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The Free Press Short Story

THE DEADLY LOG-ROLLER

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FROM wing to wing of the aeroplane went a shiver. It began to roll, alder. Florence West, inexperienced flyer, did not know anything was wrong until she glanced at her friend, Quita Varick. Her face was pale gray, both hands clutching the light framework, and her teeth chattered as if with a malarial chill. Suddenly, from her brother, Chelton, came a sound that was half cry, half groan. Quita began screaming.

The tropical woods seemed to rush upward to meet the aeroplane, and there was a scent of flowers and fruit. Quita, who really knew enough to act as an assistant, was beside herself, but Chelton had not lost his head. He managed to keep a scant course toward the spot where a river gleamed in the hot, wet forest.

Spray ascended in a cloud about them. All were wet to the skin, and there was mud in Florence's mouth; but they had struck safely in water and barring a few bruises were uninjured. Leaving the wrecked aeroplane, the three managed to get ashore. "We may wish we'd struck the rocks," commented Quita. "I might as well be here in the savage, no-white-man country."

"Keep quiet; if you're going to chatter, I'll tell you your own way home. I've no wish to be caught and tortured by a bunch of savages." Chelton's remark to his sister caused the other girl's indignation to rise. Florence had never fancied Quita's brother and, in taking this bold trip above the interior, had violated a rule she had once made for herself: "Never accept favors from one you dislike." A young school teacher far from home has few diversions, and Chelton Varick had agreed to give the girls a peep from above at the wild and desolate tracts of the forest and hill country. Although it was against the rules of the engineering company, he had assured the girls they could have the trip without risk. He was a youth of twenty-two, with a somewhat husky and sullen mouth; but he knew how to be gay company.

"Wh—what'll we do, Chet?" asked the shuddering Quita. "Will you keep quiet, or won't you?" cautiously the boy began to make his way downstream at the river's edge, and the two girls followed in silence. The river was a short one, which ran between the sea and was overflowing by dense forest. Along one bank, the water seemed to be choked with logs, and a curious mention about one of these caused Quita fresh terror. She seized her brother's arm from behind. "Chet, what is that thing?"

"Florence had not supposed he could exhibit such violence of temper. "I told you to keep still! . . . All right, here's where I quit. You can get down to the sea by yourselves." Evidently he was determined to leave the girls. He was one of those dispassionate young men who follow the path of least resistance and refuse to be responsible for others. Before leaving, he tried to justify himself. "See here, girls, I'm going off ahead for help; it's the best thing for all of us. Three people travelling through such a tangled forest to raise the natives, if you keep straight along this bank toward the sea, before many hours you'll meet me coming with a party of engineers from the company's post."

In vain his sister wept and clung to his sleeves. The girls soon found themselves alone in the tropical forest, surrounded by wild and hostile natives. At no great distance from this place, Florence knew that an American soldier had been tortured and killed not a month before.

"But by this time," comforted Quita, "our old housekeeper has already organized a searching party. I didn't dare to tell that we were going with Chet on his trip; so she probably began to worry hours ago. Pio, weren't there some soldiers in the village yesterday?" "A Hottentot, and two or three men; they don't allow as small a party as that to go into the no-white-man country."

"But if they knew a couple of girls were lost, they would, don't you think?" asked Quita. "Sh—sh! Better not talk, Quita." Florence peered uneasily into the green tangles. She recalled the hideous tale of the way that poor private was tortured a month ago. She thought of another soldier, a young lieutenant whose mother lived in California. Yes, he would be the kind to feel that he must take a risk for a countrywoman.

The tangle thickened as the girls proceeded down stream. Brilliant orchids enlivened the wet and odorous gloom. Once they saw, coiled on a limb, the huge head of the lizard, a damp and slushy mass from which a head hung downward.

As Florence halted for breath, she thought there were menacing noises, upstream, behind them. Had it been the native war cry that she heard, or only the screams of unfamiliar birds? Quita's fingers suddenly drove into the flesh of the other girl's arm, and the numbing tongue was nimb with fear. A finger pointed toward the river. "Natives!" breathed Florence.

The cause of Quita's alarm seemed to be a log, which had detached itself from the mass above and was floating slowly down the stream. It showed a peculiarly

yellowish brown color, and swayed jerkily as it navigated. From their hiding place behind a dense vine, the girls eagerly observed it.

It now occurred to Florence that no real log would thus dislodge itself and float away from the bank. As it approached, she heard splashing, as of a swimming animal; and presently she distinguished flippers or propellers. She could not help recalling an old native story of the deadly "log-roller." This was reported to be a crocodile-like creature which looked like a log in the water, but which lay in wait to gather in huge herds. Its favorite refreshment of human flesh was obtained when somebody went wading or boating in a small canoe. The school teacher had rejected the tale as a rank superstition. Was she seeing the proof of it?

An incident now occurred which was terrifying for another reason. A small, native dog, racing down the river bank, raised a furious barking and plunged into the stream. Evidently its master was not far distant. The "log-roller" instantly seized and dragged it down. All was still on the twilight water; only a few bubbles rose and a choked cry. "We'd better keep a short distance away from the water," breathed Florence.

Beet by a double peril, the two girls crouched in the green shadow some distance from the river. Some wild fruit that smelled like a pineapple was ripe in the tangles. Insects fought their way under the netting contrived for protection on this adventure. The girls' eyes and nostrils became swollen and as the poison of many things took effect, Florence experienced a slight nausea and dizziness. The girls agreed to wait until daylight and then, in the darkness before the moon arose, keeping a short distance from the river, try to make their way to the sea.

Quita was sobbing, with her head on her knees. "I know something dreadful will happen to us because we ought never to have come." She was a pretty girl, so small that her friends had nicknamed her "Mozzetta." She was one of those who take other people's care for granted. When the two were attending college in California, they had argued that girls could do anything possible for men. Surely they could, reflected Florence. Why then had she sensed from the first something wrong in this trip?

Was there for one thing, a girl does expect to sacrifice more to get her out of trouble if Chelton got himself into a fix, other men might let him take the consequences; but was a girl different? Suddenly the school teacher took her friend in her arms. "It was wrong, Quita, but mistakes are all bygones, now we'll just pray for help—like silly little youngsters who didn't know enough to keep out of trouble."

"Pray that somebody comes to find us," added Quita. "The girls covered their eyes a moment, but when Florence sent up her petition, she added another: "May nobody's life be lost to pay for our foolishness." A long while passed. The sky began to look like the foundations of the heavenly city; on the vast trees presided of gum camphor, the western gum and turned to jasper, sapphire, ruby, and emerald. The muddy surface of the river was illuminated, red as blood. Suddenly Quita, watching her friend's face, saw the color go out of it. The school teacher was listening, her head slightly lifted. She squeezed Quita's hand to indicate: "Be still, somebody's coming." Both girls shrank further into the odorless, evening shadows.

The intruders had paused and were beating the brush and lifting the overhanging branches. Their splashy footfalls began again. They stopped; it was so still that the thick wash of the river became audible. It seemed to Quita, as she crept nearer her friends, that the beating of her heart would be heard. Suddenly, an arm parted the greenery which concealed the girls. The screen slipped on Quita's lips. She saw Florence scrambling joyfully to her feet, for the arm was clad in a khaki sleeve. It belonged to a second lieutenant, and in honor of the American girls, was raised in a salute.

"Sh—sh!" warned the young lieutenant. "I have just one man with me, and the natives are all around us. We're only about a mile from the place where they got poor Jones last month." The girls pressed nearer to hear his whisper. "One of my men became separated from me this afternoon and I haven't seen him since. The other is waiting for us in a boat, not far from here. Can you be very quiet?"

Bats flew about in a cloud, as the two girls followed their guide along the river's edge. They came to a place where a small cave, draped across with vines, opened in the bank. Suddenly the lieutenant seemed to freeze, erect, like an animal scenting deadly peril.

The first impression made upon the ear was of one pounding on tree trunks, as if a few men were trying to imitate the tramping of a great native army in the forest. A wild head projected itself from among the vines. The long hair, the small and savage eyes, the curious, doubted countenance, left no doubt that the stranger was a no-white-man native. Wrongs and cruelties committed by unworthy Americans had inflamed these people to such a point that there was no hope of mercy from them. Florence

could have cried out, "All's over! No hope!" A backward sweep of the young officer's arm thrust the two girls inside the cave, concealed by the drapery of vines. The savages had not seen them.

Now, peering through the green, the girls saw that the boat lay just below in the river. Its solitary occupant, a boyish soldier, leaped ashore and ran to the defence of his lieutenant.

Quita was uttering little, stifled cries. She hid her face on her knees and thrust her fingers into her ears that she might not hear the struggle. It was not long, Florence sat with eyes wide open, motionless except for her lips. "Oh," she prayed, "let us pay for our own mistake. Oh, God, save them. Let it be Quita and me."

The words were quiet now; the bats flew about as before. The surface of the water was black, for it was night. Upstream, the tramping of feet could be heard.

"The savages took the soldiers that way," Quita pointed. "Do you suppose they'll torture them?" "Oh, don't!" Florence hid her face on her knees. She was thinking of the mother of the young lieutenant. Only yesterday he had said: "I'm going to get an honorable discharge in a month. I never meant to stay in the army after I had a little experience. I'm going home to make things easier for mother. She's counting the days."

A long while passed; finally, "Pio," breathed Quita, "we can't do them any good. Don't you think we should take the boat, and—"

"Not yet! They might escape and we want to have the boat ready for them."

"But they couldn't possibly escape; there was an army of those savages." Florence did not move and Quita was silent. The moon came up and brightened the surface of the water. Peering from the cave, the girls saw, downstream, some half-naked figures on the river bank. "They're searching for the boat," whispered Florence.

"The natives did not locate the tiny cove where the boat had been cleverly concealed; but Florence thought they were squatted in the greenery watching the river. Suddenly, around a bend in the moonlight, came an apparition. Yellowish brown by daylight, the "log-roller" looked black under the moon. It moved in its jerky manner, projected by "flippers" concealed in the muddy water.

The school teacher gave it one searching look before she leaped from the cave. "Pio, are you crazy? Those natives'll see you!" called Quita. When the school teacher, a tall, strong girl, reared on a cattle ranch, had reached the boat, Quita followed her. Florence had by this time unfastened a coil of rope and was using it as a lariat, flinging it at the animated log.

When the rope came within arm's length of the log, it was seized and the creature toward itself to the boat. "The creature which had taken it was clad in wet khaki; a head appeared over the top of the log, and the California lieutenant scrambled into the craft. He explained, breathlessly, that he and his man had overpowered the attacking party, since there were only three men and a boy. They had not fired, for the noise might have fetched re-enforcements. He had snatched the rope and was ready when a second animated log came jerking down the current.

The men seized the oars and made time, rowing for the sea. From the bank, as they expected, came a volley of missiles, and a spear or two; but those aboard the boat were able to dodge these attentions.

Hours passed, rowing through the dark during which nobody responded to Quita's conversation. At last, "Hark!" she exclaimed. And they heard the sea! "Miss Varick," politely suggested the California lieutenant, "I rather think you talk too much for a person lost in the no-white-man country. If you ever visit it again, let me advise you—" "Never mind; I shan't go there again," declared Quita.

developed that American boys had discovered an exact color resemblance between khaki and those yellow-brown logs which jammed the river. Somebody had once removed his clothing and attempted to swim in a stream, but he had been captured by sharp-eyed natives, who had done this themselves. There could be little doubt that the first mysterious "log-roller," the one who had pulled the zapping dog under, had been the missing man of the search party. It would be found next morning in the village.

"We thought," said the lieutenant, "that you girls would have taken the boat and gone. We'd have gone ashore below, to reconnoitre; I guess we'd have run right into the loving arms of the natives, and probably they had been re-enforced. We probably would be there yet. So, Miss West," he turned to the school teacher, "if you had taken that boat and gone home—" "If," repeated the school teacher. At the thought, her heart quickened. The color went out of her lips, and she said in her heart, "Thank God!"

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WRONG INTERPRETATION

Little Billy.—Mr. Jones must be awful strong to lift aunt! Billy's Mother.—Why, what do you mean, dear? Billy.—Well, when you were away last night papa and some of the neighbors went into papa's room, and I listened outside the door and heard Mr. Jones say: "I'll raise your aunt."

HIGHEST GRADE OF GOVERNMENT SECURITY WILL ATTRACT AT THIS TIME

It is confidently felt in high financial circles that all the elements required for success attend the current flotation of a loan for \$150,000,000 by the Dominion of Canada, through the Department of Finance. That all the money required by the Government to carry on the affairs of the country, without resort to outside markets, will be provided by investors is not questioned. As a sound investment in five and ten year 5 per cent bonds at attractive prices, one which investors will be glad to obtain, it is felt that it is only necessary to lay the facts before the country and that the rest will be attended to.

Confidence is returning throughout the country after passing through a trying period of two years, during which prices of both commodities and securities sank to abnormally low levels. There is a general conviction that the decline has run its course and that the tide already started will be running strongly in the other direction before a great while.

Evidence of the better, with an accompanying return of confidence, are to be found on every hand. There has been an appreciable recovery in the prices of some commodities. That in wheat is of paramount interest to Canada at the present time when there is a heavy outflow to overseas markets. This, and a better distribution of merchandise throughout the country, has been indicated in a substantial recovery in the earnings of the country's two great transportation systems. Earnings for the first two weeks of November indicate that trade and commerce is undergoing improvement, when compared with the gross receipts for the corresponding periods of the two preceding months. The figures show that the enormous decrease which have been shown for many months past are now dwindling to almost nothing, and unless all signs fail it will be but a short time before the railways will be running well ahead of the tonnage they carried in the past couple of years.

Business people everywhere are in a better frame of mind and looking forward to the resumption of business on a broader scale. Meantime the Government must do some financing and it is to the interests of all concerned to see the flotation of this new internal loan result in a great success.

The extent to which this is the case will be a measure of the public's confidence, and a successful outcome will be of incalculable benefit to the maintenance of Canada's credit in the eyes of the world, where it has stood pre-eminent for many years.

During the past summer a large Conversion Loan was successfully carried out by the Government to take care of maturing debts which originated in the Great War period. The present loan is entirely different in character, inasmuch as it calls for the supply of new money for the running of the affairs of the country. No appeal could be made for this in the markets of the world, owing to disturbed international exchange conditions. It is up to Canadians themselves to make good this amount and there is no one of the realm of finance who entertains any doubts about the outcome.

That there is a great reservoir of wealth in Canada only waiting to be tapped by an investment offering the very highest grade of security obtainable, is indicated by banking and trust corporation returns, which shows large sums held in trust for the public. That these will be released in large volume seems unquestionable. The return of confidence in the only thing that could be depended upon to turn on the tap.

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PERSPIRE FOR HEALTH

Most of us try to avoid perspiration in every way possible, but authorities on health and happiness say that we should let all the fountains of the skin gush forth at every opportunity during both winter and summer. It has been calculated that there are more than three hundred million pores in the skin of a middle-aged person, and through these tiny openings fully one-half of all we eat and drink passes off in the form of both visible and invisible perspiration.

Perhaps you remember the story of the Roman athletes who were covered with gold leaf to take part in one of the ancient festivals, and all of them perished because of the perspiration kept within their bodies, even during the few hours that the celebration lasted. All of which goes to prove that perspiration is absolutely necessary to our health and to our very existence. Why, in a single night we perspire about two and one-half pounds of waste, while on an average the surface of the body casts off from one-half to an ounce every hour, by both sensible and insensible perspiration. The perspiratory glands are most numerous in the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet. Under a magnifying glass they may be seen in rows like tiny volcanoes erupting each ridge in the skin. Although we are not conscious of it, the pores are constantly eliminating waste, an insensible perspiration that preserves the lives of those who do not exercise enough to cause sensible perspiration.

WHEN MERCY SEASONS JUSTICE

In a certain American prison, we are told, a convict is allowed to receive homemade cake from his wife. If the prisoner has a good conduct record, however, he is not forced to eat it.

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The Acton Free Press

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