54-40 OR FIGHT

BY EMERSON HOUGH

AUTHOR OF "THE MISSISSIPPI BUBBLE"

ILLUSTRATIONS by HARRY G. KUTNER

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SYNOPSIS.

The story is told by Nicholas Trist, His chief, Senator John Calhoun, offered the portfolio of secretary of state to Tyler's cabinet in hold for Mr. Ward that his friend, Mr. Webster, had declined it. The next matter to be dealt with the acting Tyler's office it means that Texas and Oregon are to be added to the Union. He plans to learn the intentions of England and France. Trist is to go to Paris to confer with Mr. Rives, envoy and reputed secretary of the English ambassador, Pakenham. Nicholas is sent to bring the latter to Calhoun's apartments and while waiting for him Trist becomes involved in a duel. Charles up and Nicholas is invited to enter.

The occupant is the baroness, who says she is being watched. She discovers and shakes off. Nicholas is invited into the house and meets Calhoun's nowadays. He notes that the baroness has lost a slipper.

Nicholas is given the remaining slipper as a pledge that she will tell Calhoun everything. She says there are secrets of Indian intrigue be intended for his sweetheart, Elizabeth Flavius.

Elizabeth's father consents to Nicholas' proposal for her hand.

Nicholas is going to leave at once for Montreal on state business and decides to call upon Elizabeth.

Calhoun's secretary, Calhoun, that state, Tyler warns Pakenham that interference by England in the Oregon question at present will not be tolerated. The vessel detained in the Mississippi bubble, goes with Great Britain refuses and has raised the cry of "fifty-four, forty or Fight."

CHAPTER IX.

A Kettle of Fish.

Few disputes exist which have not had their origin in women. Instead

saw the heavy face of Mr. Pakenham go pale, saw the face of the Baroness von Bitz flash with a swift resolution, saw the eyes of Mr. Calhoun and Mr. Tyler meet in firmness. An instant later, Mr. Tyler rose and bowed our dismissal

Mr. Pakenham threw apart and engaged in earnest speech with the lady who had accompanied him; so that meantime I received an added opportunity for a word with Mr. Calhoun.

"Now, sir," said I, "the last certainly is all in the free!"

Mr. Calhoun took sniff

"You don't know women, my son, and you don't know men, either." The little white about his head shook as he smiled.

"Certainly, I don't know what arts may have been employed in Mr. Calhoun's office at half-past two this morning." I was thinking of those of my chief and he related in turn.

"We had a most interesting hour of an hour. A delightful woman, a charming woman, and one of intellect as well. I appealed to her heart, her brain, her purse, and she laughed, for the most part. Yet she agreed with me, and seemed to have some interest—as you see proved now. Ah, I wish I could have had the other two great motives to add to my appeal!"

"Meaning—" I began.

"Love—and curiosity! With those added, I could have no doubt as to how to believe me, she is none too firmly anchored to England. I am sure of that, thought it leaves me still puzzled. If you think her personal hold on yonder gentleman will be lessened any, err, he added, in a low voice. "I consider it sure that he is bent on her as much as he is on England. Have you had him back in hand already." I would have were our friend."

"Is she not?" I asked soberly.

"We two may answer that one day," said Calhoun smiling absently.

Now I offered to Mr. Calhoun the letter I had removed from his cape.

"This journey to-night," I began, "as I took it, appeared from making that? There is a very special reason."

"What can it be?" asked Calhoun, frowning.

"I am to be married to-night, sir," said I, rather to my self.

It was Calhoun's turn now to be surprised. "Married? Zounds! boy. What do you mean? There is no time to waste.

"I do not hold it quite wasted, sir," said I with dignity. "Miss Elizabeth Churchill and I for a long time—"

"Miss Elizabeth! Is the wind in there, eh? My daughter's friend. I knew her very well, and knew her very well done, indeed, for you. But there can be no wooing to-night."

I looked at him in amazement. He was as absorbed as though he felt engrossed in some affair of his own. For a moment later, seeing Mr. Pakenham walking the floor, he stepped to the side of the baroness

"Mr. Trist," said Mr. Calhoun, "I hope you had the baroness von Bitz to her carriage, which well wait at the servants' door. I have then stated to sing near the door at the head of the house.

So now I took the lady's sunshade from her hand, and we two, making indirect, passed down the shaded walk toward the avenue.

"You are a good cavalier," she said to me. "I find you not so fat as Mr. Pakenham, nor so thin as Mr. Calhoun. My faith, could you have seen that gentleman this morning in a wrapper—and in a red worsted nightcap!"

"But what did you determine—" I asked her suddenly. "What has my friend said to cause you to fall poor Mr. Pakenham so?" I asked, pitying the poor man, in such a grueling, and downright cruel fashion.

"Monsieur is droll," she replied evasively. "As though I had changed! I will say this much: I think Sir Richard will care more for Mexico and less for Montana after this! But you do not tell me when you are coming to see me, to bring back my little shoe. His name has arrived by special messenger, but the pair remains still broken. Do you come to-night—this afternoon?"

"It would be my delight, madam, but there are two reasons—"

"One, then."

"I am going to Montreal to-night, for one."

She gave me a swift glance, which I did not understand.

"So!" she said. "Why so soon?"

"Orders," said I briefly. "But perhaps I may not obey orders for once. There is another reason—"

"And that one?"

"I am to be married at six."

She turned to enjoy her consternation. Indeed there was an alternate white and red that passed across her face! But at once she was in hand.

"And you allowed me to become your devoted slave," she said, "even to the extent of calling upon a man in a red nightcap, and then, even upon a morning like this, when the birds sing so sweetly and the little flowers show pink and white—how can one do such my most sacred feelings!"

The mockery in her tone was perfect. I scarce had paused to note it, I was absorbed in one thought—of Elizabeth.

"I might have told you," said I at last, "but I did not myself know it until this morning."

"My faith, this country!" she exclaimed with genuine surprise. "What extraordinary things it does! I have just been hearing history made between the lightings of a cigarette, as it were. Now comes this man and announces that since midnight he has met and won the lady who is to rule his heart, and that he is to marry her at six!"

"Then congratulate me!" I demanded.

"Ah," she said, suddenly absorbed; "it was that night. Yes, yes, I see! I understand! So you—"

But still you have not congratulated me."

"Ah, monsieur," she answered light-ly, "one woman never congratulates a man when he has won another! What of my own heart? Pfe! Fie!" Yet she had curious color in her face.

"I do not credit myself with such fatal charms," said I. "Rather say what of my little clasp there. I promised that to the tall girl as you know."

"And last night I was not at for an hour"

"I shall give you a dozen better some time," said I; "but to-night—"

"And my slipper!" said I. "I have that back because I cannot hop along with but one shoe all my life."

"That you shall have as soon as I can get to my rooms at Brown's hotel yonder. A messenger shall bring it to you at once. Time will indeed be short for me. That one slipper for the other. Then the license for myself. Then the minister. Then a friend. Then a carriage. Then a drive to Rockburst, and the train for the north that starts at eight. Such are the methods of this country are sometimes hurried Madam, cannot you use your wits in a cause so worthy of mine?"

I could not at the time understand the swift change of her features. "One woman's wits against another's!" she flashed at me. "As for that"—she made a swift motion to her throat. "There is the prize. Tell the tall lady it is my present to you. Tell her I may send her a wedding present when the wedding really is to happen. Of course, you do not mean what you have said about being married in such haste?"

"Every word of it," I answered "Has she fortune?"

"I do not know"

"Have you fortune?"

"God knows, not!"

"You have but love—and this country!"

"That is all."

"It is enough," said she, sighing. "Dear God, it is enough! But then"—she turned to me suddenly—"I don't think you will be married so soon, after all. Wait"

"But then you forbid our banns?"

"If you challenge me," she retorted, "I will do so, truly."

"Then do your worst!" I said. "All of you do your joint worst. You cannot shake the faith of Elizabeth Churchill in me, nor mine in her. Oh, yes, by all means do your worst!"

"Very well," she said, with a catch of her breath. "At least we both said 'on guard!'"

"I wish I could ask you to attend at our wedding," I concluded, as her carriage approached the curb; "but it is safe to say that not even friends of the family will be present, and of those not all the family will be friends."

She did not seem to see her carriage as it passed, although she appeared to enter when I opened the door.

What sat on her face was perplexity, wonder, amazement, and something else, I knew not what. Something of her perfect poise and confidence her self-control, the aplomb of the world, seemed to drop away. A strange and childlike quality came into her face, a quality unlike anything I had seen there before. She took my hand me, almost.

"Of course," said she, as though she had not heard my last words, "of course, dear God! would it not be enough!"

I did not understand her speech I stood and watched her carriage as it whirled away. Thinking of my great need for haste, presently I looked at my watch. It was one o'clock. Then I reflected that it was at 11 of the night previous that I had first met the Baroness von Bitz. Our acquaintance had therefore lasted some 14 hours.

CHAPTER X.

Mixed Duties.

Most women forgive a liberty, rather than a slight.—Voltaire.

When I crossed the White House grounds and found my way to the spot where I had left my horse, I discovered my darky boy lying on his back, fast asleep under a tree, the bridle reins hooked over his upturned foot.

I wakened him, took the reins and was about to mount, when at the moment I heard my name called.

Turning, I saw emerge from the door of Gautier's little cafe, across the street, the tall figure of an erect, white friend of mine, Jack Dandridge of Tennessee, credited with being the youngest member in the house of representatives at Washington—and credited with little else

Jack Dandridge, it may be said, was certainly possessed of a splendid constitution handsomely six feet tall, his full and somewhat protruding eye was as yet only a trifle watery. His wide lip only a trifle loose, his strong figure only a little portly. Socially he had been well received in our city and during his stay east of the mountains he had found occasion to lay desperate suit to the hand of none other than Miss Elizabeth Churchill. He had been rivals, although not enemies, for Jack, finding which way the wind sat for him, withdrew from a man, and established no ill will. When I saw him now, a sudden fear came to me, so that I crossed the street at his invitation.

"Jack," I exclaimed, grasping him by the shoulder, "you are the man I want. You are the man I have been the very one."

"Certainly, certainly," he said; "but please do not disarrange my cravat. Will you have a Dream with me? I construct them now with three additional squirts of the absinthe." He locked his arm in mine.

"You may have a Dream," said I; "but for me, I need all my head to-day. You are the man I need both out as well."

He had already rapping with the head of his cane upon the table, to call an attendant, but he turned to me. "What is the matter? Lady, this time?"

"Two of them."

"Indeed?. One apiece, eh"

"None apiece, perhaps. In any case, you have."

"Then the names—or at least one of them?" He was now very gravely. "You know Miss Elizabeth Churchill?" he added gravely. "And about the other lady?"

"I cannot tell you much about her," said I. "Her name is the Baroness von Bitz. There is the prize. Tell the tall lady it is my present to you. Tell her I may send her a wedding present when the wedding really is to happen. Of course, you do not mean what you have said about being married in such haste?"

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Parents and Children's Faults.

Parents ought to collaborate with teachers in helping to develop the best in their children, and cause quarrels to eliminate the worst instead of this view of the matter we (says Ella Wheeler Wilcox) find parents taking a stand against the teacher who tries to talk of the faults of their children and discuss a remedy, and'all the work which the teacher has hoped to do in character building fails to find ground under the lifted hammer of the unwise and belligerent parent, who insists that "my child" must be without faults, and that the teacher who sees them is an enemy, not a friend. It is set dom, indeed, that a man or a woman occupying the position of parent is so prejudiced or has personal or selfish motives for criticising a child

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