

he was now richer by more than three thousand dollars, and if his luck held out, at the end of the year he hoped to marry Emily, take her and Uncle Eph down to New Orleans, and get himself a job on the river front, where his brother was working.

But the river was rising, the rains continuing, he was in doubt whether he would get in a crop this year, so he had planned to ask Emily to marry him immediately. He was discussing this as a suitable answer to Uncle Eph's question as to means of escaping the wrath of Old Man River, when their attention was arrested by the approach of a horse and buggy.

Long before it reached them, they were able to perceive that the driver was either drunk or highly agitated, for the rig was being driven at top speed. But they were wholly unprepared for the shock they received when the driver brought the panting horse to a halt in the road where they were standing.

It was Emily. She had gone to the little store about two miles down the road to get some garden seed, and was to go around by way of Sam and Minnie Dawson's house on the way back. Sam was their only neighbor, excepting Jeb. He lived some seven miles away, and as Emily had not been gone an hour, it was hardly possible that she had made the complete trip with the spavined old mare they used as their sole means of transportation.

Before either of them had time to utter one of the many questions which were on the tips of their tongues, she was out of the buggy, and in Jeb's arms, half sobbing, half talking to him, her words jamming, one on the other, so anxious was she to get her lover told of the danger that was creeping up on him.

"Oh, Jeb, you must go," she cried hysterically. "They're comin' to get you."

Jeb slowly disentangled her arms from his shoulders.

"Who's comin' to get me? an' fer what?" he asked huskily. "Calm yo' self, honey an' tell us what you is talkin' 'bout."

Both men waited breathlessly while Emily endeavored to stifle the torrent of emotion which was welling up in her breast long enough to tell them the immediate cause of her excitement.

After what seemed to them an eternity, but was in reality only a few seconds, she began her story, and what she told them caused them both to sweat freely despite the fact that the day was very cool.

"While I was in Mr. Higgins's

store," she began in a voice that seemed strange and far away, "the sheriff telephoned here an' asted him ef he'd seen you. He said he hadn't, and from what he said back inter the fomer the sheriff musta told 'im that he was to tell all the w'ite folks to be lookin' out fer you. They was n' nobody watchin' me, so I run out ovet to mis' Higgins an' ast Mandy to let me use the fomer."

"I took down the earpiece an' listened to all he said. He said some body'd done sumpin' ter his daughter Mary while his wife was in town, and she'd sworn twus you. Dat slinkin' Will Randall swore he seen you runnin' from the house after he'd stopped to see whut Mary was screamin' 'bout an' he is leadin' a mob out here to git you," she ended in a heart-rending sob.

"Oh, Jeb, don't let 'em git you," she pleaded, piteously, her very soul seeming to go out to the crest-fallen youth, who stood before her, so overcome by this sudden turn of events, that he could not utter a sound.

Uncle Eph was the first to recover his speech. A crafty gleam came into his eyes.

"Don't worry, chillun, we'll beat de dirty skunks yit," he chided them. "We'll all go 'way t'gether. Jeb, you an' Emily go down to dat cotton shed o' yours and ah'll stay heah ter t'row dat w'ite trash off'n de traks. We'n dey's gone ah'll pack up e'bry thing and come down dere. We kin figger on some way ter git out atter night comes on."

Uncle Eph's plan needed plenty of time for consummation. But Fate had other plans, and Fate must be served, always.

Jeb and Emily were hardly out of sight before five carloads of men, armed to the teeth, drove up to the gate. Randall, in the first car, called Uncle Eph out to the gate.

"You ain't seen nothin' o' Jeb Williams, have you, Uncle Eph?" he asked innocently. "We were going into the bottoms to do a little hunting, and thought he might want to go along."

"Yassuh, Mis' Will, I is. He jest passed heah 'bout two hours back. Said he was goin' over to Sam Dawson's ter git a saw Sam was fixin' fer 'im."

"Thanks, Uncle Eph, we'll bring you a couple of rabbits for that," Randall replied with a wink to his companions.

"You is welcome," came from that worthy, as he turned to go back to the house. He watched the cars drive off, and saw them turn left at the forks of the road just below his house. Jeb and Emily had gone to the right.

"Dat am one time a ole coon put it ober on you skunks," he mused as he busied himself with the task of getting his few earthly belongings in position for immediate removal from the house.

He planned to take only their clothes and a few things that would not make a bulky load. He would load these into the bottom of the wagon, cover them with cotton seed and drive down to Jeb's shed, where he would conceal Jeb beneath the cotton seed and, with Emily beside him, he would drive on out of the county without molestation.

It was generally known that he had sold most of his cotton seed to an oil mill in the adjoining county, and there would be nothing out of the ordinary in his delivering a load of it at this time.

But, shrewd as he was, he had underestimated the ruthlessness of the man Will Randall. Randall was a true product of the nefarious feudal system of the South. He was the only child of old Colonel Randall, who in his life-time had owned almost half of the county. Consequently he had been nurtured in the idea that he was to have his way about everything and at all times.

Colonel Randall had been quite liberal in his treatment of the darker and weaker people of his community. He was responsible for the presence of the one school in the county. He had encouraged farmers to buy their own farms, and in many cases had bought them himself, practically giving them to the poor colored farmers who were unable to pay for them.

His one besetting sin and fault was his weakness for the wiles and charms of the women of this people he did so much to help along the road to independence. It was known that more of Aunt Hagar's children bore the classic Randall features in and around this particular community than you could "shake a stick at."

As for the son, the only part of his father's interest in the "unbleached" Americans he had inherited was that in the woman. His first act after the death of his father, had been to reclaim every farm which the old man had given from the original estate, and force the occupants to pay rent or move. They had all moved, for they readily surmised that he

would be too hard a taskmaster.

As most of the land in this settlement had comprised the Randall estate, this accounted for the fact that only Uncle Eph, Sam Dawson, and Jeb, who happened to own their farms in their own rights, remained in this settlement.

But he could not keep his eyes and hands off the women, and already was following in his father's footsteps in the matter of helping to destroy the "color line."

A few days before, on Sunday, to be exact, Jeb and Emily, while coming from the little Baptist church that served as the one enlightening element in this otherwise benighted community, had been accosted by Randall. He appeared to be intoxicated, and attempted to force Emily to get out of Jeb's rig and accompany him. When Jeb tried to remonstrate with him quietly, he cursed him and addressed Emily in an unspeakable manner.

Jeb saw red, and climbing out of his buggy, gave the cowardly bully the beating of his life-time. He left swearing to "get" Jeb if it was the last thing he did. He was however, too convicted by his own conscience to make a move in the direction of vengeance until fickle Fate threw a fat chance to get even with Jeb and at the same time put himself, as he thought, "in good" with the family of the girl he wanted to marry.

Big Jim Donovan, stern and fearless sheriff of the county, had a daughter, Mary, whom Randall adored. But Donovan, familiar with the escapades of the young renegade and in knowledge of the fact that only his money and the color of the persons he offended most kept him out of the county boarding house, forbade that he should come near his daughter.

It was impossible, however, for the sheriff to keep constant watch over his charge and watch to see that his rule about Randall was obeyed; for his rather indulgent wife, who did not share his views about the youth, gave him little support in the matter, in fact, frequently helped them to forestall her husband's objections.

And so it happened that, on the day Will Randall received his thrashing at the hands of Jeb, he was even then on his way to keep a secret date with Mary, having been previously apprised of the fact that her folks were spending the day with her uncle in an adjoining county.

When, a few hours after his unfortunate encounter, he put in his appearance looking as though he'd come out second best in an encounter with a steam roller, Mary was horrified.

"Why, Billy Randall, what on earth has happened to you?" she cried in dismay. "You look as if a cyclone had struck you."

"It was that black Jeb Williams," he said viciously. "I met him and that hussy Emily down the road, and had no more than spoken to them, when he leaped out of his buggy and assaulted me. He accused me of insulting his gal. As if any one could insult a yellow hussy!"

"The big brute!" Mary said scornfully. "Something ought to be done about it. I'll tell father, and he'll see that he is in jail before tomorrow night."

"No, no, don't do that. It would cause a lot of stink, and besides, you know your father doesn't like me, and would believe I was responsible for it all. We must think of some other way to get even. . . . By Jove, I have it! You can accuse him of trying to assault you. I'll be near and you'll say that I appeared and scared him off."

"William Randall, do you realize what you are saying?" Mary asked hotly. "I refuse to have anything to do with such a dirty scheme."

"But, honey, you won't take any risk. All you have to do is to wait until your mother is away some day and he is passing. Go out and speak to him, and come to me. I'll manage the rest."

"How will I ever be able to get such a perfect setting for pulling-off your perfect stunt? No, Billy, I don't think I'll have anything to do with your plan."

Randall was desperate, and seeing that he was losing out in his argument, he resorted to the old trusted servant of the Southern whites in their oppression of the Negro—prejudice.

"So you'd turn me down for a common. . . . eh?" he asked with pointed irony. "Honest, Mary, I didn't think you'd do me like that. He means nothing to you, and if we worked it right, I could lead the mob and put myself in good with your father. Then we could get married. Come on, kid, don't let a good-for-nothing. . . . stand between us and our happiness."

"If I were only sure that we could

build happiness on such a foundation," she mused.

"Sure we can," he put in quickly before the spell broke. "Forget about the sob stuff and listen to this. Next Wednesday morning he will be in town to see about selling some of his cotton seed. I know he will, 'cause I made the deal myself. I would have it cancelled, only it gives me a good chance to get even with him. Your mother always goes over to her sister's on Wednesdays, doesn't she?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Well, when he comes by, you go out and ask him to bring you something from town. When he returns, let him bring it in to you, and get him to stay a while on some pretext. In the meantime, I'll rustle up an old coat of his and plant it in the house. We'll let him get almost home, then we'll go into town and spring our story. We'll have it over with in a day. I'll be a hero and we can get married in grand style. Ain't your little Billy some planner, eh what?"

"It sounds kind of funny, but I'll try it," Mary answered a trifle dubiously.

"Atta girl. Now buck up and think of the fun we'll have together, for everything's going to be all right."

When the mob pulled up at Sam Dawson's, he was out in the front yard sharpening a saw. Consequently, in the light of what Uncle Eph had told them it was not strange that they doubted Sam when he told them that he had not seen Jeb since Sunday.

"Listen here, . . . you'd better not lie to us or you'll be sorry," Randall bullied him.

"Now, sah, Mis' Randall, ah ain't seed him. Ef ah had ah'd tell y'all," Sam retorted acridly.

"Well, you needn't get sassy about it. We'll take you in his place."

"Lawd, whut's he done, Mis' Randall?" the old farmer asked anxiously.

"Plenty, and when we catch him there's going to be one. . . . less in this county."

"Well, ah ain't seed 'im, and that's a fac," Sam finished as he went back to the business of sharpening his saw.

This, an act appearing to be intended as a dismissal of Randall, angered him.

"Look here old. . . . what do you mean by ignoring me?" he demanded nastily.

"I thought y'all was thu wid me, boss. I didn't mean no harm," the other replied, thoroughly alarmed at this new show of hostility.

"Well I ain't. Take this," and he sent Sam reeling with a powerful swing of his right fist.

For a moment the poor fellow lay stunned. Then apparently forgetting that he did not have a chance against the crowd with his antagonist, he got to his feet and started menacingly toward him. Started. That was all. A well-placed shot from one of the cars dispatched him quickly. As he

fell, his wife, who had been watching the drama from the porch rushed, screaming, out into the yard, but a dozen bullets pierced her body before she had made ten steps.

A few minutes later they pulled out, leaving a flaming cottage in their wake.

"Now, to get old Eph for lying to us," the leader ordered as the calyca-cade of death got under way.

It was mid-afternoon when they again arrived at Uncle Eph's house. His wagon, loaded with cotton seed and hitched up for traveling, was standing in front of the gate. At the sounding of the horn on one of the cars, he came out, feigning surprise.

"Lawd, Mis' Randall, y'all ain't back from huntin' a'ready is you?" he asked.

"Yep, Eph, we're back, and we ain't huntin' rabbits this time, it's. . . . Where's Jeb?"

"Wus'n he over at Sam's house?"

"No, and you knew he wasn't when you sent us over there. Mr. Higgins told us about your gal being in his store when the sheriff called, and his cook told him about her listening in over the house phone. Now, Eph, come clean, it's your only chance. Where's Jeb and Emily?"

"Ah don't know sah."

"There's ways of making a fellow know, Eph."

"Not when he don't, Mis' Randall." "Well, we won't argue about that. I know he and the gal ain't out of the county yet and can't get out without some one seeing them, so we'll find them ourselves. Tie him up and give him a taste of what lying blacks get in a white man's country, boys."

"Sure and how!" came back a dozen of his henchmen as they laid ready hands on the silent old man.

When they left, another chapter had been added to the book of Death, and the flames were greedily devouring all that was left of Ephraim Daniels, along with the last iota of his earthly possessions.

Their trail of blood led to Jeb's house. Finding the house deserted and all signs pointing to its owner's having left for good, they were stumped. Their quarry apparently had run the gauntlet and escaped, and there were no more unfortunate colored folk to torture and burn, so

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