

THUNDERBOLT'S MATE.

BY E. W. HORNING.

CHAPTER I.

Penelope Lees, cantering from the woodshed to the home-station in the red light of a Riverina sunset, was, beyond a doubt, the best of all the merry-looking, black-haired, blue-eyed little minxes in the colony. It is true that there was not another minx of any description within fifty miles of the Bilbil boundary-fence; but there was not a second Penelope in New South Wales; at all events, not one to compare with the Penelope that cantered home so briskly this evening, after a long day out at the shed. Her spirits were not always so high, nor her looks so jaunty and engaging. It was a special occasion; the day now dying had been the happiest day of Penelope's life: it was the first day of the shearing at Bilbil Station.

All day long little Miss Pen, on her piebald pony, had been helping with the sheep—really helping, not hindering. It was not the first time she had helped with the sheep; she could "muster" with the best, and the mysteries of "yarding-up" were not mysteries to Pen; but it was the first time she had been allowed out at the shed during shearing. Last year she was too young; the privilege had been promised her when she should have entered "double figures." And now that Rubicon was passed—the child was ten; and three times a week, while shearing lasted, Pen was to be one of the regular hands for mustering the woolly sheep and driving the shorn ones back to their paddocks. The first day of this stirring work was at an end, and it had not disappointed her. This was why her blue eyes were so full of light, and her brown little face full of animation. This was why she was pleased to imagine herself a real, big, bearded bushman; and why she must needs ride in the thick scrub, a mile wide of the track—the very thing a real bushman would not have done.

Not that there was the least fear of Penelope. She was the very last person to lose her way on Bilbil run. She knew every mile of it—particularly those few between the homestead and the wool-shed—too well for that. But it was good practice to strike a straight line through the scrub when opportunity offered; and Pen was now in one of the thickest belts of scrub on the run, which was famous for its small share of useless timbered country, and for the extent of its fertile salt-bush plains. Here and there, where the short trees grow sparsely, pools of lingering sunlight lay across the pony's path; once a great carpet-snake—thick as a strong man's arm, and exquisitely marked—glided into its hole almost under his canting hoofs; and more than once huge red kangaroos bounded noiselessly past, in front of his nose. The pony did not mind being bush-bred, and used to the swift, silent movements of its denizens. The silence, indeed, was extraordinary; it always is in a belt of scrub. Even the pony's canter was muffled in the soft sandy soil. Penelope apparently grew tired of the silence all at once; for she uncoiled the long lash of her stock-whip—her real bushman's stock-whip—and cracked it smartly. With the long lash swinging in the air for a second shot, she suddenly pulled up the pony. She fancied she had heard a human cry. She cracked the whip again: this time it was no fancy; a man's voice was calling faintly for help.

Penelope was startled, and for an instant greatly frightened. Then, as she could see nothing, she took about the wisest course open to her: she marked the spot where she had first heard the cry—which was being repeated a short interval—and took it for the centre of a circle which she now proceeded to describe at a slow trot. The immediate result of this manoeuvre was that she almost rode over a man who was sitting on the ground in the shadow of a hop-bush with his two hands planted firmly behind him, and half his weight upon his straightened arms.

The pony shied; kangaroos it knew, and snakes it knew; but a solitary man squatting behind a hop-bush in the heart of the scrub was a distinct irregularity. The next moment Pen leapt lightly from the saddle—and the man uttered one word, and that indistinctly: "Water!"

Pen tore from her saddle the canvas water-bag, which was another of her "real bushman's" equipments. "There's precious little in it, but there's a drop or two, I know," she exclaimed nervously; and she was down at his side, wrenching the cork from the glass mouthpiece.

"Take care of that leg, for God's sake!" ejaculated the man.

"Why? Whatever's the matter?" She had noticed that his left leg was lying in an odd position.

"Broken," answered the man; and his lips closed over the mouth-piece.

It was no misfortune that there was not more water in the bag. There was enough to moisten lips and tongue and throat, and a mouthful or two besides. Had there been more, the man might have done himself harm, as men have done before on obtaining water, after enduring the pangs of prolonged thirst. Though far from satisfied, however, the man was relieved. Moreover, he knew now that he was saved. He sank back and closed his eyes with a look of weary thankfulness.

Penelope gazed down upon him, not liking to say anything, and uncertain for the moment what to do. He was a man, she guessed, of about her father's age—between forty and fifty; but his long black hair was not yet grizzled, nor was there a single gray strand in the bushy black beard and whiskers. Below the line of black hair, the forehead was ghastly in its pallor; and the deep bronze of the lower part of the face had faded into a sickly, yellow hue as of jaundice. The features were pinched and drawn; the closed eyes like deep-set caverns. The limbs were large and powerful, and had all the grace and suppleness of vigorous life—all but the left leg. That limb had the hard and motionless outline of death, and lay, besides in an unnatural position. The man had neither coat nor "swag," but he wore long riding-boots and spurs; and this led Penelope to the conclusion—which turned out to be correct—that he had been thrown from horseback. She also noticed that his right hand rested upon his wide awake, which was on the ground by his side, as though he feared its being blown away; and this struck her as odd, seeing that the day was closing without a breath of wind.

At length he opened his eyes. "How far is it to the homestead, missy?"

"From here? About two miles," replied Pen.

"Do you think," asked the fallen man, half shyly, "they would send—if they knew?"

"Think? I know they would; why, of course. Only, the worst of it there's no horse any one at the homestead. There's only my mother, and Sid the butcher, and Sammy the Chinese cook. I don't suppose the groom's got in yet; he was mustering—and so was I. The rest are out in the shed. The shearing began to-day, you know."

"How far from this is the shed, then?"

"Well, it's six miles from the homestead," said Pen thoughtfully; "so it must be about four from here. I'm certain it isn't a yard less than four miles from here: I've just come from there."

"Do you think they would send? My leg's broken. I've been lying here twenty-four hours. But for you, little missy, tonight would have finished me, straight; though for that matter—Bless me, missy, you're smart at mounting that little pony of yours!"

Penelope had vaulted back into the saddle. Her red little lips were tightly pressed, her teeth clenched. And there were no more surays anywhere to be seen, but only a pale, pink reflection in the western sky.

"Are you going to ride back to the shed, little miss—alone—so late?"

"Yes; I'm off. They'll be here with the buggy in another hour."

The man muttered a blessing; it was no good blessing her aloud, for Pen and her pony were a good twenty yards away; the trees and their shadows closed over them.

Before the sound of the galloping hoofs died away, the broken-legged bushman lifted his wide-awake from the ground; and under it all the while had lain a brace of revolvers.

Before the sound of hoofs returned, and with it that of wheels, the revolvers had disappeared. No one would have guessed that they were ten inches under ground. But the man's finger-nails were torn and bent, and the sand had penetrated to the quick.

II.

The boss of Bilbil admitted that evening that there was something after all in the Ambulance Movement. The admission was remarkable, because for years he had vowed that there was nothing in that movement. During his last long holiday in Melbourne he had attended a course of ambulance classes, to pacify his wife, who worried him into it, and to convince her out of his own experience that there was nothing in those classes; and he accepted the certificate which was duly awarded him as a conclusive proof that that certificate was within any fool's reach; thus disparaging himself to disparage the movement of which he had heard too much. The Philistine was converted now. A simple fracture had come in his way, a few simple directions had come back to his mind; to his great surprise, he knew all about it when the moment came; to his greater delight, the broken leg seemed to set itself. Late into that night—as late hours go, in the bush—William Lees stamped up and down his wife's sitting-room in ecstasies; delighted with himself, delighted with his wife, who has goaded him into attending them. His delight might have been less had she taken her triumph less gently; but as a matter of fact, she was doing her very best to read a book, and could not for his chatter.

"I never saw a neater break in my life," William Lees reported for the twentieth time—"plain as a pike-staff and clean as a whistle. And I do believe I've set it safe and sound. He's sleeping now like a top."

Mr. Lees was hard-working, open-handed, and kindly, and as popular among the station hands as any squatter need wish to be. He was of prepossessing looks, with eyes as merry and good-natured and almost as blue as those of his small daughter; and he joined a schoolboy's enthusiasm with a love of personal exertion which no school-boy was even yet known to exhibit.

"I am glad you have been able to make the poor man so comfortable," remarked Mrs. Lees—not for the first time, either—without looking up from her book.

"Comfortable? I've fixed him up all; you should just see. He's in young Miller's room. I'll tell you what I've done: first of all, I've shifted."

"I don't at all know how I shall get on with him upon my hands while I am all alone, as I am to be this shearing."

There was some slight reticence in her tone; she had been obliged at last to shut up her book in despair. It was not that she was an atom less kind and good than her husband, in her own way. But it was a very different way. Mrs. Lees was robust neither in health nor in spirits; in appearance she was delicate and pale, in her manner gentle; but there were signs of determination in her thin sweet face—particularly about the mouth—which were not difficult to read, and which, by the way, were reproduced pretty plainly in Penelope. She lay in one of those long, wicker-work arrangements which are more like sofas than chairs, as her husband paced the room and puffed his pipe; she disliked the smoke no less than the incessant tramping to and fro; but she complained of neither.

"Why bother your head about him, my dear?" said the boss, still marching up and down. "If you just look him up now and then, and see that Sammy feeds him properly—he must live like a fighting-cock, you know—that'll be all that's necessary. I don't fancy, from what I see of him, that he's the one to talk much to anybody; but if, for instance, he cared to be read to, why, you—or even Pen—could do that for him; though not, of course, to any wearisome extent."

For a while Mrs. Lees remained silent and thoughtful. "Has he told you all about the accident, Will?" she asked at length.

"He fell off his horse."

"But the circumstances—was he alone?"

"I should think so; I didn't ask," and Will Lees shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say that that was no business of his.

"Then what happened to his horse?"

"And where was he bound for?"

"I really didn't ask," answered the boss. "Well, I think you ought to know something of the man, Will, dear."

Lees stopped in his walk, and pointed at his wife the pipe-stem of masculine scorn. "You ladies are so horribly suspicious!" he said. "What business of mine is it who he is? What business of mine—or yours—whether the man is a hump or not, since that's what you're driving at? There was no hump about the broken leg; that's enough for me. It ought to be enough for you too; for he can't get at your silver spoons, my lady, and good old family plate, and priceless old ancestral jewels, and closets full of golden guineas—he can't get at any of them just yet a bit."

The boss laughed loud at his pleasantry, being pleased with himself in every way to-night.

"No, but"—Mrs. Lees began earnestly; she broke off: "Dear me, how late it is! I am going to bed."

She went. It had been on the tip of her tongue to express the objection she felt to being left alone, or practically alone, from Monday till Saturday, for six long weeks, with this stranger within the gates. But she remembered how heavily her husband had paid, the previous year, through not giving to the shearing that personal supervision which was of little use unless it began with the first shift in the early morning. She knew that the overseer was too young a man to manage thirty-six shearers, and half that number of "rousbouts," single-handed. She also knew that at a word from her, her husband would give up sleeping out at the shed; and this was the reason of all others why she held her tongue.

Nevertheless, William Lees did receive a hint as to the doubtful wisdom of leaving his wife and child alone at the homestead without protection during the inside of every week. It came from an outsider; in fact, from no other than the object of Mrs. Lees's feminine suspicions. It was Saturday evening, the man having been brought in on the Thursday; the squatter has returned from the wool-shed for the weekend; and his very first care was to see how the broken leg was mending.

The man lay in a room in the "barracks"—a superior sort of hut with four rooms, sacred to the bachelors of the station. "Now, Brown," said the squatter, bustling in—Brown was the name the man had given "let's have a look at the leg."

The brief examination that followed was entirely satisfactory to the amateur bone-setter—there was no professional one within seventy miles of Bilbil. The starched bandages were hard as flint; the form of the leg was perfect; that the snap had been really as simple as it seemed, there could be no longer any doubt. What was far less satisfactory was the patient's face.

"I like the leg; it's doing very nicely," said Lees, sitting down on the edge of the bed. "But I don't like your looks: you look like death, man. Are you eating anything Brown?"

"Plenty sir, thank you. Sammy's a first-rate attendant."

"But not first-rate company, eh? Come, my good fellow, I'm afraid you're moping. Mrs. Lees tells me you seem to prefer being alone from morning till night; indeed, you've as good as told her so."

The patient smiled faintly, and gazed at Lees with a strange expression in his cavernous eyes. "Shall I tell you, sir, who mopes more at this station than I do?"

"By all means—if there is such a person."

"And I don't want to give offence."

"Then none shall be taken. Who is it?"

"The missis."

"The mistress! What on earth do you mean, man?"

"There! I knew you wouldn't like it. But it's a fact. The missis mopes more'n I do. It's nervous work for lonesome women at a station of night-time. Mrs. Lees, beg your pardon, sir, is nervous, and well she may be."

"Well she may be! My good fellow, what are you driving at?"

Brown closed his eyes. "You've heard of Thunderbolt, sir?"

"I've heard of a villain known by that name. What about him? He's in Queensland, isn't he?"

"He's a good deal nearer home, sir," replied Brown earnestly. "If I'm not mistaken, I saw him a very little while ago. I don't think I am mistaken: I know him: I have very good reason to know him well—by sight." A dark look came over the white face. Brown ground his teeth savagely. "I was once stuck up by him, he continued in a low voice. "I shall never forget him. And I saw him as plain as I see you, Mr. Lees," said Brown impressively, opening his eyes again—"the day I broke my leg—in the paddock I broke it in!"

"In my paddock?" cried William Lees. Brown raised his head an inch from the pillow and nodded. "As sure as I lie here, sir, you heard of Moolah Station, twenty miles south of this, being stuck up last Wednesday?"

"Just heard of it to-day; but that was never Thunderbolt?"

"It was never any one else, sir!"

"Then why should he leave us alone?—Are you quite certain you aren't mistaken, Brown? And—what the deuce is there to grin at, my man?"

"Nothing, sir. I beg pardon. Only Thunderbolt and Co. never did do two jobs running, with only twenty miles between them. Strike, and show clean heels; that's their line. I know them—I tell you I've been stuck up by them. Now, if you was to hear of them twenty miles north?"

"Has he a mate, then?"

"He had. But he was alone on Thursday—course him! As for being mistaken, I know I'm not. I was in the scrub; he was in the open. It was just before my horse fell and smashed me—the horse that's never been seen since. You can guess now who got it. Thunderbolt has a sharp eye for horse-flesh. The boss jumped up from the bed. "I wish to Heaven you'd told me this before, Brown!"

"My leg was that bad; I couldn't think of things."

At this moment a hum of voices came through the open window from the long veranda opposite. The squatter looked out hastily. "The Belton buggy!" he exclaimed. "Young Rooper and Michie!" He hurried out. Brown closed his eyes wearily. But the buzz of voices outside grew louder and louder; and presently, back rushed Lees to the sick-room, his face flaming with excitement. "You were right Brown! I couldn't have believed it! It was that villain you saw!"

Brown raised himself upon one elbow. "You don't mean that—that—they've caught him?"

"I do! He was taken at Belton this afternoon; old Rooper has got him there now; and young Rooper and Michie are on their way to the township for the police."

A grin of exultation spread over Brown's wan features—to fade rapidly into a peevish smile of unbelief. His shoulders sank back feebly upon the pillows; he shook his head slowly from side to side.

"They'll never keep him—never, never, though they'd caught him twenty times over! A slippery gentleman is Thunderbolt I know him well; he stuck me up, I tell you—he stuck me up!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Some Russian Sketches.

A correspondent of the London Daily Graphic, investigating the famine-stricken districts of Russia, came to describe some of the native's customs as follows:

"There are scarcely any forests in the province of Tambof, the ground is simply bare steppes, with scarcely a tree or shrub on them. You can take a sledge and drive for miles over the undulating plains without coming across any forest land. Here and there you see a recently planted wood consisting of young trees which have been set by some enterprising landed proprietor.

The result of this want of wood is that the inhabitants are obliged to use straw for fuel. A bundle of straw is pushed into the oven and a light is applied. When the straw has burned out, leaving nothing but the glowing embers, the oven is shut up so that the heat may be retained for as long a period as possible. As there was a failure of the crops last autumn, there has been very little straw available for fuel this winter. In fact, in some of the poorer villages there are cottages where the warmth of a fire has for several months been unknown. In such cases two or three families have crowded into one hut, and have tried to keep some heat in their bodies by packing themselves like sardines on the top of the stove, and on the shelf which extends thence to the opposite wall, on a level with the top of the oven. This shelf is generally six feet wide and eight feet long, so that about eight people can find sleeping accommodation on it. In many of the larger huts a wide bench takes the place of the shelf, but the bench is not a very warm sleeping place if there is no heat in the stove, hence the preference for a shelf close to the ceiling where it is warm.

While passing through St. Petersburg the other day I saw some clothes which some industrious and philanthropic ladies were making for the distressed peasantry. These ladies were, in my opinion, wasting their labor, for in the first place the material used was too good, costing about four or five times the price of the cloth of which the moujik and his wife make their clothes; and in the second place the garments were not such as the people ordinarily wear. The peasant woman wears a shift, a petticoat, and a sheepskin coat. Her legs are wrapped up in rags, and bark shoes are tied to her feet; while the richer women wear long felt boots reaching to the knee. The man wears a shirt, trousers, and bark shoes, or long felt boots, and a sheepskin coat. For head-gear the women tie a scarf or handkerchief over the head; the men wear a sheepskin cap. Obviously these people don't want jackets made of flannelette, or vests of hygienic wool, or petticoats of pink flannel, with curious designs in aesthetic colors. A woman was offered a petticoat which had been sent from Moscow and she refused it, saying she would be afraid to appear in that in the village. Such are the inexorable decrees of fashion even in humble life. It would, therefore, be better if the ladies of St. Petersburg and Moscow were to buy common material and send that to the villages with stocks of needles and cotton, and let the villagers make their own clothes. As it is, some of the people honestly say they can not wear the clothes, and refuse to take them, while others take the clothes—and sell them. The money thus obtained goes to the dram-shop.

Terrible Plight of Two Ladies.

The Daily Graphic contains the third letter of their special commissioner describing his visit to Russia. He writes of a workroom having been established by Prince Viasimsky's steward and his wife and adds—"The steward's wife told me an amusing though touching anecdote of what had occurred two days before. The news of the sewing-room had spread to a village some miles off, and two sisters determined to make the attempt to get to the workroom, although they had sold every article of clothing they possessed for food. They borrowed a neighbour's horse, harnessed him to their sledge, wrapped their father's sheepskin coat round them, and drove off to the workroom. Arrived there, they jumped out and ran into the room, when the steward's wife said that one girl was stark naked, while the other had nothing on but the remnants of a shirt. They had driven the eight or ten miles with only their father's tattered sheepskin coat over them, and the thermometer was standing at something like 10 degrees below zero (Fahrenheit). These two determined young girls were pointed out to me. They were now clothed in garments made in the workroom, and looked clean and industrious lassies.

When the merits of a good thing are considered, it only requires proof like the following to convince and settle any doubt.—Constantine, Mich., U. S. A., Feb. 16, 1887: "Was troubled 30 years with pains in the back from strain; in bed for weeks at a time; no relief from other remedies. About 8 years ago I bought St. Jacobs Oil and made about 14 applications; have been well and strong ever since. Have done all kinds of work and can lift as much as ever. No return of pain in years." D. M. REARICK.

It Makes Pure Blood

And by so doing Hood's Sarsaparilla cures scrofula, salt rheum, and all other blood diseases, aids proper digestion, cures dyspepsia, gives strength to every organ of the body, and prevents attacks of that tired feeling or more serious affection. The fact that it has cured thousands of others is sufficient reason for belief that it will cure you.

N. B. Be sure to get

Hood's Sarsaparilla

Sold by all druggists, \$1; six for \$5. Prepared only by C. I. HOOD & CO., Apothecaries, Lowell, Mass.

10 Doses One Dollar

Judicious Advertising.

The advertiser often slights this, which is a most important branch of his business. He prepares his copy hurriedly and without judgment or thought, leaves its display to the printer's taste, does not attract the eye or the dollar of the reader, and then says advertising does not pay. Advertising is an art, and does pay, if made a study. The advertising agent has goods just as legitimate and valuable to sell as the salesman of drugs or jewelry, and this fact is recognized by advertisers. The essentials of advertising can perhaps be stated as but three in number: you must have what people want or can be made to want; you must select the proper medium to reach them, and you must tell your story in an attractive and forcible manner. All the resources of modern ingenuity are called to the aid of the advertiser—art, poetry, music, high literary ability, keen business insight, all contribute their quota. Lincoln's famous saying that "you can fool all the people part of the time, and part of the people all the time, but you can't fool all the people all the time," must not be denied in practice, if one expects to build up an enduring success. Advertising is a field of an infinitude of variety; what succeeds in one branch, is a failure in another. Intelligent study of the question is an absolute necessity.—[Pharm Era.

"August Flower"

For Dyspepsia.

A. Bellanger, Propr., Stove Foundry, Montigny, Quebec, writes: "I have used August Flower for Dyspepsia. It gave me great relief. I recommend it to all Dyspeptics as a very good remedy."

Ed. Bergeron, General Dealer, Lauzon, Levis, Quebec, writes: "I have used August Flower with the best possible results for Dyspepsia."

C. A. Barrington, Engineer and General Smith, Sydney, Australia, writes: "August Flower has effected a complete cure in my case. It acted like a miracle."

Geo. Gates, Corinth, Miss., writes: "I consider your August Flower the best remedy in the world for Dyspepsia. I was almost dead with that disease, but used several bottles of August Flower, and now consider myself a well man. I sincerely recommend this medicine to suffering humanity the world over."

G. G. GREEN, Sole Manufacturer, Woodbury, New Jersey, U. S. A.

A Brilliant Past.

Wagg—"Do you see that seedy, shabby, dilapidated, bleary old wreck sitting over there?"

Salpinx—"Yes, what a perfectly frightful specimen."

Wagg—"Well, that old man used to live in a magnificent great stone house that covered acres of ground."

Salpinx—"You don't tell me."

Wagg—"Yes, it was one of the most expensive structures in the State. It cost fully a million."

Salpinx—"You simply astound me! Where was it?"

Wagg—"It was the penitentiary."

Bid For a Spring Hat.

They were about going out, and she sat down while her husband got into his overcoat.

"I don't believe you love me any more," she said with a sigh. "I'm convinced of it," and her voice trembled a little.

"Not love you, my dear? Why, how absurd! Must I tell you every moment that I love you—love you with all my soul?"

"Oh, that will do to say, but I know you care for me no longer. How can you love me in this old hat?"

THIRTY YEARS.

Johnston, N. B., March 11, 1889.

"I was troubled for thirty years with pains in my side, which increased and became very bad. I used

ST. JACOBS OIL

and it completely cured. I give it all praise."

MRS. WM. RYDER.

"ALL RIGHT! ST. JACOBS OIL DID IT."