

# November Joe: Woodsman Detective

## THE CASE OF MISS VIRGINIA PLANX

(Continued from Page 12.)

"My partner and me is come to make you an offer, Mr. Planx. We've got your daughter where you'd never find her, where you'd never dream of looking for her."

"Don't be too sure of that," growled Planx.

The tall man passed over the remark without notice.

"If we agree on a bargain, she shall be returned to you unhurt three days from the time the price is paid over. And that price is one hundred thousand dollars."

The spokesman went on calmly: "The question is, do you want your daughter or do you not?"

The next incident was as swift as it was unexpected.

"I conjecture that is something of an easy question to answer," said Planx in his slow tones. "In fact, I..."

On the word he slipped out a revolver, as quick as was Planx's hand to carry out the impulse of his brain, my friend's was quicker. Joe struck the revolver from the millionaire's grasp.

"You treacherous dog, Planx!" cried the kidnapper. "Is that how you keep faith? Well, we have a reply to that, too. We offered to give up the girl for one hundred thousand dollars; now we make the price one hundred and fifty thousand dollars!"

"I'll never pay a cent of it!" shouted Planx.

"When you come to change your mind," replied the kidnapper, quietly, "just hang a white handkerchief on one of the trees at the edge of this wood. Then, put the money in notes in that tin on the shelf. Leave us two clear days and you'll get your girl back safe. But if you monkey, it will be the worse for her."

Without more words, the two masked men left the hut, and before long we heard the sound of their paddles upon the water. We listened until the noise died away; then, like the explosion of a thunderstorm, Planx opened upon Joe.

November faced the storm with an entirely placid aspect, until I began to wonder at his patience. But when at last he spoke, the other fell dumb as if Joe had struck him.

"That's settled, Mr. Planx. You've done with me and I've done with you. Now, shut your mouth and out!"

Planx opened his lips as if to speak; but seeing Joe's face, he changed his mind and rushed from us into the darkness.

"At once, Joe put out the light. "We can't trust Planx just at the moment. He's fair mad. But we'll have him back in half an hour to show him the way back to Wilshire's," he remarked with a low laugh.

And, in fact, this was exactly what happened. It was a subdued, but still a very resentful, Planx that we escorted through the dark woods. On our way back to our camp, Joe made a detour to examine the tracks of the kidnappers by the light of the lantern, which he had carried with him.

As had been the case by Mooseshank Lake, so now we found the trails very clear near the waterside. Joe studied them for a long time.

"What do you make of them?" asked he, at last.

"Moccasin... there are the footprints of one of the same men that we saw before, I think," I answered.

Joe nodded.

"Well, you're out of it now, at any rate," said I.

"And what about my promise to Calvey?" he rejoined. "I'm deeper in it than ever. I've got to find Miss Virginnny, sure."

"You can't track her because of that threat in the letter to Planx?"

"That's so, and I have another reason again it."

"What is it?"

"That I'll be speaking to Miss Virginnny herself before tomorrow night," said Joe quietly; nor, having made this dramatic announcement, would he say any more.

The next morning, Joe was early astir.

"What are you going to do today?" asked I.

"I'm going to find out the name of the man that has Miss Virginnny hid away. If you'll wait here, Mr. Quaritch, I'll come back as soon as I've done it. You've got your rod and there's plenty of fish in the lake."

With that, I had to be content. Through the pleasant morning hours I fished; but my mind was not on the sport.

About two o'clock, I heard November hail me.

"Who's the kidnapper?" I called.

"A fellow called Hank Harper."

"Why, I've heard of him. He passes for a man of high character."

Joe laughed. "All the same, he's the chap who's done it," said he. "I expect he's got her up at his cabin on Otter Brook."

"Look here, November," I said. "You tell me Hank Harper is in the kidnapping business, and I believe you because I've never known you speak without solid facts behind you; but I think you owe me the whole yarn."

Joe pulled at his pipe. "All right, Mr. Quaritch. We've some time to put in, any way, before we need start to go to Harper's and I'll spend the time in showing you how I lit on Hank. To begin at the beginning: There are two of them. One's this man Harper. I don't know who the other is, and it don't much matter. If we find Harper, we find his partner. Well, Miss Virginnny was fishing when they stole down upon her and carried her off. I've already told you what happened until they took to the canoe. They paddled across the lake and the two men got out, leaving Miss Virginnny in the canoe to paddle herself round and land elsewhere."

"But surely she could have escaped!" I cried.

"She was under their rifles and had to do exactly what she was ordered. I spotted where she'd landed and followed her tracks to that little waterfall stream, and it was there I found the golden hair. So far, you see, everything fitted in together as good as the jaws of a trap, and the message on the bit of paper about a ransom carried it farther on. So did the talk we had with Harper... it must have been him did the speaking... at Black Lake. When I knocked up Planx's revolver, I was wonderfully sorry to have to do it; but a promise is a promise, and he'd passed his word for a safe-conduct. After, when my eyes fell upon the trail left by Harper's partner, I knew I never done a better act in my life!"

"Explain, Joe!"

"That trail showed me I'd been wrong in my notions of the business, wrong from beginning to end."

"Wrong? Why, as you said yourself, it fits in all along."

"Did you take any notice of that trail?" inquired Joe.

"It seemed an ordinary trail with nothing special about it."

"Wasn't there? It gives me a start, I can tell you, Mr. Quaritch! You see all the weight was in the middle of the moccasin. The heels and toes was hardly marked at all."

November looked at me, as if expecting me to see the meaning of this peculiarity; but I shook my head.

"It meant that the foot inside the moccasin was a very little one, a good bit shorter than the moccasin."

"You can't mean..." I began.

"Yes," said Joe. "The second person at Black Lake was n't a man at all, but just Miss Virginnny herself!"

"Well, if that was so, why she had the game in her hands then... she had only to appeal to us... to speak."

Joe interrupted me. "Hers was another sort of game. You see, I'm pretty sure that Miss Virginnny has kidnapped herself, or, at any rate, consented to be kidnapped!" He waited for this amazing statement to sink in before he continued:

"The minute I come to that fact, I knew that my notion about her being covered with their rifles at the lake and all that was wrong, plumb wrong. She had just paddled round and joined the two men later; and then, when I come to think over it carefully, I saw how I might raise

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