

Clean Fiction
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True Stories

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Features

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The 'RATTLESNAKE TWINS'

Unhappy Prosperity of the Popular Snake Hunters which Brought them Romance but Destroyed their Friendship, Lost them the Girl, and Almost Cost them their Lives.



Miss Nancy, a native new school teacher who almost permanently severed the close friendship between the "Rattlesnake Twins," because they both fell in love with her.



Joe made a rush and tried to grab the snake by the neck but he missed on account of stumbling against the root of a tree and was bitten in the hand. Jim rushed in from the other side and grabbed the child just as the snake turned and struck at her. . . . Then the Reverend Shell charged, erect and bold as a matador entering the bull ring, with a piece of two by two oak board and killed the reptile.

By EYE G. BILLINGS

Joe Hall and Jim Short, known as "The Rattlesnake Twins," had a unique occupation—they hunted rattlesnakes.

Joe and Jim were sworn buddies and partners but they were no relation to each other. They were nicknamed the "Rattlesnake Twins" on account of their strange vocation, and their intimate business relationship. When one was seen the other was near at hand. They were a "thick as thieves" or as Damon and Pythias, and no one believed anything could destroy their great friendship.

They did not reckon, however, with the "eternal triangle," a side of which each of the buddies was destined to become. The other side of this triangle, of course, was a good-looking woman. But this is ahead of the story.

Joe and Jim lived in Pancake Bottom in Missouri.

The twins were bachelors and lived together on a farm owned by "Uncle Sam" White, Joe's uncle. They did most of their own house work and cooking. In the spring and summer they farmed Uncle Sam's farm and raised provisions; while in the fall and winter they hewed ties in the hills roundabout or worked on the railroad. Joe and Jim were carefree and jolly and their musical ability and general liveliness made them popular at all the social gatherings in the neighborhood.

It was a business trip to Cairo, at the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, that led to their undertaking the new trade that brought them the name of The Rattlesnake Twins. Aunt Mandy Moore asked them to get her a bottle of rattlesnake oil liniment for her rheumatism. As it happened the drug store at which they bought the remedy was owned by a wholesale concern which manufactured the rattlesnake oil liniment, among other remedies. The owner of the establishment heard Jim ask for the liniment and asked them where they were from.

In the casual talk that followed he asked them if there were rattlesnakes where they lived, and when they informed him that there were, he told them he was in the market

for the oil from rattlesnakes and that they could make good money catching the snakes and extracting the oil. The oil was worth \$3.25 an ounce at that time.

While it was not known that the oil possessed any healing value in itself, its fine-grained quality made it a splendid vehicle for various healing agents. The company also made a lubricant from the oil which was highly prized by gunsmiths and watchmakers.

Joe and Jim had seen many rattlesnakes while making railroad ties, and they considered them a dangerous pest. They had never dreamed they could make money out of them. On one occasion Joe had been bitten in the calf of the leg by a huge rattler which he had unwittingly stepped upon, and only Jim's promptness in cutting out the flesh where the fangs had penetrated and his running a mile and a half after a bottle of whiskey had saved Jim's life.

The poison from a rattlesnake bite is a heart depressant. Small doses of whiskey given frequently act as a counter stimulant.

Joe and Jim were live wires and bold men and as such possessed a good deal of initiative. They were willing to try anything once and were not afraid to undertake a new line of work that held promise of substantial returns.

The rattlesnakes where Joe and Jim lived frequented the sunny side of rocky hills and bluffs. Many of them reached a length of five feet,

were several inches in girth and had from sixteen to twenty-five rattles. A full fair bite from one of these proportions is very dangerous but the Rattlesnake Twins knew that rattlers were rather sluggish as a general thing and loath to bite unless surprised into a sudden stroke. Extra care was necessary when the snakes were sloughing their skins, inasmuch as they are unusually irritable at these times.

Before beginning their new work Joe and Jim bought leather boots to wear as a protection to their legs and feet.

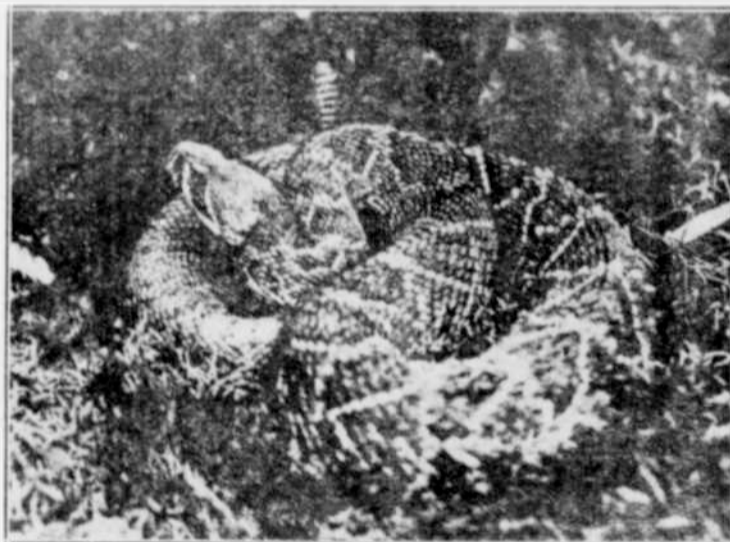
The hunters killed the reptiles by shooting them in the head with shotguns or by striking them with heavy, long-handled garden hoes. They were successful in finding snakes with more or less regularity from the very start.

After the heads had been cut off well back of the poison sacs, the snakes were hung up by the tail in the smokehouse to drip. A light fire kept burning constantly facilitated the oil-dripping process. The Twins were surprised and enthused to find that the oil from a big rattler was worth as much as a two-year-old steer.

Joe and Jim hunted snakes during the late summer and early fall weeks after their crops had been laid by and they ransacked all the haunts of the reptiles for several miles around. A little black cur dog they owned was indefatigable in locating the reptiles. From Uncle Sam White they bought an



Mrs. Melissa Wise and her children. The child seated in her lap is the one who narrowly escaped being bitten by the angered rattler.



A deadly rattler, ready to strike. This is one of the most dangerous of the snake tribe. But the "Rattlesnake Twins" had practically mastered the science of capturing rattlesnakes and this vicious reptile offered them very little difficulty.

old razor-backed sow which proved to be a very valuable snake-hunter, too.

They knew that hogs will kill and eat all rattlesnakes they come across and when they saw the sow eating a rattler it occurred to them they might put the old mammal to work for them. The bite of a rattlesnake does not hurt a hog. The poison is dissipated in the thick skin and layer of subcutaneous fat under the hide and does not reach the vital vascular tissues beneath.

The old sow, doughty in her armour of epidermis and lard, would find snakes in weedy and grassy spots and thickets and the rattling racket made by them when attacked by "Old Hanner" would notify the hunters that a strike had been made. The Twins would kill the snakes and then feed Old Hanner pieces of chicken to keep her zeal for snake hunting undiminished.

The second season they hunted snakes, Joe and Jim made a regular "killing," which netted them several hundred dollars. While hunting game the previous winter they had found around fifty rattlers, many large ones being among them, hibernating in a cave in a bluff of rock.

The hunters built a sort of cave cellar on top of the ground near their home and enclosed it with a fence made from poultry netting. While the reptiles were still dead to the world in their winter sleep they carried them in boxes to the improvised cave.

When the arrival of warm weather caused the snakes to wake up and crawl out of the cellar, Joe and Jim bought a lot of mouse traps. They left these at all of the homes in the vicinity and gave the children a cent for each mouse delivered to them. The mice were fed to the snakes and after they had become fat and full of oil they were killed and hung in the smokehouse.

The hunters also made a good deal of money on the side catching live rattlers for museums and zoological gardens. To catch snakes alive they cut poles with a fork at one end. The snakes would be caught behind the head, with the fork of the pole and while held this way so they could not bite, the snakes would be tied to the pole and afterward cut loose into a box.

Joe and Jim raised crops, hunted snakes, coon hunted, hacked ties

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