

SLATS' DIARY

(By Oliver N. Warren)

Sunday: Recent Jakes Ma told Jakes littel Bro. if the preacher called & ast him his name & who made him to tell him Willyem James & God. The preacher come this p. m. and did. In reply to the 1st? the littel feloe sed Bill Jim which was rite. To the 2d? he replide & sed his mother told him the mans name but he forgot. I dont see no thing to laff at but evry body elts thinks it are a big joak. Some how.

Monday: Ma sed to Pa wouldeht he be serprized if I ever gradgeate from school & Pa replide & sed he diddent see why he would be serprized at some thing he had been xpecting for sevrsl yrs. Unkel Hen sniggered & got me about 1/2 mad. As he thinks I cant lern no thing.

Tuesday: Sevrsl of us kids was a talking about air plains and etc. and suddenly Jake sed Mister Gillem has recent bot a new set of baloon tires. Why sed Blisters I diddent even know he has got a baloon. I bleeve Blisters is too dumheded ever to even get to be a ottomobeel meccannick.

Wednesday: As I & Jane was a walking home together from school I sed to her I and her is a going to get married some day. Thats rite she replide and sed tho I wander who is a going to marrie you. I did dent understand what she ment at the time but now I figger it was a hint she issent extending to becum my better 1/2. That dame can make dirty cracks so you cant hardly apsesheate them. Till later on.

Thursday: The teacher ast Jake did he go to the pitcher show about Tom Sawyer last night & Jake sed no he had to stay home & help his Pop with the night work the teacher give him to do. I think Jake diddent mean the teacher give the work to his Pop. But all the kids laff enney how.

Friday: This is the last day of school this wk. Witch issent worrieing me a offle lot. Pa & Ma have both sed to me that school is a offle good thing for kids to go to & I suppose that is corect, but some whairs I have hearn that they can be 2 mutch of a good thing. Witch I bleeve.

Saturday: This were a fine warm sunshiney spring a. m. & the world looked in love with evry boddie. But a lot of misforchens overtuk yrs. tngoly. I aint got paper enuff to menshen all of same. But among same was the hoe & rake & lon more & etc. Not to menshen no fishen or B. B.

R. H. KANE

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THE LIBERAL SHORT STORY THE CLAIM NEXT DOOR

By Morrison Calladay

Virginia Clay arrived in Altamont driving a decrepit old car loaded with camping equipment. Benny Peterson was the first person she saw. She stopped the car. "Can you tell me how to find Mr. Spike Jessup's claim?"

Benny stared at the vision speechless for a moment. Curly, short dark hair, big blue eyes, corduroy slacks - 18 or 19 years old and not a day more.

"Spike ain't here any more," he said when he regained his voice. "You a friend of his'n?"

"Oh, no, I just bought his claim." "Bought it, eh? What you figger on doin' with it?"

"Work it, of course." Here Benny got a glimpse of the radiant smile that was to cause so much devastation in the camp. "Of course. Mr. Jessup said it was right next to the Whelan claim where they made the big strike."

"Sure, it's next to it all right," Benny said morosely. "How much did Spike stick you for it?"

"One thousand dollars. He wanted more but that was all I had."

"I suppose he told you why he was selling it so cheap?"

The girl nodded. "His health broke down and he had to get to a lower altitude. He said if he could wait until he found the vein he might sell it for anything up to half a million, but he'd probably die if he didn't get away. Here's the transfer. I had it drawn up by a lawyer."

"I ain't doubting you own it all right, ma'am," said Benny. "Where you figger to live? There ain't a vacant house. Of course one of the boys might be willing to give up his'n."

"Oh, no! I'm going to camp out right on the claim. I've got a tent in the car."

That night a young man strolled over to where Virginia Clay was cooking supper on a camp gasoline stove.

"I have the claim next to yours," he said. "I thought you might need some help getting settled."

She looked up wide-eyed at the blonde, frank-looking person in rough miner's clothing. "You mean you're Mr. Jim Whelan?"

"That's my name. How did you happen to hear it?"

"Oh, everybody's heard about your wonderful strike. That's the reason I bought this claim. Mr. Jessup told me your vein runs right through it."

Whelan choughed noncommittally. "Well, if there's anything I can do, just let me know, will you?"

Spike Jessup had never been less popular in the camp than when his financial transaction with Virginia Clay became known. And that was saying quite a lot. It was a good thing for Spike Jessup that he was a long way off.

Virginia started work energetically. The rotten rock in Spike's abandoned shaft could be dug with a shovel. She could have had her choice of a hundred volunteer assistants to man wheelbarrows, but she smilingly declined to be helped.

She was sitting wearily in a little heap on the ground when Whelan came over after supper.

"Pretty tired, I guess," he ventured.

"Worse than that. But I'll get used to it. See my hands? I didn't know there were so many places you could get blisters."

"You going to keep on working like you been doing today?"

"Of course. I've got to strike your vein before I starve to death. Mr. Jessup told me how to do it."

"He did, did he? You better get the boys to help you."

She shook her head. "I can't pay them. I've spent all my money and I won't let them work for me without pay."

Each day Whelan called on his neighbor. As the weeks passed she grew visibly thinner and he had a strong suspicion that she wasn't getting enough to eat. But she would not accept help of any kind.

She wouldn't starve, he thought gloomily. There were at least fifty men in the camp ready and anxious to marry her.

One night she asked him about his strike. "Mr. Whelan, are you making as much money as they say you are?"

"Quite a lot. The vein's sixteen inches wide and assays twelve ounces to the ton."

"I wonder if I'll ever find it?" she said wearily, more to herself than to him.

"I don't believe so," he answered. She looked at him in sudden anger. "You don't want me to, do you? You want to keep everything yourself?"

"Well, I discovered it. I don't know why I should share it with anyone else unless I have to. I'll buy your claim, though, if you want

to sell."

"I'll starve before I sell to you!" Without replying he got up and walked away.

She watched for him the next night but he did not appear. After the second night she decided he wasn't coming again. She missed him. He was the only man in the camp who hadn't been in love with her.

After ten days she hunted him up.

He was sitting in front of his cabin smoking a pipe, chair tilted back against the wall. He got up when he saw her.

"You said you'd buy my claim," she began abruptly.

"Yes, I said that."

"All right, you can have it. I give up. I haven't any money. I'll starve if I stay here. See, I'm telling you so you'll know I'll have to take whatever you offer, if it's only fifty dollars."

"What do you think the claim's worth?"

"What's that got to do with it? Didn't you hear me say I'd have to take whatever you'll give me?"

"I don't set the price of the things I buy."

"Well, then, twenty thousand dollars. What do you say to that?"

"Come inside and I'll give you a cheque. Benny Peterson's driving to town tomorrow. You can go along and get it cashed."

She told Benny the next morning as she started out that she was going back East.

"There'll sure be a lot of busted hearts around this here camp when you leave, ma'am," Benny prophesied. "When you figger on going?"

"Oh, in two or three days."

"The boys'd like to make up the thousand bucks that skunk Jessup skinned you out of, if you'll let 'em, ma'am."

"Skinned me out of? What do you mean?"

"He knowed there wasn't a cent's worth of gold in that claim of his'n the low varmint!"

"But the Whelan vein runs right through it!"

"No ma'am, it don't. Nobody wanted to tell you but the Whelan vein runs north and south, and your claim is west of Jim's. Not a chance in a million of ever striking anything. That's the reason Spike stopped working it."

"But that isn't possible," said Virginia, "or Mr. Whelan wouldn't have paid me twenty thousand dollars for it."

"You say Jim Whelan paid you twenty thousand dollars for your claim?"

She nodded. "I've got the cheque here. I'm going to town to cash it. That proves you're wrong, doesn't it?"

"Mebbe it does," replied Benny laconically, and relapsed into silence.

Presently she said, "You don't think so, though, do you?"

Benny cleared his throat. "Well, Jim's got mighty good judgment. He ain't throwing away twenty thousand. I don't reckon."

"Will you tell me something honestly, Mr. Peterson?"

Benny answered cautiously. "I always aim to be honest when it ain't too expensive."

"If, what you say about the claim is true, I've been very unjust to Mr. Whelan. I've treated him badly." She turned to Benny coaxingly. "Why do you think he gave me the twenty thousand dollars?"

Benny sighed. He threw her a fleeting glance. "You better ask Jim, ma'am. I reckon he'll probably tell you."

Virginia's cheeks were pink. "I shall, as soon as we get back!"

"Come inside," said Whelan when she went to his cabin that night. "I've got the transfer all ready to sign."

"Oh, have you? Well, I found out today accidentally that my claim isn't worth anything. I want to know why you bought it?"

Whelan shrugged his shoulders. "You can't ever tell about a claim. That's half the fun of mining."

"Why did you pay me twenty thousand dollars?" she persisted.

"I offered to buy you out. You set the price."

"You mean you just gave me \$20,000. Of course I won't take it. Here's your cheque."

He ignored the cheque and she put it on the table.

"What are you going to do?" he asked. "You said your money was all gone."

"I might get married. A lot of men have asked me."

"You like any of 'em well enough?"

She nodded, head down. "One I do. And that's all I can marry."

"Well, he's damn lucky, whoever he is. Suppose you keep the cheque for a wedding present."

"Oh, but I don't know yet whether I'll get married."

"I thought you just said you were going to!"

"It's this way; the only man I'd take hasn't asked me."

He frowned as he gazed at her. "Virginia, I figure you need a good spanking more than anything. But I guess you're too big for it. You wouldn't by any chance marry me would you?"

She gave a deep sigh. "Would I? Oh, Jim, ever since that first night! And the only man in the camp that just wouldn't - just wouldn't fall in love with me."

Suitor—"There isn't much I can say for myself. I'm just a plain citizen and a taxpayer."

Prospective Father-in-law—"Taxpayer, eh? Income or dog?"

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