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CHAPTER IX.

"Come in, dear Joe."

them," whispered Planx.

man in a thick overcoat stepped into the

light, followed by a tall and strongly

built companion. Both wore black visor

masks, with fringe covering the mouth.

I noticed they were shod in mocca-

was throughout the spokesman. "My

partner and me is come to make you

an offer, Mr. Planx. We've got your

where you'd never dream of looking

"Don't be too sure of that," growled

"If we agree on a bargain she shall

be returned to you unhurt three days

and that price is \$100,000.

or do you not?"

was unexpected.

\$150,000!"

from the time the price is paid over,

"Those are our terms. The question

The next incident was as swift as it

"I conjecture that is something of an

easy question to answer," said Planx

On the word he slipped out a re-

volver. But quick as was Planx's

hand to carry out the impulse of his

brain. Joe's was quicker. He knocked

"You treacherous dog, Planx!" cried

the kidnaper. "Is that how you keep

faith? Well, we have a reply to that

too. We offered to give up the girl

for \$100,000, now we make the price

"I'll never pay a cent of it!" shouted

"When you come to change your

mind," replied the kidnaper quietly,

"just hang a white handkerchief on

one of the trees at the edge of this

wood. Then put the money in notes in

Juni

At the Third Swing of the Light

Voice Hailed Him.

that tin on the shelf. Leave us two

clear days and you'll get your girl back

safe. But if you monkey it will be the

Without more words the two masked

men left the hut, and, like the explo-

sion of a thunderstorm, Planx opened

November faced the storm with an

entirely placid aspect until I began to

wonder at his patience. But when at

last he spoke the other fell dumb as if

"That's settled, Mr. Planx. You've

Planx opened his lips as if to speak.

but, seeing Joe's face, he changed his

mind and rushed from us into the

At once Joe put out the light. "We

can't trust Planx just at the moment.

He's fair mad, but we'll have him back

in half an hour to show him the way

back to Wilshere's," he remarked with

And in fact this was exactly what

done with me and I've done with you.

worse for her."

Joe had struck him.

Now quiet down and out!"

upon Joe.

darkness.

a chuckle.

in his slow tones. "In fact, I"-

the revolver from Planx's grasp.

for you is do you want your daughter

for her."

"Evenin'," said the tall man, who

UR visitors besitated outside the

door. "There are only two of

"You're right! He hates me because Virginia won't marry Schelperg of the combine. He hasn't let us meet for months. And more than that, be's ruined me and my partner in business It was easy for a rich man to de that," added Calvey bitterly.

"You go and start into business again," advised Joe. "I'll send you word first thing I know for certain." But it was some time before he could induce Calvey to leave us. After be had gone I wondered whether Joe suspected him of having a hand in spiriting away Virginia. Presently I asked

Joe shook his head. "He couldn't daughter where you'll never find her, have done it if he wanted to. He's a good young chap, but look at his boots and his clothes-he was bred on a pavement, but he's Miss Virginny's choice for all that. We'll start now, Mr. Quaritch, just where I found that bit of gold caught in a branch that hangs over the little stream up above there. a splendid lot of hair, and so when I could find no tracks, for they came School down the bed of the stream, I searched bout as high as her head. I guessed

But we had hardly started when we heard the voice of Planx roaring in the wood below us. He was coming along at an extraordinary pace in spite of his ungainly, rolling stride.

"You were right, Joe; Virginia is alive! It is a case of abduction. See He held a long stick or wand in his

ly split, and a scrap of paper stuck in "Ed's just found this in the canoe on the lake," he went on. "These black-

guards must have come back in the "What have they said in the paper?"

asked November. "'You must pay to get your daughter

back. If you want our terms come to the old log camp on Black lake tomorrow night. No tricks. We have you rounded up sure. Don't try to track us or we will make it bad for

Joe touched the ends of the wand. "Green spruce wood, cut near their camp," said he.

"There's plenty of spruce like that right here," objected Planx; "why do you say it was cut near their camp?" "It's cut and split with a heavy ax.

such as no man ever carries about with him. Well, we'd best do no more tracking till we see the chaps that has Miss Virginny. It's Black lake tonight,

On the way Planx made known to us his plan of campaign. It was a simple one. He would get the men into the hut and speak them fair till a favorable moment presented itself, when he would demand the surrender of his daughter under threat of shooting the kidnapers if they refused or demurred.

"There are three of us, and we can fix them easy," said Planx.

November Joe shook his head. "They're not near such big fools as you think them." he remarked.

We had stopped on some high ground in the shelter of the woods, from which we could see the fishing hut. Joe van-

ished with his silent, Indian-like glide, his movements as inaudible as those of a ghost. In about five minutes a light suddenly sprang up in the hut, and Joe's voice called us.

As we entered the door I saw Joe was pointing to a piece of paper which lay on the rough hewn table.

"The same writing as before. Listen to this: 'It' you will swear to give us safe conduct we will come to talk it out. If you agree to this wave the lantern three times on the lake shore, and that will mean you give your oath to let us come and go freely."

"I told you they were not fools." said Joe. "What's the orders now, Mr. Planx?"

Planx handed Joe the lantern. "Go and wave the lantern."

From the door of the hut we watched November as he walked down to the lake. At the third swing of the light a voice hailed him.

"You hear? They were waiting in :

canoe." said Planx to me. Then followed the splash of paddles and the rasp of the frosted rushes as the canoe took the shore. Joe had relantern so that it lit the whole of the Apply to any C. P. R. Agent for but. Then the three of us stood together at one side of the table.

happened. It was a subdued but still a very resentful Planx whom we escorted through the dark woods. On our way back to our camp Joe made detour to examine the tracks of the kidnapers by the light of the lantern which he had carried with him. As had been the case by Moosesbank

lake, so now we found the trails very clear near the waterside. Joe studied them for a long time. "Well, you're out of it now, at any

rate." said I. "And what about my promise to Calvey?" he rejoined. "I'm deeper in

it than ever. I've got to find Miss Virginny sure." "You can't track her because of that threat in the letter to Planx?"

Miss Virginny before tomorrow night." said Joe quietly, nor, having made this dramatic announcement, would be say

"That's so, but I'll be speaking to

The next morning Joe was early

"What are you going to do today?"

"I'm going to find out the name of the man that has Miss Virginny hid away. If you'll wait here, Mr. Quaritch, I'll come back as soon as I've done it. You've got your rod and there's plenty of fish in the lake."

With that I had to be content. Before starting Joe had laid a bet with me that he would come back with the name of her abductor, and I was wondering what clew he had to go upon Hardly any that I could think of-the As he spoke a short, bearded trail of the two men and the golden hair, very little more.

About 2 o'clock I heard November hail me.

"What about the bet?" I called on sight of him. "Who pays?" "You pay, Mr. Quaritch," said Joe.

"Why, who is it, then?" "A fellow called Hank Harper." "Why. I've heard of him. He pass-

es for a man of high character." Joe laughed. "All the same, he's the chap who done it," said he. "I expect

he's got her up at his cabin on Otter "Look here, November," I said. "You tell me Hank Harper is in the kidnap-

ing business and I believe you, because I've never known you speak without solid facts behind you. But I think you owe me the whole yarn." Joe pulled out his pipe. "All right,

Mr. Quaritch. To begin at the beginning. There are two of them. One's this man Harper. I don't know who the other is, and it don't much matter. If we find Harper we find his partner. Well. Miss Virginny was fishing when they stole down upon her and carried her off. I've already told you what happened until they took to the canoe They paddled across the lake and the two men got out, leaving Miss Virgin ny in the canoe to puddle herself round and land elsewhere."

"But surely she could have escaped!"

"She was under their rifles and had to do exactly what she was ordered. I found where she'd landed and followed her tracks to that little waterfall stream, and it was there I found the golden hair. So far, you see, everything fitted in together as good as the jaws of a trap, and the message on the bit of paper about a ransom carried it further on. So did the talk we had with Harper-it must have been him did the speaking-at Black lake. When I knocked up Planx's revolver I was wonderful sorry to have to do it, but a promise is a promise. and he'd passed his word for a safe conduct. After, when my eyes fell upon the trail left by Harper's partner, I knew I never done a better act in my life. It give me a start, I can tell you, Mr. Quaritch! You see, all the weight was in the middle of the moccasion. The heels and toes were hardly marked at all."

November looked at me as if expecting me to see the meaning of this peculiarity, but I shook my head.

"It meant that the foot inside the moccasion was a very little one, a good bit shorter than the moccasin." "You can't mean"- I began.

"Yes," said Joe. "The second person at Black lake wasn't a man at all, but just Miss Virginny herself." "Well, if that was so, why, she had the game in her hands then. She had only to appeal to us-to speak."

Joe interrupted me. "Hers was another sort of game. You see, I'm pretty sure that Miss Virginny has kidnaped herself, or, at any rate, consented to be kidnaped. She had just paddled round and joined the two men later, and then when I come to think over it careful I saw how I might raise the name of the man that was helping her. I lit out for Wilshere's camp and asked the woman if there was anything of Miss Virginny's missing from her room. She said there wasn't. Then I saw my way a bit. was in the woods with Miss Virginny last year, and I know she's mighty particular about personal things. I don't believe she could live a day without a sponge and a comb and, most of all, without a toothbrush. None of them high toned gals can. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, that is so, but"-"Well," went on November, "if she went of her own free will, as I was thinking she did-or else why did she come to Black lake?-if, as I say, I was right in my notion and she'd made out the plans and kidnaped herself, the man who was with her would be only just her servant, in a manner of speaking. And I was certain that one of the first things she'd do would be to send him to some store to buy the things she wanted most. She couldn't get her own from Planx's camp without giving herself away, so she was bound to send Hank to hike out new ones from

somewhere." "What hannened then?" Continued next week.

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