

THE WAY OF A MAN

By EMERSON HOUGH

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"Full your gun, you low down coward," she commanded. Reluctantly the boy complied, his own revolver trembling in his hand.

"Now, what'd you do if a man was to kiver you like I'm a-doin' now?" demanded his mother.

"G-g-gosh, maw, I dunno! I think I'd j-j-jump off in the river," confessed the boy.

"Shore you would, and good luck if you'd git plumb drowned, you white livered son of misery. Whatever in this yere ole world you was borned for certainly is more'n I can tell, and I your maw at that, that orto know if anybody could."

"Madam," I interrupted, "what do you mean by such talk to your son, for I presume he is your son?"

"Shut up and mind yore own business!" answered the virago, swiftly turning the barrel of her weapon upon me. "Whut business is this here of yores?"

"None, madam," I bowed, "but I was only curious."

"You keep your own curiosity to yourself ef you'r goin' to travel in these parts. That's a mighty good thing for you to learn. You, Andrew Jackson, stick your pistol up agin your head the way I tol' you. Now snap it, dash you! Snap it till you git through bel'n' scared of it. Do it now, or, by gosh, I'll chase you over the side of the boat and feed you to the catfish, you low down imertation of a he thing!"

"My good woman," said I, "do you mind telling me what is your name?"

"Name's Mandy McGovern, and I come from Pike," she answered, almost before the words were out of my mouth. "I've been married three times, and my first two husbands died a-fightin' like gentlemen in difficulties with friends. Then along come this Danny Calkins, that taken up some land nigh to me in the bottoms—low downst coward of a man that ever disgraced the side of yearth—and then I married him."

"Is he dead, too, my dear woman?" I asked.

"Don't you 'dear woman' me. I ain't free to merry agin yit," said she. "Naw, he ain't dead, and I ain't divorced either. I just done left him. Why, every man in Pike has whupped Danny Calkins one time or other. When a man couldn't git no reputation any other way he'd come erlong and whupped my husband. I got right tired of it. And me the wife of two real men befo' then! I had eight chillen by my two husbands that was real men, and every one of them died or got killed like a man or went west like a man exceptin' this thing here, the son of that there Danny Calkins. Why, he's afraid to go coon huntin' at night for fear the cats'll get him. He don't like to melk a keow for fear she'll kick him. He's afraid to court a gal. He kaint shoot, he kaint chop, he kaint do nothin'."

"Say, mister," said she, "how tall are you?"

"About six feet, I think."

"Hum! That's just about how tall my first husband was. You look some like him in the face too. Say, he was the fightin'est man in Pike. How come him to get killed was a difflkity with his brother-in-law, a Dutchman that kept a saloon and couldn't talk English. Jim, he went in there to get a bite to eat and asked this Dutchman what he could set up. Paul—that was the Dutchman's name—he says, 'Well, we got dawg—mallard dawg and red-head dawg and canvasback dawg—what's the kind of dawg you like, Chim?'"

"My husband thought he was pokin' fun at him, talkin' about eatin' dawg, not knowin' the Dutchman was tryin' to say 'duck' and couldn't. 'I might have a piece of duck,' said Jim, 'but I ain't eatin' no dawg.'"

"'I said dawg,' says Paul, still a-tryin' to say 'duck.'"

"I know you did," says Jim, and then they clinched. Jim he broke his knife off, and the Dutchman soaked him with a beer mallet. 'But, Mandy,' says Jim to me jest before he shet his eyes, 'I die content. That there fellow was the sweetest cuttin' man I ever did cut in all my life. He was jest like a ripe pumpkin.' Say, there was a man for you, was Jim. You look some like him."

"You compliment me very much, Mrs. McGovern," I said.

"Say," she responded, "I got 2,000 head o' haws runnin' around in the timber down there in Pike."

At the moment I did not see the veiled tenderness of this speech, but thought of nothing better than to tell her that I was going no farther up the river than Fort Leavenworth.

"And I may be a widdler almost any day now; somebody 'll shore kill Danny Calkins 'fore long," was Mandy's final hint.

We were running in the dark before the rising of the moon, a thing cautious steamboat men would not have ventured, when some time toward midnight there came a slight shock, a grating slide and a rasping crash of wood. With a forward churning of her paddles which sent water high along the rail the River Belle shuddered and lay still, her engines throbbing and groaning.

I joined the rush to the bows and, leaning over, saw that we were hard aground at the lower end of a sand bar. Imbedded in this bar was a long white snag, a tree trunk whose naked arms, thrusting far downstream, had literally impaled us. The upper wood-work of the boat was pierced quite through, and, for all that one could tell at the moment, the hull below the line was in all likelihood similarly crushed.

Sudden disaster usually brings sudden calm, the pause before resolution or resignation. Running down the companionway, I found myself among a crowd of excited deckhands, most of whom, with many of the passengers, were pushing toward the starboard rail, whence could be seen the gloom of the forest along shore. The gangway door on the opposite side of the boat was open. I sprang out and, making good my hold upon the nearest limb as I plunged, found myself standing in not more than four feet of water, the foot of the bar evidently running down well under the boat. As I turned to call to others I saw the tall figure of my platoonman, Auberry, take a flying leap, and he joined me on the snag. "It's better here than there," he said, "if she sinks or busts, and they're allus likely to do both."

As we pulled ourselves up into the fork of the long naked branch we



Up We Clambered, the Girl Catching Her Breath in Terror.

I heard a voice and saw a woman leaning over the rail of the upper deck. I recognized Mandy McGovern. "What you all doin' down there?" she called. "Wait a minute; I'm comin' too." A moment later she appeared at the opening of the lower-deck and craned out her long neck. I then saw at her side the figure of a young woman, her hair fallen from its coils, her feet bare, her body wrapped apparently only in some light silken dressing to be thrown above her night wear.

"Here, you," called out Mandy McGovern; "git hold of the end of this rope."

She tossed to me the end of the gang-plank rope, by which the sliding stage was drawn out and in at the boat landings. I caught this and passed it over a projection on the snag.

The gangplank, confined by the rope, swung in the current alongside the snag, but it seemed useless to undertake to restore it to its position. The girl covered against the side of the deck opening. "Wait," I called to her, and, slipping down into the water again, I waded as close as I could to the door, the water then catching me close to the shoulders.

"Jump!" I ordered, holding out my arms.

"I can't; I'm afraid," she said. "Do as I tell you!" I roared. "Jump at once!" As I caught her weight with my arms under hers she was for the moment almost immersed, but I staggered backward and managed to hold my footing till Auberry's arms reached us from the snag, up which we clambered, the girl dripping wet and catching her breath in terror.

We had traveled perhaps three-quarters of a mile when I noticed the dim loom of trees on our side of the stream and saw that we were approaching a long point which ran out below us. This should have been the deep side of the river, but no one can account for the vagaries of the Missouri. When we were within a hundred yards or so of the point we felt a long shuddering scrape under us, and after a series of slips and jerks our old snag came to anchor again, its roots having once more laid hold upon a bar. It occurred to me that as I had been able to touch bottom on the other bar I might do so here. I crawled back along the trunk of the snag to a place as near the roots as I could reach and, letting myself down gently, found that I could keep my footing on the sand.

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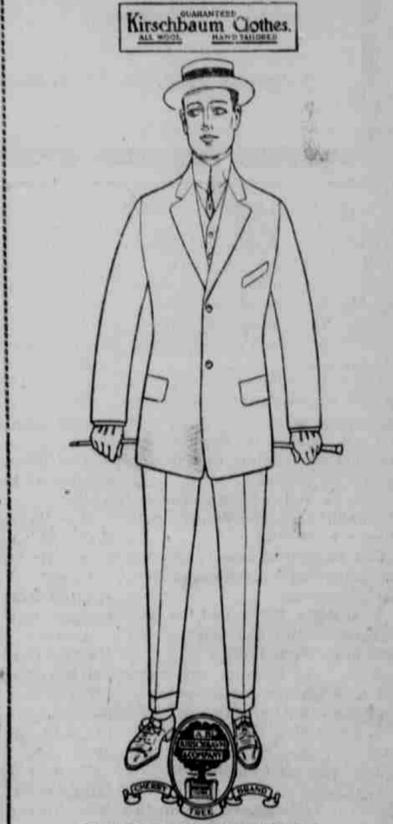
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Little by little I edged up the stream and found that the water shoaled toward the heap of driftwood. It dropped off, I know not how deep, between the edge of the bar and the piled drift; but, standing no more than waist deep, I could reach the outer limbs of the drift and saw that they would support my weight. After that I waded back to the snag carefully and once more ordered the young woman to come to me.

She came back along the naked and slippery trunk of the snag, pulling herself along by her hands, her bare feet and limbs deep in the water alongside. I could hear the sob of her intaken breath and saw that she trembled in fright, and, more dead than alive, it seemed to me, she fell once more into my arms. I felt her grasp tighten about my neck and her firm body crowd against me as we both sank down for an instant. Then I caught my feet and straightened and was really the steadier for the added weight, as any one knows who has waded in fast water.

"Get up, Auberry," I said to him as he approached and motioned to the long, overhanging branches from the driftwood. He swung up, breaking off the more insecure boughs, and was of the belief that we could get across in that way. As he reached down I swung the young woman up to him, and she clambered on as best she could. Thus, I scarce know how, we

all managed to reach the solid drift and so presently found ourselves ashore on a narrow sandy beach hedged on the back by a heavy growth of willows.

(To Be Continued.)

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Special Teachers' Examination.

County Superintendent Miss Mary Foster has announced a special teachers' examination for Friday and Saturday, June 21 and 22, to certificates for county schools only. There will be no city teachers' examination at this time.

Mr. and Mrs. J. A. VanAnda, who have been spending a week as guests of Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Robertson, departed for their home at Fremont this afternoon. They are just returning from their honeymoon in the east.