

How Barrows Made Good || Short Story by Bert Foster

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GENERAL ALPHEUS COMPTON swore steadily all the way from the gate to the terraced approach to the broad piazza. Then the sight of his daughter and Barrows smothered the audible sounds of his wrath but his face was like a thundercloud when he halted before them.

"My! how hot you must be, general," said Barrows, as though his own appearance of coolness in clean linen and a straw hat was not enough to madden any ordinarily warm man.

"I am," said the old gentleman, convincingly.

"Something must have happened, papa," said Mary, wondering.

"I've made a discovery!" ejaculated the general, vigorously. "I've found out that you might as well try to make a seven-holed flute out of a pig's tail as to depend upon a confounded whippersnapper of a college graduate to possess any common sense."

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Mary, springing up and looking from her wrathful parent to Barrows.

The latter did not change color. "I'd not expect it, then, general," he drawled, most exasperatingly.

At that the old man almost suffocated. "Go-go into the house, Mary," he stammered. "Mr. Barrows and I have some business to discuss."

The girl turned pleading eyes on Barrows. And as that young man was red hot at the brutality of her father's speech, he continued to smile most sweetly.

"There is but one thing keeping me from breaking your head and then inquiring into the meaning of your late remark afterward, general," he said, his voice low. "And that is your age. I'm sorry you haven't a son."

"But I see you're turning my daughter's head, Jim Barrows!" snapped the other. "I tell you, right from this hour, you'll keep away from here. And now we'll talk business—you an' I. And we won't talk long."

"No, not long," said Barrows, getting up and looking down upon the angry old gentleman from his height of six feet one.

The old man drew a letter from his pocket and, unfolding it, placed it in Barrows' hand. "You read that—condemn ye! I s'pose you remember that you sent that load o' lumber and Lady Bird down there to Eusibe on your own responsibility?"

"I did. There was a sale for the lumber there. And you had told me to use my own judgment if anything turned up," finished Barrows, in his unshaken voice.

"That lumber's wuth seven thousand five hundred," stuttered the old man, dropping back into familiar idioms of speech, "t' say nothin' of Lady Bird. You—you—"

"If I've made a mistake, I'm prepared to make good," said Barrows, proudly.

"How'll you make good?" demanded the general. "You'll never earn so much money in your whole lazy, dawdling—oh, d—n! Read that letter and see what Spero says!"

He stamped up and down the walk. Barrows looked at the letter received that very afternoon by the Central American mail.

"The fat's all in the fire," read Barrows, with unwrinkled brow. "You ordered Lady Bird to Eusibe and its captain would take it there, despite my advice. Now General Laguerre has sprung his mine and holds Eusibe and all the surrounding country. As we got our franchise from President Dio Blanco—and paid him a good round price for it, too—we've got to stick to him, and that means that Lady Bird and its cargo is worth about 30 cents in confederate money. Some of you people up there in New Orleans had better wake up."

Barrows knew that the agent of the company was a man not given to crying "Wolf! Wolf!" when there was no danger. "Isn't there a steamer sailing in the morning?" he asked.

"Terre. What do you want to do?"

"I'll go down myself."

"Not at my expense! Not at my expense!" cried the general.

"Sir!" exclaimed the young man, wheeling on him at last. "You haven't money enough to pay my passage down there—nor to pay me for another day's work! But I'll make good for this mistake of mine and then the company—and you—can go hang."

"Tut, tut!" exclaimed the old man, more mildly. "You don't mean to do anything foolish?"

"You can apologize after I have come back and your boat and its cargo are safe," said Barrows, shortly.

"Apologize!" shouted Compton. "Why, you—you—condemn you! You'll get into hell down there or be shot against the 'dobe wall.'"

"I'm not asking you to go my bail," returned Barrows, and walked away with his shoulders very square and his head high. But out of the tail of his eye he saw a white dress and a whiter hand at the end window of the house.

II.

They dowed him ashore at Eusibe. The captain of Terre would not come in too

near, for several vessels had already been seized by the redoubtable Laguerre.

"I'll stop for you on our way back—in a week," said the commander, good naturedly. "If you keep your mouth shut you may be alive then."

"You needn't bother," said Barrows, lightly. "I'll have steam up on Lady Bird yonder by that time and will bring it out myself."

As he drew near the shore he studied the town itself.

It looked like an egg salad—a background of green, adobe houses setting about like hard-boiled eggs.

"There's the consul's office, sir," said the petty officer, when the boat's nose grated

seat and addressed himself to his writing.

Barrows marched to the door which evidently led to the stairway.

The clerk did not move. But when he flung open the door Barrows found, standing in the entry, a big, grinning, barefooted negro, with a secondhand Remington on his shoulder.

"Massa can't pass here," he said, in better English than the yellow boy possessed. "Gov'ment set me here to guard 'Merican consul."

Barrows said things and flung himself out of the place. He wanted to think the matter over and adjust himself to these new discoveries. Eusibe was evidently not New Orleans.

when you've got such a little scoundrel as this Jennings to look to. If it ain't impertinent I'd like to ask what brought you down here at this time sir?"

"Why, our Mr. Spero wrote us of the revolution, and that Lady Bird would likely get into trouble. So I came down to see about it."

"You—came—down!" gasped the purser. "Why, yes. The general was mad because I had put the ship in jeopardy, and I told him I'd make good. Fact, is, I'm here on my own hook."

"You go home, Mr. Barrows," said the other, solemnly. "You're no more able to do anything here than I am."

"But both of us together?" suggested



"MR BARROWS AND I HAVESOME BUSINESS TO DISCUSS."

on the strand. "But if he's like most of them along here—"

His remark ended in a grunt of contempt. Barrows tossed him a silver dollar.

"You and the two men drink to my good luck when you get to Bluefields," he said. "I'll beat you home to New Orleans."

Nobody disturbed him as he walked up to the street fronting the water. He even had hard work rousing a particularly ragged specimen of negro to carry his bag. He drew out of this individual, in lingering dialect, the fact that Laguerre was nominally in control of the town and coast.

"Are the ships really held in the harbor?" asked Barrows.

The darkey looked a little frightened and shook his head vigorously. Oh, no! There was nothing of the kind. Only none of the "captains" cared to take their vessels out at present. Barrows looked across at El Moro, with its guns frowning from every port, and something like a shiver traversed his spine.

Now, Barrows had come down here with no more real idea of what it meant to be up against a Central American revolution than he had of the tenets of the Talmud. "There can't be really anything serious the matter if our man is still here," he told himself.

"The senior must send in his card," said a haughty little yellow boy with a pen behind his ear, who occupied the lower room in the consul's office.

"You tell the consul—what's his name?"

"Senior Jennings."

"All right. You tell Mr. Jennings I want to speak to him." He passed over his card—fortunately a plain visiting card. He could thank his luck afterward that one of the company's pasteboards had not come to light first.

"Meester Ballows—ve-ree well," said the yellow kid, proud to flaunt his knowledge of English.

He trotted up stairs. He trotted down again. "Meester Ballows will tell hees business to me," he said, smiling and bowing.

"You go to—well, I guess not! See here, you little monkey, is Jennings in?"

The boy nodded, sullenly. He knew enough English to be insulted.

"I want to see him—understand? You tell him I'm an American—just off a steamer that sent me ashore. I've come to Eusibe on business—private business."

"I act for heem," said the clerk.

"Well, you'll not act in my affairs. I'm going to see Jennings himself—and he'll hear from this through the State department, too."

The yellow boy went calmly back to his

His porter, who had gone to sleep outside, was shaken into a more wakeful state, and showed him the way to a tavern where he was given a room and bed without question. These people were too lazy to be inquisitive; or else Laguerre felt his strength so great that he feared nobody.

Yet, the longer he stayed the more cautious he grew. He posed as a traveling agent before the day was over. And he never as much as glanced toward Lady Bird.

He knew Captain Egbert. He had met him and his two officers. He wandered about the town in the evening, hoping to find them in some one of the cafes.

But there were few white men. So few that his own presence attracted attention and he finally went to the hotel and up to his room, to get away from staring black eyes.

There he hauled out his big meerschaum and fired up. It reminded him of the college gang, who had given the pipe to him, and he wondered what they'd say if they knew he was so far away from God's country.

And as he knocked the ashes from the pipe after his smoke by the window, there came a rap at the door, which opened before he could speak. He sat up straight, the warm pipe bowl gripped in his hand.

"What's the trouble? What do you want?"

"By gosh, it is! was the relieved reply.

"Thought I couldn't have been mistaken. Remember me, Mr. Barrows?"

"Ah—the purser. So it is. Mr.—er—"

"Peckham."

"Just so. Saw you before Lady Bird sailed. How's everybody aboard it?"

"Ev'rybody aboard it is pretty blanked well, I reckon," snarled Peckham. "Least-ways, they look so—the dirty, yaller trash!"

"What!"

"Niggers. Laguerre's men. I'm the only one outside o' jail."

"What!" That startled exclamation became tiresome before the purser's story was finished.

"There you have it, sir," he said, at last.

"Just sheer luck took me ashore before Lady Bird was gobbled up. And I've been keeping rather close to cover ever since. The consul is sold out body and soul to Laguerre. You see, he represents a gun manufactory up north, and he's sold the revolutionists their weapons. Only hope he doesn't know you are connected with the company. I've seen men shot for less."

"American citizens!" quoth Barrows, in horror.

"Yes. That don't mean much, especially

Barrows.

"Don't you count on me. I'm going to sneak away and get another job."

Barrows looked at him. He felt just how little the tall man was.

"The boys will get out of jail in time. Laguerre is no fool—neither is his man in Eusibe, Callistro. He's a devil they say—a butcher. But he's no fool. As for the ship, she's a dead loss. Laguerre is going to win here—sure. You take my advice. You can't do anything for Egbert or for the ship."

Barrows again denied himself the pleasure of telling Peckham what he was. "I've come here to make good," he said, having filled his pipe once more and now lighting it. "Guess I'll (puff) stay (puff) awhile (puff) longer!"

III.

The next day he absorbed gossip like a sponge. There were plenty of people to talk—all he had to do was to listen to bad Spanish and worse English. He learned that the captain and crew of Lady Bird had been shut up as "filibusters." It was claimed arms were found in the cargo of the steamship, but the rest of the cargo had not been touched.

He was told by one party that Laguerre (to whom the ignorant already looked as president or dictator, vice Dio Blanco, put out) proposed to build a fine new palace at Serra Garda, farther along the coast and that the expensive lumber which made up Lady Bird's cargo would go into that new official residence.

"Not if I see it first," muttered Barrows, and he sat down and smoked again.

And as he smoked he saw a light-haired, pasty-faced, youngish man come out of the 'dobe house over the doorway of which floated the tattered-demolition American flag and approach a nearby cafe. He heard one or two of the dagoes address him as "Senior Jennings."

"Guess it's up to me to know, Jennings," muttered Barrows, rising and slipping his empty pipe into the side pocket of his coat.

"Anyway, I've got about tired of this Eusibe. There must be a change."

He strolled into the cafe after his fellow countryman. Jennings was sitting at a table in the rear of the cafe, but he was not alone. Barrows selected a table at which he could sit with his own back to the light. He watched Jennings and his friend, who was a dark little man, eager,

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