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Just a Pasture-al Tale

By MARTHA M. WILLIAMS

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THE cow bells' distant tinkling broke suddenly into loud clanging, undevolved by the thuddings of rapid hoofs. Peggy Lynn, in wait at the drawbars, listened, smiling happily, then began calling keen and mellowly: "Soo-oo! Soo-oo! Soo-oo! Soo-oo! Blue-bell! Brandy! Bell-Cow! Cherry! Lila! Lady Luck! Soo-oo! Soo-oo!" Lucky they were coming thus early—half an hour ahead of sundown. It meant they were tight as drums with tender new grass and browse that by morning would be turned miraculously into foamy, creamy milk. Pastures got greener daily, still they didn't match the range along the creek—valley growth was always two weeks ahead of upland. Besides the creatures loved it so well that they had to be driven home, not called, the first few days. Also they had got tarty ticks of brand and rule. Peggy and Jiny, her loyal helper, and after a sort, partner, had recklessly taken over the Lynn cows, not on shares as would have been safe, but upon a strict cash basis.

Peggy wanted real money in hand—the one very good thing she had ever lacked. Things came so easily she never had the fun of wanting them very, very badly. Henceforth she would buy or go without as she chose—of course keeping a tight rein on poor Jiny, whose supreme joy in a dollar was the wasting of it. This notwithstanding she had bought a bit of land, fairly dragooned into it by Miss Peggy, and it was less than half paid for. Only a cabin—but it meant shelter for Jiny's flock. Isham, eldest of the lot, stood rope in hand before the calf-pen whence already lusty howlings answered the mother-chorus of lowings. Isham "kept off" calves—raising them was part of the game. A mighty profitable part when, as this season, they were all heifers that in twenty months would be fine young cows worth manifold their cost in milk. Good stock all—returning a pound of butter, down-weight, daily.

Dusk fell before milking ended—with every cup and bucket brimming full, not to name extras. That meant churning twice all round next day—each cow's milk was kept separate. Troublesome—but worth it. Lynn-brook customers were glad to pay three times the market rate. Then there was the butter-milk, butter-flecked, almost as rich as cream—enough of it for all the black folk and white, the popples and the youngest pigs. Often hot hockets went along with it—feeding the hungry was Peggy's dear delight.

It was partly that which made her deaf to the creamery man, who had persisted her, since he opened in March, to patronize him, saying: "Not quite so much money, maybe, until we're firm in the saddle—but—think of the trouble you'll miss and the pedigreed pigs and calves you can raise on your skim milk."

This May twilight she was dreadfully tired. Her wrists ached, her hands cramped—the big milking had been too heavy a strain. As Isham put up the bars after turning the calves in the pasture, a hall came across them—that pestilent fellow had come again. But on a different errand—in behalf of a friend who was planning to open an exclusive resort hotel in the foothills twenty miles off.

Accidentally he had tasted Peggy's butter—in result he was determined to have it, all she made—no matter about the price. Send for it every day—also a gallon stuff, broilers, fruits, cake, strictly home-made. A fortune sure in any of them, once they had won their public.

"Let's talk it over at supper," Peggy conceded. The creamery man shook his head. "Better talk it out between you—I'll fetch him tomorrow," he said over his shoulder as he scuttled away.

Young Bruce, the hotel man, came, saw, but did not conquer—Peggy was too much in love with her work to think of quitting it. But she let herself be persuaded to help a bit by reporting to him over the telephone whenever she found things he might buy to his advantage. Thus they came to have a loose-woven comradery, never guessing its strength until October. The week might not have come even then but for Jiny, who upon discovery that her sometime husband was real sure-enough dead and properly buried, said airily: "So now I'm gwine marry dat Jim Baxter who's been peetering me so long. So we'll hab ter dissolve dis yere partnership."

At that Peggy laughed hard—then with Jiny away sighed even harder. She had made money hand over hand—but oh, she was tired. Upon this mood of discouragement in walked Sidney Bruce, Esquire, armed with double determination, a string of pearls and a platinum ring no normal woman could possibly resist. Peggy, being strictly normal, did not try to resist. Instead she slid the circlet upon its proper finger dutifully, twisted it about, flashed it in autumn sunshine, then said with her trickiest smile: "If I milk another month, I shan't be able to get it on." And she laid the pearls against her lips.

Sidney looked aggrieved, "I call that wicked waste," he said sulkily.

Peggy replied, saying demurely: "I can't let things I want go to waste."

"Neither shall I—hereafter," Sidney said, catching her in his arms.

Tom Ballotti and Little Mike.

By AD SCHUSTER

(Copyright)

A QUEER story, that of the stocky Tom Ballotti, who worked his hands raw and his face gaunt for the sake of a friend. Queer, because of the speech he made and the interpretations that followed. Did he mean just what he said, or was he shaking off praise in an attempt at modesty? Was he showing his feelings or hiding them? They still argue the question up in Mother Lode, though Tom had wandered away to other fields.

At the time of the story Tom was a rock miner. His name was not Tom Ballotti, but that was as near as men could make it out. He ran it all together—"Tawballotti"—and Tom Ballotti it became. One of the hundreds of miners working in the big mines, he walked up the trail at shift times, rode down the skips, and emerged gray with slime. No different from the rest. He had his enemies, and his friends, and one of the latter was Mike, Little Mike for distinction.

One day the whistle near the collar of the mine blew and as it was not time for the change of shifts, all in the little city dropped work and turned their heads toward the gallows and frame structures on the hill. In a body the town went to lie a mine and there discovered tragedy. There was no time to be lost, a tunnel had caved in. The only question was: "How many?" and the answer was, "eleven."

Everything stopped while the efforts of men were directed to releasing the eleven men from a prison of rock. Word came up there was danger in the job and no one would be ordered to the task. Who would volunteer? The son of the superintendent pulled off his coat, and was first in the ship. Tom Ballotti was second. There was a cheer when the car was filled and there was disappointment from the scores who were willing but who must wait.

From the first Tom Ballotti clung to his place in the crevice. He made it when he would fight for the opportunity and was so determined there was no one who dared try to take his place.

"It is his friend down there, Little Mike," he said. "Tom is working to save his friend."

The crews worked in six-hour shifts and Tom took two out of each four. His short body and strong back were built for this sort of work in which man must crouch while they labor and strain. Tom shoved the rock and muck into the wheelbarrow after the smoke of each charge had blown away. He was the first to the nose of the tunnel to see what progress had been made. He would be the first to break through, if the rescue came on his shift. They all worked hard but none could do the work of Tom.

To the surface he came, plastered with grime, with a face of dead gray through which burned his agonized eyes. The man was suffering, physically and emotionally. His friend was below, his bones and his muscles were aching and his arms and back were bleeding. Tom slept six hours, worked six more, and kept at it, until the blast gave forth a new and hollow sound and a rush of air signaled that the wall was pierced.

Tom Ballotti was the first one through. The rest crowded after. "They are alive," he said, and he patted Little Mike gently. Then came the painful, terrible delay while the tortuous passage was made wide enough to accommodate the stretchers. The weakened men were given stimulants and then shoved back over the rock to the shaft. When they reached the surface, ghosts of men smiling weakly, there was a mighty cheer.

Men praised the rescuers and most of all Tom Ballotti. He tried to escape but they seized him.

"Fine, Tom," they said. "He worked double shift to save his friend."

"And Little Mike," Tom said, "How is he now?"

"See for yourself. He is eating; see him! He is smiling again."

"Little Mike," said Tom Ballotti, stopping before the rescued miner and speaking that all might hear: "You owe me \$18. You have owed it to me for three months. When are you going to pay?"

There was a gasp, an incredulous rasp. Could it be Tom Ballotti has been thinking of his money? What a thing to say!

"He is no friend at all, that Tom Ballotti, thinking of his \$18."

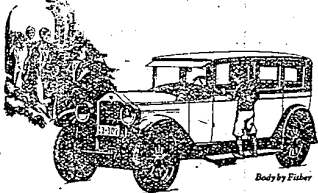
And they let him walk away alone.

He has gone now, to the placer fields where there is no rock to cave in. There are some who tell his story to show how selfish a man may be. Once in a while someone goes so far as to say that Tom didn't mean it at all; that he was embarrassed and had sought to escape their praise. That is the story and the argument. A queer fellow, Tom Ballotti.

Pure Air for President

President Coolidge has an "air purifier" on his desk at the White House. The instrument consists of a tall amber-colored glass jar with a dome-shaped glass top. Inside the jar are little cubes of a camphor preparation which resemble lumps of sugar. Between callers the President lifts the lid for a few seconds. A strong trace of camphor quickly permeates the air, stifling other odors and "purifying" the air.

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