

Abner Daniel

By . . .
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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I. The story opens with Alfred Bishop, a Georgia planter, closing a trade of 5000 in mill stocks for 2000 acres of mountain land. Mrs. Bishop and their son Alan object to the trade. Mrs. Bishop's brother, Abner Daniel, tells a story. II.—The sale over. Bishop boasts that his land is on a prospective railroad. Tomkins, the former owner, has just sold a tract of 2,000 acres adjoining Bishop's. III.—Bishop goes to Atlanta to see Lawyer Perkins, who told him about the railroad. He has been deceived. The old man is so cast down that he returns home without seeing his brother William or his daughter Adele, who is at her uncle's in Atlanta. IV.—Bishop has bought 20,000 acres of mountain land in all and mortgaged his plantation. Abner tells Alan to consult Rayburn Miller, a land speculator. V.—Miller tells Alan about a dance at Bartley. Alan's sweetheart, Dolly Barclay, will be there. Frank Hillhouse is attentive to Dolly. Craig, the banker. VI.—Dolly tells Alan that her father objects to his love quest. Barclay has also been caught on mountain land. VII and VIII.—Miller gives Alan cynical advice on love. Dolly's mother talks to her of her own love experiences. Dolly unhappy. IX.—Abner and Rev. Mr. Dole discuss religion. Pole Baker, ex-moonshiner, whom Alan has reformed. X.—Abner goes to Barclay's, and Dolly talks to him of Alan. He tells Alan of his own sweetheart who died and he still loves her. Alan will hope and wait. XI and XII.—Alan goes to Miller with a project for a railroad to the land. He redeems Pole Baker from the prison gang. XIII.—Miller sends news by Dolly to Alan about his railroad project. She disputes Miller's cynical view of love. XIV.—Miller interests Tiltman Wilson, president of the Southern Land and Timber company, in the mountain road. Loan of \$25,000 arranged on Bishop's tract. XV and XVI.—The deal finished with a verbal option for the company to take the land at \$100,000. XVII and XVIII.—Miller meets Alan's sister Adele in Atlanta and is smitten. Craig's bank fails. Bishop loses his money. Dolly sends word to Alan that she loves him more than ever. XIX and XX.—Miller takes the news of the failure to the Bishops. Pole Baker and Abner suspect that Craig is hiding his money. XXI and XXII.—Pole Baker excites Craig's enmity by a story about having found gold in the mountain. He takes the banker to his old moonshiner cave and compels him to write an order on his wife for \$25,000. XXIII

"That was a good talk," he whispered. "You understand how to touch



"We'll take a vote on it an' let you know."

"em up. You set them to laughing; that's the thing. I wonder if it would do any good for me to try my hand."

"Do they know you have any timber land over here?" asked Miller.

"Oh, yes; I guess they do," replied the colonel.

"Then I don't believe I'd chip in," advised Miller. "Bartell would throw it up to you."

"I reckon you are right," said Barclay, "but for the Lord's sake do something. It never will do to let this thing fall through."

"I've done all I can," said Miller dejectedly. "Bartell's got the whole gang hoodooed, the blasted blockhead! Wouldn't he make a fine representative in the legislature?"

The colonel went back to his seat, and Wilson came to Miller just as Alan approached.

"It's going to fall flatter than a pancake," said Wilson. "My company simply cannot afford to buy the right of way. Can't you choke that illiterate fellow over there or—buy him off?"

"He ain't that sort," said Miller consolately.

Alan glanced at his father and mother. On their wrinkled faces lay ample evidences of dejection. The old man seemed scarcely to breathe. Up to Bartell's speech he had seemed buoyantly hopeful, but his horizon had changed. He looked as if he were wondering why he had treated himself to such a bright view of a thing which had no foundation at all.

At this juncture Abner Daniel rose from his seat near the stove and slow-

ly walked forward till he stood facing the audience. Immediately quiet reigned, for he was a man who was invariably listened to.

"Gentlemen an' ladies," he began, clearing his throat and wiping his mouth with his long hand. "This ain't no put in o' mine, gracious knows. I hain't got nothin' an' I don't expect to lose or gain by what is done in this matter, but I want to do what I kin fer what I think is right an' proper. Fer my part, I don't think we kin do without a railroad much longer. Folks is a-pokin' fun at us, I tell you. It's God's truth. T'other day I was over at Darley a-walkin' along the railroad nigh the turnin' table, whar they dirt engines round like children on a flyin' jenny, when all at once a big strappin' feller with a red flag in his hand run up an' knocked me off'n the track ker-whallop in a ditch. It was just in time to keep me from bein' run over by a switch engine. He was as mad as Tucker. 'Looky heer,' ses he, 'did you think that thing was playin' tag with you an' ud tap you on the shoulder an' run an' hide behind a tree? Say, ain't you from Short Pine district; this side o' the mountains?' I told 'im he'd guessed right, an' he said, 'I loved so fer that ain't no other spot on the whirlin' globe that produces folks as green as gourds.' Well, gentlemen, that doored me. It was bad enough to be jerked about like a rag doll, but it was tough to hear my section jeered at. 'What makes you say that?' I axed 'im as I stood thar tryin' to git a pussle o' wet glass out o' my hip pocket without cuttin' my fingers. [Laughter, led by Pole Baker, who sensed the meaning of the reference.] 'Beac'se,' ses he, 'you mossbacks over thar don't know the war's over. A nigger from over thar come in town t'other day an' heard fer the first time that he was free. Two men over thar swapped wives without knowin' thar was a law ag'n it. Half o' you uns never laid eyes on a railroad an' wouldn't have one as a free gift. I turned off an' left 'im an' went up on the main street. Un thar a barber ketched me by the arm an' said, ses he: 'Come in an' le me cut that hair. You are from Short Pine, ain't you?' I axed him why he thought so, an' he said, ses he, 'Beac'se you got a Short Pine hair cut.' 'What's that?' ses I. An' he laughed at a feller cocked up in a cheer an' said: 'It's a cut that is made by the women out yore way. They jest turn a saucer upside down on the men's heads an' trim around the edges. I could tell one a mile. They make a man look like a bobtailed mule.' [Laughter, loud and prolonged.]

"Yes, as I said, they are a-pokin' all manner o' fun at us, an' it's chiefly beac'se we hain't got no railroad. The maddest I ever got on this line was down at Fillmore's store one day. A little, slick chap come along sellin' naps of the United States of America. They was purty things on black sticks, an' I wanted one fer the wall o' my room. I was about to buy one, but I thought I'd fust make shore that our county was on it, so I axed the peddler to p'int it out to me. Well, after some s'arch he put his knife blade on what he called this county, but, lo and behold, it was mighty nigh kivered with round dots about the size of flyspecks. 'What's the matter with it?' I axed 'im. 'Oh, you mean them dots,' ses he, an' he turned to a lot of reference words in the corner of the map. 'Them,' ses he, 'them's put thar to indicate the amount o' ignorance in a locality. You'll find 'em in all places away from the railroads. A body kin say what they please agin railroads, but they fetch schools an' books an' enlightenment. You've got a good many specks,' ses he, kinder comfortin' like, 'but some o' these days a railroad will shoot out this away, an' them brainy men amongst you will git the chance God intends to give 'em.' Gentlemen, I didn't buy no map. I wouldn't 'a' had the thing on my wall with the specks a-starin' me in the face. It wouldn't 'a' done any good to scrape 'em off, fer their traces would 'a' been left. No, friends, citizens an' wellwishers, thar ain't but one scraper that will ever rake our specks off, an' that's the cow-catcher of a steam engine. I say let 'er come. Some objection has been raised on the score o' killin' cattle. That reminds me of a story they tell on old Burt Preston, who has a farm on the main line beyant Darley. He was always a-gittin' his stock killed so fast an' a-puttin' in heavy claims for damages, until folks began to say he made his livin' by buyin' scrub cattle an' sellin' mangled beef to the corporation. One day the road sent out a detective to watch 'im, an' he seed Burt drive a spindlin' yerlin' out o' the thicket on the track jest in time to get it knocked off by a through freight. The detective went back an' reported, an'

they wanted to see what Preston ud do. By the next mail they got a claim in which Preston said the yerlin' weighed 800 pound an' was a fine four gallon milk cow. They threatened to jail 'im, an' Preston agreed to withdraw his claim. But he got downhearted an' traded his place for a farm on t'other railroad, an' the last I heard o' him he was at his old trade ag'in. I reckon that's about the way we'll be damaged by gettin' our stock killed. That's all I got to say, gentlemen. Let's git this road an' scrape our flyspecks off."

The house shook with the applause that greeted this speech. Even the opposition seemed to be wavering. Only Bartell kept a rigid countenance. He rose and in a low voice invited his group to repair with him to one of the jury rooms. They got up and followed him out. As he was about to close the door after them he nodded to Miller. "We'll take a vote on it an' let you know," he said coldly.

"He's going to talk to them," said Miller aloud to Wilson. "Mr. Daniel's speech almost shook them out of their boots, and he saw he was losing ground. It looks squally."

"You are right," said Wilson gloomily. "Our chances are very slim."

Miller caught Adele's eye and went to her.

"I'm bound to say the outlook is not so favorable," he said. "If we could have put it to a vote just after your uncle spoke, we would have clinched them, but Bartell thinks his election depends on beating us today, and, being the chief landowner, he has influence."

"It will break my heart," said the girl tremulously. "Poor father and mother! They look as if they were on trial for their lives. Oh, I had so much hope as we drove over here this morning, but now—"

"I can't bear to see you take it that way," said Miller tenderly. "I did not intend to speak to you so soon about another matter, but I can't put it off. You have become very, very dear to me, little girl. In fact, I never dreamed there was such a thing as genuine, unselfish love till I knew you. It seems to me that you were actually created for me. I want you to be my wife. Somehow I feel that you care for me at least a little, and I believe when you realize how much I love you and how devoted I shall be you will love me as I do you."

To his surprise she averted her face and said nothing, though he remarked that she had paled a little and compressed her lips. He waited a moment, then said anxiously:

"Haven't you something to say, Adele? Perhaps I have misread you all along and really have no right to hope. Oh, that would be hard to bear!"

"It is not that," she said, her breast heaving suddenly. "It is not that."

"Not that?" he repeated, his wondering eyes fixed on hers.

Then she turned to him.

"Alan has told me of some of your talks to him about love, and—"

"Oh, he has?" Miller laughed out uneasily. "But surely you wouldn't hold anything against me that I said before I met you in Atlanta and fell heels over head in love with you. Besides, I was simply stretching my imagination to save him from making a serious mistake. But I know what it is to care for a girl now, and I have wanted to tell him so, but simply could not face him with my confession—when—when his own sister was in question."

"I have tried to believe," Adele hastened, "that you had changed in your ideas of love since—since we learned to know each other, and I confess I succeeded to some extent, but there was one thing that simply sticks and refuses to be eradicated. It sticks more right now than ever. I mean this morning, since—"

"Now you do surprise me," declared Miller. "Please explain. Don't you see I'm simply dying with impatience?"

"You pressed the point in one of those talks with brother," said Adele quite firmly, "that it was impossible for two people of unequal fortune to be happy together, and—"

"Now, you wouldn't surely hurl that rubbish at me," broke in Miller. "I never would have dreamed of saying such a thing if I had not thought Alan was about to butt his head against a stone wall in the hostility of Colonel Barclay. If he had been fairly well off and she had been without money, I'd have said sail in and take her, but I knew what a mercenary old man Barclay is, and I thought I could save the boy from a good many heartaches."

"That—even as you now put it—would be hard for a girl in my position to forget," Adele told him. "For if this enterprise fails today I shall—just think of it!—I shall not only be penniless, but my father will owe you a large amount of money that he never will be able to pay. Oh, I could not bear to go to you under such circumstances! I have always wanted my independence, and this grates on my very soul."

Their eyes met in a long, steady stare. "Oh, you must—you really must not see it that way," floundered the young man. "You will make me very miserable. I can't live without you, Adele. Besides, I shall not lose by the loan I made to your father. The land will bring the money back sooner or later, and what will it matter? You will be my wife, and your parents will be my parents. Already I love them as my own. Oh, darling, don't turn me down

this way! Really I can't help the turn matters have taken, and if you care far more you ought not to wreck our happiness for a silly whim like this."

She sat unmoved for a moment, avoiding the fervid glow of his passion-filled eyes.

"If this thing fails I shall be very unhappy," she finally said. "Its success would not make me rich, but it would remove a debt that has nearly killed me. I have never mentioned it, but it has been like a sword hanging over my happiness."

"Then it shall not fail," he told her. "It shall not fail! If those blockheads vote against it, I'll buy the right of way if it takes the last cent I've got."

This forced a smile to Adele's lips. "Then we'd be as deep in the mud as we now are in the mire," she said. Just then Pole Baker came to Miller.

"I don't want to make no break," he said, "but I've got a idea I'd like to work on them hill Billies in the jury room if you hain't no objections. I hain't got time to tell you about it, but as you are a-runnin' the shebang I thought I'd ax permission."

"Go and do what you think best," said Miller recklessly. "We can trust to your head, and anything is better than nothing just now. I really think it's gone by the board."

"All right, thanks," said Pole as he shuffled away. He marched straight to the jury room and without rapping opened the door and went in, closing the door after him. He found the men all discussing the matter and was delighted to find that the strength of the opposition now rested chiefly in Bartell and a few men who seemed afraid to pull away from him. Pole slid up to Bartell and said as he drew him to one side, "Say, Mr. Bartell, what on earth have you got agin Alan Bishop?"

"Why, nothin'," Pole, as I know of," said Bartell rather sheepishly. "Nothin' as I know of."

"Well, it looks to me like you got a mighty pore way o' showin' good will. Why, he's the best friend you got, Mr. Bartell, an' totes more votes in his vest pocket fer you than any man in this county."

"Huh! You don't say!" grunted Bartell in slow surprise. "Well, he never told me about it."

"Beac'se you hain't announced yore-self yet," said Pole, with a steady eye and a set face. "Why, he said t'other day to several of us at the log rollin'—you remember you rid by on yore bay, leadin' a milk cow by a rope. Well, after you passed Alan Bishop said: 'Boys, thar goes the only man in this county that has convictions an' the courage to stand by 'em. They say he's goin' to run fer the legislature,' an' ef he

hadn't said that, I'd have been sure to

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"listen to me a minute. I see a good many of you was affected by Ab Bartell's speech an' sort o' want the road anyway, so ef—"

"I don't exactly like them specks," broke in a fat, middle-aged man at a window. "By gum! I believe old Ab had us down about right. Ef we kin git sort o' opened up along with the rest o' creation, I say let's git in the game, Huh!"—the man finished, with a laughing shrug—"I don't like them flyspecks one bit."

"Me nuther," said a man beside him. "Nur me!" came from some one else.

"Well, I'm willin' ef the rest are," announced Bartell. "All in favor hold up fore hands."

Pole Baker grinned broadly as he counted them. "All up—the last one," he said, then he sprang for the door and stood before the expectant audience.

"Toot, toot!" he cried, imitating the whistle of a locomotive. "All aboard! The road's a settled thing. They say they don't want no specks, and they ain't a-goin' to have 'em. Hooley!"

The audience was electrified by the announcement. For an instant there was a pause of incredulous astonishment, and then the floor resounded from the clatter of feet, and glad shouts filled the air.

Alan, his face ablaze with startled triumph, came toward Adele and Miller. "Pole worked the rabbit foot on them back there," he said. "I don't know what he did, but he did something."

"He told me he had a card left," laughed Miller. "I'll bet he had it up his sleeve. There he is now. Oh, Pole, come here!"

The man thus addressed slouched down the aisle to them, his big brown eyes flashing merrily under his heavy brows, his sun-browned face dark with the flush of triumph.

"Ef you don't back me in it, I'm a gone dog," said Pole to Alan. "All I want you to do is to vote fer Bartell ef you kin possibly swallow the dose."

A light broke on the two men. "I'll do it if you say so, Pole," said Alan. "Not only that, but I'll work for him if you wish it."

Pole looked down and pulled at his heavy mustache.

"Well," he smiled, "I reckon he won't harm us any more in the legislature than the road 'll do us good, so you'd better support 'im. I seed the bare down a minute ago, an' I didn't have no time to consult you. I'd 'a' told a bigger lie 'an that to clinch this thing."

Abner Daniel joined them, smiling broadly, his eyes twinkling joyously.

The old jester stroked his face and swung his long body back and forth in the wind of his content. "I've always argued," said he, "that what is to be will be, an' it will be a sight sooner 'n most of us count on ef we'll jest keep our sperits up."

The others moved on, leaving Adele and Miller together.

"Oh, just look at mamma and papa," she said in the round, full voice indicative of deep emotion. "They are so glad they are about to cry."

"What a dear, dear girl you are!" said Miller softly. "There is nothing to separate us now, is there?"

For a moment they met in a full look into each other's eyes. Adele's voice shook when she replied, "I believe I'm the happiest, proudest girl in all the world."

"Then you love me?"

"I believe I've loved you from the very minute I met you in Atlanta last summer."

Alan saw Dolly looking at him and waving her handkerchief, her face warm and flushed. He was tempted to go to her, but she still sat by her father and mother, and that fact checked him. Mrs. Barclay caught his eye and, rising suddenly, came through the crowd to him. She extended her gloved hand.

"You and Dolly must stop your foolishness," she said. "I've been thinking of a plan to help you two out. If I were you I wouldn't say a word to her now, but next Sunday night come and take her to church just like you used to. I'll attend to Colonel Barclay. He is just tickled to death over this thing, and he won't make any fuss. He is as stubborn as a mule, though, and when he has to give in it's better not to let him think you are gloating over him. He won't bother you any more. I'll see to that."

Alan thanked her. He was so full of happiness that he was afraid to trust his voice to utterance. As Mrs. Barclay was going back to her husband and daughter Pole Baker passed. Alan grasped him by the hand.

"Say, Pole," he said, his voice full and quivering, "I want to tell you that I think more of you than I do of any man alive."

"Well, Alan," said Pole awkwardly, yet with an eye that did not waver. "I kin shore return the compliment. Ef it hain't been fer you an' yore advice, I'd 'a' been in hell long ago, an' as it is I feel morelike livin' a straight, honest life than ever I did. You never axed me, but one thing that I didn't grant, an' that was to give up whisky. I don't know whether I ever will be able to do it or not, but by the great God above I'm goin' to keep on tryin', fer I know you want it jest fer my good. I don't want a dram today, fer a wonder, an' maybe in time I'll ait over my thirst."

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