

The Man Who Loosed His Hold

By WM. H. OSBORNE

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One of the distinguished features of the little village of Far Hills was the deep gully that lay upon one side of it. This gully was a never ending source of fear to the inhabitants. Mothers of bad children threatened them with it. Mothers of good children warned them against it. Its sides were deep and almost perpendicular. The bottom was so covered with a dense growth of underbrush that it looked as though there were no end to its depth.

Young Perry Haskins, known as Piggy by his friends, was a very youthful specimen of humanity in the village of Far Hills. At times he was a bad boy; at other times, few and far between, he was exceptionally good. He was a pusher at any rate, and in enterprise of all kinds he generally was the leader of the gang. His daring knew no bounds, and when the C. L. and P. decided to take in Far Hills on its main branch young Haskins was the first lad of his crowd to cross the trestle that had been built to span the gully. And this he did even before it had been completed. After that the boys called it Piggy's bridge. Piggy would crawl out to the middle and with the eyes of all Far Hills upon him would lie upon his stomach and gaze with interest into the black depths of the gully down below.

After it was finished young Haskins' day was never a complete one unless he had walked across the trestle and then back again. Even this was a ticklish proceeding, for there was nothing but the ties upon which to step, and a misstep might prove fatal. And then, besides, there were the trains.

One night in spring young Haskins started upon his constitutional across the trestle. He whistled as he went. But he was not the only thing that whistled on that warm night. He had barely reached the middle of the bridge when before his startled eyes he beheld the glaring headlight of a locomotive. It was coming his way and with infernal speed. He stopped and stood as though turned to a pillar of salt. The bridge held but one track. There was no place to seek for safety, for the trestle was no wider than an ordinary train. And the train came whirling down. It was not a hundred yards away when Piggy Haskins did the only thing there was left to do. With the deftness of an agile monkey he let himself carefully down between the ties. Underneath him there was naught but space and the bottom of the gully. Over him there was nothing but the rushing, roaring train. The train did not take much time in getting over; but, according to Piggy Haskins' calculation, it was a couple of months at least. When at last he drew himself up upon a place of safety he felt that he had been through the experience of his life. His limbs quivered, and he felt obliged to crawl the length of the trestle upon his hands and knees. He ran home, entered the window of his room by way of the grape arbor and, lighting a candle, hastily regarded his appearance in a mirror. He was sure that his hair had turned white during the occurrence. But it had not. It still was a delightful shade of red.

Years passed, Haskins grew to be almost a man. One eventful morning he shook hands with all his family and friends and stepped forth from the village of Far Hills to make his living. He went into a far country and made it. He became prosperous. It was just ten years after he had left that he determined to return. In the meantime he had not been back. His parents one spring morning received a letter from him which in its contents was somewhat out of the usual run of his epistles. It ended with this pleasing statement:

I am coming home for a short vacation. And what do you good people think? I shall not come alone. It is my purpose to bring with me one of the most charming girls in this wide world, a young person who tomorrow will become my bride. My trip to Far Hills will be a wedding trip. Expect us in the evening of the 3d.

Haskins and his bride started from the far country where they belonged and purchased tickets for his native place. All along the way young Haskins regaled his bride with stories of his youth. She listened with delight, for at that early stage in the game anything that Haskins said went.

Haskins and his bride were due at he old home somewhat early in the evening. They would arrive at just about dusk. Haskins, suddenly aroused by some of his old recollections, suggested a romantic scheme. He proposed that they should alight from the train at the little station shed at East Far Hills on this side of the gully, and

should walk across the trestle. There was but one thing that made Haskins' young bride consent, and that was that a lonely walk at that hour of the night with Haskins would not be amiss. She suggested the question of danger, as in duty bound to do, but the suggestion only made Haskins all the more determined. And, above all, he wanted to show his bride just where he hung on that eventful night so very long ago.

It happened therefore that at East Far Hills they alighted. And then, stepping out upon the track in the wake of the receding train, they walked along the trestle. In the near distance the lights of Far Hills gleamed. To the right the moon, a large red ball of fire, was just beginning to rise. Finally they reached the middle of the bridge. Haskins halted.

"This," he exclaimed, "is the very spot where I hung for dear life. I was traveling in the opposite direction, and when I reached this very spot I heard a terrific whistling of an engine and saw the headlight there, down toward East Far Hills!"

He stopped suddenly, for suddenly upon the still night air he heard the terrific whistling of an engine, and he saw a headlight down toward East Far Hills. Haskins looked wildly around them for a place of shelter. There was none. He knew then that there was but one thing to do. Grasping his bride in his arms he half slid, half lowered himself and her down between the ties. It was hard work, for he had grown into a man, while the space between the ties had held its own. One thing was lucky—Haskins' bride was small and slight. He directed her briefly to cling to him with both hands round his neck. She did so. With his two hands he clung to the ties above. They had barely adjusted themselves when the train was upon them. Haskins whispered to his bride that it would soon be over, and they would again be safe. But Haskins had reckoned without his host, for the train was a freighter and was moving with the rapidity of a snail. Besides, it had to wait till the passenger train ahead had moved along. Car after car bumped slowly over the ties, and Haskins held on till his arms, with double weight upon them, seemed starting from the sockets. Suddenly he breathed a sigh of relief, for his trained ear acquainted him with the fact that the last car was approaching. It did approach, but it did not reach them, for suddenly the train began to back toward East Far Hills more slowly than it had proceeded. Haskins groaned. The strain was becoming unbearable. "I can't stand it much longer," he muttered, gritting his teeth. He shut his eyes and held on tight.

And then the train stopped. Haskins yelled for aid. The whistle drowned his voice. Then the freight began to move again, and this time it moved forward. "Kitty," exclaimed Haskins wildly, "kiss me for the last time! I—we've got to drop. I can't hold on—I can't do anything. Goodby until!" And then they dropped. They didn't drop very far. They dropped about a foot or so, not more. For in the long ten years that Haskins was away the road had filled up the old gully, and they had been hanging in the dark for nothing. Later they reached the house of Haskins' parents. As they stepped into the light his bride gave a strange start. Then she smiled. "Your gray hair," she whispered to Haskins, "is an improvement on the red."

The Valor of Private Howell.

During the Indian mutiny, says a London journal, it was sometimes in battle almost impossible to tell our loyal native allies from the revolted enemy. At the relief of Lucknow Private Howell was near a loyal native regiment that had, through too great impetuosity and misconception of orders, got to a position where it was mistaken for the enemy, and the whole advance of the British army, amid the smoke, poured into it an awful fire, killing great numbers of men. At this moment Howell, who saw that the men exposed were paralyzed with astonishment and fear, rushed forward some thirty yards in advance of their line and, throwing up his left hand warningly, waved his helmet at the point of his musket with his right. Hundreds of bullets from his own comrades whizzed past him, two of them cutting his right arm, but the daring deed served his purpose, for the British officers saw what was intended. No sooner had the "Cease fire!" sounded than the men, to be the moment after again in the throes of battle, sent up a magnificent cheer for Howell.

Jokes at Sea.

There is no occasion which presents such terrible advantage to the practical joker as that of a sea voyage, and there is none on which his jokes become more unbearable. The following incident embodies one of his most ambitious efforts: When we were in the middle of the gulf of St. Lawrence

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and the nearest coast was 200 miles away a Yankee quietly remarked: "Waal, I guess we are quite close to land now. It ain't more'n three-quarters of a mile away, nohow." Personally we took no interest in facts of this nature and were content to sit and believe, but many excited travelers dashed out of the smoking room to have a look at the long hoped for continent. They presently came back in the worst of tempers, saying that the charts and all other authorities declared the land to be at least 200 miles away and that there was certainly none in sight. "Waal, I didn't say the shore," returned the champion joker. "I guess there's land right under us, not three-quarters of a mile away."

Macready's Quickness.

Brander Matthews in a lecture on the drama told of an incident showing the rare presence of mind of William Charles Macready. According to Mr. Matthews, he got the story from an old man who saw Macready far back in the forties.

In a shipboard scene the actor paced the deck while the canvas representing the sea was kept in motion by the walking beneath of men with half bent bodies. The cloth had been worn to thinness by dint of much use. When Macready came to the most impassioned part of his monologue and the waves were rising higher and higher the audience was astounded to see a red head pop up through the crest of a wave. The actor saw it, too, and for a moment he looked as if he were disconcerted, but it was only for a moment. Raising his voice, he shouted: "Man overboard!"

And this made the people cheer and praise Macready all the more.

Working Backward.

"Did you ask her father?" "I did." "What did he say?" "He said yes." "Then that settles it." "Not much it doesn't. Now I've got to ask the girl."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Holding Her Down.

Miss Loveylyp—He said my mouth was like "a cleft honeycomb." Wasn't that sweet?

Miss Chellus—M-m, yes, but a honeycomb doesn't look very neat or pretty when it's split open, you know.—Philadelphia Press.

A Certain Significance.

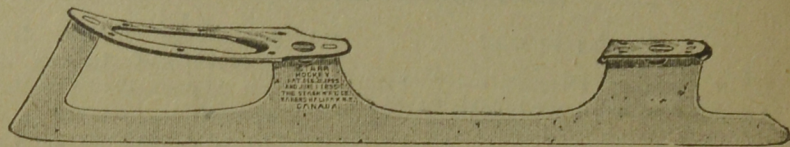
"Do you regard money as the supreme test of success?" asked the man with the artistic temperament. "No," answered the practical person, "but the absence of it is a pretty sure sign of failure."—Washington Star.

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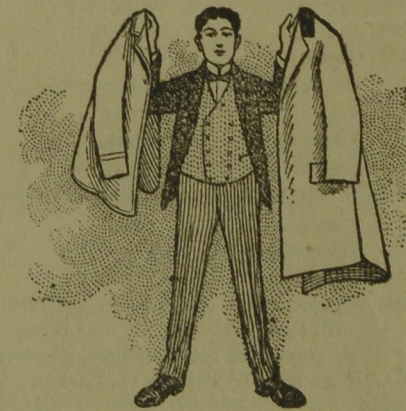
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