

Plantation Pageants

by Joel Chandler Harris

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PART X.

Hodo Gets His Blood Up.

Old Scar-Face would have had quite a shivery feeling if he had known that the whining cry he heard was the voice of Mr. Collingsworth's music, telling the rest of the hounds that she had discovered the dog who had been hunting for her. Buster John behind him, and Hodo trotting in a dignified way at his horse's heels, had gone directly into the public road by way of the gate near the spring, the rest of the hounds, led by the White-Haired Master, went through the ginhouse lot. The dogs, delighted to be free once more, and enthusiastic over the prospect of a chase, went galloping about the place, nosing in every corner; not because they expected to find the scent of a fox thereabouts, but because it is their nature.

It fell to the lot of Music to pass near the spot where Old Scar-Face had caught the hen the night before. A few feathers were lying scattered about. These Music investigated, and immediately her nose made an important discovery. A fox had passed that way! Whereupon she lifted up her voice to warn the whole pack. Some responded, while others thought it was a piece of folly, and went trotting along about their business. But Music persisted.

Mr. Collingsworth stopped his horse and listened. "That's a fox as sure as the world," said he. "Pooh!" cried Mr. Dennis contemptuously; "You're best training your dogs with a cat skin. Call the silly creature off, or you will have all the dogs going at full cry after a neighborhood tomcat."

Just then Mr. Dennis' Ruth put in: "What did I tell you?" he insisted. "If there's a fox within a radius of five miles this chase of a tomcat will scare him out of the country."

"Wait!" said Mr. Kilpatrick; "I hear Whalbone trying to whimper, and I know mighty well he's not interested in cats. The rain has taken a good deal of the snap out of the dog. Joe Maxwell explained to Buster John afterwards that the hounds knew their business. They swung themselves about trying to hit upon a fresher scent, but finally worked back to the ginhouse, from the ginhouse to the road, and along the road to the bars. They worked very quietly. Music's warning wails had not been repeated, but she, as well as the rest, knuckled down to business, working with occasional whines and half-barks.

Joe Maxwell and Buster John had already arrived at the bars that opened into the woods. When Hodo saw that all the rest of the hounds were coming in his direction he lost his dignity so far as to examine the ground near the bars.

"If that fox was fool enough to go down to the barn during the night he's fool enough to stay in this field until he heard Music bark awhile ago. If that's so, he'll never run ahead of the dogs any more." This was Joe Maxwell's conclusion.

Old Fountain, somewhat belated (for his going had not been decided on till the last moment), came galloping up, riding a mule, dismounted and hung down his head. Somehow, it seemed to Buster John that fluttering down the bars had brought daylight; for, as the last one fell, he looked about him, and everything was plainly visible. He could see the rest of the hunters coming along the line that led from the ginhouse lot, and he could see Hodo cantering rapidly toward the pine thicket, where he had seen Old Scar-Face.

"When he's up, where does he run?" Joe Maxwell asked Fountain. "Straight to the pint or woods 'cross yander, an' den he b'ars ter de leaf, allers ter de leaf."

At the instant Hodo gave a fierce challenge, to which Joe Maxwell responded with

a cheerful halloo that brought all the dogs into the field with their heads up. The clouds had now blown away from the east, and the level beams of the rising sun fell upon the tops of the pines.

"Name or de Lord! Look at dat dog!" exclaimed Old Fountain. Hodo had leaped from the clump of pines and was now leaping in the air above the level of the ridge and running wildly about. The rest of the dogs were soon excited. They ran around, giving tongue and acting as if the fox were right under their noses. But Hodo suddenly ceased his antics, challenged twice, and was away, followed by the whole pack, their voices rhyming and chiming in the crisp morning air. Involuntarily, Buster John squeezed Joe Maxwell as hard as he could. He was deliciously happy.

He felt a pang, however, when he saw the rest of the hunters galloping heteroskeller after the dogs, while he and Joe Maxwell were ambling along in a direction that seemed gradually to lead away from

them. Butteryfly, however, was running toward a hill in which the ridge fell, and from this point a wide expanse of country lay under the eye.

Joe Maxwell looked at his watch and found that only five minutes had passed since Hodo had led the hunt away from the clump of pines near which Old Scar-Face made his home. The young man gave Butteryfly his head, and in a few moments had reached the top of the hill, which, though not high, was the highest point for many miles. The sun, shining at their backs, threw a flood of yellow light on the hunt. Buster John could see his grandfather, tall and straight, riding after the hounds, flanked on either side by the rest of the houndmen, while Old Fountain brought up the rear, belaboring his mule with a brush broken from some convenient tree.

The dog could be heard, but they were not in sight. They were running through the point of woods to which Old Fountain had referred. While Buster John was looking at the hunters, Joe Maxwell ran his eye along the horizon to the left and caught sight of the fox going as swiftly as the shadow of a flying bird. He tried to show this swiftly moving shadow to Buster John, and finally succeeded; and then it vanished.

"Great goodness!" exclaimed Maxwell, gleefully; "he must have stopped to catch a rat. What is he thinking about? He won't last forty minutes."

"Why, he's a mile or more ahead of the dog," said Buster John. "A mile and a quarter," admitted Maxwell, measuring the distance with his eye. "Wait till I send word to Hodo."

Prompt as an echo a black shadow hurried across the open country. Joe Maxwell raised himself in his stirrups, placed both hands to his mouth and uttered three short,

sharp, shrill yells that cut through the air like a whip lash. Hodo answered with a roar, and seemed to grow smaller. Certain, and increased his speed. The rest of the dogs, headed by Whalbone, Ruth and Music, were by this time well out of the woods, and the hunters, who were not far away, cheered them on. They were running beautifully, and Joe Maxwell could afford to snigger.

"They'll not be far away when the end comes," he remarked. "And if that old fox has any grit in him, he'll be caught somewhere between this hill and the point of woods the dogs came out of."

"Why, he's running away from here," cried Joe Maxwell. "And before many minutes have passed he'll discover that he can't play the old game. Of course, if this isn't the old fox we're after, we'll never see the dog catch him. They'll be coming back presently, and we'll have to face him on his own ground. If it is the old fox, he'll run away till he hears Hodo close at hand, and then he'll get scared and try to reach home again."

"The rest are following the dogs," said Buster John, ruefully, as he saw them galloping in the sunlight. "And you are sorry you're not with 'em," suggested Joe Maxwell. "Well, they see no more of the race than we have seen, even if we're after the wrong fox. If they are ready for their inspection by the time they get back, but we're not going to stand here," he said, reassuringly. "We are to put Hodo right at his heels when he comes back."

This they did. In fact, as Butteryfly was chasing at the bit, Joe Maxwell felt him have his head on the firm Bermuda turf, and he went flying along in a way that thrilled Buster John. A mile of this sort of traveling was enough to satisfy Butteryfly's ambition for awhile, and he was willing to stand quietly when his rider finally drew rein.

The dogs could be heard running far away, their voices borne back on the morning breeze like the echoes of melodious complainings. Joe Maxwell looked at his watch again. The hunt had been going on twenty minutes. "That's the right fox," said the young fellow, "and he's pretty game; but he would have made his double before this."

Finally the dogs went out of hearing altogether, and Buster John took advantage of that fact to follow with his finger on Maxwell's leg the entire outline of the triple loop by means of which Old Scar-Face had been in the habit of throwing his pursuers off.

"If he had had an hour's start," said Maxwell, "this would have been a pretty performance, but he's had his work cut out for him this morning. Maybe he was making one of his loops beyond the point of woods yonder. Yes, sir! That's just what he was up to." The dogs came out of the woods not twenty-five yards from where they went in.

"No; they're coming back," replied Maxwell. "I don't hear them," said Buster John. "Nor I," Maxwell admitted; "but Butteryfly does."

And sure enough the thin and sensitive seams of the horse's pointed ears, and he was listening intently. Presently a murmuring, singing sound was heard, like the humming of bees. It grew louder by degrees and seemed to be coming nearer and nearer.

"He's due here pretty soon, if he's on schedule time," said Joe Maxwell, in a low voice. "Keep perfectly still. Don't move. I want you to see how Hodo manages this sort of thing."

As the dogs topped a distant hill their voices sounded like a clash of cymbals, with full brass band accompaniment. They seemed to be nearer than they really were. "Yonder he comes," said Buster John, under his breath. He had his hand on Joe Maxwell's arm, and he indicated the position of Old Scar-Face with his thumb.

The old fox was running bravely. He showed none of the usual symptoms of defeat, or even fatigue. His brush was well up, and he was going very nimbly and rapidly. He soon disappeared, and the music of the pack died away as the dogs descended into the depression below the hill. Then came the sharp, eager cry of Hodo, close at hand. The watchers saw him come over a fence 100 yards away, like a bird, and he ran toward them with head up and tail down. Evidently his blood was up, too.

He swept by some distance from the point where the fox had passed and Buster John declared that he was not on the track at all. Joe Maxwell made no reply, but gave to Hodo the signal which told the dog that the fox was not far away. Again, as before, the dog increased his speed, bearing closer to the drag, and this time Joe Maxwell, with

from his mule, under pretense of fixing a buckle or strap.

"Well, sah," he said with fervor, "I has seed dogs in my time; I has seed dem what dey head an' dey tail, but I has seed dem what dey eye seed a dog what could reely run. Unless, sah, tuz dem a greyhound's what b'long ter Marso Billy Ross. Dem dogs has got de body an' de legs, but dey ain't got de head an' dey ain't got de feet. Give um a mile dash in open ground, an' maybe dey could git dar 'fo' dish yer dog, but when it come ter brush an' briar and canebrake, dey wouldn't show up nowhar close ter dat dog dar. Yes—yes, sub!—er you'd 'a' seed what I seed you'd 'a' rubbed yo' eyes like I did."

"What did you see, Fountain?" inquired the White-Haired Master.

"Well, sir, a broof of win' will tell it, but a preacher wouldn't make you believe it," Fountain threw his head back and placed the forefinger of his right hand in the palm of his left. "When ol' Scar-Face made his turn fer ter come back, he made it like a mule shoe—a wide sweep at de top, but narrer, as you may say, at de heels. De top er de turn wuz 'a' been a mile broad—put all my know better—Bosts dat dan me—but at de narrer part a man stan' in de middle could 'a' seed de dogs gwine, an' could 'a' seed um comin'." I know, bekaze I seed whar dey went down a gully, an' I wuz settin' on dish yer mule in sight er de fountain. I hear dat ar dog fetchin' ol' Scar-Face back.

"De fox, sah, come by me not twenty yards off, an' by de time he made his disappearance I hear dat dog open up one hundred yards behind, an' he come by me, sah, deke like a bird a-flyin'." I fetched a whop all my know better, Bosts dat dan me—but at de narrer part a man stan' in de middle could 'a' seed de dogs gwine, an' could 'a' seed um comin'." I know, bekaze I seed whar dey went down a gully, an' I wuz settin' on dish yer mule in sight er de fountain. I hear dat ar dog fetchin' ol' Scar-Face back.

"Faster and faster went Butteryfly for several hundred yards, and then suddenly drew rein. The valley before them afforded a plain view, except for a ditch which ran through the middle. The dampness there had attracted a growth of alders, brambles and such weeds and shrubbery as thrive where the ground is wet. On either side of this ditch there was a clear space of Bermuda turf, dotted here and there with small pine bushes. On the further side of this ditch Hodo was running. Suddenly he turned, crossed the ditch and came flying back, while Joe Maxwell rode toward him as fast as Butteryfly could go. Again Hodo crossed the ditch, and as he did so Old Scar-Face came out on the opposite side and went cantering across the open field. In a series of wild yells Joe Maxwell gave Hodo the view halloo, and in another moment the dog had been across the ditch again, and had Old Scar-Face in plain view.

It is safe to say that never in the course of his life will Buster John ever experience such sensations as he then had, or behold such another spectacle as was there enacted before his eyes. He could only vaguely remember that he heard the cry of the dogs behind him, and that the voice of Hodo

sounded like a deep and continuous murmur. Within the course of fifty yards the dog overran the fox and turned in and caught him before Old Scar-Face could get himself under way again.

And the funny part of it was that all the other dogs were up in time to give the dead fox a good shaking before he got out. When the hunters came to Mr. Collingsworth pretended to believe that Music had killed the fox, and Buster John was astonished to see that Joe Maxwell claimed nothing for Hodo. Mr. Dennis insisted that Rowan or Ruth was the guilty party, while Mr. Kilpatrick declared that if killing foxes was a hanging crime he wouldn't give a trhip for Whalbone's life. These remarks were all jokes, some of them as old as the men who made them. But Buster John didn't know that.

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"Why, the other dogs were not in sight when Hodo and the fox came into the field, and they didn't come up till the fox was caught and killed," Buster John asserted.

This statement seemed to make no impression on the others. Abercrombie made the boy tell you tonight how much Maxwell gave him to talk that way," remarked Mr. Collingsworth.

Seeing that Buster John's feelings were hurt, Joe Maxwell turned to him laughing.

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