



"I JUDGED THEY WERE DEAD, AND
STARTED HUNTING FOR
MY GRIP."

CARRYING THE BOODLE TO CASEY.

By E. Florence

Uncle Monk, with a Can of Dynamite, Tries to Do a "Message-to-Garcia" Stunt.

THE Loose-jointed Individual reclined in the shade of a tree by the roadside, serene and content, watching the approaching figure on the highway. As the traveler halted and gave the high-sign of the fraternity, he said:

"Welcome, brother, to my arboreal abode. Enter within its cool shade and shake off the rigors of your personally conducted pilgrimage."

"Thanks, my lord," replied the individual with the De Bergerac nose, "I am weary with walking. My motor has served me

a scurvy trick, hence the necessity of this ambling advance. Have a smoke?"

The Lean-and-lanky One extracted a hostage from the tobacco-bag of his guest, and filled and lighted his pipe. Under the mellowing influence of the aromatic weed, his mind took a reminiscent turn, and he started off like a parlor phonograph with a new record:

"Say, pard, was you ever initiated into any of those secret societies where you have to do a lot of fool things for the amusement of a lot of overgrowns? Have you ever

unconsciously acted like a post-graduate student of a Bloomingdale correspondence course in lunacy, or been 'it' for the delectation of the bunch of speed-breakers in the land of the midnight fun?"

"Well," replied De Bergerac, "I have never shone as a vaudeville luminary; but, in the production of merry mirth, I calculate I have contributed somewhat to the risible reserve of the nation."

"My boy, resumed the Lean-and-lanky One, "I was just thinking of the time when I was the star performer in a comedy drama that was a howling farce to the initiated audience, but a sort of 'your-money-or-your-life' experience to your Uncle Monk."

"Nothing can spoil the pleasure of a good smoke, so let's have your yarn," ventured De Bergerac.

"This adventure happened in Pennsylvania, whither I had drifted after blowing out of the Sunflower State. I was holding down a job as extra man in the office of the P. and A. R. R., not a great distance from that section of the country where the Molly Maguires had flourished some years previous.

"My duties consisted of doing anything for which my abilities fitted me, and the superintendent fed me on such a liberal diet of work that it was a wonder I didn't contract indigestion in my labor organization.

"He ordered me, one day, to go to a certain station up the road and secure a package which had been expressed earlier in the day, and to deliver it to its destination, which I would learn from the station-master. Owing to an accident on the line, I was unable to get away until about 3 P.M., and then I was compelled to take the freight and ride in the tonneau of the caboose.

"The funereal cortege landed me at my station at about four-thirty, and I hurried to present my credentials to the station-master.

As he looked them over, I imagined I saw a grin lurking in the corners of his mug.

"As it disappeared he said. 'I am to deliver to you a package of money for the semimonthly pay of the men up at the lumber-camp, which is situated on the other side of a spur of the mountain. You have a good five-mile tramp before you, and should be able to reach there about dark. You simply have to follow the road to and across the spur, which is shorter than going around.

"There is no danger of going astray if you keep your eyes open. I'm glad you have come to relieve me of the money, as I will feel easier with it off my hands.'

"Why, there's no danger in this joyless paradise, is there?' I asked.

"No, not ordinarily,' he replied.

'But word has come over the Wire that the Sweeney boys have broken jail. As you know, they are notorious outlaws, and they make these mountains their headquarters.'

"Gee!' I commented. 'And here's me carrying the coin to Casey without so, much as a putty shooter to protect the company's pay-roll. You don't happen to have a blunderbuss handy, that I could, borrow?'

"No,' he answered; 'I have not. But I have made up a dummy package for you, which may help you outwit any one who may tackle you. The genuine package is sealed with red wax, while the dummy is sealed with black. But for that, you couldn't tell them apart.'

"I handed him my grip, and he placed the two packages in it. I thanked him, and was about starting off, after getting explicit directions, when he said:

"By George! I nearly forgot. You are to take this can of dynamite up to Casey. He needs it to blast out tree stumps, to clear a wagon road so that he can haul his timber out.'

"He handed me a can—something like

a dinner-pail, only smaller—painted a bright red, with the word ‘Dynamite’ painted on it in white letters. I didn’t like the idea of lugging that canned destruction along, but the station-master said Casey had to have it.

“I slung the strap of my grip over my shoulder and started off, carrying the can by the handle, and you can bet I carried it carefully. I knew that if I dropped it, pay-day for those wood-choppers would be postponed and I would be post-mortemed.

“Weighing my chances of being held up, I hiked along. Shortly the sky became overcast, and I knew that I was in for a wetting unless I reached shelter. As I neared the mountain I heard some one calling, and on looking around I saw a lad running toward me and beckoning for me to wait.

“When he came up, he asked me if I was going to the lumber-camp, and, if so, would I take a letter to his father, who had gone over the day before.

“I assented, and he gave me a letter, addressed to ‘Bill Jenkins, sheriff.’ I hurried on, being anxious to reach-the shelter of the timber, and in a short time I reached the wooded slope and started the ascent.

“After proceeding a short distance I beheld a cabin in the clearing to the right, and decided to investigate. There was no evidence, of habitation, so I walked up and knocked. There was no response, so I pushed open the door and entered.

“I found myself in an ordinary mountain hut, of one room, with a large, open fireplace to one side. Suddenly I discovered that the can of dynamite was missing, and I realized that I had put it down while waiting for the lad to overtake me, and had forgotten to take it up again.

“There was nothing to do but retrace my steps and secure the can. I decided to cache the grip and get it on my return, and found a good place up the chimney. Hurrying

back, I found the can where I had left it. Securing it, I again made for the hut, and as I was about entering I heard voices inside.

“Some one was evidently inside, so I cautiously peeped in. Two men were kneeling on the floor, with my grip between them. One of them held an open letter, which he was reading, and I judged it was the one that had been given me for delivery to the sheriff.

“‘Say, Tim,’ he said. ‘This here letter won’t never be delivered to that big galoot who put us away. He’ll find out soon enough that we have made our getaway. These packages look like they has money in them, so I guess we’d better fade away before the owner comes along with a baggage-check and claims his grip.’

“‘He can come, and be blowed! This ain’t no claim office. What he’ll get will be plenty, and it won’t do him no good if he comes moseying around here,’ growled the one called Tim.

“I stepped boldly into the room and said: ‘Gentlemen, I fear you have made a mistake. I happen to own that grip you are taking liberties with, and I will thank you to hand it over.’

“They had both jumped up as I entered, and as I finished they looked at each other and grinned.

“‘Say, Mike,’ says Tim, ‘he wants this grip. He won’t need it when we get through with him, will he?’

“With that they both made a move toward me; but, raising the can of dynamite above my head, I said: ‘If you two amateur highwaymen don’t want to shuffle off by the dynamite route, you’d better be good. Hand over that grip, or I’ll make mixed Micks of you.’

“They stood, hesitating, while I held the can aloft, ready to throw it at the first hostile move they made. Outside, the storm had broken, and the crashing of the thunder

furnished the fitting effect for our little drama.

"I watched them closely, and as they both made a rush, I hurled the can to the ground, jumping back through the open door as I did so.

"As it struck there was a flash and a roar, and the cabin collapsed. When I recovered consciousness it was dark, and the moon was shining through the trees. It was some time before I could locate myself, but gradually everything came back to me.

"I arose and looked around. The cabin was a wreck, and I saw the outlaws pinned down beneath the heavy timbers. I judged they were dead, and started hunting for my grip, thinking it might possibly have escaped destruction. I found it intact, and the next thing I saw was that can of demolition powder smiling at me from amid the wreckage.

"In my excited state I had thought the dynamite had caused the wreck, but I now realized that an opportune flash of lightning had furnished the dramatic denouement to my heroic stand. I didn't bother trying to find out why the dynamite had not exploded, but, gathering my paraphernalia, I started afresh on my interrupted journey.

"The darkness and the solitude got onto my nerves, and I wondered whether there were any more highwaymen waiting for an easy mark. After proceeding some distance, I stopped to make sure the packages were all right, and found them undisturbed.

"I decided to adopt an extra precaution for the safety of the package with the red seal, and, taking a fishing-line which I happened to have in my pocket, I tied it around the package securely. Then I took hold of the line by the end, and proceeded, dragging the package after me, fifteen or twenty feet to the rear.

"I calculated that if any one held me up, I could drop the end of the line, and the package would not be discovered.

"I had proceeded about half a mile in this way when, suddenly, I felt something tugging on my line, just like a bite. I tried to pull in, but whatever it was had nabbed my precious bait, refused to give an inch. Finally, I tied the loose end around a tree and followed the line back to find out what I had caught.

"I found that a stray dog had hold of the package, which he had evidently mistaken for a rabbit or something, and was trying to shake the life out of it. I tried to shoo him away, but he wouldn't shoo; so, losing patience, I soaked him on the head with the can and laid him out.



"Then I realized that, for the second time, that feminine gunpowder had failed to make a demonstration when provoked. Securing my package, I rolled the dog into a convenient gully, and proceeded as before, trailing the package, like an innocent little Lord Fauntleroy kid dragging a diminutive red wagon.

"But it seemed that I was doomed to catch it from all sides, for suddenly I felt the other end of the line going up into the air, and my hair promptly did the same.

" 'What's the matter with this enchanted mountain?' says I to myself as I tried to draw in on the line.

"It was just like flying a kite in n high wind, for whatever had hold of the other end fought hard; but finally I got the thing started, and it came toward me with a swoop, when I realized that I had been kite-flying an owl. 1

made a bat at it with that non-responsive dynamite, and it released its hold and flew into a tree, where it started to make a noise like a locomotive in distress.

“After that, I put the package into the bag and proceeded in a rational way, thinking it better, to meet danger than to fish for it.

“As I continued on my way, the owl kept up its Caruso solo. It rather annoyed me to have a nocturnal canary asking ‘Who?’ ‘Who?’ In a short time answering calls seemed to come from all quarters of the mountain. It did not take me long to realize that there was a method in these calls, and that they were gradually drawing nearer in a narrowing circle.

“Finally, on reaching a clearing in the timber, I realized that I was surrounded by a troop of ghostlike figures, each one wearing an improvised mask.

“The most prominent figure in the troupe was a woman, who looked like a veritable giantess. Like the rest, she also wore a mask, while her cloak fell in easy folds from her shoulders over a massive figure.

“‘Who have we here?’ she asked.

“‘Who? Who?’ piped the operabouffe chorus.

“‘An enemy to the cause.’ came from one of the figures in a voice that sounded familiar.

“‘Step forward and make your plaint, my son,’ commanded the massive Brunhild.

“‘Good mother,’ replied the owner of the voice, stepping forward, ‘the oppressors of the poor have sent this man into our midst with money to pay the men who are ruining your retreat by cutting down the trees. Since entering our domain, he has wrecked our cabin and nearly killed two of your loyal subjects. He has laid violent hands on our watchdog and spoiled his bark, and he has offered indignities to the pet of the clan—the sacred owl.’

“As the speaker proceeded, I recognized him as one of the men who had held me up in the cabin, and whom I had left for dead among the wreckage.

“‘Son of iniquity!’ thundered Brunhild. ‘What have you to say?’

“‘Nothing,’ I replied, ‘that I care to say to this bunch of masqueraders. My sole wish is to continue on my way, and continue quickly-’

“With that, I attempted to break through the circle, but the fellow who had summed up the indictment barred my way.

“‘Stand back!’ I shouted, ‘or, by Heaven! I will blow the bunch of you into smithereens.’ I raised the can of dynamite above my head, that all might see it.

“A mocking shout of laughter greeted this threat, and the fellow called Mike asked: ‘Is that a new kind of explosiveless dynamite you are armed with?’

“‘No,’ I replied; ‘not when it hits something hard, and it’s going to hit the hardest thing in this locality right now.’ And then I let it drive straight at his head.

“He ducked, and the can sailed harmlessly by and was caught by the man behind him, while I was seized and held by a number of the other heavy villains.

“The one who had caught the can handed it to Brunhild, who pried off the lid, and said: ‘Boys, here’s a treat for you. A canful of good old rough-and-ready tobacco. Now you can smoke and chew to your hearts’ content.’

“You can bet it jarred me to learn that I had been carrying a harmless can of tobacco around, under the impression that it was canned destruction. The tobacco was distributed, and Mike remarked:

“‘Now, friends, why not burn up the pay of those tree-chopping vandals while we are burning up this good tobacco?’

“This proposition was greeted with a

shout, and the maker of the motion took the packages from the grip. Several of the others busied themselves making a fire, and when it had gotten fairly started the packages were tossed into the flames, while I struggled to free myself and prevent this mad act.

"When the packages were consumed, the massive Brunhild raised her mighty hand and commanded silence. 'My sons,' she asked, 'what is to be done with the prisoner?'"

"'Why not do with him as with all the other enemies of the cause?' spoke up Mike.

"'Enough of bloodshed,' replied the chiefess. 'I have a plan. It would be a shame to sacrifice a man as brave as he. Since my Tim died, I have looked in vain for a man to fill his place. This man seems like a bonny lad, so what do you say to my taking him for better or for worse? And bad cess to him if it's for worse.'

"This proposition was received with shouts of approval, and when they had subsided I entered a protest, and swore I would never consent.

"Brunhild approached, and, facing me, said: 'Think well before you refuse to do the bidding of a lady. My brave boys will not stand for a refusal; and before speaking the word that might mean your destruction, I entreat you to look upon the fair face you would renounce.'

"As she ended, she tore off the mask, and I beheld the bearded face of Casey, the biggest devil in four counties.

"'What the heck!' I stuttered, while the rest of the outfit pulled off their masks and executed a wild dance around me, shouting with laughter.

"'Monk, you barbarian,' roared Casey, 'you are now a full-fledged member of the Brotherhood of Joy. You stood the third degree bravely, and we are proud of you.'"



"And the whole thing was a joke on you?" inquired De Bergerac.

"A rank farce, hatched out by Casey. He had gone to the station earlier in the day and secured the money, and fixed up the scheme with the station-master. The whole outfit of opera-bouffers and heavy villains was nothing more than Casey's wood-choppers.

"Of course, we had a royal blowout at the lumber-camp that night; but I'll bet that the man who carried the message to Garcia didn't have half the excitement that I did in carrying the boodle to Casey."

"A very interesting story," commented De Bergerac. "I am weary; so, with your permission, I will reel off a few yards of sleep. Should a car approach that looks as though it might be mine, kindly instruct the choffer to await my awakening, and I will give you a lift."