



The SLE of the WINDS

By S. R. CROCKETT

Author of "The Stick Minister," "The Raiders," "The Lilac Sun-Bonnet," "Cleg Kelly," "The Red Axe," Etc.

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Synopsis of Previous Installments.

Sir James Stanfield of New Mills, in company with his grandson, young Philip, and his son's paramour, Janet Mark, they quarrel. Sir James goes home, taking with him his grandson. That night he is murdered by the disreputable and Janet Mark. They take his body outside the city and upon an ice-boat, in the effort to fasten the crime upon other shoulders. But the boy, Philip, betrays the crime—tells his grandfather's chief tenant, Umphray Spurway, and Spurway succeeds in having the real murderer, brought to justice. He is sentenced to be hanged, his woman accomplice is transported to the galleys, and Philip Stanfield escapes the galleys, sees his wife, finds her in the company of Spurway, and tries to murder her, but does not quite succeed. She is taken away to Abercain for cure, leaving her son, young Philip, in charge of Spurway and in the company of little Anna Mark, from whom she learns that in some ways girls are worth killing as much as boys. For example, in the time of the cattle-driving, when Master Spurway bought his winter house in the "Mart," Anna beats Philip by helping to cut them out. Still they are excellent friends, even though she beats him at her studies in the school to which they go together. John Stanfield, Philip's lawyer uncle, brings in the doctor, Dominic Ringrose, a small man with wonderful eyes. Shortly after his coming the countryside is shocked and filled with a number of bloody and mysterious murders, evidently for the sake of robbery. Business calls Umphray Spurway from home, and in his absence a big packing case, purporting to be full of fine Spanish wool, is delivered to Will Bowman, Umphray's clerk. He puts it in the weaving shed. That night Philip, playing about the mill, is walking through the maze of the packing case, a pair of eyes,

surprise that over in all my life stilled and dimmed my soul within me. The packing case was empty! And beyond it, in the direction of the stirring noise which I had heard, my eyes felt as if a light to stretch and follow my reason. He that had been dead was standing by the great doors, swaying, staggering on his feet, and endeavoring to undo the great iron stanchions, so that, when pushed against from without, the leaves might open inward. I cried aloud in fear. My hands trembled so that I dropped my musket on the ground. In a moment the terrifying apparition had turned toward me. I saw the countenance of a dead man come to life, streaked and blotched with blood, the eyes fixed and injected, staring like knots in window glass with an inward green light. Terrae of wood stuck to his dress here and there, with an effect incomparably bizarre. Yet such was the strength and fidelity of the man in evil doing that at the first sight of me he swerved and, steadying himself, with an infernal cry that was more than half a moan, he raised the knife which was in his right hand and came toward me with the stealthy tread of a wild beast. They laid the dominie back again in his beautifully-fitted case among the wool and the stained scraps of netted fabric. Will Bowman's first thrust had gone through his shoulder a little beneath the spring of the neck. Yet so fierce was the desperado in his determination that no murmur had escaped him even when the sharp steel ran clear through his flesh till the point encountered the wooden back of the case against which his shoulders were braced. As soon as Will Bowman realized what he had done, he set about making his preparations. He dispatched by a back door one of the most trusty of the men who had hurriedly rallied to him with orders to call in all the women and children out of their houses. For believing that the defenses of

"You will waste your words," said Sawkins. "Will began in a loud, clear voice: "Your spy is dead; we are fully prepared for you. You cannot take our fortress. With a movement of my hand I can sweep you all to perdition. But I give you a chance to save your lives for the galleys. Call off your men; leave us and our houses un-molested and we will serve you the same." "Legs of the English," cried the voice, "we will not leave one alive in all your dirty kennel. We will burn you alive to teach you to bide at home and not come here, taking the bread out of our mouths!" Then another voice, deeper and fiercer, cried "Forward!" And with a loud shout

He looked angrily about at us as we stood about him, and he said to himself: "But see," he cried, "I will take it myself to make certain." And with a quick hand and in a sudden characteristic burst of anger he tore away the rough packing and yellow gauzy stuff from the blowhole in front of the square of wood, blue and white and clean, was revealed—nothing else. "Th—there!" he cried, actually stammering in his anger, "get to bed, both of you wretched little croaking beasts! And let me fasten up this case again as best I can!" He was bending down to pick up the torn sheeting, when in a clear childish treble little Anna Mark uttered the words: "Will, what is that on the point of your sword?" William Bowman held his sword up, let the fine point of the rapier was red for a good three inches. A drop or two had distilled upon the floor. Instantly Will's face took on the fighting look of his North Riding forefathers. His underjaw shot forward, his forehead seemed to flatten. His eye fell on the case and in the midst of the white square of wool a red spot had appeared at the place from which Will had withdrawn the blade. "Ah! I have you this time, cowardly murderer," he cried in a voice like a harsh snarl. "Hold, Hold, Will! Do not kill him!" I shouted, but Will was too late.

CHAPTER XV. Will Bowman Counts Three. This I did not scream out, as Anna Mark had done when she stood behind the case. I have always put down to a last wish of Dutch courage given me by the Umphray small ale. At any rate, I only dropped my glass and stared at the fire brand, trying to think what I should do. Presently I heard a noise in the parlor and the voice of William Bowman loud in some argument. "Come, Will!" I cried aloud, starting quickly from my seat as if I had heard him call me. Will Bowman was going up the stairs to bed, with his boots in his hand. "Will," I whispered, "Will, we are all dead men. What Anna said is true. There is a murderer in that case." Will paused on the second step. "What do you mean? Have you gone as mad as Anna?" he said, smiling. "As soon as I had told him of the eyes which had looked at me through the coarse veiling, he came back down the stairs and began to consider, scratching his head and thinking hard, and dropping over the boots out of his hand. "The weavers are either away with their master or over to the change-houses by this time," he meditated. "There will not be one sober man in New Mills by this hour of the night. Philip, are you attached? Can you stand behind me in this? I will go and outface him now, this murderer or whatever it is!" I answered that I would certainly do that which in me lay, though I knew not what he meant to be at. He was back in a moment with a couple of small swords and a dagger. "Come on," he said; "we will try cold steel on our lurker. A pass or two will do my master's Spanish wool no great harm, while shooting blazing wads into it at that range would set the stuff on fire. And that would be the end of me with Umphray Spurway!"

So, giving me one of the rapiers, Will Bowman took a candle in one hand and his own small sword in the other. We went into the great, silent weaving shed, where he set the candlestick down on a loom. But indeed, with all my throwing of fuel on the dogs of the grate, the place was like day and even the dark corner where the packing case stood was filled with light. As we went softly down the floor we heard a light patter of feet behind us and there at the door was little Anna Mark with a pistol in her hand. "Ah!" she was beginning; "did I not tell you? I thought—" But Will stopped her with a wave of his hand. We stood before the canvas-covered case. It loomed up bigger than ever, looking black and spinnate enough to have contained gravestones. I heard Will suck in a long breath as he threw back his sword that was in his hand to be ready for the thrust. Then he spoke in a loud voice: "Now," he cried, "we know that there is a man inside this packing case. We are here fully armed and are resolved to try the truth of our suspicion. Whoever you may be, I bid you in my master's name and the name of the law to surrender yourself. I will count three and thereafter thrust the case through and through with my sword. I give you fair warning!" Then he counted slowly, "One!" There was no sign or sound from the packing case, though we listened intently, and I own that I quaked to my very shoe leather. "Two!" Still there was no answer, not a sigh or



THEN HE WOULD LEAN OVER TO SEE IF HE COULD REACH ME WITH HIS KNIFE.

the mill would be tried before morning, he would permit no man to return to his house. Nor, indeed, was there any one looking at the set face of the dominie and the lip he had bitten through in the vain attempt to show his sword, desired to set a foot outside the defenses of the Mill house that night. I did not hide long upstairs, you may be sure. The heart-flutter and tremulous excitement of the night would not let me go to sleep. Indeed, I never so much as tried, but sat on my bed listening to the hum about his sword, as this one ran this way and the other that. I could distinguish clearly the sharp incidence of Will Bowman's shouted orders. Presently I heard a light step without. I peeped out at the door and there, if you please, with her handkerchief over her shoulder, her powder-disk, pistol and skean dhu (or Highland dirk) was little Anna Mark, pretending to mount guard on the side which looks to the south over the mill lake and the birchen linn to the Kirkcound water singing below in the dusk. At sight of her array I was greatly stung. I, a boy and the first discoverer of treachery, to be behindhand as the defense of the place which gave me shelter—while a girl— Well, after all, it was little Anna Mark. And that was a very different thing, I told myself. As soon as she saw me she called out, "Oh, Philip, you are there—I thought you had gone out to the mill." And continued her promenade in a military manner. "I am going into Umphray Spurway's room," said I, "to get his new musket that has the bayonet fixed by the general who ran away at Killcreegan." I dare you to take it," she said, for she did not want me to be better armed than she. "And pray, miss, what have you to do with it?" she asked her. She nodded her head in an aggravating way she had, as one who would say: "Never mind," yet refrains from saying it and use it and never be faulted for it!" I made answer. For I thought of my mother and of my standing with Umphray Spurway on her account. "Don't," she cried, with her thumb pointing to the strap of her sash-dagger. "I have my hand standing guard in a place where he can be stared at by the maids. I ran toward Umphray Spurway's room to get the new musket, which I had always coveted an occasion to try. But when I got to the upper floor I heard a mocking laugh behind me, which quickened both my ears and my desire. The door stood open, and as soon as I got within I saw that the nest was empty and the bird flown. The musket was gone, with all the other arms of the better sort which Umphray kept in his bed chamber for safe and dry keeping. I came out again, and there, with the very musket dropped at the ready, the bayonet fixed and the priming in the pan, stood Anna Mark, who stamped her little foot and called on me to stand in the king's name in the most approved fashion. "Whereat I bade her to be careful, for that such things were not to be trifled with save by those who understood them. At

which Mistress Malapert turned up her nose and, handing me the piece, cried: "Sir Wiscaree, see if Umphray himself could have charged it any better." "All was perfect when I examined it and with very good intent, I could find no fault. "There," she said, "you might have had this at the first if you had asked properly. I made it ready for you. So do not forget that airs and graces neither become nor advantage you, Master Philip Stanfield!" To this I had no time to answer, nor indeed any answer ready to hand. So I betook me down the stairs, having secured Umphray's powder flask and twenty charges of ball. To himself, with a man who had skill in gunnery, was to have charge of the little four-pounder cannonade, which was placed on the top of the main gatehouse tower. The battlements stood a little out and were constructed to sweep the whole long east-cast side. One man was placed on the roof of the mill to watch the water front, while Anna Mark had installed herself, as I have told, in the corridor which overlooks the little inn of Kirkcound.

Nor was it long till we had tidings of Mr. Ringrose's associates. Will had quietly allowed no lights, save and except the dark lantern which he had himself taken to the top of the gate tower in order that he might see to cast loose and load the cannonade. Now, whether the dominie was to make some signal to his mates with a lantern or no I cannot tell. Certain it is that the one was found, with the tinder, flint and steel, all ready to be lighted, at his feet. And it may be that Will or Stephen Sawkins, turning the gim this way and that at the charging of their piece, unwittingly made the signal agreed upon or something like it. So much was never known. At all events, it was not long before in the dim light we could make out a row of dark figures running from the willow copse and scrubby oaks on the north and east, toward the Mill house. We three crouched behind the battlements of the little tower and strained our eyes into the darkness. His mouth was wide open to draw in air enough to clear for the moment his clogging lungs. His breath came in labored and gulping pants, nevertheless he had the resolution to pursue me, in order that he might finish the work for which he had come, and open the great doors for his friends. I could scarcely leap behind the empty case before he was upon me. I tried to escape either way about it, but from his swaying uncertainty of motion he was ready there with his knife. So I had to content myself with leaning first to the right and then to the left. I was afraid that he would see my musket lying at the foot of the stairs, but either his glazed eyes did not perceive it or, as is more probable, he did not judge it wise for the success of his project to fire a shot. At any rate, he began slowly and deliberately to move the empty packing case toward me to trap me in the corner.

It must have been the weirdest spectacle and had I been able to watch it like an uninterested spectator the duel between the terrified boy, dodging and doubling like a cornered rat, and the dying man, apparently resolved to finish his dire work, must have been worthy of the Roman arena. Gradually and methodically the dominie reduced the space in which I turned and waded, pivoting the box alternately on one angle and on the other. Then he would lean over to see if he could reach me with his knife. At last I was so pent in that I could move neither way and as I realized this I lifted up my voice in a great piteous cry of "Anna—Anna Mark!" The terrible streaked face, the gouted breast and the fingers clutched about the knife were very near to me now, and I could see the ruddy foam break in bubbles between the grey of his lips. But at the cry of "Anna Mark!" he seemed to pause. I pushed with all my might against the case. It toppled and fell over against his breast, causing him to stagger backward. He was on his feet, he could recover and set it up again on edge, a sharp report came from the stairway, waking the echoes of the great weaving room. My pursuer uttered a sobbing cry, his knife jingled on the floor from his twitching hand and he fell backward with all the weight of the packing case upon him. Little Anna Mark stood on the steps near the top with a smoking musket in her hand. Then she threw it down and began to weep: "Oh, I have killed a man!" she cried; "I am wicked girl!" Presently Will Bowman came rushing in. "A glorious victory," he said, "but I would have liked a whole year's wages to have had another lick at them with the cannonade full to the muzzle of slugs and rusty nails!" I told him of my adventure and we went down to look at the fastenings of the great doors, one of which had been forced up. The marks of Ringrose's hands were wet and red upon it. Had his friends returned in force the doors would have opened at a touch. He had been so hard to slay, so faithful unto death in the devil's service. Three of Will's strokes had pierced him, but only one fatally. Anna's single bullet had sunk itself into his brain. "Will stood musing upon him. "I tell you what, Philip Stanfield," he said presently, "there lies a kind of man with whom it was a toss-up whether he became his grace of Marlborough or—this poor piece of carrion. This dominie was a man brave enough to win a score of battles. But he took the wrong turning. Well, Umphray Spurway will not think the worse of him for his pluck." "Nor for trying to kill me!" I cried, for my charity did not reach quite so far, nor the matter strike me so imperiously. "No," he answered coolly. "He held his tongue when I thrust him through and through, though he was held fast hand and foot in a dark box. And while dying by inches he could yet rise to finish his work before he died. I tell you what, Philip, if I stick to our jobs as well as the dominie Ringrose—why, we may sit down and take a rest awhile when we are well out of it all."

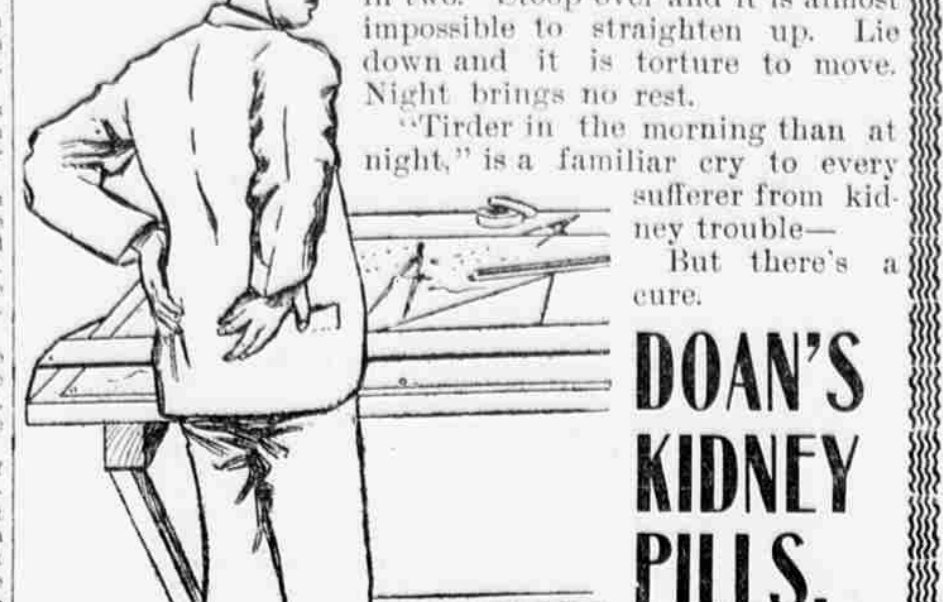
CHAPTER XVIII. Anna Sends a Challenge. William Bowman sent Anna Mark and me off to bed with many expressions of commendation, saying that he would inform Umphray Spurway our courage and resolution. And this presently he did, though heaven knows it was little enough I had done. But Anna Mark, being as jealous of what others should think of me as zealous to beat me privately at all manner of plays, gave such an account of my struggle with the dominie that I had all the credit for having stopped him from opening the doors to his confederates. And, not to be outdone in generosity by a girl, I told them that but for her clever shot from the stairs I had been a very dead man. Whereat I bade her to be careful, for that such things were not to be trifled with save by those who understood them. At

CHAPTER XIX. Resurrection of Dominic Ringrose. The money came in three divisions to the number of, apparently, some thirty or forty, but our fears and the night may very likely have doubled their numbers. Then one holder than the rest, a tall figure staked in blackness against the gray-black night, came boldly up and tried both halves, throwing his whole weight upon them. They rested still, silent and immovable. Then this apparent leader went back to consult. Had they mistaken the signal? Was it a trap? The men meditating when the voice of Will Bowman rang out and tried both halves. "What do you here, under arms, at my master's gate? If you do not instantly betake yourselves off whence you came I will blow you all to the devil!" We could see their line reel at the unexpected salutation and make a movement backward. I knew what they would have done if they had been left to themselves—perhaps retreated. But at that moment, from the deep gully of the linn, there came first one shot and on the heels of that another. Then there was the cry of one in pain, the hoarse cry of a man. It was little Anna Mark at work, first of all the defenders of the Mill house to smelt powder. "Bravo!" cried Stephen Sawkins. "Shall I let them have it, Master Will?" "Hold!" said Will. "It is my duty to save life if I can. But our own, not the lives of our throats!" muttered the ex-buccancer. "I will speak once more to them."

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spend all my holidays at the house of Umphray Spurway. And this was chiefly owing to an idea my poor mother had that those who attacked the Mill house intended chiefly to kill me and not merely to plunder the mill, although in proof thereof that the eye, Bernard Ringrose, had been a tool of my uncle John, and if he were not, they had been risen as it were, from his very grave to attack me with his knife. And from this she could not be beaten, though even Umphray Spurway laughed at her. For surely it was not possible that a man of law, and one so nearly related to me, could wish me ill. And, moreover, if he did, there were many ways of injuring me without assailing the chiefest stronghold in the countryside. (To be continued.)