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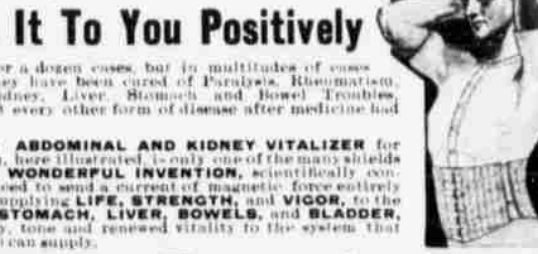
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the name of the man that was helping her."

"It does not look an easy thing to do," I said.

Joe smiled. "I lit out for Wilshire's camp and asked the woman if there was any thing of Miss Virginy's missing from her room. She said there was n't. Then, I saw my way a bit. I was in the woods with Miss Virginy last year, and I know she's mighty particular about personal things. I don't believe she could live a day without a sponge and a comb, and most of all without a toothbrush... none of them high-toned gals can. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, that is so; but..."

"Well," went on November, "if she went of her own free will, as I was thinking she did... or else why did she come to Black Lake?... if, as I say, I was right in my notion and she'd made out the plans and kidnapped herself, the man who was with her would be only just her servant in a manner of speaking. And I was certain one of the first things she'd do would be to send him to some store to buy the things she wanted most. She couldn't get her own from Planx's camp without giving herself away, so she was bound to send Hank to hike out new ones from somewhere."

"What happened, then?"

"I started in on the stores round about this country, and with luck I stepped in to the big store at Lavette and asked if any one had been buying truck of that kind. They told me Hank Harper. I asked just what. They said a hairbrush, a comb, a couple of toothbrushes and some other gear. That was enough for me. They weren't for Mrs. Hank, who's a half-breed woman and don't always remember to clean herself o' Saturdays."

"I see," said I.

"The things was bought yesterday, so it all fits in, and there's no more left to find out but why Miss Virginy acted the way she has; and that we'll know afore tomorrow."

It was well on toward ten o'clock that night before we reached Harper's cabin on Otter Brook. At first, we knocked and knocked in vain; but at length a gruff voice demanded angrily what we wanted.

"Tell Miss Virginy Planx that November Joe would like to have a word or two with her."

"Are you drunk?" shouted the man, "or only crazy?"

"I've tracked her down fair and square, and I've got to see her."

"I tell you she is n't here."

"Let me in to see for myself."

"If a man comes to my door with a threat, I'll meet him with my rifle in my hand. So, you're warned!" came from the cabin.

"All right; then I'll start back to report to Mr. Planx."

On the words, the door opened and a vivid, appealing face looked out. "Come in, dear Joe," said a honeyed voice.

"Thank you, Miss Virginy, I will," said Joe.

We entered. A lamp and the fire lit up the interior of a poor trapper's cabin, and lit up also the tall, slim form of Miss Virginia Planx. She wore a buckskin hunting shirt belted in to her waist, and her glorious hair hung down her back in a thick and heavy plait. She held out her hand to Joe with one of the sweetest smiles I have ever seen or dreamed of.

"You're not going to give me away, dear Joe, are you?" said she.

"You've given yourself away; have n't you, Miss Virginy?"

Virginia Planx looked Joe frankly in the eyes; then, she laughed. "I see that I have n't. But can I speak before this gentleman?"

Joe hastened to vouch for my discretion, while Hank Harper nursed his rifle and glowered from the background, where one could also discern the dark face of the half-breed squaw. But Miss Virginia showed her complete command of the situation.

"Coffee for these two, please, Mrs. Harper," she cried; and while we were drinking it, she told us her story.

"You may have heard of old Mr. Schelberg of the 'Combine'" she began. "My father wanted to force me to marry him. Why, he's fifty by the look of him, and... I'd much rather drown myself than marry him."

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