

At Five O'Clock P. M.

By JOHN HAMPTON

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When the revolution broke out the president of the Union mine, which was owned by New Yorkers and run by Americans, ordered a shutdown and decided that things must be left to take care of themselves until the two factions had got through cutting each other's throat. The laborers and foremen and office staff got away by the last boat descending the river, but through accident the superintendent was left behind. He was missed, and the boat turned back; but, being fired on, she had to resume her course and leave him to take his chances.

The men who knew George Scott best didn't worry much over the situation. He was a man who was always taking



THE SMILE GREW Blander as he advanced.

chances and coming out on top. The laborers in the mine were always ripe for mutiny, but he had held them in hand without bluster. They noted his quietness and his grimness, and they feared him more than if he had talked and threatened. They said to each other that a devil lurked under his placid demeanor and if that devil was ever aroused it would demand blood.

Scott didn't set out for a forty mile tramp through a tropical forest when he found that he had been left behind. He simply settled down to stay on and receive visitors and dispense such hospitalities as the situation afforded. Neither of the belligerent factions was likely to disturb him for a week or so, but other callers might drop in any day.

Pedro the Devil was abroad in the land. Pedro was the leader of a guerrilla band. He was a robber and a murderer in peace; he was a pretty fair specimen of a band when war was on. He had not acquired his title in a day. On the contrary, it had not come to him until he had shot, banged or cut the throats of 200 or 300 prisoners. He was not at all particular in his killing. Everything was fish that came to his net, be it an American, an Englishman, a German or one of his own countrymen.

Pedro had a way about him. It was a suave, slick, oily way. He interrogated his prisoners with a grin on his face, and he sent them to their death with a smile that was bland. He prided himself on his suavity. Pedro's band had been heard of within twenty miles of the mine on the morning of its abandonment, and it could be safely figured that he would look in on the Union before leaving for other fields. He might find no throats to cut, but there would be considerable plunder and opportunity for destruction. Pedro knew the power of blasting powder and had used it with great success to blow down stone walls and to blow open iron doors.

Scott went to work with pick and shovel and dug many holes on the level ground in front of the stone office building. He was at this work all day long. Every hole received a deposit after being dug to a certain depth and was then covered up again. Copper wires connected one hole with another, and then a signal wire was led into the stone house and connected with an electrical battery. It was sundown before he had finished his labor, and he ate his supper and smoked a couple of cheroots and waited for Pedro the Devil. Pedro was taking things easy a dozen miles away. He had a church to blow up in case the priest failed to raise ransom money, and there were half a dozen prisoners to be done to death in different ways. Being thus employed and not knowing that any one was waiting at the Union to interview him, he did not arrive until 3 o'clock p. m. the next day. He had forty of his cutthroats with him, and he smiled one of his blandest smiles when he saw Scott sitting alone in the open door of the office building. The smile grew blander as he advanced alone and greeted the superin-

tendent with:

"Senor Scott, I take it that the mine has been closed down on account of the war and that all the people have left but you?"

"You take it correctly," was the quiet reply.

"And your mission is to guard the mine, to keep intruders at a distance?"

"You've hit it, Pedro. I have been expecting you and your murderers all day, and now that you have finally shown up let us have a plain understanding. I am here to defend this property. I have a strong fort in this house, and I have a Winchester rifle and plenty of ammunition. Don't try any of your little games here if you want to keep a whole hide."

"The senor American is inclined to speak plainly," said Pedro as blandly as an auctioneer, "and I will match him. My men are tired out just now with their long march, but two hours later—say at 5 o'clock—we will do you the honor of calling upon you in a body. For supper, in case the senor is hungry, I promise him a novelty—his own ears roasted to a turn."

"They call you Pedro the Devil," replied Scott as he looked the fellow straight in the eyes, "but I believe you to be a bluffer. You are talking through your hat, as we say at home, but it won't work. If you and your cutthroats desire to take 5 o'clock tea with me, please be punctual. The tea will be ready. I think we have reached an understanding."

"The senor is correct. It shall be 5 o'clock to the minute, and I shall hope to get a couple of hours of amusement out of the senor later on. Adios till 5."

With that same bland smile playing over his face the guerrilla turned and walked away and was soon out of sight in the thickets. Scott could have filled him with lead as he went, but he made no move to do it. Pedro had trusted him. In return he trusted the guerrillas—that is, he continued to sit in the open door until his watch told him that it was a quarter to 5. They could have crept up and shot him as he sat, but he neither saw nor heard of them. When he had barred the door, he sat down with his hand on the key of the battery and looked out of a window. At ten minutes to 5 he seemed to be the only living man for miles around. At five minutes to 5 the birds ceased their songs, and the insects in the thickets were strangely quiet.

Pedro the Devil understood the hour and the moment. Punctually at 5 his band broke out of the thickets twenty rods away, he leading, and with yells and cheers they rushed the house.

"Tea is ready!" whispered Scott to himself as he realized the crisis, and five seconds later he turned the electric current through the wires. It was ten minutes before the cloud of dirt and leaves and smoke blew away and he opened the door and walked out. There was nothing to be afraid of. The dynamite mines had wiped Pedro and his gang off the face of the earth and scattered the fragments to the four winds of heaven.

ENTR' ACTE

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"Of course you knew all along." He was tearing the edges of the programme into scallops and did not look at her.

"I did not, you silly boy. How could I? You never said a word."

"But I looked."

"Lots look."

"Harvey?"

"He looks lovely."

"How do I look?"

"Bertie! You big, silly, silly kid child!"

"Don't laugh at me, then. It isn't a joke."

She leaned over the plush rail of the box and let a rose leaf flutter, light as a baby butterfly, down to the tier below.

"You girls must have loads of proposals."

"Why?"

"Oh, you all take it so easy. You just laugh at a fellow and look pleasant and all that."

"Have you asked so many, Bertie?"

"Ten. Scored, didn't you? Honest, though, I haven't, Gwen; just you, dear."

"There was that Ferris girl."

"Who? Madge—little Madge Ferris? I wasn't in love with her. We just chummed. You know, Gwen. She was a great chum."

"Did you ever kiss her, Bertie?"

"Not since she was old enough to fight. That isn't anything. I've kissed you, Gwen."

Dead silence; orchestra plays "La Paloma."

"Gwen, the tip of your ear's awfully pink. Turn around, won't you? I don't care. I did. It was down at Faraway Beach, that summer. 'Member, Gwen? You were an awfully funny little gawky kid those days. Fuzzy hair and big eyes."

"You used to call me a walleied frizletop," she said over her shoulder, and her eyes were full of dream light and her voice was low. "It was ages ago."

"And I chased you that day. You could run as fast as us boys. Way up the beach, past the cottages and the hill road, up to where the rocks began."

"There was a cave with shells in the sand, and seaweed tangled in the

rocks—She bent nearer with parson lips of expectancy.

"The Green Dragon's cave, you called it, 'member. And I caught you there and kissed you hard, didn't I, Gwen? And you said it wasn't fair, 'cause you turned into a mermaid as soon as you reached the cave."

"And you said you were a wave, then, and could follow. Wasn't it fun?"

"Great fun, Gwen, Gwen, darling. I wish I had you there this minute."

"I slapped you."

"And then I held your hands and kissed you again. I was good those days. Returned a kiss for a blow. And you didn't slap that time. You laughed and kissed back."

"It was ages ago."

"She bent over the rail again away from him. His eyes were so full of something—something—it unnerved her, and the others were watching. She could almost feel Harvey's gaze."

"But, dear, I've been loving you all the time. I'm not a kid, Gwen. Listen to me. Turn your head again. You're afraid."

"Of what?"

"Your eyes. They tell."

After a pause:

"Dare you to, Gwen?"

She turned her head slowly and looked at him.

"You silly boy!"

"Sweetheart!"

"I'm not, Bertie, don't! Mamma's watching!"

"And Harvey? Is he so very rich, Gwen? Say, Gwen, don't he look like a frog in his evening suit? Gwen, look at that old fossil and then at me. Love me, Gwen?"

"The curtain will go up in a minute. Hush!"

"Gwen?"

"Hush—dear!"

"You darling! Say it again!"

"Dear, dear, dear! Now will you believe me?"

"If I could tell him for sure, Gwen—dad, I mean—that I had you for sure you know, dear, he'd stand by us; I know he would. He isn't like the women. All they think of is landing a fellow like Harvey and his cash. Dad knows I love you. He'd give me a start, dear heart. It would be fun starting together, wouldn't it, Gwen? You're young, and I'm young. I would do anything in life with you to say 'Go ahead.' Gwen!"

"The curtain is rising."

"Never mind. The rest will look at the stage. Just give me your hand if you're afraid, sweetheart—just your hand for answer. When I bend forward put your hand down, and they won't see. Please, Gwen. Then I'll be told, dear. Just to be sure. Your eyes told anyway. Oh, you darling!"

Curtain rises. Her fan falls.

LYOLA L. MERRIFIELD.

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