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ROBERTINE

The New Minister

By Frank H. Sweet

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"He's come," said old Herkamer as he came into the kitchen and began to unload himself of the packages which he had brought from the trading post ten miles away, "an' now I reckon the next thing will be for him to go. We ain't waited five years for a meetin' house jest to carry it on as a nursery now we've got it. I don't see what Dr. Brown was thinkin' on."

"Is he very young?" asked Mrs. Herkamer, transferring the packages to a small cupboard fastened against the logs of the cabin wall.

"Young?" and old Herkamer's grim face seemed yet grimmer as it peered out through the small triangle formed by his down drawn cap and big, upturned collar. "He's younger'n our Seth, an' he couldn't speak ten words to folks lookin' at him to save his life. What we want is a tough, hard headed man who knows our ways an' can put up with 'em. This feller's store made an' soft. I could see that soon's the doctor introduced him. I wouldn't be surprised if he shaved every day, an' cleaned his nails an' bathed."

When he again appeared and had emerged from the depths of his greatcoat his mind still seemed to be harking back to his day's discontent, for he went on: "Ain't old's our Seth, no; an' ain't more'n five feet four an' has hands soft's a ba-by. Huh! Our old minister where we come from had hands like the bark of an old hick'ry an' could chaw tberacy an' wrestle with a grizzly an' pitch a man through a window when he got sassed. That's the sort we need here. Hoss sense comes 'fore book sense, an' hard hands 'fore p'liteness. That's my idee."

He drew a stool to the fireplace and spread his hands out over the blaze with thawing satisfaction. One by one the grim lines of his face softened and mellowed under the fire's influence, and presently he turned half round toward his wife, who was preparing supper.

"Of course we needn't say anything like this outside," he observed, half apologetically. "The boy ain't to blame for what he is, an' the doctor got him here. An' furder," still mellowing, "we won't be hard on the doctor either. He's our nearest neighbor an' generally does things pretty sensible. We can pass over a slip now an' then. An' that reminds me," turning entirely round, "the doctor said he'd bring him over this eventin' if it didn't storm too hard, an' if it did they'd likely be round tomorrow. The boy seemed spry an' good natered an' said he wanted to visit everybody an' get acquainted. We'll treat him right's we can, for he won't be here many days. Poor little feller! He don't realize how soon the boys'll run him out. You might save the wild turkey I shot yesterday, Liza, an' that's plenty of venison. We'll treat him right."

Outside they could hear the sounds of the approaching storm, and Herkamer went to the windows and door and fastened them more securely.

"The doctor won't bring him out tonight," he said as he resumed his stool by the fire, "an' I don't reckon Seth an' the half breed will come in either. Leastway, I hope not. It'll be safer in the gulch than findin' one's way through this snow."

But he was mistaken, for presently there came a tramping and stamping outside, and as the cabin door was thrown open a tall, white haired old man stepped in, accompanied by a boyish figure of slight but compact build. The old man was Dr. Brown, the neighborhood autocrat, and in his companion Herkamer recognized the new minister. But he was no longer the fashionably dressed figure which had alighted from the train at Minot, but rather a trim frontiersman in appropriate costume. Old Herkamer's eyes darkened a little as they rested upon him. He did not approve of ministers in masquerade.

"I hardly thought you'd get over tonight," he said rather shortly, "the storm."

"That's just why we came," the doctor interrupted gaily. "The storm is likely to be a long one, and we can get back before it becomes severe. By tomorrow even the malle between our homes may be difficult to make. You are one of our prominent members," frankly, "and I wanted you to see more of Mr. Irwin before hearing him in the pulpit. We are apt to be prejudiced against strangers."

Herkamer's grimness increased. He was not prejudiced, he told himself, only conservative and steadfast. The man was all right, of course, but he was in the wrong place. It was a manifest duty to discourage the mistake.

And yet there was something in the clear, earnest gaze of the young minister, in his frank smile and warm, sympathetic eyes that somehow thrill-

ed the cynical old heart. If only the boy had been content with his professional costume, well, who knew but in time— But this outfit, so ridiculously new! Probably the boy had never had on such clothes before in his life. It was masquerading, trying to appear what he was not.

At this moment came a stumbling outside and an ineffectual groping for the latch string, then an "Open de do!" I sa-say, open de do!"

Herkamer sprang forward to comply, and as the door swung back a short, squatly figure half fell into the room.

"The half breed!" ejaculated Herkamer, forgetting to shut the door in his consternation. "What's up, Baptist? Where's Seth?"

"Busted," responded Baptiste, throwing out his arms dramatically. "Tree fall on shanty, break 'roun. Seth busted, me—Baptiste—busted too. Come for help, med'cine—rub on."

"Not dead!" gasped Mrs. Herkamer, her face whitening. "Seth ain't dead?" This brought the half breed to his senses.

"Non, on'y jes' busted," he reassured her. "Leg hurt so can't walk. Me—Baptiste—busted, too; finger broke. Come for med'cine—rub on. Ain't busted bad, non."

With trembling hands Mrs. Herkamer produced some bottles and bandages from the cupboard; her husband reached for his greatcoat.

"We must hurry back to him," he cried. "If his leg's broke it must be attended to at once. You'll have to excuse me, to his guests."

Baptiste raised his squatly figure to its full height.

"No good you go," he declared sturdily, "bad way 'rroun ravine. Fo'teen mule me come, all time fallin' an' climbin'; take five, six hour. You no strong like young man. Better me go 'lone. Go two time quick. Leg broke, want look out for soon. Me fix him, den we stay two tree day an' come home all right. Bee's way."

"The half breed's right," said Dr. Brown. "If the leg's broken it needs looking after at once, and Baptiste is just as good at that work as I am. Two old fellows like us, Herkamer, would only be a drag on Baptiste's progress."

But old Herkamer paid not the least notice. He was resolutely humping his shoulders into his greatcoat when he felt a light touch upon his arm.

"You had better stay here, Mr. Herkamer," the young minister said quietly.

He strode out into the gathering darkness.



He strode out into the gathering darkness.

ly. "Your son is in need of help which should reach him just as speedily as possible. I am used to this sort of thing and am young and strong; besides I have some little knowledge of medicine. Mr. Baptiste and I can do all that is necessary." He buttoned his coat and turned to the half breed, who had been listening with open derision. But somehow, when Baptiste met the straight gaze of this young fellow, the contempt faded from his face. Like those who live close to nature, he was accustomed to look into eyes, and these eyes were strangely light.

"Well, I guess mebbe you go 'long," he acquiesced graciously, "dat is, if you 'fink you good for tough job."

Old Herkamer stared. That soft handed boy "used to this sort of thing" and Baptiste accepting him in preference to himself. What was the world coming to?

"Why, the boy can't get through that ravine to save his life," he blurted out. "Ain't go 'rroun' ravine," Baptiste declared stolidly, "go 'rroun' by hill dis time. Take two time longer, but mo' safe. Go in ravine, find snow 'tick, mebbe no get 'rroun. Bee's go safe. But no time wait for old peoples."

Herkamer snorted, but slowly removed his coat.

"Well, young feller," ignoring Baptiste and speaking to the minister, "you'd better put on my big coat an' all the other warm stuff we can scare up. Better freeze comfortable long's you're bound to freeze. An' don't let that half breed push you on too fast. We don't want no remains on our hands even if Seth has broke his leg."

The young minister smiled.

"This costume is all I need, thank you, Mr. Herkamer," he said reassuringly. "I had it made especially for this sort of work, and it is very warm. I do not like heavy wraps for hard walking; the exercise is better. If the wind is hard or the cold becomes very severe I have a hood which I can

draw over my head and shoulders. Now, Baptiste, about the route. Is this ravine you speak of a plain trail? Would a greenhorn like me be likely to lose his way?"

"Non; it be narrow, an' dere be rocks high on bot' sides, an' de camp be right in de middle. It can't be miss if one go dat fur. But we ain't goin' in de ravine, non. We go 'rroun' by de hill. De ravine no let us out, mebbe, an' him berry dark now."

"Well, we must remember that a man is waiting in urgent need of help and that a barrier is liable to block any trail. We must take no chances. You go round by the hill, and I will take the ravine with a lantern. I am used to climbing and can probably get through without any trouble."

Baptiste raised his hands as though to protest, but no words came from his lips. Those straight glances were controlling him, and his hands fell to his side. The minister was a leader; he was to obey.

When they turned toward the door the rest accompanied them. Baptiste bent his head to the storm and plunged stolidly away to the hill route; the minister waited for a few directions from Herkamer, then he strode out into the gathering darkness toward the ravine. "Do you think there's any chance at all of his making it?" asked Herkamer in a troubled voice as they turned back into the cabin.

"Chance," echoed the doctor, with a curious ring in his voice, "of course I do. That young fellow is small only in size. Why, he's climbed half the mountains in Europe and likes nothing better than a tough wrestle like this to help somebody. It's the best job I ever did for the neighborhood, getting him here. I was afraid I couldn't, for he has plenty of money and only took to the ministry through love for the work. I thought he'd want a softer place; but, no, he actually seemed pleased when I asked him to come out to our wild country. Of course he'll make it."

And he did, but with a sheer force of will that made it linger for many a long year about the neighborhood fire-sides as a story of pluck and endurance, and when he stood in the pulpit the next Sabbath, with one arm in a sling and his face still pale from the journey, there was not one in the rough audience but listened with respectful and earnest attention. And later, when they crowded about him to shake hands after service, it was not an effeminate, boyish figure they saw, but a brave, strong man to whom all were more than pleased to pay homage.

Grateful Snakes.

That hoop snakes roll up hill I can vouch for on the authority of a man by the name of Bell, whom I knew in Ohio and whose statements were accepted as gospel truth, says Ananias Juulor in the Chicago Inter Ocean. Out on his farm he had four hoop snakes that were as tame as kittens and seemed to understand everything he said to them. On one occasion Bell started at cider making, and after the press was started and the cider began to fill the first barrel it was found that the juice began to run out of the barrel joints because the hoops had not been tightened. The tools necessary to drive in the hoops were some distance away at the house, and it began to look as if the entire barrel of cider would be lost. But the pet hoop snakes took in the situation and two of them voluntarily surrounded the barrel and held it tight until the hired man came with the necessary tools.

Bell told me that it was a custom of the snakes in cider making time to imitate cider until they became frisky and then start to run races. They had a favorite course down a hill for some 200 yards and in returning always came back in hoop shape.

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