The World Against Him

By WILL N. HARBEN.

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on the left. From behind these bushes Syd continued to fire, and wherever Ronald could catch sight of him through the foliage he coolly directed his shots. Ronald did not know which of his last two shots had done the work, but suddenly he saw the horse plunge into the road without its rider and start down towards Carnleigh at the speed of a runaway. For a moment Ronald remained where he was; his revolver was empty, and he did not know but that Syd might be unharmed, hiding in ambush and waiting for him to draw nearer. At this juncture another horseman galloped up. It was Thad Williams, his long stringy locks flying in the breeze, his revolver drawn, ready for use. He reined his horse in at a point in the road from whence he could see behind the bushes that obscured Hart from Ronald's view. For fully a minute he sat astride his snorting animal, his eyes bulging from their sockets.

"Damn you, you've done 'im!" he said, with a deep breath, and he swung his revolver round till it pointed at our hero.

"Mine is empty," answered Ronald. "I'm in your power."

With another oath, the stalwart fellow thrust his revolver into his belt and swung his right leg over the rump of his horse and stood on the ground.

"You've killed 'im," he grunted, as he stepped towards the bushes; "dare to cuss nigh 'im, an' I'll let daylight through you!"

Ronald stood as if rooted to the spot. He had no desire to see the man who had fallen by his hand. A chill like that of death stole over him. He had killed a man—killed a man! Then his heart bounded suddenly—a little ray of hope crept upon him, for he heard Thad Williams' voice, low and tender: "Are you hurt, Syd, old boy? Say, old chum, come off; don't play tricks on me!" There was a low monotonous response to this, and it continued for fully half a minute. Then Ronald heard a guttural, labored coughing, and when it had ceased he knew that Sydney Hart was dead. Striding forward, he parted the branches of the bushes. He found Thad Williams holding the dead man's head on his arm, as he might have held that of an infant.

"Is he dead?" Ronald asked.

The giant lowered the lolling head with its glaring eyes to the turf and looked at the speaker with a glare of hate.

"He don't look like he's runnin' of a race, does—" he sneered, and a [illegible] face as [illegible] said think of my father [illegible] Should

"What has happened?" her eyes falling on his revolver.

With his disengaged hand he lifted his hat.

"I—I think you had better not go that way," he said, haltingly.

"But why?" her glance shifted from his revolver to his rigid face.

He hesitated, and then it occurred to him that he might as well tell her all. It might be better for her to hear it from his own lips than to get a distorted report from others.

"I have had trouble with Syd Hart." He wondered at the strange calmness that had suddenly come over him in her presence. "It took place just there, round the bend; you'd better turn your pony the other way."

Her face was as full of agony as her shrill voice when she said:

"You don't mean that you have—?"

He nodded. "They are removing the body now. Please be calm; don't be afraid of me! I had to do it; he would have killed me. Perhaps it would have been better if he had. I have always thought I'd rather die than kill a man, even in defense of my own life, but in the heat of the fight I did not look at it that way. All I wanted was to hit him—to hit him in the heart before he could kill me."

Every muscle in her body seemed to lend an ear to what he was saying. The reins fell from her inert fingers.

"Oh Ronald" (she had never called the name aloud before, and it thrilled him to the center of his benumbed being), "for God's sake, tell me it is not true—there must be some mistake."

"None whatever," was his reply, as his desperate eyes feasted on her sweet, love-filled face. "Evelyn, darling," a gentle glow showed in his face like the flame of his inward, spiritual fire, "there was never the slightest hope for our love, but had there been, this would have killed it. You have been only a hopeless dream to me. I have been unworthy of even your faith in me; this is the end; my struggles were great enough before, my burden is now too heavy to bear. Without a gleam of hope I cannot move—I haven't that."

She gazed at him steadily, her glance continually softening.

"I shall be true to you always," she said. "I love you more than I do my life. This will make me suffer as much as you. Remember that. I shall not have one moment's peace. Already I feel like an old woman. Where are you going, Ronald?"

He told her calmly enough.

"I guess that is best—if anything can be best," she said, bitterly. "I know where the sheriff lives. Get in the cart with me; I shall drive there; it is only a mile."

"That will never do," he drew back; "your father—"

She shrugged a shoulder, and took up the reins in a pair of suddenly firm hands.

open space where cotton-fields stretched out on one side. Behind them now loomed the white facade of Carnleigh. A score of negroes were picking cotton beyond the rail fence, but they did not look up. Ronald was congratulating himself on this, knowing that the sheriff lived only a little further on, but his elation on this score was short of life, for just then a horseman appeared in front of them. It was Capt. Winkie, riding like an Englishman, rising and falling in his stirrups. As his trotting horse brought him swiftly nearer he lifted his hat and bowed to Evelyn. Evidently he had recognized Ronald and he showed much surprise. Looking back our hero saw that he had reined his horse in and was staring after them in a bewildered fashion.

Evelyn gave her companion a comprehensive glance. "Never mind," she said, "he'll tell everybody he knows that he has seen us together, but you and I have other things to think about. Will my love console you at all?"

"More than anything in the world."

"Well, remember," they are now in sight of the sheriff's house, a five-roomed erection with a porch over which clambered a wealth of vines, "remember that I shall be thinking of you every minute."

"Thank you for that," he said, and added: "I might as well get out here and walk up to the house."

Her only answer was to whip up the pony; her face was pinched by pain as she drew up at the gate in front of the house. He got out.

"Good-by," he said.

She held out her hand.

"Good-by," she echoed, and as he took her hand he felt her quivering fingers tighten round his own. "I am going to pray for you night and day," she said. And then she turned her pony and drove slowly homeward. As he was entering the gate, he saw her stop and look back; then she signaled him to come to her. Obeying, he found her face wet with tears.

"Is there nothing I can do for you?" she questioned.

He reflected, and then:

"If you should happen to meet David on your way back, please tell him what I have done, and that I came to the sheriff."

"I wish it were something harder," she said, pressing her handkerchief to her twitching lips. "Oh, it is so awful—there is so little to hope for—you see you are so despondent!"

He could not deny this last charge; her very words seemed to add weight to his gloom. Lifting his hat, he turned away.

There was an open passage between the two front rooms of the sheriff's house, and at a washtub, on a little back porch, battling stick in hand, he saw Mrs. Rateliff. She was about 30 years of age, but might easily have proved that she was a third older, if her appearance had been taken as testimony.

Ronald rapped on the door-facing to attract her attention, and when she [illegible] no he asked her if her husband [illegible] said

brown beard thoughtfully. He would have made a joke if he were at a funeral and the joke had been at the expense of the corpse.

"It's bad on me," he said, drily, "if you fellers kill out many more ringleaders like Syd I'll be out of a job—that skunk has been bread an' meat to me fur a long time. But, no jokin', we'd better make a bee line fur town, an' I'll see if I can't git you up a bond. You are too good a citizen to be stuck in a common jail. We cayn't do a thing till we've had a committal trial. To tell you the truth, I don't like the looks of the business. Thad Williams is a devil on wheels; he'll give you trouble. What he'll swear won't be prompted by the angels, an his threat shows his hand. But his testimony, true or untrue, will go as fur at court as a presidin' elder's. Many an innocent man has had his life swore away by designin' rascals."

CHAPTER XII.

Twenty minutes later they were in the sheriff's buggy, on the way to Danube. Rateliff had put a cheap cigar between his teeth, but he was not going to light it till they were entering the town.

"Thar's one disagreeable feature," he remarked. "At first, my idea was to hurry up an' git it over, so you wouldn't have to go to jail at all; but it has just struck me that this is Saturday, an' it is sometimes awkward work to have a trial the last day o' the week. You see the prosecution will want to summon Thad Williams, an' that will take time. Then, as to-morrow is Sunday, you may have obleeged to wait over till Monday."

Ronald told him that it would make little difference to him whether he spent the time in jail or out.

"You feel that away now," commented the sheriff, "but you will feel different when you git in thar, at least that's my experience with prisoners. A jail house is like a woman's bonnet; it has a better look from the outside than the inside."

Just before driving into the public square Rateliff struck a match and applied the flame to his cigar, then he drew himself up more erectly and drove on to the office of Judge Richardson, the magistrate. A man coming out told Rateliff that the judge had gone out to his farm to spend Sunday.

"You see," said Rateliff, as he puffed, and seemed to view himself from the standpoint of a group of citizens who had gathered on the sidewalk and whose eyes were asking what had happened. One of the crowd stepped out to the buggy and asked if Ronald was under arrest, but he received only a non-committal grin and a shrug as Rateliff turned his horse towards the jail, a modern red brick structure adjoining the courthouse in the center of the town. When they arrived the jailer, a short, thickset man, with a bald spot on his head, was playing checkers in the yard with the ordinary of the county. The jailer answered to his name reluctantly, without looking up from the board.

"You'd better git up from [illegible] Rateliff, jo[illegible]

the room sat the neighbors discussing his many manly virtues and his untimely end. He saw a white-haired mother, and old man Hart, from whom Syd had inherited his intrepid, turbulent spirit.

"Some men," shuddered our hero, "could justify themselves in such a case as this, but I shall never be able to forget. My ideal man—the Master of the World—would have found a way to avoid what I did. If only I had offered no resistance. Syd Hart would have been alive, and I—and Evelyn—"

There his agony overwhelmed him and he threw himself on his bed again and pressed his hands over his eyes. The strains of an organ swelled up from the nearer church and stole into his room; voices began to sing. The singers broke down and merry laughter—the laughter of free, hopeful people—rolled after the fleeing strains of music.

[illegible] was a sound of a key [illegible] the lock and t[illegible] "The voice

make 'im regret it to his dyin' day. They both went off in the smokehouse, jowerin' like cats a-fightin'. I slid up agin the wall o' the smokehouse to see if I could make out what was wrong. Thar they had it up an' down fur half an hour, but I couldn't catch head nur tail of it. But it seemed like pa had committed some crime or other durin' the war, up in Tennessee, an' she was threatenin' to give him away. They kept bringing yore name into the fuss, but I couldn't tell why they did it. You was too little durin' the war to 'a done anything wrong."

Ronald made no comment on these remarks; indeed he had caught only about half of what his brother was saying, so far away were his thoughts from any row between his mother and father.

Noting his inattention, Dave [illegible] the iron door [illegible] between [illegible]

[illegible] ps.

[illegible] dney Hart, Mrs. Rat- [illegible] this explanation after a slight hesitation, for he feared that being a woman and alone with him it might upset her nerves.

"You don't say," she ejaculated; "well, I'll be switched."

She did not seem more surprised than if he had told her that he had had a tooth extracted, and then he remembered that she had been Rateliff's companion in many a rough experience. One night when he was taking three desperadoes to jail and had stopped at home for refreshments, he found that the mountain streams ahead were so much swollen by recent rains that he could not go on, and there was nothing open to him but to convert their company room into a temporary prison. Mrs. Rateliff sat up till daybreak with a shotgun on one knee, and a restless baby on the other, and remarked afterwards that she didn't sleep half the night.

Ronald watched her as she stood like an Amazon in the doorway and gave two long echoing blasts on the horn. Then she came back to him.

"Well I reckon you had obleeged to do it," as she looked into the room on the right at the little box cradle. "Mr. Rateliff 'lowed you an' Syd would have a taste o' one another's gore 'fore long; he 'lowed he'd never seed a man with yore reckless nerve, an' that Hart never would sleep till he'd bucked ag'in it."

The baby being quiet, she stepped back to the door. "I see Mr. Rateliff comin' lickity-split through the broomsedge. We agreed when thar was anything important fur me to blow twice; I reckon he'll think the house is afire. My la! did you ever see a body skeddaddle like that? You'd think a hoop-snake was at his heels! Nothin' ain't the matter!" (she shouted this to her husband); "you are wanted—that's all!" She stood in the doorway and waved her hands. "I want 'im to see I'm unharmed ur he'd break his fool neck."

A moment later the sheriff came into the passage panting and perspiring.

"Well, I 'lowed the niggers had riz," he laughed.

Briefly Ronald explained what he had come for and Rateliff pulled his long

[illegible] but you [illegible] alike."

They followed him into [illegible] up the stone steps to a heavy door at the head of the stairs. The room was too large to be called a cell. It was light, having four windows, which were heavily barred, and a bed that was faultlessly clean. As Rateliff and the jailer were leaving, the sheriff asked Ronald if he could do anything for him.

Ronald told him he could think of nothing; indeed, he could think of nothing at the moment but Syd Hart's eyes—Syd Hart's blood.

"You'll have to have a lawyer," suggested Rateliff.

"Then send Mr. Redding to me," said the prisoner.

When they had left him, Ronald threw himself on the bed and stared up at the ceiling. Hart's corpse had a way of coming before him with new force each time that it made its appearance. It approached him now in solitude oftener and with more tenacious reality than ever. The afternoon died slowly. It began to grow colder as the sun went down, and the light against the western sky turned from yellow to gray. Once he fancied he saw the body on the floor by his bed, in the shadow, just as it was lying when he had last beheld it. Almost with a prayer for protection he turned his face away and stifled a scream, and yet the feeling of actual guilt had not come to him. He tried to draw Evelyn into his thoughts, but there was cold comfort in the memory that he had blighted her life as well as his own. Could he have done so then, he would have killed her affection for him that she might have the peace of soul that was denied him. He heard steps on the stairs and a key rattled in the lock of a little iron door in the wall, and through it came a woman's voice:

"Here's yore supper, Mr. Fanshaw."

It was the jailer's wife, and he arose and took the plate of food and cup of hot coffee from her hands.

"Mr. Rateliff stopped at the door just now," she said, in a cold, methodical tone, "an' he said tell you Mr. Reddin' was out in the country, but he'd left word at his house fur 'im to come an' see you as soon as he got back."

When she had gone, Ronald put the plate on the bed (there was no table in the room) and washed his hands and face in the tin basin, but somehow the cold water added to the general chill that was on him and he quickly dried himself on a towel. The sight of the food gave him a touch of nausea; he started to drink the coffee, but remembered that coffee at night made him restless, and he wanted to sleep. He went to the window which commanded the widest view of the buildings round the prison. A negro on a bony horse was lighting the gas along the avenue, which stretched out till, on a distant hillside, it lost itself in the clouds. Two churches were within sight, and they were being lighted. The choirs were going to meet to practice for the service on the morrow. The nearest bell was rung. The night fell like a threat of coming terror.

He had another vision of the dead man. This time Syd lay covered with a white sheet in the sitting-room of his own home. Round the walls of

[illegible] pped. The men [illegible] ken with horror. [illegible] where the dead [illegible] ned to go. "I [illegible] if up to the [illegible] to the staring [illegible] Williams. "I did it in [illegible]

[illegible] will pass on that," [illegible] iams, with a growl.

[illegible] ed on. Under the con- [illegible] ng stare of his neighbors he felt

"I SHOT HIM IN SELF-DEFENSE," ANSWERED RONALD.

[illegible] almost as if he had committed a de- [illegible] crime. They gave way for [illegible] to pass as if his garments held [illegible] germs of death. Round the bend [illegible] strident voice of Williams held [illegible] up.

"Reckoned 'im easy, men; he was not skerd o' anything that ever wore a hide; you don't git to tetch many such in a lifetime; his dead meat is better'n a meetin'-house full o' the common sort, in the best o' health. Easy thar! put yore han' under his head; he ain't a-goin' to pizen you. He's no more fur this worl'. You'll never heer his jolly laugh agin on this earth. My God! is it possible you are dead—dead, old comrade?"

CHAPTER XI.

With head bowed like an ox drawing a burden, Ronald plunged along the road. His fingers still held his revolver in a grasp of steel. The ping-ping of exploding cartridges still sounded in his ears—the dead man's stark face and glaring orbs seemed photographed on his brain.

"I've killed a man!" he tried to enunciate the words, but his tongue seemed to have swollen in his mouth. [illegible] only that happened which at that [illegible] he would have died to obli- [illegible] the yellow pony-cart [illegible] and its sole occupant [illegible] He stopped [illegible] and stood [illegible] Dee-

"You are different from me, Ronald." He read vast truth in her deep, despairing eyes. "I have never for one instant fought my love for you. I have gloried in its growth. I'd rather go to prison with you than to a palace with any other man."

The road was very shady; large trees grew on each side of it and their foliage was interlaced overhead. He had a strong inclination to clasp her in his arms, but he did not give in to it; he told himself that his bloodstained hands should not pollute her being. Already he was taking advantage of her in allowing her to drive with him when to be seen with him at such a time would excite widespread comment. He made no answer to what she had just said and in looking in her face he saw that her eyes were full of tears.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

Her breast heaved convulsively.

"It has occurred to me that I am driving you to prison," she said, simply, the last word ending in a sob.

He would have comforted her if he could, but there was nothing in his mind to say. The awful realization was stealing back upon him that in killing Syd Hart he had blighted his whole future, covered the sun of his hopes with human blood. They drove out into an

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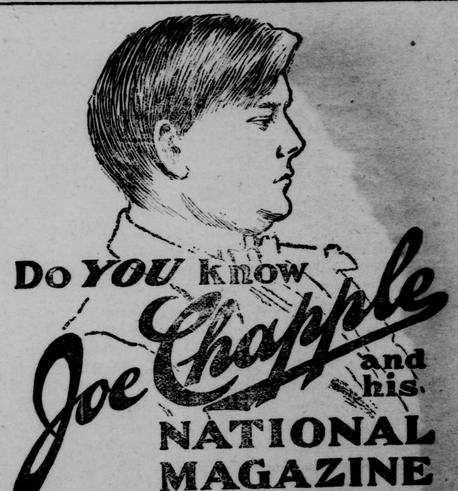

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THE NIGHT FELL LIKE A THREAT OF COMING TERROR.

Ronald sighed despondently.

"I presume that they blame me?"

"Some few 'lowed that you ort not t-bucked agin 'im that night at the swamp."

"But the boy was innocent," said our hero.

"That's a fact, Ron; but mountain folks don't reason that way; they only remember how mad you made 'im when you turned his cake to dough. They don't admit that you was right. Base they don't want to know how high they come to murder that night. The nigger that did the deed has long ago met his God, but some of 'em try to believe he was innocent. Let a body have even a spindlin' excuse, and he'll clear his own skirts. Do you reckon they will let you out on bail?"

"Mr. Rateliff is going to help me try for it," replied the prisoner. "We shall not know what can be done till after the trial Monday."

Dave moved towards the door, as if he were ready to go, but he lingered.

"I reckon," he said, as his eyes roved about the bare room, "that you feel a little lonesome heer." Receiving a nod from his brother, he went on: "You needn't look to pa for help. Bill Tyga hinted to 'im this evenin' that folks would naturally expect him to sign yore bond, an' it made 'im as mad as a wet hen. He swore like rips fur fully five minutes on a stretch, an' said some'n about yore bein' no son o' his'n. Ma run out to him an' slapped 'er hand smack dab over his mouth, an' tol' 'im to shet up ur she'd

[illegible] Dave?" [illegible] the poor fellow [illegible] placed it on a little shel[illegible]

"Sympathy's always with the at first," answered Dave. "I n[illegible] have heerd as many good things said about George Washington as I have about Syd Hart in the last three hours."

[illegible] no[illegible] [illegible]ment possessed [illegible] Evelyn in[illegible] door with sign[illegible] ness.

"So you see what you [illegible] was her first shot, [illegible] anged her guns ag[illegible] stood at the dresser, [illegible] gloves and hat.

"I don't understand you," sa[illegible] lyn.

Caroline came a step nearer, her [illegible] eyes flashing.

"You came within an inch of fall[illegible] in love with him last summer. Ca[illegible] Winkle has told me a thing or two. I intended to report it to father if you had not changed your tactics. Suppose you had let your silly romanticism run on, how would you have felt now?"

This sort of goading was maddening. Evelyn turned upon the offender. "I don't see how I could be more miserable than I am," she said, with sharp frankness of voice and look.

The elder girl grasped the speaker's arm and her bony fingers tightened on it. "Evelyn," she said, raspingly, "you are not in love with that man?"

"More deeply, Caroline, than you will ever love—or ever could love anybody with that stony heart of yours. Yes, I love him! If it would give him one moment's relief, I'd go to his cell to-night and share his sufferings."

"Evelyn Hasbrooke!" Caroline stood like a figure of stone. "You cannot mean it!"

But Evelyn simply sank into a chair in the semi-darkness of the room. Her sister's voice sounded as if it came from a great distance.

"I shall not tell father," Caroline was saying. "It would humble him to the dust. It would simply break his heart." She paused. The plantation bell rang for the last time. It was a signal for all loiterers in the fields to come into the quarter, a custom which had been kept alive since the days of slavery. The elder sister drew up a chair and sat down near Evelyn.

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