggared Manor, the major stepped out of the front door, which was still waiting, and drove hastily off toward Fairifax.

The horses were quick of foot, and it was not long before the equipage drew up the second time that evening in front of the Arms. There, the major stepped from the carriage, the office behind the counter of which a blank sheet was said.

"Ah! good-evening, major—ah—"

"Is Mr. Daniels about?" the major interrupted.

"Yes, sir; he is in his room."

"Tell him, then, that I desire to see him at once."

The clerk dispatched a bell-boy, and Daniels, the lessee of the hotel, soon made his appearance—a nervous, dapper little man, who looked in the position of mine host for a place like The Arms. He and the major stepped to one side, and the latter exclaimed:

"See here, Daniels, I want to ask a favor of you."

"Most likely, when I know its nature," was the reply.

"Well, it is this: A young peddler stopped here to-night. What room did you assign him to?"

"Number 36, I believe."

"His traps were taken there, I suppose?"

"Yes. He had only a pack.""
N. "The major thoroughly searched the garments, first of all, but found nothing. Whatever the poacher had made away with, it had been removed.

A moment of disgust ceased the search, and he next undid the oilskin cloth that covered Fred's stock in trade.

The members of the Yankee nations were spread out in front of him, comprising various ladies' work-basket, bobs, and so forth.

Major Magruder searched them carefully over, never missing an article.

At last he came across something that caused him an eager start. It was a small pasteboard box, with the cover tied on with a bit of ribbon.

He quickly slipped off this ribbon, and lifted the cover.

Then Major Magruder uttered a low, cantankerous cry. In the heart of them curled up, side by side, gold thread and golden lock-and-chain.

Crimson-nerved, he read the letters "R. M.

Inside the locket there were no likenesses, but a tiny scrap of light brown hair was inserted upon some white silk."

"By heaven! My suspicions have not proven me false!" the major said, rubbing the locket.

"I think I can lead him to glance toward the window with a smothered oath, and his fault be seen as he bade, pressed against the pane, the long visage of the Witch of the Black Swamp.

Only I am certain—that is past disappeared.

As soon as he could recover from the shock of the discovery, he had hurried toward the window, raised it, and looked out.

A tender, leading, leaning against the rear of the carriage, the driver had reached the window.

But she was no longer to be seen.

Major Magruder went back to the pack, put the box and its contents into his pocket, and cautiously did up the pack as he had found it, which consumed several minutes of time.

He then left the room, and went down-stairs, passing out of the rear hall, and carefully reaccommodated the vicinity, to no purpose.

But the instant—he went direct to his own apartment, and rung for Belfry.

The old colored servant promptly answered the summons, and stood in waiting.

"Gnome!" the master said, arising from a reverie, "has everybody returned for the night?"

"All 'cept de guest, sah."

"De Belfry?"

"Yes, sah.

"Where is he?"

"De young man, sah."

"I don't know, nor care. He's gone wi' the devil!"

"No nonsense! Out with it. You can and must explain."

"Well this is all I know about it. He an' I was settin' here, talkin', when we heard a laugh that made my heart jump back! In fact, I was thinkin' of Heaven's name, what's that? I axed. 'Have you heard of the Witch of the Black Swamp?' my companian axed. 'An' the magic star?' I told him yes, an' then he cried: 'Behold, I have the magic star, and my liberty is at hand!'

"This is incredible! the major gasped, pale as death, his eyes gleaming with the specter, who is the owner of this 'magic star?""

The negro obeyed.

He reported directly that there was no evidence of the poacher interfered with; in fact, the door could not be opened, except from the hall, outside.

"I tell you don't git out by the dooryard!" Jones stoutly asserted. "I torer know, when I was lookin' straight at the door, and it didn't open!"

"Did you see the alleged magic star?"

"Ay! say!"

"Describe it!"

"It was a red star, with raised center, and curious engraving upon the prongs, and a gleaming diamond in the center!"

The major fastened on the star, and steel-ed a race, with an audible gasp of astonishment.

"I am unable to describe it myself, however."

"Gnome, try the safe!" he said, in a husky tone. "One of them may have inadvertent-ly been let down, and the fellow could squeeze himself inside."

Gnome obeyed, and pronounced each door to be locked.

"Open them!" the major growled.

Gnome, by the first glance, fastened the combination knobs, and opened the ponderous doors.

A glance, by candle-light, into each safe, satisfied the major, and the magic star was safe, and the doors were closed and locked.

"There is no infernal hocus-pocus here that surpasses my comprehension," the major then said. "It is evident that in some unaccountable way the young gentleman's flow, or by what means, I cannot conceive, for this wall of the rooms are of solid masonry. However, he is gone, and must be reciprocated, at all hazards. You may not know it, Jones, but this star you describe was for generations a family heirloom, and I have grown a great deal for want of your cat."

"Spect nebosc you're right, sah."

"I am growing more and more positive of it every day, and I have made an eye on the movements of the magic and De Belfry, and I'll consider what to do. Did you look the young man in the strong-room as I directed?"

"Yes, sah—hobe oh 'em! 'Both of them' the major echoed.

"Yes, sah."

"Why, thulderation! I didn't tell you to lock the constable!"

I thought you did, sah!"

"By no means. Go release Jones and let him go home. Then go back and tell the peddler I want to see him. Don't let him see you don't like he done."

Gnome left the room.

In a moment, seemingly, he was back, appearing nervous and excited.

"You'd better come, sah, an' see fo' you'nd! he announced. "One ob de poachers has escaped!"

"Escaped!" the major cried, leaping to his feet.

"Which one?"

"De young man, sah."

"Two hurried at once to the strong-room, and entered, there to find Jones about the most frightened-looking man they could imagine.

"What in the infernal furies is the matter here, and where is the prisoner?" the major demanded, angrily.

"Why in the infernal furies was I locked up?" Jones demanded, in return.

That was the matter. My servant understood my order that you were both to be locked up. But explain. Where is young Floyd?"

"I don't know, nor care. He's gone wi' the devil!"

"No nonsense! Out with it. You can and must explain!"

Well this is all I know about it. He an' I was settin' here, talkin', when we heard a laugh that made my heart jump back! In fact, I was thinkin' of Heaven's name, what's that? I axed. 'Have you heard of the Witch of the Black Swamp?' my companian axed. 'An' the magic star?' I told him yes, an' then he cried: 'Behold, I have the magic star, and my liberty is at hand!'

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entrance to your room, opened your pack, and secured the golden locket you carried!

He did not go to sleep.

The night was so far advanced that he knew it would not be long till daylight, when he would have to be on his way. He really did not feel like taking the chance of sleeping.

No one approached, to his knowledge, during the remainder of the night, and he was so busied with perplexed thought that morning was beginning to break through his sleep. He noticed, however, that the first light of day had not yet passed the hour.

Fearing down from his perch, Flip Fred was able to make out.

Dick Magerlad’s favored guest, Boyd de Byrnville, dressed with scrupulous care, and looking every inch a dandy.

**CHAPTER XI**

**THE DUEL AND THE ARREST.**

Flip Fred was not a little surprised to see De Byrnville, more especially as he was alone. Had he been accompanied by companions the boy would naturally have concluded that the party were searching for him; but the man did not appear to be searching for anyone.

He glanced about him, and sat down on a rock in under the tree, evidently to wait for someone.

At the end of ten minutes another man approached from up the road, and as he drew near De Byrnville answered the knock.

Fred’s position was such that he could see both without being seen by either. On noticing the man’s movements, he once decided that the man was to be—a duel.

**Magistrate, you are late!** De Byrnville said, in a paironing voice.

**It matters little, as long as I am here,** was the reply; then, **Listeners for business!**

**Quire ready, thank you!**

**Very well.** You can have your choice of weapons, and Magerlad cast the polished blades on the ground at his feet.**

**Oh, I’m not particular; after all will do.** De Byrnville returned carelessly, picking up the one nearest to him.

Dick Magerlad seized the other.

Now, there, said De Byrnville, **let’s understand each other. This is to be a friendly little hunt, to satisfy honor, or is it to be life to the last man?**

**Life and death?** was the terse response.

**As you like, though for your part, and your sake, I’d far rather it be the other way.**

**Bah! you lie, you coward! You’d as soon kill me as I would you if I were clever enough to correct.**

**Correct. We will to business.** According to the code under which I was disciplined, we should shake hands ten paces each, back, and then advance.

**Bah!** he scorn to touch your hand! Retreat as we face!

Both men retreated step for step—then, when the aim pieces had been made, each advanced, and the glittering blades crossed with a clash.

Up in the tree Flip Fred looked down with feelings indescribable. He knew it would be useless to interfere, and there was every likelihood that the other—a sight he preferred not to witness. But, how avoid it?

Clash! clash! clash!

The contest had begun in good earnest, as the ringing and flashing of the blades in the morning sunlight, but after a few moments that flash had died out, and De Byrnville’s form was seen to be the only one.

This could not last long, however. The better man must eventually distinguish himself by succumbing to the contest.

And this man proved to be Boyd de Byrnville.

After some minutes of force of stroke, thrust, feast, and parry, he got in so heavy a blow on Magerlad’s defense as to snap the latter’s weapon. The young duellist, with another instant De Byrnville’s sword pierced the lung, Virginia’s breath—literally run him through to the heart.

Poor Dick threw up his arms with a wild shriek of terror, and

His death must have been almost instantaneous, for he did not stir after he fell.

Roy de Byrnville was beside his father in momentarily pitting, then a harsh laugh broke from his lips.

**The poor devil brought it on himself!** he said, aloud, with a keen glance around him, **at his death he deserves!**

Then, dropping his sword, he walked quickly away down the road toward the manner and was lost to view.

Seeing that young Magerlad did not stir, Flip Fred left the service of the former, and made his way out of the tree, when he heard footsteps approaching, and Hoyt Hayden came striding out of the wood.

A cry of consternation and horror escaped him. The sight was suddenly and unexpectedly upon the scene of the duel.

**Great Heaven! what does this mean?** he exclaimed, to Dick Magerlad. **What is the matter with that? He has been fighting a duel and has got the worst of it. I wonder whom he could have shot?**

He picked up De Byrnville’s sword, and stood gazing at the bloodstained weapon with a troubled expression.

As he stood thus a party of six men burst suddenly out of the swamp, and, taking in the situation at a glance, as they supposed rushed upon Hayden with victorious yells.

He was hard pressed to keep them off, but by a force of numbers, they swept him from his feet.

An instant more handscrews were upon his wrists, and he was helpless.

The men were a party of villagers, six in number, headed by Constable Jones.

They had already been searching in the swamp before Flip Fred, having penetrated it half a mile below.

**Aha! So we’ve caught you in the act, have we?** cried Constable. **I’ll bet you didn’t know you was a settled dislike for Hayden.**

**What’s the matter with the man?** asked the constable in the act. Hoyt declared, fiercely. **I arrived on the spot but the very minute before you did, and found Magerlad, and since that I had picked up the bloody sword to examine it the moment yet as much a dueller as you could be.**

**Bah! don’t try to stuff us with that!** Jones grunted, as he arose from beside Dick. **Magerlad is dead, but he isn’t cold yet, an’ the act’s jest bin did. No one’s in sight, an’ so it’s plain enough it was you who slew Dick Magerlad.**

**That’s right,** said one young man.

Flip Fred heard all this, and, for a moment, was at a loss as to how to explain matters; but what good would it do?

Of course Jones and his gang would not believe him, and if they did, they would rush him on Major Magerlad’s account, which he suspected they had been instructed to do.

So it was imminent the wisest course for him to remain silent for the present, since he might tell that he knew more advantageously in the future.

He allowed the party to move away, with much haste.

Two of the men lifted Dick Magerlad’s stiffened form toward the road. When the whole party were out of sight, Fred was considering what was best to do, when he heard a powerful voice that, he beheld, to his joy and surprise—Freckles—

**Come down,** she called. **There’s no one about.

Fred at once descended, and they shook hands, warm.

**How did you discover that I was up in the tree?** Fred asked.

**After I spied you there before the duel, but didn’t get a chance to speak, for De Byrnville was too far down,** Freckles answered.

**Then you were a witness to the duel?**

**You bet I was!**

**That is most fortunate!** Fred declared.

**You will be one more witness toward clearing me.**

**Humph! He’ll get free all right when his trial comes off. The Witch seed the fight, too. They ain’t said ‘er’ over yourin’ in the edge of the swamp,**

**Where is she now?**

**She is in the swamp, to her castle. She sent me tor you,**

**In a little danger of our encountering another band of searchers,**

**None. Gone along,**

**He was very much aware that an active search for him was being made, and was determined he would be arrested, he would not desert his efforts. He was at a loss to know what to do.**

**Then you are back?**

**I am.**
into the fastness, and the further they entered its recesses the wilder grew its aspect.

It made no half gesture, but the very note that Freckles was considerably improved in her personal appearance.

She was not neatly fitting gingham dress, shoes and stockings, her face was clean and her hair was no longer disarranged.

"She now looked really very pretty.

"I wonder if she fixed up on my account?"

Freckles was so fat, and she was so adult with her than I ever was with a girl before. I wonder if she wouldn't make a good wife—wise, of course. I was to turn out to be a Magerald, of Magerald Manor, with a compete for life on one.

The idea had occurred to him more than once before, and now was by no means an unpleasant one.

To be sure she was wild and uncultured, but a little time and a little teaching might put her in any position, seeing how mentally bright she was.

But, after all, mussed your young peddler, was it in your heart to hit the unconscious child, and nothing savored of witchery, unless it was the widow Hayden herself and the blinking poll-parrot person who followed her.

The widow was seated at a table, with some documents spread out before her, when she gathered up and placed in an envelope as Fred and Freckles entered.

They could see the fourth person—a smooth-faced, elderly and ministerial-looking individual, who stood up and beckoned to the witch in a way that seemed to argue that he was anxious to get through with his business at the moment.

The widow motioned Fred to a seat, and then turned and regarded him stolidly.

"You near witness to the duel?" she said.

"Yes, ma'am.

"Who was the duel with, Mr. Magerald?"

"A man known heretofore as Boyd de Bynville.

"And Hoyt had no hand in the affair?"

"No; he was not even a witness of it."

Fred might as well have been this De Bynville possessed of another name?

"Yes, sir."

"The name I know him by is—"

We beg pardon, Miss de Bynville, but the door is just then, with force enough to have burst it in.

CHAPTER XII

SHAKES "THROWS UP HIS HAND."

What Fred saw here, was a peculiar expression fitting her visage.

"What was it?" both Freckles and Fred asked, in a breathless tone.

"I will see," was the grim reply, and advancing to the door, she flung it open.

A sight was then revealed.

Partly upon the door-step, and partly upon the ground, lay the prostrate figure of old Tom Shakes.

He was evidently in a state of utter insensibility.

Old man, the things were covered with a shawl, and his garments saturated with his life-blood. Or, as the widow chirped, excitedly.

"It's Tom Shakes, and he's all knifed up. Help me in with him!"

He at once came to her assistance, and they carried Shakes into the cabin, and laid him on a bench.

Freckles went and knelt beside him, in awful distress.

The Witch softly set to work applying repressive, of which she appeared to have a good store. Her movements were quick and deft, and her hands glanced at those who gathered around.

Then a sign of apparent relief escaped him.

"We are the widow reply, "But speak of yourself—are you badly hurt? and who did it?"

"Yes, I'm all stabbed to pieces, and won't hold out many minutes. The gang did it, an' I made no half gesture for any of it. I thought I'd never be able to get here, I bled so!

"What did they set onto ye for?" the widow demanded, eagerly.

"Causa I refuse to have a hand in murderin' him," and he slowly slumbered off.

Fred de Bynville came last night, and wanted the young feller killed. We finally agreed to do it, but he wouldn't do it. Aided to the young man I told the boys I'd have no hand in it, and the result was as free as sea. Ye see, I got the worst o' it!

Then there followed a brief silence, when the widow continued.

"Sally"

"The girl almost bent over him.

"Well, did?"

"Sally, I've got something to say to you afore we make a disposing of this. I've a mighty toughen at hand to you sometimes, gal?"

"Oh, don't mention it, daddy; it's all past and forgiven.

"Thankles, girl! Then's sweet words to my ears. Sally, the neighbors have long cast hints that ye weren't my child!"

"Yes, well, they were wrong. You are my own child, and your mother—ver legal mother—is there," and he nodded toward the Witch.

"She my mother?" Sally gasped, in astonishment.

"Just so! The widow an' I hitched up in double harness, shortly after Haydon died, though it wasn't generally known, and you were the result, but only as we drew a smooth hitch and, after you were born you came to the conclusion that you were a mother a sum a' o' money un' tuk you, and she dropped out. As you know, however, the old woman has watched over you ever since as she's a good like you, and it is Witch Hayden's desire that you and me— and I, on my death-bed, second the motion!"

"Fred knew not what to say. He was confused.

Shakes awoke, and regarding the boy narrowly.

"Shakes—why?" he began, stammeringly, "I have had no thought of getting married yet a while am I— only.

"You are eighty!" the Witch spoke up.

"True. But I could not think of incumbering myself with a wife until I was able to support her."

"Boy, here are papers to prove that you are Richard Magerald, stolen from your parents in infancy, and in now the only heir direct to the vast Magerald estates. Magerald is not a name for all. She was adopted after you were stolen. So you see, by marrying, Sally you get both a worthy girl for your wife and a welcome at Magerald Manor."

"How is the major my enemy?"

"Leave that to me. I, and I alone, can prove your claim. I have pay for your hearty welcome with your rights."

"Supposing I refuse to marry?"

"Then you must leave and with them your identity, and you go out upon the world again an' make a new start."

"It would seem that this plot originated long ago!" Fred observed.

"You don't say."

The Widow smiled answer. Her face had become strangely hard and strong.

"After a few moments of deliberation thought, Fred said, "I'll take Sally and trek both hands in his.

"She said, "What do you say to this singular bargain? Do you think you would be perfectly satisfied and willing to become my wife with a young man who has lost more than you have?"

"Fred remained silent, with gaze bent upon the floor, and her cheeks like blushing roses.

She did not release her hands, however, and after a moment her cherry lips slightly moved and "Yes; if you really love me, and will let me love you.

"I could not get at her fondly for a moment, then turned to the Witch and said, "I have announced; "I accept the conditions, so we may as well go ahead with this matter without delay, for if I mistake not, you have a right to be the result and provided a minister.

He said this to the Reverend Mr. Hoover, of Fairfax.

It was plain that Tom Shakes was rapidly sinking, and the marriage could not be delayed without delay, and Fred and Sally received the outlaw's dying blessing.

Hoover remained until Tom Shakes died, and during his last moments administered such consolation as he could.

Then, after life was extinct, the minister, guided by the Witch, departed for Fairfax and notified the authorities to take charge of the remains.

In this they did so the afternoon, piloted by the Witch, and removed the body to Fairfax, where an inquest would have to be held.

The Constable Jones, of course, searched Mother Hayden's abode for Fit Fred, but the evil woman had taken the precaution to secrete the corporal couple on a tangle of the existence of which no one knew herself.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WITCH'S VENGEANCE.

The excitement caused by the death of Dick Haydon, and the marriage of the young man with Sally, was said to be said of Hoyt Hayden for participating in the affair of honor, for Constable Jones told his story so vividly that no one who was in Fairfax had a doubt but Hayden's hand had shared in the murder.

Hayden was incarcerated in a room at the hotel, and a strong guard was placed over him. His wife kept until the day to keep up the show from the county town, where were the jail and the sheriff.

Hayden bore up under his arrest proudly.

He emphatically protested his innocence when the subject of the murder was brought up, and he had no fears for the future.

At Magerald Manor, about the same time the real Richard Magerald was being married, his unfortunate predecessor of the same name lay in a magnificent rosewood casket.

Clad in somber black, German, the colored servant, sat beside the corpse, and kept the vigil of his father.

The major entered occasionally, stately and noiseless, yet seldom remained more than a couple of minutes at a time.

Mildred, utterly broken down with grief, kept to her room.

The widow, too, was "indisposed," and Boyd de Bynville busy with the terror of the dead, so kept closely to his room. Guilty wretch, he dared not look upon the man he had slain.

Mildred, after the first paroxysm of grief at her father's demise, had become so firmly attached to each other—ordered her own carriage and drove away to Fairfax, unknown to her father.

At Fairfax she made a strong effort to get an interview with Hoyt Hayden, but her appeal was refused by Constable Jones, whose dignity had largely augmented in the past few hours, and who honestly believed that he was the most important personage in all Fairfax.

So, sorrowfully, poor Mildred drove back to the hotel, and took her place as a widow, more or less, in the small, dark room in the rear of the hotel, where the furniture was most simple, but where the window was long and portentous than ever, now that it was dark, and remote from the general bustle of her own chamber, where to battle with two griefs—the death of a brother, and the imminent marriage of Miss de Bynville to a rich man.

Dick was to be buried on the morrow, when the neighbors and friends would be permitted to enter the hotel, and it would remain for the Magerald family custom of long standing.

About in his last agony, the unfortunate young man did not look as if he had suffered much pain, and was as one quietly and peacefully dying.

Major Magerald entered the parlor about half past five, and said to the major of Richmond's death had affected him deeply, he did not show it, for except a slight pallor, his face wore that calm and expectant look which was so true of his death. After passing silently at the face in the cabinet for a few minutes, he said, "I am going out for a stroll about the grounds, and as far as he could.
and on my return will relieve you until the next time I can give you a seat.

'"No, ma'am,' said the mayor, 'I shall have to hire a new comforter for the house.'

'The Mayor had not so much for recreation that Major Mageral fitted the house.

'I havent found anything else,' said the mayor, walking along the shady flower garden, 'but I would like to get an idea of the state of the place.'

'I saw an old man who lived in the garden,' said the mayor, 'and he said that the place was going to be abandoned.'

'Then, as he retraced his steps, there was a young bird, and a woman stepped out and confronted him,' he said, 'I have a little more of the same to say to you.'

"Yes, I have heard of your grounds," was the reply.

"I have come for an interview. Shall we have it here, or in your private library?"

"I am not aware that there is any occasion for an interview between man and woman. What is Satan's name do you want?"

"Nothing in Satan's name, sir. I have come to have a thorough talk with you—something I have not done in eighteen years. I have come, on business.

"Relative to the release of your son, I suppose. I shall have to inform you, madam, that I have no knowledge of the matter myself. I must leave it to him."

"I went to talk to you about Hoyt Mageral. There is ample evidence to clear him and exonerate the right man, when the proper time of the trial is that of the son that I have to talk of now."

"We have no money—or at least, not with you, at any rate. He is dead, poor boy. I propose to let bygones be bygones in his case."

"I told him, and he said, "I think it's all right, but of the rest Real will Mageral, who disappeared al
day's birth, and for whom an
other infant was substituted."

"Had woman, what is that you say? How do you know he is dead?"

"No, your story is a lie. I haven't a son."

"You can't play up tricks with me, Mageral. You have always half believed that another child was put in place of your own—seeing he has acted like you say.

"This false story."

"But tell me. If you had faith and was fully satisfied that he had died of your own, born of your wife, what caused you to go to the Fairview Arms, and find the pedler's pack for the locket which was given to young Richard the day he was born?"

"To prove to me."

"The witch, he led the way toward the manner. They entered by a side door and ascended to the third floor by a stairway that was seldom used.

"Then they traversed several hallways and finally reached a corner room. There was another room, a circular office, as it was called.

"A person shut up within this could talk loudly without fear of being heard. Into this the mayor conducted the Witch, locked the door, and lit a lamp.

"They were seated, he said:

"Now, then, I want a thorough and unhesitating explanation of all this matter. I'll have it, or you never leave here alive, as sure as my name is Mageral."

"The mayor, and I suppose you." She said, "You couldn't kill me if you were to try. But enough, You shall not kill me."

"Years ago you, Maximilian Mageral, lov
e a pretty girl named Trixy Telford, or, at least, you had a love for her, and you have returned from her."

"Fearful of openly marrying Trixy Telford, I fled, and was never seen again. I have been disdained in favor of your younger brother, John Mageral.

"Trixy Telford was an honest, highly honorable girl, and refused to wed you unless you were very sure that you were the real person. Did you marry her No! You cast her aside, and now I have her back. I am going about a month after married another Poor Trixy. She was then pointed out as one of your cast-off flames, and folks ridiculed her for" not having better sense than to suppose that she could marry a Mageral.

"All this imitated her against the world and its heartless, until she saw her des
erate, and then she registered an oath that was destined to control all her future:

"'By all the powers of Almighty God, and by all the frauds and deceptions of Trixy Telford, I hereby register an oath that one of mine own first born shall get reign at Mageral Manor as early as possible.'"

"The mayor started; but his face was inscrut
able, and he hastened to change it.

So the Witch went on:

"After that, Trixy Telford, had but to wait and hold her breath, and it would come sooner or later, and I was content. The time came at last. A new heir was born to Mageral Manor.

"I was known to be an excellent nurse, and was called upon to attend my lady and readiness accepted the call, nor was I unprepared, for I had nothing left of my plot carefully."

"Your young wife lay for a week at death's door, and I had sole charge of the infant. Aid
ded by a confidante, it was an easy matter to smuggle off the real heir and substitute a pretty baby from the same locket.

"Your confederate: the mayor quietly asked.

"Was your brother Jim. He was wild and reckless, you know, and, understanding, that he was to be dead, old fish, to pull into the world for himself. I persuaded him to enter into my scheme, and take the child away and deliver it to me, as could be found when.

"He didn't love you much, as you well knew, and I had to finally consent, providing I would get him out of the way. I informed the Magerals to give him luck.

"Well, I did for him—It matters not how—he disappeared. Your child went with him. When the star was missed I was suspected of having it; but it could not be found, and I was kicked out of Mageral Manor, branded a thief."

"I didn't care. I was thinking in years after a sweeter revenge was in store for me.

"Well, Jim took the boy East, put it out to work with the others, and found it again. They scraped enough together to pay its beard. When it was six, he carried it with him, and they began a wandering life. Heaven only knows where they didn't go. Now they were at the further end of the earth, and again they'd be back in America. Sometimes Jim was flush, and at others dead broke, and whenever thus, he'd always write me, and I always had a snug sum put by to help him out.

"At the last I heard, he was in the Statesman. He said it didn't give him much luck, and I'd better take charge of the boy gave him more luck than anything else.

"Well we kept up occasional correspondence unt six years ago. I wrote to him, and I heard no more of him until two months ago, when he wrote me that he did not expect to live long anywhere, and that the boy would come back to me, as I had originally promised.

"But, to make the story complete, I must turn back.

"After leaving Mageral Manor I went back to my home in the swamp. In time I married him, the woodcutter, and we were married, leaving me his son, and a larger sum of money than any one supposed he possessed. Six months after his death, I learned that I could not well live there alone."

"Major Mageral looked astounded.

"The marriage was never known outside the swamp. Shakes and I didn't get along harmoniously together. After a little girl was born, we agreed to quit each other, he paying me a good share of the child's support."

"I, however, watched over her welfare, and she grew up to be a bright and attractive girl.

"She is, and perhaps now you may begin to see how the culmination of my triumph comes in.

"I saw nothing," was the reply. "Go on."

"He tells of how Elizabeth Mageral arrived in this valley, known, however, to himself and others as Fred Floyd, a pack

"I had known of his coming for a few days, and met him at the school, and soon again, at Fairview, where I caused him to be
come possessed of the Magic Star. But how did you come to get the major, eh?" Flip Floyd said, thoughtfully.

"Yes! You want to see if I can detect any of the old stock Mageral characteristics in you?"

"And if he does not discover any?"
And without another word the haughty master of the manor turned and strode away with a step that seemed to shake the ground under his feet. Fred and Freckles watched him a few minutes with the same expression of amazement and then turned and reentered the swamp, where they met the Witch.

"You did nobly!" she said, patting Fred on the shoulder. "You two will reign at Magdalor Manor, yet!"

CHAPTER XV

"WHOM GOD DESTINETH TO LEAD, LET NO MAN PUT ASUNDER."

Major Magedler was lost in time in getting back to the manor.

He entered the park, hurried through it, and entered the town, dining at the Gnome in the dimly-lit hall.

"Have the watchers come?" he asked, hoarsely.

"Yes, sir. But, to de Gnome's sake, master, what's de matter? You look like a ghost!"

"I am a ghost—a paralyzing one," was the response. "Nor do I care or order him to saddle Sheffield and bring him around in five minutes."

He then hurried on up-stairs.

In less than ten minutes more he was in the saddle and the prisoners were away toward Fairfax.

When he drew up in front of The Arms, Sheffield was panting and decked with fleeces of foam.

The major dismounted and entered the hotel, which kept open all night.

"Who's on guard at Hayden's room?" he demanded.

"Constable Jones, sir," said the man in the little room.

"All right. Give Jones what he wants to drink when he comes down."

Then the major hurried up-stairs.

He found Hayden's room, and Jones sitting outside the door, wide awake and vigilant.

"Jones, give me the key, while you go down and get a drink," the major said. "You needn't hurry back until I come down. I want to have a talk with the prisoner.

Jones hesitated a minute, then handed over the keys and walked away. The major, under whose patronage he really was, and dared not refuse him.

When he went down, Constable Jones had gone down-stairs, the major entered Hayden's room.

The prisoner was partly reclining on the bed, but was not asleep.

He nodded slightly in answer to the major's bowed head.

Then the major quietly locked the door, and seated himself upon the only chair the room contained.

"Hayden," he said, beginning the conversation at once, "this is the most serious charge that's been placed to your credit."

"Oh! I don't know. It hasn't worried me much."

"Indeed! You must be wonderfully strong-nerved. I believe that killing a man in duel in this State means a long term of imprisonment."

"So I know. But I've never killed man yet."

"Of course I cannot aver anything to that. But the evidence is overwhelmingly strong against you. I don't doubt it, but what you will be convicted unless some special intervention is made."

Some specious, unsympathetic argument.

"Exactly.

"I do not understand you."

"Well, you see I have a powerful influence in this county with the courts, and were I to enlist myself in behalf of you, there is no reason to think there would be any doubt but what I could clear you."

"Well, I should like to get a new conviction just as easy as the turning over of your hand—I suppose that is what you are at."

"Not exactly, but your words are nevertheless very clear. I prefer to help you, if you choose to be helped."

"Well."

"I'll not beat about the bush, but plainly tell you on what terms I will secure your release. Are you aware that Fred Floyd, ostensibly a pack-peddler, has been for years the ward of your son, stolen from me years ago?"

"Yes, I am aware of the particulars."

"Ah! Well. I wish to receive this young man at my home, as a son and heir, but there is an obstacle to the step—namely, that a man has gone and disgraced the Magedler name by marrying your stepson—beholder of the swag, Sid, and the swag, Snaky, I want her kidnaped and removed so far away that she will never again set foot under your roof. Can you bring my son a divorce, I can receive him at the same time."

"But, sir, what is all this to me?"

"Nothing much—I want you to do the job. Nay! do not shake your head—you must do it. You want your liberty—more, you want Mildred's hand in marriage. You shall have both, and besides that, I'll start you handsomely in business."

Hoyt Hayden, however, was not the man to jump at a bribe, no matter how munificent it might be.

He simply laughed as he eyed the aristocratic master of the manor.

"Major," he said, decidedly, "excuse my presumption, but you are what I must now refer to, to a certain fool and stump. Can you enter for an instant to suppose that I could be tempted, under any circumstances, to act as an instrument to ruin an honest, upright, unsullied and virtuous side of town—"a knife, to think of putting amuder those poor innocent hands. How do you mean to make an honest man and you have done me both inestimable injustice."

The major sat for a moment speechless with rage and astonishment.

And how to get the money?"

"So! my fine fellow, you refuse to do as I have asked you to do, eh?" he demanded acidly.

"Most assuredly I do."

"Then hark ye! I'll see that you spend the next twenty years in the state."

And he left the room, locking the door after him.

Hastening down-stairs, he gave the key to Jones, and immediately passed from the hotel, vaulted into the saddle, and rode toward the manor.

Later, when he sat in his private apartment, with his head bowed in his hands, those words which he had heard uttered that night still rang in his ears:

"Whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder!—and mechanically he repeated

"Yes! and so it shall be!" he said, slowly.

"I have been a fool and a knave, as young Hayden said. But no longer shall it be thus. Henceforth, Maximilian Magedler, and to the end of my days, you shall bear the yoke, and Major Magedler shall resound with happiness in a manner so long sought after by him."

And he prayed that it might be so.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PREVIOUS PARAGRAPHS SHOW THEIR HANDS.

The next day had been set for poor Dick's funeral.

The funeral service was to be held at the manor at two o'clock, after which the remains were to be taken to Fairhaw for internment.

At noon the manor was to be opened to such a crowd to view the corpse, but could not attend the funeral.

Fred was up early that morning at the Witch's cabin, and after breakfast, express- ed a desire to see the remains of the young man whom, as long as he lived, he visited daily. The Witch at once came to his aid.

"I'll show you the path. It's a multi- tud of clever disguises, and with a deart hand she soon had him so perfectly disguised that there was no danger of his being recognized by any one who had seen him before.

"But after kinning the path you are out for the manor, without any Pretty idea of what was to be done more than to get into the park, say a word to the man there, the throng of callers came—then join them, and there get up the things that interested him.

He gained entrance to the park at the rear, and was soon settled snugly down behind a large hedge, where he could be observed with foliage of creeping vines that no one within the park could see him, and where he could see through an occasional opening and view the interior.

He had not long become settled down in the
nook when he heard footsteps, and making a cautious reconnaissance, saw Boyd de Byville approaching. His appearance was as elegant as ever, but there was about him the air of a man in his life. He entered the arbour without hesitation, and the door was locked behind him; then he lit a cigar and puffed leisurely away at it.

He declared to Fred that he was waiting, and such proved to be the case, for, after a few minutes, Denny and the negro man walked from the arbour, and Fred soon was made aware of the presence of Madame Marguerid.

She was about a foot shorter than de Byville’s neck and kissed him rapturously, as she entered the room and threw her arms around his neck.

“I’ve got the note you showed under the door,” she said, “and slipped away without being seen. When are you going to be here being heard over?”

Fred considered. “Not for at least, I reconnoitered as I came. This part of the grounds is seldom visited.”

“Well, then, what is it, dear? Has anything important happened?”

“Yes, something of the utmost importance. But first, are you going to tell me the names of the engineers.”

“No!” and Madame shrugged her shoulders with a little laugh. “I am too indolent, you know. I shall have a little chill before the services commence, and will not be able to come down.”

“Well, yes, I see. I suppose I shall be in duty bound to be present at the services, and go to the place where the body can be done afterward.”

“Of course. Explain, please.”

“Easy enough. There’s only one or two things, I’ve got to light out of this vicinity.”

“Ah! and for what reason?”

“Uh, somehow, the way I see that I saw that peddler, who called me by name.”

“I see. Remember the night I lifted the pocketbook of Mount, a cattle-bred, in a summer garden of Baltimore a year ago? By a slight-of-hand movement, I slipped it to you who sat in a table in my rear. You slipped it out. I was arrested. I was held for some time before the court, and I cut a mouth, on suspicion. Well, this is the case. The thing before the court passed the present when I was arrested and again at my hearing. I remember his face perfectly!”

“Well, well, you know, I was afterward betrayed to the police, and I did as the Federal officer. We slid out of Baltimore in time, however, to avoid arrest. If this peddler is not a detective, I fear he may notify the Monumental authorities, so that I’m in danger.”

“Is this too bad? Must you really go? If you do my love, I go with you!”

“Not that I see, and we won’t go empty-handed. We will take as much of Madame’s money as we can secure, and then go out of the vicinity.”

“You are provoking; why don’t you explain how?”

“Well, yes, last night I discovered a secret way of reaching the Maguerid stronghold.”

“What?”

“Just as I tell you. In the summer kitchen there is a section of board wall that slides aside and admits you to a secret stairway. You close the panel and ascend a spiraling way, when you find yourself in a room in the rear of the others. One of the safes has a back door. You open it, and the interior arrangement of the same is such that as soon as it comes out with it, so that you can get into the safety of the room, it is possible for you to push open this door of the safe and get out into the strongroom.”

“Did you ever do this before? How did you do this ever before? Does Maguerid know of it?”

“If you are not for the fact in this way: The major’s grandson is said to have been a singular old crone. He built the house himself and had the safes you are to hide himself away from his family for days, and you must not tell. It was undoubledly he who ordered them, for he was she safe.”

“Most likely. And you round all this out last night?”

“Yes, but I could do more. I had no tools with me. I hid as much in a sack tied with a string, and later, the body was found. You know just what’s been discovered.”

“You think you can open the safes that have money in them?”

“Well, I should! I never saw the safe I couldn’t open. I can generally catch the combination, but, in case I can’t, I can fetch the door with my tools. Besides that, all the safes contain money; I suppose, anyhow, that the shelves of the safe false contain fifty thousand dollars in various bills. Just think of that!”

“Madame utters a little cry of delight.”

“I see no danger, love.”

“None in the least. You are to listen at the door of the safe. I will be back in an hour. I will be surprised, while I go for the safes. It won’t take me more than two hours to go in and take them. I am authorized to open the safes of unlimited wealth, and en route for parts unknown.”

“I will try to be brave, dearest.”

“That’s right; and now, you’ll get back to the room. If you do not get to the room undiscovered, you can say you were out for a little fresh air.”

After exchanging a few more words they left the arbor, de Byville in one direction, and the madame in another.

After they were gone, Fred took possession of the armchair in the office, and lighted a cigar. They had discovered the path to the room undiscovered, and Fred was so carefully addressed.

“We, however, are allowed! I soliloquized, scratching

head, reflexively. ‘The major is nursing the gallant pair of crooks as we have to.”

I know De Byville was a shark when he came to the bridge, but don’t know’s I saw her old man before. So they’re onto me, and are going to stop me before it’s too late. Well, now they fancy not. I’m entirely too slip to allow such a proceeding. Now, let me see. What am I to do, and how shall I talk? That’s the present question.”

He deliberated for several minutes.

“There isn’t any present danger,” he finally concluded. “Nothing will be done till De Byville gets back, and the crooks. Then they can’t get away with the swing until to-night. So, I reckoned this was a good time to let the major go to the funeral, and when he comes back he and I will give ‘em fits.”

So Fred waited.

Soon noon came, and a crowd or country people and relatives assembled to view the remains of poor Dick.

Fred had no difficulty in mingling among them. He took a pitting glance at the corpse, lying there so handsome, even in death, and then passed out and returned to the arbor.

At half-past two the guests hidden to the major’s burial services have left the place. Dick was carried from Maguerid Manor, never to return there again.

Then the general footwork was moved off and wound away down the road toward Fairfax.

Major Maguerid, Mildred and de Byville occupied the rear of the funeral procession, and the madame remained at home, "indisposed."
from the swamp and made the arrest. I concluded to keep him until the proper time came for taking him to court.

"Did you recognize the man who slew Magerald?"

"I did. He is a guest of Madame Magerald at the manor, and is called Boyd de Bynville!"

"How do you know this?"

"I heard friends of mine in the neighborhood say they knew the man."

The queer story is that the case was brought to the attention of the sheriff, and he went to the manor and took the man into custody. His name is Boyd de Bynville, and he is a guest of Madame Magerald. The case was heard in court, and the man was found guilty and sentenced to death.

"But how did you come to the manor?"

"I was following orders. I was told by Mr. Jones, the sheriff, to look into the matter and get the facts."

"And what did you find?"

"I found that Boyd de Bynville was the man who had been accused of the murder. He had been in the neighborhood for several weeks, and had been seen near the scene of the crime."

"And what happened after that?"

"The man was taken into custody and brought to trial. The case was heard in court, and the man was found guilty and sentenced to death."

"And how do you know all this?"

"I was present at the trial, and I heard the evidence."

"And what do you think of the case?"

"I think the man was guilty."

"And what do you think of the sentence?"

"I think it was just."
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