

The Free Press Short Story

The Better Part of Valour

By MAE FOSTER JAY

"WELL, what's wrong with the picture, Dad?" Jack Barrows sat on the arm of a chair in his father's office of the Hartley Museum, swinging an impatient foot. "And what has it to do with the wild men of Borneo?"

For it was Borneo and the world's other uncharted places that occupied the thoughts of Jack's interest, rather than the picture the elder Barrows had just drawn. These outposts had determined the choice of major studies in the middle west university from which the boy had just been graduated. His impatient foot was eager to be treading the trackless wilds.

"How soon can I be off, Dad?" had come the ardent question as Jack had swung into the office. "I'm ready to go!"

The president of the Hartley Museum had looked up from the letter he was reading, and had removed his glasses slowly. "As soon, son, as you are quite ready. The appointment to that field is yours, you know. I only want to feel that you are absolutely qualified."

"Ready? Qualified? Haven't I just taken my degree? Haven't I worked here side by side with you, for years? Haven't I gone into our own Southwest, till I'm more intimate terms with the ancient cliff dwellers than I am with my own classmates? How could I be better prepared for my work? You mean you want me to take post-grad work, more ethnology, archaeology, biology?"

Walter Barrows had shaken his head in denial. He had narrowed his eyes, the patient eyes of a man who has spent a life time at research work, and had regarded his son quizzically. "I see a picture of a child of two, climbing up into the forest before a blooded horse, sliding aside his neck as the animal lowers his head to eat. The same child at three, is running with a band of apes, fascinated by a covered wagon. At eight, a small boy is adrift in the lake upon a floating cake of ice which broke off when he ventured beyond the danger line. This, had, a year later, is lost in the northern woods, far from the camp from which he set out with a very characteristic, 'Who's afraid?' A broken arm and leg are the rewards of a young winner in an auto race hurtling pulled off on an abandoned track. A pilot of an airplane at a county fair is enthusiastically doing stunts which cause the audience to look the other way."

"Well," demanded Jack, thrusting back his dark red hair in which the curl still persisted, "what's wrong in the picture, Dad?"

"You do not see?"

"It seems to me that fearlessness is a necessary qualification for one whose work will take him into constant danger."

Walter Barrows tapped his glasses upon the letter he held, glancing down at it idly. "Jack," he asked, a smile showing beneath the dignified short mustache, "this letter from Dick Blair gives me an idea. I believe you'd find it eminently worth while to go down on the border and prospect about with him a bit before you start on the Orient. I believe that would give you just the preparation you need."

Jack regarded his father in amazement; then broke into an incredulous laugh. "And you worry about me facing the dangers of the South Sea Islands? From what I read, tribes of the interior of the Philippines are regular lounge liards compared to Mexican bandits in their present state of mind."

"And yet Dick has spent his whole life among them in security?"

"Oh, well," Jack studied his father with amused but respectful interest, knowing that his reasoning unflinchingly probed deep and sure. "I don't know why I should be going to go, if you wish it. I ought to find adventure enough to curb my impatience. How long is this prep course to last?"

"Come back," said Barrows, with his slow smile, "any time you find what's wrong in the picture."

So it was that Jack Barrows found himself following an old prospector through the mountains of North Mexico at a time when the far wiser course for an American was to stay on his own side of the border. He smiled as he watched the seasoned miner swing up the trail with his easy stride. There were holes through the crown of the sombrero Blair wore, and a lobe was missing from his right ear. The slight limp with which he walked had been acquired but a few weeks ago when attacked by bandits a short distance from town on the American side, he had climbed a telephone pole, tapped the wires, and phoned for help, meanwhile a splendid target for whizzing bullets.

Dick Blair did not seem to court danger, neither did he seem to avoid it. He simply treated it as if it did not exist. Jack reflected as he followed him higher and higher up into the Sierra Madre Mountains. Two burros loaded with equipment, and a reluctant Mexican, were the other two in this quest for an elusive vein of ore.

Pedro, the Mexican boy, was the only wary one in the party. He quaked with fear as he punched the stubborn burros before him. Had not the burros, the Mexican mounted police, warned them a half mile back that the mountains beyond were infested with bandits? Blair had laughed in his irrepressible

two Americans learned that he was an old peddler who had been robbed and beaten. He warned them of the danger they were in, urged them to get back to civilization. Then, accepting the blanket Blair gave him with a fervent "Gracias!" he plunged on into the underbrush, intent only upon his flight, too frightened to stop for the food that had been offered him.

"It looks a little bad, Son," Blair said thoughtfully, again occupied with his batter.

Jack placed the tender quail in the sizzling frying pan. "Guess we can hold 'em!" was his only comment.

"It might be wiser to get away from this shack."

"I shouldn't like to think that we'd be guilty of running from them!" Blair dropped a spoonful of batter upon the heated stone, inhaled the savorties appreciatively, and added, poignantly, "Or toward them!"

The two men sealed themselves on the ground before the fire, quite ready to do justice to their meal. Hardly had they filled their plates, however, when there was the crashing of hoofs, through the underbrush of a near-by draw, and four Mexicans rode forward at full speed, guns and machetes flashing.

The Americans sprang to their feet, and again, with brooding eyes, Jack watched Dick Blair meet his enemies with a comradely hail. "You're just in time!" he added, motioning to their fire. "Fortified! Quail! Steamy coffee! Come, partners! You don't want to harm us! We're good humors! Come! Eat with us!"

Blair's friendliness was magnetic. The savory odor of the hot food and drink distractedly tempting, and a Mexican as such a child! Gradually the hostility on the leader's face softened, and gleaming eyes warmed to the Americans and his food. A moment more the men would have been won, and the others would have followed!

In that moment, however, Jack Barrows reached the limit of his endurance. Were he and Blair, two strong, hardy men, again to dodge the lance? Were they to beg for peace of a small handful of ignorant outlaws? "Not on your life!" he burst out in hot protest to Blair's friendly overtures. "We're not going to compromise again, not while we've red blood left in us!"

He started in blind fury toward the leader of the band.

The whistle of a bullet, perceptible as Jack's hot words, was the Mexican's answer. An angry pain at the side of his head followed, and then darkness.

When he finally opened his eyes, there was a struggle to remember. Sudden, poignant recollection came, and with an effort the boy tried to raise his head.

The band leader, a rope taut from the point of his saddle, was dragging along on the ground behind him something clumsy and heavy, an unwieldy weight. Cautiously Jack raised his head a little higher. The other Mexicans, following behind their leader, distracted his vision. What was this object the rider dragged, as he urged his horse to a gallop? Suddenly the boy realized the truth. The bandits were dragging Dick Blair.

An awful sickness almost overpowered the young American. With shaking hand he wiped from his face and eyes the blood that flowed from the wound caused by the bullet which grazed his head.

What was this? The rope had broken! Dick Blair jumped to his feet on the instant, faced about, seized the machete from the first advancing Mexican, and knocked him unconscious, before the native had begun to cope with the sudden turn of affairs. Blair turned to the next, who was upon him now, and fought him like a wild thing.

Jack ran forward, still uncertain of his feet, whipped out his gun determinedly, and with its butt knocked away the man who was grappling with his friend.

The third Mexican wheeled about, beheld himself outnumbered, and fled toward the underbrush of the mountain side.

"I never was born," Dick managed to gasp whimsically when the enemies had fled, "to be killed by a Mex."

Jack could not answer. He was regarding with horror and compassion the neck of the gallant fighter which was without skin, entirely!

For four days followed as Blair and Jack hid about in the hills, little by little and under cover fighting their way back to their own land. They must travel slowly because of Blair's bruises and a wrenched knee. There was the constant fear of poisoning in their wounds which they could dress but superficially with their small emergency outfit. Jack Barrows' torture during these long days of hiding was entirely of the mind, however, for the head wound had been but slight, and was healing properly. Dressing the other's neck was actual suffering, and the boy could scarcely keep from crying out whenever his eyes fell upon the many bandages. He realized that those awful scars must always testify to his folly.

When once in a while he could contain himself no longer, and sobbed in anguish, Blair would say in his kindly way, "Forget it, boy!"

"But it's all my fault!"

"Don't you suppose that I know that young blood is hot?"

"Any fool!" Jack finished bitterly. "The partners came at last to the open plains upon which the mountains loomed. 'Twice that last day they had lain prone like rocks among the brush while a bandit party passed almost over them. Now in the edge of the foothills they sought shelter in the hut of an old Chihuahua who hid them in his cellar while the Mexicans stopped at his very door. His native imperturbability forestalled any suspicion. In the comparative safety of this hut the Americans waited while the Ohhuanan brought a rescue party from Nogales."

When Jack Barrows walked into his father's office in the Hartley Museum, he found the older man sober and depressed.

"What's up, Dad?"

"It's Orimes," answered Mr. Barrows, mentioning one of the Museum men who had been leading an expedition into African wilds.

"Orimes? You mean—?"

"He flouted a native ceremony. He dared refuse to drink a cup they gave him because he did not like the stuff. He knew the act symbolized unfraternity in their code. His body comes on the next boat."

When father and son had discussed the details of the tragedy, Jack said quietly, "I know just what is in the back of your mind, Father. You are telling yourself that I would have done just such a thing."

Walter Barrows' eyes sought the other's questioningly.

The younger brown eyes met his with new soaring calm in their depths. "I might have," Jack went on, "before I went south. But I wouldn't now. You see, I've discovered what was wrong in that picture. That's why I came home. That child all his life, even after he was no longer a child, misook recklessness for courage. But," Jack spoke uncertainly, "but he knows now. He's had his lesson. He will never forget that discretion is the better part of valor."

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SUMMER SALADS AND DRESSINGS

By Betty Barclay

Many women fail to serve a daily salad because for some reason or other they seem to look upon the salad dish as something rather difficult to prepare. This is by no means true. There are elaborate salads that are delightful for special occasions, but on the other hand, there are scores of salads that may be prepared from ingredients usually on hand that are very delicious and healthful.

The salad is the kind of light dish one needs on a hot day, but do not for a moment imagine that it is lacking in food value. The sugar, which is so commonly used in salads is the kind of quick-energy food needed to pep up a languid diner. The minerals, salts, and vitamins of the fruits or vegetables used in the salad are also very desirable from the standpoint of a dietitian.

Learn how to prepare several kinds of dressings for different types of salads. A simple syrup made by combining the juice of two oranges and one lemon with several teaspoons of sugar is excellent for fruit salads. Just before serving sprinkle this syrup liberally over the fruit and lettuce.

A tomato dressing is good on any salad green or on cooked vegetables. This calls for six tablespoons salad oil, two tablespoons vinegar, one tablespoon tomato catsup, one-half teaspoon sugar, and a little salt, pepper, and cayenne—all mixed thoroughly together.

PEA SALAD
1 can peas
3 tablespoons sweet cucumber pickles
2 tablespoons grated cheese
2 tablespoons finely minced onion
1 teaspoon sugar

Drain the peas. Cut the cucumber pickles in small pieces. Combine all the ingredients. Arrange on crisp lettuce and serve with mayonnaise.

ROBY APPLE SALAD
Select medium-sized apples, pare and core. Cook in a covered pan in enough syrup made in the proportion of 3 cups water and 1 cup sugar to cover the apples. Red cinnamon candies added, the syrup give the apples an attractive rose color. After cooking, chill the apples and fill them with cream cheese which has been mixed with salt, paprika, and a little finely chopped green pepper. Or form the cheese mixture into balls, roll in ground nuts and place beside the apples. Serve on lettuce with mayonnaise or French dressing.

CHICKEN AND TOMATO SALAD
1 1/2 cups tomato juice
1/2 teaspoon cold water
2 tablespoons gelatin
1 tablespoon sugar
2 cups cooked chicken, diced
3 sliced onion
2 cups small green peas, cooked
Salt and pepper

Soak the gelatin in the cold water. Strain the juice from canned tomatoes. Heat the sugar and onion with tomato juice. Season with salt and pepper. Add gelatin and stir until dissolved. Strain out the onion. Pour a little of the tomato mixture into wet mould. When firm, add a layer of chicken. Cover with another layer of the tomato and set in a cold place to get firm. Then add the peas and rest of the tomato. Chill. Turn out on lettuce. Serve with mayonnaise.

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