

The Duel on the Trail.

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waiting fox, and die before it had time to realise in what shape doom had come upon it.

All unconscious that he was trespassing upon another's hunt, the fox with a skillful jerk of his head flung the limp and sprawling victim across his shoulder, holding it by one leg, and started away down the slope toward his lair on the other side of the pond.

As the mink's long body darted out from the hollow log he stopped short, crouched flat upon the snow with twitching tail, and stared at the triumphant intruder with eyes that suddenly blazed red. The trespass was no less an insult than an injury; and many of the wild kindreds show themselves possessed of a nice sensitiveness on the point of their personal dignity. For an animal of the mink's size the fox was an overwhelmingly powerful antagonist, to be avoided with care under all ordinary circumstances. But to the disappointed hunter, his blood hot from one long, exciting chase, this present circumstance seemed by no means ordinary. Noiseless as a shadow, and swift and stealthy as a snake, he sped after the leisurely fox, and with one snap lit through the great tendon of his right hindleg, permanently laming him.

As the pang went through him, and the maimed leg gave way beneath his weight, the fox dropped his burden and turned savagely upon his unexpected assailant. The mink, however, had sprung away, and lay crouched in readiness on the snow, eyeing his enemy malignantly. With a fierce snap of his long, punishing jaws the fox rushed upon him. But—the mink was not there. With a movement so quick as fairly to elude the sight, he was now crouching several yards away, watchful, vindictive, menacing. The fox made two more short rushes, in vain; then he, too, crouched considering the situation and glaring at his slender, black antagonist. The mink's small eyes were lit with a smoldering, ruddy glow, sinister and implacable; while rage and pain had cast over the eyes of the fox a peculiar greenish opalescence.

For perhaps half a minute the two lay motionless, though quivering with the intensity of restraint and expectation. Then, with lightning suddenness, the fox repeated his dangerous rush. But again the mink was not there. As composed as if he had never moved a hair, he was lying about three yards to one side, glaring with that same immutable hate.

At this the fox seemed to realise that it was no use trying to catch so elusive a foe. The realization came to him slowly—and slowly, sullenly, he arose and turned away, ignoring the prize which he could not carry off. With an awkward limp he started across the ice, seeming to scorn his small but troublesome antagonist.

Having thus recovered the spoils, and succeeded in scoring his point over so mighty an adversary, the mink might have been expected to let the matter rest and quietly reap the profit of his triumph. But all the vindictiveness of his ferocious and implacable tribe was now aroused. Vengeance, not victory, was his craving. When the fox had gone about a dozen feet, all at once the place where the mink had been crouching was empty. Almost in the same instant, as it seemed, the fox was again, and mercilessly, bitten through the leg.

This time, although the fox had seemed to be ignoring the foe, he turned like a flash to meet the assault. Again, however, he was just too late. His mad rush, the snapping of his long jaws, availed him nothing. The mink crouched, eyeing him, ever just beyond his reach. A gleam of something very close to fear came into his furious eyes as he turned again to continue his reluctant retreat.

Again, and again, and yet again, the mink repeated his elusive attack, each time inflicting a deep and disastrous wound, and each time successfully escaping the counter-assault. The trail of the fox was now streaked and flecked with

scarlet, and both his hind legs dragged heavily. He reached the edge of the smooth ice and turned at bay. The mink drew back, cautious for all his hate. Then the fox started across the steel-gray glair, picking his steps that he might have firm foothold.

A few seconds later the mink once more delivered his thrust. Pointing towards the enemy's right, he swerved with that snake-like celerity of his, and bit deep into the tender upper edge of the fox's thigh, where it plays over the groin.

It was a cunning and deadly stroke. But in recovering from it, to dart away again to safe distance, his feet slipped, ever so little, on the shining surface of the ice. The delay was but for the minutest fraction of a second. But in that minutest fraction lay the fox's opportunity. His wheel and spring were this time not too late. His jaws closed about the mink's slim backbone and crunched it to fragments. The lean, black shape straightened out with a sharp convulsion and lay still on the ice.

Though fully aware of the efficacy and finality of that bite, the fox set his teeth again and again, with curious deliberation of movement, into the limp and unresisting form. Then, with his tongue hanging a little from his bloody jaws, he lifted his head and stared, with a curious, wavering, anxiously doubtful look, over the white, familiar fields. The world, somehow, looked strange and blurry to him. He turned, leaving the dead mink on the ice, and painfully retraced his deeply-crimsoned trail. Just ahead was the opening in the log, the way to that privacy which he desperately craved. The code of all the aristocrats of the wild kindred, subtly binding even in that supreme hour, forbade that he should consent to yield himself to death in the garish publicity of the open. With the last of his strength he crawled into the log, till just the bushy tip of his tail protruded to betray him. There he lay down with one paw over his nose, and sank into the long sleep. For an hour the frost bit hard upon the fields, stiffening to stone the bodies but now so hot with eager life. Then the snow came, thick and silent, filling the emptiness with a moving blur, and buried away all witness of the fight.

BABY'S SENSITIVE SKIN.

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A baby's soft, delicate skin often becomes very sensitive, burning, irritating, and inflamed, as shown by chafing, eruptions, soreness, and itching. This condition causes not only agony to the little one, but brings on a lot of worry and annoyance for his mother and nurse. Powder and puff will not more than temporarily allay the pain; and as a consequence when this resort is adopted the itching condition is aggravated and all the more difficult to control. Evidence that this is so will be found in the statements of Mr Graham Weatherley, scenic artist, of Leichhardt, Sydney. This gentleman writes:—"My wife has derived great benefit from your Zam-Buk Balm in cases of chapped hands and face, and has proved it invaluable in the case of our little daughter, aged eighteen months, who was very chafed in the limbs. Other treatments had been previously tried, but as the child has an extremely sensitive skin, these caused her much pain, but Zam-Buk has a wonderfully soothing influence, and completely heals the affected parts." Zam-Buk, the great healer, is a speedy cure for Piles, Eczema, Boils, Running Sores, Sore Legs, Ringworm, Rheumatism, Lumbago, Sciatica, etc. As an Embrocation for Strained Muscles and Tendons, Zam-Buk, rubbed well into the parts affected, is unequalled. As a Household Balm for Cuts, Burns, Bruises, Pimples, Blackheads, Sore Throat, Sore Chest, Chapped Hands, Chillsbains, Sore Feet, Rash, and Bites of insects, Zam-Buk is invaluable. From all medicine vendors, 1/6, or 3/6 family size (containing nearly four times the quantity), or from Zam-Buk Co., 39, Pitt-street, Sydney. Send a penny stamp for FREE SAMPLE POT.

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The Major's Romance and How It Ended

By ELSA MORELAND.

Major Mucklebury was a grim, cross, sour old bachelor—yes, sour! Some people say it is old maids who are sour, but old bachelors when they have been in India and have a "liver" are a thousand times worse. Major Mucklebury was the terror and the squire of the village. He was a magistrate, as trespassers on his estate knew to their cost, for his preserves were most jealously guarded, and the villagers used to say they believed Major Mucklebury could have detected the feathers of his own estate in the refuse of a poulterer's shop.

It was a lovely morning, and Major Mucklebury was strolling through his pheasant covers with a gun over his shoulder. Of course the time for pheasants was not yet, but the major kept a keen eye on the prospects, and sometimes a stray cat—Ha! What was that?

A tiny, fluffy, clinging thing looked down at him from a beech tree close by. Two blue, innocent eyes, a ball of fur, a little plaintive mew, and then—bang! "Had him that time, by jove! Caught in the act!" muttered the major, as the little cat fell with a thud on the soft greensward. And, striding forward, he prepared to bag his game. Imagine his surprise when a golden-haired pinafored little fury darted before him, and, stooping, clasped the dying kitten in her arms, looking meanwhile at his destroyer with flashing, angry eyes!

Now somehow experiences never come singly, and the major was going through a gamut of experiences at that moment, and this last was the most startling of them all. "There is no one in the whole wide world who loves you as much as I loved that dear, dear kitten!" No, certainly, as far as the major knew, there was not. No one, at least, who would disgrace her pretty face with a single tear for him were he to be shot dead at this moment.

With an overwhelming flash this all at once came home to him, and this selfish, wealthy man of the world stood before the golden haired, crying child confounded—dumb!

"And what is your name, my dear?" asked the old soldier, as, ten minutes later, they trudged along, the little girl still sobbing as she clung to his big finger, and the major carrying the murdered cat. "I'll never do to let her go home alone with all that blood on her pinafore," he thought; "her mother would have a fit at the sight of her!"

"My name is Letty—Letty Fane," said the child.

"Letty Fane!" The major dropped her fingers, and nearly dropped the kitten, too. "Bless my soul!"

Little Letty looked at him in surprise. She didn't like his voice when he growled like that. She had heard old Maggie say, "When the major was angry there was no need for folks to go to the menagerie to see wild beasts; they could see one for nothing at the hall." But they were nearly home; she could see the green gate; yes, and the major could see the green gate, too! The sight of that gate and the sound of that name, "Letty Fane," conjured up such a rush of memories that no wonder he was silent!

Letty Fane! Could this be her child—the child of the only woman he had ever loved! But no! Her own name was Letty Fane, so that couldn't be. What was he dreaming of?

In fancy he was back again just ten years ago. He was a young man then—at least, he liked his friends to think so, though he himself knew better, but ten years' hard work in a bad climate knocked all that out of him. He was an old man now—old, rich, gloomy and alone.

How well he remembered it! Ten years ago he had come to look after his property. He was leaving the army soon, but Indian speculations would keep him away some years, and it was then that he met Letty Fane, Letty Fane—just "sweet 17"—whose only brother was gazetted to the major's own

regiment, and was to sail in the same boat for India.

The man of the world had felt flattered by the admiration and thanks these two young things had lavished on him in return for the scraps of information he had bestowed on the young sub. It had been pleasant to him to see the colour flood the sweet, oval face of the sub's sister as he lingered over giving counsel to the brother to pay court to his sister. Then had come a summer night when they stood by the green gate; the stars twinkled overhead, the nightingale sang in the distant dale; the major pressed his lips to two warm red ones that trembled beneath their first kiss, and said, "Good-bye."

In a dream he saw it all! As they reached the gate little Letty took her precious bundle from the major and ran to the woman coming swiftly down the path.

"Auntie! auntie!" she sobbed. "My kitty, my dear kitty!" And she flung herself upon the white gowned figure which stood as if turned to stone. And over the childish golden head the man's and the woman's eyes met. In his were memory, wonder, longing, and vain regret; in hers were memory, wounded pride, cold disdain and the ghost of a murdered love.

For had she not trusted him and waited for him to return! And he had come home, taken up his abode on his wealthy estate, had daily passed and repassed her gate, and made no sign. "Letty!"

The major spoke the one word in hopeless, despairing tones, and held out two trembling hands—hands full of all save love.

But Letty only bent slightly, like a lily before the gale; then, turning with her little charge, went slowly back to the house. The major stood there in the brilliant sunshine till the door clanged. Then the words rang in his ears:

"There is nobody in the whole wide world who loves you as much as I loved my dear, dear kitty!"

The days passed and the major paused often at the gate, but no Letty—either child or woman—was to be seen. The child had been overjoyed at the appearance of a pretty, fluffy Persian, but the woman's heart was still empty.

One night, coming bounding in through the summer dusk, little Letty paused, transfixed. Two figures stood close together on the hearth.

"O, auntie! auntie!" she cried. "That cruel man! How can you—"

"Hush, hush, darling!" the other answered gently, with a new soft ring in her tones. "Don't say that, Letty, darling, for—I love him!"

"Scatter your millions!" said Disease one day To the demon Cold and his friend Decay. "Winter is here to give you a hand. Out! friend, out! and ravage the land." "I can't," said the Demon, "I'm quite out of work. A mortal named Woods pulls me up with a jerk. His Great Peppermint Cure is death to my host. Good-bye!" said the Demon, and gave up the ghost!

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