MAD TOM THURSBY.

How He Showed That There Was Method In His Madness.

By SARAH BRYCE VAUGHAN.

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One night, or, rather, one morning, about fifty years ago a group of young men were standing before a sideboard in the city of Nashville, Tenn., drinking mint juleps. They were all in fancy costume, for they were attending a masquerade ball, and strains of music and laughter came in from the adjoining rooms. The season was the beginning of autumn, but in that southern location warm weather lingered. Indeed, the "galleries" were inclosed to gain room for the guests.

"What shall we do for hunting this season?" remarked one of the young men at the sideboard. "The country is all taken up, and every estate has a sign up forbidding shooting on the premises."

"Last year," said another, "we were permitted to shoot on the Woodbridge estate. There was no one there except caretakers and servants, but now Miss Woodbridge has returned from the east to take possession of her inheritance, and I see that a notice against trespassing and shooting has been put up."

Among these young men was one Tom Thursby, a graduate of the University of Virginia, who had come out to Tennessee to practice law. Some called him "Mad" Thursby, but whether that was because he was crack brained or insisted in doing things as no one else would do them is a question.

"I think," said Thursby musingly, sipping his julep, "that I shall shoot on Miss Woodbridge's estate."

"What!" exclaimed one of the group. "Trespass on the estate of a young lady?"

"No; I shall gain her permission."

"She has already refused it to others; she can't consistently give it to

"MAY I BEG A BOON?"

you. What influence do you propose to bring to bear upon her?"

"None."

"Do you know her?"

"No; I have never seen her."

"Very well; I'll bet you $50 you don't shoot this fall on Miss Woodbridge's plantation."

"I take the bet."

The rays of the rising sun were streaming in through the windows, the music ceased, and the revelers began to take their departure.

It was about 9 o'clock that Virginia Woodbridge was out among her dew covered flowers—none had yet been nipped by frost—when she heard a voice behind her.

"May I beg a boon?"

Turning, she saw a young man dressed in white satin. His coat, trimmed with gold braid, was cut in the fashion that we call "clawhammer," with two long extensions in rear reaching almost to his ankles. From his vest escaped a profusion of ruffled lace. His breeches were tight to the skin and reached only to the knee; his stockings were silk; his shoes were ornamented with enormous silver buckles. In the hollow of his left arm was a gun; from his shoulder were suspended a shot pouch, a powder flask and a game bag. As to head covering, there was none. The figure was bowing low before her with his right hand on his heart.

The first idea Miss Woodbridge had of this singular apparition was that he was supernatural; the next, that she was confronted by a lunatic.

"I have called," said the visitor, "to ask your kind permission to shoot a few birds on your plantation."

It occurred to the lady that to refuse the man would be tantamount to an invitation to shoot her. No man in his senses would go hunting in such costume, and, although this poor demented creature looked harmless enough, it was impossible to say that a refusal would not rouse him.

"Certainly," she hurried to say as soon as she could gain speech. "Hunt all over the plantation."

The lunatic bowed again, thanked her for her kindness and strode away. As for Miss Woodbridge, as soon as his back was turned she darted into the house and locked the door behind her. Then when she was sufficiently recovered she sent for her overseer, told him how by her presence of mind she had saved herself from being shot by a lunatic and directed him to send to the insane asylum, a short distance north of her estate, and ask them to send at once and capture the lunatic.

By this time a perpetual "bang" was heard without. A darky rushed in and began to talk with eyes wide opened.

"Missy Ginnie, dere's a ha'nt down in de medder killin' all de bobwhite. He dressed like a ghost, all in white, with stars and things on he breast. Wha' all gwine to do?"

"For heaven's sake, don't try to stop him," said the mistress. "If you do he'll kill you."

"Oh, no. I'm not gwine to stop him. As soon as I sor him I run like de debbil was after me. Ebery time he shoot, down comes a thousand quail."

"Never mind the quail. I don't care how many he kills if he doesn't kill any one else before we can get rid of him."

At this juncture the housekeeper entered the room and asked what was the matter. When informed of the facts she smiled and said:

"I saw your lunatic go by my window. He's Tom Thursby, that Virginia scapegrace."

"And sane?" asked Miss Woodbridge.

"Perfectly."

"Then why appear here in such costume and ask permission to hunt?"

"I don't know. There was a masquerade ball in the city last night, and not an hour ago I saw some of the masqueraders rolling along in their carriages on their way home. Perhaps Mr. Thursby was one of them and took a fancy to do some shooting."

"But why in such costume?"

"No one knows what Tom Thursby will do. He's singular. But I have heard he is very bright. He'll probably break his neck some day riding across country. He's a terrible man on horseback."

"That would be a pity," said Miss Woodbridge sympathetically—"he's so handsome."

Whether the lady meant that it did not matter if homely men broke their necks is not of importance to this story. The order to send to the asylum was countermanded, and Mr. Thursby was permitted to bang away till midday, when he came to the house with a bagful of quail and asked to see the mistress. She met him, vainly endeavoring to suppress a smile.

"I have only killed these birds," he said, "for the pleasure of the hunt. I leave them for their rightful owner."

"You are Mr. Thursby, I believe, from Virginia."

"I am, and at your service." A low bow.

"That you may not think we Tennesseeans less hospitable than the people of the Old Dominion I will ask you to remain for a dinner on the birds you have shot."

"That will certainly be an honor as well as a pleasure." Another bow.

Miss Woodbridge entertained Mr. Thursby till the quails were cooked and the repast was announced. Then she took his arm, and they went into the dining room. Never a smile crossed Mr. Thursby's face. His hostess said nothing about having mistaken him for a lunatic, and he made no reference to his fantastic dress.

The servants on the plantation either had not heard the explanation as to the guest's habiliments, or, if they had, it made little impression on them. The opinion among them gained ground that he was a ha'nt, though many of them declared that he was a lunatic. The braver of the colored children flattened their noses against the dining room window panes to observe the specter. Aunt Eunice, who had been Virginia Woodbridge's "mammy," was very much disturbed.

"Wha' fo' yo' niggers let yo' mist'ess induce dat lunaticker fo'?" she asked the men. "Yo' gwine let him shoot her?"

At this white headed Uncle Peter went off and returned with his gun and said he was "gwine to kiver de ha'nt." Miss Woodbridge, while dissecting a quail, discovered him standing in the doorway leveling a shotgun at her guest.

"For heaven's sake, Uncle Peter, what are you going to do?—Don't shoot!"

"Don' yo' bodder, Missy Ginnie. I got de drop on him."

"Oh, that's nothing," said Thursby. "I've seen him for some time. It hasn't spoiled my appetite."

And he helped himself to another quail.

Uncle Peter was finally persuaded to go away with his gun, and the meal proceeded. Then when it was finished Miss Woodbridge and her singular guest spent some time together in the drawing room, after which the guest departed.

Miss Woodbridge was so well pleased with Mr. Thursby that she deeply regretted he was so freaky. But when the next day she received from him several dozen pairs of gloves, with a letter stating that her leniency with him had enabled him to win a bet that he would shoot with her permission on her plantation, she did not consider him so freaky after all. Indeed, she considered him very clever.

After this Mr. Thursby continued his mad pranks at horsemanship and other feats, devoted himself to Miss Woodbridge and practiced law. His associates were divided as to whether he were really crack brained or whether he won an important suit by an expedient similar to the one by which he had won permission to shoot on the Woodbridge premises. From that time forward all agreed that if he were mad there was a lot of method in his madness.

This impression continued to grow till it was concluded by the people of Mr. Thursby's section that they had better send him to represent them in Washington, and he was elected to congress. He took Miss Woodbridge with him.

The White Spruce

It Brought Barbara and the Young Forester Together.

By CLARISSA MACKIE.

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Barbara Owen parted the flaps of the tent and drank in with delighted eyes the scene before her. The little camp perched almost on the edge of the precipice commanded a magnificent view of the snow topped Cascade range blushing under the first rays of the rising sun.

Barbara went to another tent and called her father. He replied by a yawn, followed by a racking cough. Then she hastened to a third tent and prepared breakfast.

Presently James Owen came forth.

"Hungry as a bear, Bab," he said. "The very smell of that coffee makes me feel ten years younger!"

"I wish the taste of it would make you feel ten times better," said Barbara as she placed the meal on the table.

Barbara chatted brightly during the meal and when it was over completed her household tasks, and, leaving her father swinging in a hammock among the trees with a book between his thin fingers, she disappeared in the forest.

The path she trod was faintly defined by disturbed brown needles, and it followed a course marked by high branched trees, winding in and out, skirting a thicket of dwarfed spruce or leading over a roughly bridged gully to a broad wagon trail.

Before she reached the wagon trail Barbara turned abruptly to the left. Here a giant spruce lifted a naked white shaft high above the surrounding trees of the forest.

Crowding about the spruce was a thicket of young hemlock, ragged and starved for want of light and air. There were an opening in the thicket and a low mound covered with brown needles. Dry eyed and tearless, Barbara sat down in the dimness and tried to face a future that was ominously near—a future when her father should be laid beside her mother in another grave under the tall spruce.

A branch crackled under a firm tread and then another. A man's low whistle came nearer to Barbara's retreat, and presently the man himself came into view among the distant tree trunks. Clad in brown khaki, like herself, with leather puttees, blue flannel shirt open at a strong brown throat and a canvas hat tossed back on a rumpled head, Barbara recognized the young man as one of the foresters patrolling the government's forest reserve wherein their camp was pitched. She had met these men occasionally along the wagon trail, and her father had fallen into conversation with one of the sturdy, bronzed woodsmen and afterward had spoken enthusiastically of the splendid work in which they were engaged.

Barbara watched him with interest, confident that he would not penetrate into the thicket.

When he came to the spruce he stopped suddenly, leaned back and squinted his eyes at the white shaft above his head. He knelt down and examined the young hemlocks and once more drew out his notebook. Barbara, silent and brown, blending with the background of brown trunks, was unobserved until the forester drew his hatchet and cut a deep incision in the spruce tree. The girl was on her feet in an instant.

"Stop!" she cried. "Don't do that!"

The man started and peered as if some brown wood fairy had arisen before his bewildered eyes. Barbara laughed shakily.

"It sounds like a school oration, 'Woodman, spare that tree;' but, you see, my mother is buried here—and—and—the tree marks her grave."

The man had removed his hat and looked at her with respectful attention. Barbara noted that he was young, perhaps thirty, with a crop of thick, sunburned hair and a handsome, well tanned face lighted by keen dark eyes.

"I am very sorry." He hesitated. "I would not do anything to pain you; but, you see, it is my duty to take care of the forest. For the safety of the other and younger trees this dead spruce should come down."

Barbara's eyes filled with tears as she bowed her head against the white trunk of the spruce. "We thought it would be quite undisturbed here in the forest," she sobbed. "There are only three of us—mother here—she died suddenly; father, back at the camp, where he is trying to regain his health in the open, and I. I dare not tell father about the tree. He loves to come here when he is strong enough. The trees sing overhead"—

The forester stepped forward and placed a finger on her sleeve. "Please do not cry," he said awkwardly. "Will you trust me to respect this little spot in the forest and yet do my duty to my employer?"

Barbara looked at his steady eyes and the friendly smile on his clean cut mouth. "Yes," she said slowly; "I will trust you."

"Will you give me your mother's name and the date of her birth and death?" he asked, pulling his notebook out.

Puzzled and a little curious, Barbara gave him the desired information and, with a word of thanks, turned away.

"One week from today you may come again," said the forester gravely.

"Thank you," said Barbara once more, and then she stepped lightly into the trail and was gone.

It was a long week for Barbara Owen. Her father's health improved for the time, and he was anxious to walk in the forest and visit his wife's grave. Barbara invented a dozen excuses to keep him away from the white spruce.

Seven mornings she saw the reflection of the rising sun on the western mountain snows.

On the seventh day she took her father, and together they walked over the narrow trail to where the white spruce had towered. James Owen uttered an astonished cry as he stopped before his wife's grave. Barbara clung to his arm, overcome by a strange emotion. She was glad that the forester was not there to witness it.

The stump of the white spruce arose like a five foot shaft of marble; the bark had been planed off until the wood showed white as satin and as smooth; the top was rounded, and on the flattened side of the stump a hot iron had burned a brief epitaph above Mrs. Owen's resting place. The young hemlocks had been thinned out until they formed a green semicircle about the white shaft.

"Who has done this?" asked Owen huskily.

Barbara told him in a few words of her meeting with the young forester, and after awhile the two walked over to the wagon trail in the direction of the metallic ax blows.

He saw them coming and came to meet them. "I am glad you liked it," he said simply in response to Mr. Owen's warm thanks. "It was better that we should remove the tree in a shipshape manner than permit it to fall of its own accord."

"But the work you did on the stump, young man—it was more than kind of you; we are deeply grateful."

"I had a mother once myself," he replied soberly.

"Come over to the camp and see us, Mr."— said Owen suggestively.

"My name's Charter — Benjamin Charter," said the forester quickly. "You are very kind; I shall be glad to come."

After that day James Owen improved rapidly. There would never be hope of his complete recovery, but a return to even moderate health was an encouragement to his only child. They walked through the woods to the little hemlock circle and felt that here was a spot they might call their own forever.

Their walks often included a search for the foresters engaged in their interesting work of conserving the native trees and guarding against encroaching lumbermen or wandering flocks of sheep or devastating herds of cattle.

Benjamin Charter came to the camp and proved an entertaining companion for father and daughter. He played cards with Mr. Owen or read to the invalid the week old newspapers that came their way. He brought his violin, and Barbara drank in the wonderful melodies woven by the brown fingers and the flashing bow.

The snow caps on the mountains became a little smaller as the season advanced; the dry air was warmer and seemed to give new life to the sick man. Barbara's eyes had a new light in them, and Benjamin Charter's fingers trembled when he played the violin.

Then one day Barbara and her father walked in the forest. They had gone along the wagon trail and were drawing near the working foresters. There was a sound of blows on wood, a silence and then a crashing tearing sound close at hand. Somebody shouted wildly and pushed Barbara and her father out of harm's way, somebody who was too late himself to spring from under the falling tree and so was caught beneath the weight of heavy green branches.

A tree had fallen in an unexpected direction, and Benjamin Charter's quickness had probably saved Mr. Owen and his daughter from injury, if not death. When the tree was removed by the score of laborers that sprang into view Charter was quite unconscious.

He was carried into the camp on the precipice, and one of the men rode madly away to the distant settlement for a doctor. In the meantime Barbara and her father did what they could. The forester opened his eyes upon their anxious faces.

"I am glad you are safe," he said feebly.

"You saved my worthless life and Barbara's precious one," said Owen brokenly. "I wish I could reward you, Charter. You have been a friend indeed to me."

"I wish you would give me Barbara," said Charter, with more strength. "I haven't got very much, but I can take care of her and make her comfortable."

"What do you say, Bab?" asked her father.

Barbara's face, bent above the injured man's, was sufficient answer.

"You needn't wait till I'm gone to be happy," suggested Mr. Owen after the doctor had come and pronounced Charter's injuries to be slight—more painful than dangerous. "You can get married as soon as you are well enough to hobble around and find a minister."

"Thank you, sir," said Charter. His arm was about Barbara as she knelt beside his cot.

"I suppose you know who you're marrying," resumed Owen, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Barbara Owen, the sweetest girl in the world," returned Charter promptly.

Owen laughed softly. "Barbara Owen, daughter of James Herkimer Owen, the copper king," he said dryly.

"I can't leave the forest," said the forester when he had recovered from his surprise.

"And I don't want to leave it," said Barbara happily.