

CHARGING the ENEMY

By Martha McCulloch-Williams

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Old Gib Ezell went swinging and stumping upon his crutches down the street and up the steps of his store. It was the biggest store in town, though not the smartest. Joe Beeman, who had opened up the spring before, just across the street, was running old Gib Ezell in groceries and hardware and leaving him out of sight when it came to knockknocks or dry goods pure and simple.

A man who half knew looked after old Gib, then across at the sign of his young rival and murmured half to himself, "What a pity!" Another man who knew also looked, listened to the exclamation and answered it, sticking out his chin as he spoke, "Better say, 'What a shame!'"

"What a shame, do?" a third said, coming up behind them. Doctor Waters smiled half grimly. "I'm not quite sure it seems to be the bitch in the course of a true love," he answered.

Law Bayne, the man who had spoken first, shook his head energetically. "I meant that poor old fellow's legs," he said. "I suppose, doc, it's certain he'll never walk again."

"Now you've got me," the doctor protested. "I'd risk my professional reputation that fell he got on the slippery pavement did he worse harm to his shrunken slanks than bark them up pretty good. There were bruises, of course, and on the shoulder and side as well. I told him he'd be out and about in plenty time for the Christmas trade, but from the first he stood up and down that he'd never take another steady step, and so far I'm bound to admit, he was right. There's nothing on earth the matter with his legs, nothing at least that I or the other doctors can see. Against that there is the fact that the minute he tries to stand on them they do the joint rule act—double under him as though they hadn't strength to bear up a spider. The trouble must lie in the nerves. If that's what you meant, I agree with you that it's a pity. I thought you had reference to the trick he's played on Joe Beeman."

"What is it?" asked Merton, the third of the group. "You know I've been away six months! Tell me all about it."

"Not much to tell," Dr. Waters said. "You know Florrie Ezell."

"I might be considering she sent me away," Merton broke in ruefully. "You don't mean Joe is gone on her like the rest of us? I thought!"

"You've hit it," the doctor said. "Joe did stand out mighty well against the prevailing infection, but a man never knows what's coming to him until it hits him square in the face."

"Lord! To think of Joe, the 'bomby-proof' we called him," Merton chuckled.

"How did it happen? Tell me all about it."

Merton, a newly evolved drummer, had given what he would have called "a comprehensive order." Dr. Waters also chuckled as he answered, nodding his head by way of emphasizing his points. "Well, you see, it's this way. The hour struck for Joe when he saw Florrie Ezell swinging around, a blue-tartan angel, in a waltz with Bob Acton at the Pattons' party. Florrie's a pretty girl anyway you see her. That night she was particularly fetching. But that wasn't the thing. I insist Joe's time had come. He knew it. Soon as the waltz was over he froze to Florrie—didn't get a yard away from her all the evening."

"It was a freezing time, as I remember," Law Bayne interrupted, with a laugh. "Indian summer up to dusk; then a cold rain that turned to sleet in short order. Say, didn't old Gib get his fall that very night?"

"I'm coming to that, if you'll wait," the doctor ran on. "I tell you that was a sleet to remember. Joe, of course, wouldn't let Florrie walk home, though the Ezell house is only six blocks from the Pattons'. No sir! He telephoned for the finest rig at the livery stable and landed all that blue tartan in it as strong as you please. I heard Florrie protesting that she ought really to wait for papa, but we all persuaded her papa wouldn't think of risking himself upon pavement like glass. We ought to have known better. Old Gib always does the thing that any other man would let alone."

"But a hat he came," Merton said, chuckling more than ever.

"You win—from yourself," Dr. Waters answered. "He came, he didn't see his daughter, he went back coloring like a trooper, though he is a doctor, and he fell right before Master Joe's fine rig, coming back from leaving Miss Florrie safe at the safe. Of course Joe picked him up and carried him home. Equally, of course, old Gib hates him for doing it. By the time I got to him next morning he was fully persuaded Joe was at the bottom of his fall, with Florrie as accessory; said they ran away and left him, hoping he'd break his neck, so Joe could have both his daughter and his store. You know he didn't take overkindly to competition anyway."

"That he didn't! Why, he even wrote to our credit man to keep a peeled eye on Joe," Merton interrupted.

"That's like him," Dr. Waters said. "I tell you, boys, nature must work along a certain line of compensation. I'm sure she slipped into old Gib all the small meanness due to two generations of Ezells—it may even be three. His father was a fine man, and his daughter is just as good a woman as ever was made."

"About Joe, now?" Merton queried.

Dr. Waters frowned.

"Joe courted Florrie with such a rush that in a week they were engaged. Then he went right in to old Gib and laid it out with him—told him all about himself and his business, in and out, up and down—but the substance of it was he wanted Florrie for his wife, and would do whatever old Gib said.

If only he could get her. And then an old creosote pretended to cry; said Florrie was all he had to live for; he hoped Joe wouldn't press him for an answer then, nor, indeed, talk of an engagement until he was either dead or himself again. You know how soft-hearted old Joe is, and how he hangs on to his word once he passes it. Of course he promised, never mistrusting the old wretch was playing him. So there you are! Florrie's worrying and losing color because Joe only speaks when they pass by, but don't come to the house. Joe's about desperate, and old Gib is fattening and getting ten years younger on spite and crutches. What the end is to be nobody can guess."

"Can old Gib be shamming?" Merton asked. Dr. Waters shook his head. "I thought so at first," he said. "But if he is it beats anything in the books. There's certainly nothing wrong with his legs, except that they're a bit flabby. It's equally as certain he can't walk on them. I think sometimes he has hypnotized himself. If it was just deceit and what I call cussedness, I would have been able before this to take him off his guard."

"Well, I can at least go over and console with Joe," Merton said, stepping across the street. "And maybe sympathy will be worth an order," he called back over his shoulder as he struck the store steps.

Although it was late March, it was still biting cold. A red fire roared in the big burner inside old Gib's store. Old Gib himself sat close beside it, his eye ranging all the miscellaneous merchandise which crowded shelves and floor. His three clerks had been on the jump all morning, but toward noon there came a lull. He was about to send two of them off to dinner when the door opened wide, and Merton came through, with Joe Beeman in his wake and Dr. Waters and Law Bayne marching solemnly behind. Joe's face was white, his eyes brilliant, his figure tense in every line. Indeed he looked desperate, and his voice rang hard as he said, stopping short, three feet away.

"Mr. Ezell, I have come to ask you, here in the presence of these witnesses, to release me from my promise. You know well how it was given—with a total misapprehension of the truth."

"You mean you want to take my daughter, as well as my trade, and leave me a cripple, to starve?" old Gib roared.

Joe set his teeth. "I mean nothing of the sort," he said. "Give me your daughter, and our home shall be yours. I will serve and care for you as I would for my own father."

"You won't get the chance," old Gib sneered. Joe half turned to his friends and whispered emphatically, "Go away!"

"Going to murder me, hey?" old Gib snarled.

Joe stood very straight. The others had slunk toward the door, with the aged clerks huddling after. They heard Joe shout:

"It is not murder! I shall give my life to free Florrie from your intolerable tyranny!"

When they saw him King wide-eyed, door and dash into it when seemed like several pounds of gun powder.

Old Gib saw it too. With one wild swooping yet he leaped from his chair, careless of crutches, of everything but flight, rushed madly for the door, dashed through it and did not pause until he came panting and trembling to his own gate. As he clung there the others overtook him, as breathless as himself betwixt running and laughing.

Dr. Waters made a low bow. "If I had thought three pounds of black sand would be so effective, I would have had you well long ago," he said.

Merton dragged Joe forward. "If you want to kick anybody, kick me," he said to old Gib. "I put this lad," putting Joe's shoulder, "up to playing you that trick."

"Humph! I knew he didn't have the brains for it himself," old Gib snorted. But, though he had found his legs, he was none the less old Gib. The fact was proved by his letting Joe and Florrie marry almost out of hand and presenting them with both his store and his blessing.

Known him as a Sharper.

Lord Hampton, when he was Mr. Justice Hawkins, when on circuit, finding a long summer evening drag on his hands, took a turn in the lanes, and, staying at a rural inn for a cup of tea, his ears were assailed by the charmed sound of the falling anapests.

With a lively eagerness he inquired of the landlord if there was an answer on the premises. By way of answer the landlord conducted him further. The goodly company assembled eyed the newcomer with steady eyes, thinking they would lead him on to an ad-vantageous game.

The landlord judge at once proceeded to their invitation, in the course of a very short time relieving every gentleman in the place of his spare shillings.

Then the landlord thought it time to intervene and, touching his forehead on the back, said:

"Look here, my fine friend, we have had you here before, and if you don't want to shake hands with the police you'd better get out of this!"

His lordship went—London Standard.

A Complimented Case.

A country "squire" is often called upon to settle questions which tax both his knowledge and his magnanimity. One such matter was presented to Squire Prescott of Rumbury.

"Squire," said a solemn-faced man, stopping the lawyer one day as he was having the postholes. "There's a point I want you should settle, and whatever you say I'll abide by it, whether you think as I expect you will or not."

"Well, let's hear what it is," said Squire Prescott good naturedly.

"It's just like this," said the man, stepping closer and speaking in a few tones. "Then Rogers wants to trade farms with me, but we can't quite agree on terms. His cow pasture is better than mine, but I've got twice as many bit berry bushes as he has, his corn is all started, and mine isn't, but I've got screws to five windows and his has three. I've got a fine stone in his back, but he's got a fine stone in his back."

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meadow mind than there is to mine, but there's more bog.

"Now, I won't tell you which is which, but one of us thinks Hen's colts dog had ought to be thrown into the bar, and the other one thinks that my better would just about even up. Now, what should you say was the fair thing?"—Youth's Companion.

When Tisot Was Satisfied.

An interesting story is told of Jacques Tisot, the great French painter. While in England he painted a beautiful religious picture and, meeting a countrywoman, asked her opinion of his work. "It's a chef-d'œuvre," she replied, giving a remarkably just and detailed appreciation of the various merits of the painting.

"Are you satisfied?" asked a friend. Tisot answered in the negative. He entirely repainted his picture, working night and day.

When finished, he sent again for his fair critic, who pronounced it admirable and remained silently admiring it with smiling criticism.

"Are you satisfied?" asked the friend again when the lady had departed. "No," replied the artist, and he set to work for the third time.

When the Parisienne saw the new painting, she gazed at it for some moments with evident emotion and then without a word sank softly to her knees and began to pray.

"Are you satisfied now?" whispered the friend, and Tisot said "Yes."

The First Skaters.

It is very doubtful which race first skated, for traces have been found among prehistoric remains all over northern Europe, indicating that the art was practiced by primitive peoples. The Eskimo, of the farthest north, are also found to be in possession of rudimentary skates from antiquity.

Skating is mentioned by a Dutch historian about 1174 and Philosopher in his "History of London" says that in the twelfth century young men fastened the legs of boys of animals under their feet by means of thongs in order to slide along the ice.

This statement is confirmed by the fact of some skates of the period found in the British museum. It is likely, however, that these early Londoners got their idea from Holland, probably via Lincolnshire, where skates have been used on the frozen fens from very remote times.

Paul the Tyrant.

Paul I. of Russia was very deaf and also very tyrannical. One day an aide-camp, intending to please him, approached and cried in his ear, "I am glad to see, your majesty, that your hearing is much improved!" "What is that you say?" growled the czar.

Raising his voice, the aide-camp said, "I am glad that your majesty's hearing is so much improved!"

"Ah, that's it, eh?" chuckled the czar, and then added, "Say it once more!"

The aide-camp repeated the words, whereupon Paul I. thundered, "So you dare to make fun of me, do you? Just wait awhile!"

Next day the aide-camp was on his way to the mines of Siberia.

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