The Blue Moon

A Tale of the Flatwoods

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"UP WITH 'EM!"

Synopsis.—Never batting nearly his father, and living with his mother on a homestead on the Wabash river, Pearlhunter Smith sees his handsome young father killed in a duel of fist and rifle. He avoids a young girl whom he mentally christens the Wild Rose. Shortly after the duel there he sees made her acquaintance. He finds himself in a cave where his enemies the assassins of the killing woman, and their tragic leader, Oliver last meet by chance. Oliver has escaped from the penitentiary by the Southern route. Pearlhunter overhears the murderer scheming. The mother dramatically drives the intruder away. She says he is the "Other Man," whom she has sworn to kill. Oliver is shot back by someone wearing a red mask. Nobody knows his identity; he is known at the post office simply as Box 13. Pearlhunter finds a pocketbook of the Blue Moon and sends for a team to operate. Wild Rose agrees. Pearlhunter sees the Blue Moon for $1,000 to Louie Solomon.

CHAPTER VII.

The Face in the Draft.

The banker brought back the plush case and set it down on the table. The Jew took out his check book and began to write.

Pearlhunter never could remember the thoughts that rense over him at that high moment of his life. For all he could recall, there were no clear thoughts at all—just a confusion of the throat; a relaxing of the muscles; as if he had heard a bell. Puller (which he had been straining. He didn't know it, but the old banker was watching him. The old, embarrassing question—what name to write in the check—brought him back out of the haze. He noticed that the Jew's hand trembled as he wrote. It was an odd trifle to notice, but it was the one thing he could afterward clearly recall.

The check, made out to "Pearlhunter," was in the figures: "Five thousand dollars—in words, and big plain figures! It was the first check he had ever owned—the first one he had ever seen. He was still standing it, pondering over it, when the banker grasped his hand. The banker shaking hands with him! This was his day!

"May I have the money on this?"

"Why, my dear boy," the banker answered, laughing and clapping him on the shoulder, "there isn't that much cash in the bank!"

That was a new one on the Pearlhunter. He had supposed a bank had in its vaults unlimited loads of money.

"What will I do?"

"You can draw part of it, and deposit the rest in your own bank."

All of which was a foreign language to the Pearlhunter.

"I didn't want to use any of the money," he finally managed to say. "I don't expect to spend a cent of it for myself. I promised my mother I'd have it right here till I can spend it for something—well, that I just wanted to make her a present."

"You might show your—friend the check." The banker stole a glance at Solomon, gaining agency over the pen over his head. "Perhaps he can help be continued. "There's a—better—before he was shown the check. "—way than that. Why not deposit the check and take out a part of it?"

"Draft? What's that?"

She and Solomon settled his fingers up through his hair and studied the man before him. The banker at last decided he wrote rapidly for a moment.

"This is a draft," he said, handing over the slip he had been writing on and taking the check in his left hand, "as good as gold anywhere, at any bank, any time. Solomon is my friend, and I suggest that you after you've had it back. I'll cash it and deposit it. I will then give you a check book and show you how to use it."

The Pearlhunter read the paper over with curious interest, put it in the big, formidable envelope the banker gave him for the purpose, and buttoned it away in an inside pocket of his blouse.

The little Jew had by this time put the Blue Moon back in the plush case—put the case in his vest pocket, and pinned up the pocket.

"Hmmm!" he grunted, turning away from the table. "You pavet fellers let all every. I'd get it to you Friman' more."

"I got my puke."

"Didn't don't more as anybody put it up from Louie Solomon."

He chuckled all the way out the door, a small crowd waited outside. Nobody knows how news leaks out in a small town. Not a soul there but knew much the pearl had brought. One of the crowd, a lanky, sun-cured Tennessee, sidled up to the Pearlhunter.

"I'll gollies, didn't I?"

The Pearlhunter was too slow, and the little Jew answered for him.

"Coshes he got it. What chance a poor devil poor lumper get out'a his own seather 'im?"

That statement, or one like it, was what the crowd had been waiting for. Pearlhunter, now the owner of the Blue Moon, the famous old fiasco gem, the most valuable property ever "leased" along the Wabash, was now history—Flatwoods history. The one-eyed fisherman clutched his hat up in the air and yelled—a hoary cheer, in which the crowd joined. One would have thought that each man there had sold a Blue Moon—or found one.

The Pearlhunter felt a good deal as the crowd seemed to feel—a loosening of the tension. For that matter, the fat little lumper seemed to feel something of the same relief. Caught up in the crowd, both buyer and seller were swept across the road and into the exuberant door of the Mad Hen.

The Pearlhunter had just twenty-five dollars and twenty-seven cents in his pocket. He had counted it that morning while waiting for Louie Solomon to come. It was the last cent after paying his mother's funeral expenses. He threw a pocket-worn twenty-dollar bill on the bar and motioned to the crowd.

"Make it good whisky," he said. "No 'sniffers' goes this round."

He couldn't have made a better speech for the occasion. The crowd cheered. The little Jew said something but it couldn't be heard. The bartender set out a line row of glasses. The river men grew suddenly quiet with the gurgle of the filling.

Each man picked up a glass and stood waiting until every other man was served. The crowd was too overjoyed to notice it, but the Pearlhunter's knees were fairly shaking under him; his face was pale. He was afraid to do the hardest thing he had ever tackled in his life—even harder than mentioning money to the Wild Rose. He tried to lift his glass; set it down—pushed it back.

"Water for mine!"

To a man, the crowd whirled and stared. Louie Solomon spoke.

"Yet isn't" he said. "You make foolishness!"

"No," was the slow answer. "I'm off the booze."

"H-l-l!" growled the one-eyed fisherman. "Where's when did it's quit?"

"Yesterday—about sundown."

He raised his glass and clinked with Louie Solomon—the aristocratic bourbon against the Flatwoods spring—and drank the celebration of his great day in a glass of water. The others were too busy just then, or cared too little, to press the point, or take the trouble to wonder just what and what all he had given up. Pearlhunter—about sundown, Louie Solomon set his glass down with a bang.

"Hmmm!" For don't shtrack but you pizzness. You all soaked up in what the money's really. Fill 'em up'in, all round. I'll pay for this one on a Louie."

"Where no nine friendly ice trin from me twenty-five dollars?" Louie asked, producing his vest pocket, as he had done probably a score of times since crossing the street.

"Oh, he went up the Yellow branch this afternoon to look at some timber options," the bartender answered.

"Tell 'im nothe he come by de camp Tuesday night and me chance to git it back with the twenty-two dollars."

"I'll tell him when he comes in."

Louie ordered a round of the bar. The Pearlhunter was already out on the street, where the Jew soon joined him, and they walked together down to the white skiff. The three owners were still in their places, glum as their employer was visible.

It was well toward evening when they pulled up to the landing at which the homeward trip began. Some grew carried directions where to build the fire, and followed the Pearlhunter up through

"Make It Good Whisky," He Said.

the underbrush beyond the strip of river-bank, and to the cabin, topped every few steps, the pocket where the money was. He went straight to the spring.

"You should eat supper till me, Mister Smith?" he said, the dropping pearl could not hide his joy.

"Sure. But I'm not much as starvation—not quite. I think I'd have to have to content."

The Pearlhunter had for some time been debating with himself whether or not to tell Solomon of the danger was character of the man that was now his partner. The consideration that kept him from speaking was the fact that he had no proof—nothing tangible to hand to proof. He decided not to speak yet.

"You no like him?" The Jew asked, seeing how long the pearl was on the stick and stood looking out over the landscape, approaching away amid the genial sunshine.

"Let you do now?"

The question caught the Pearlhunter unawares. He, too, was gazing out over the landscape, but absorbed in things of which the placid little Jew had not the remotest inkling.

"I hardly know," he answered slowly, as if feeling for each word. "Maybe I'll go to school."

"School!" The Jew ridiculed the word with his hands. "I know a ready men could be professors, undt dey got nothing. I go by school out two weeks for mine life, undt look at neighbors."

The Pearlhunter did look at him—a hard face, with a hooked, yellowish beak, a pasty grandmother sewing to the front of his waistcoat. It looked like two weeks wasted.

"Why you don't buy timber? You can shoot it on waterfall into a flume—make it good whisky."

The Pearlhunter made no answer. The little Jew talked on.

"You can buy it de Flatwoods a-penny, yet, if you holds your money." He walked back around the end of the cabin. The Pearlhunter followed. "Well, you come 'long two days undt you don't know it!"

He went on down the slope, through the bottom toward his skiff; the Pearlhunter turned in at the cabin door.

Alone at last, he did the very thing that nine men out of ten would have done—took the draft out of his pocket and fingered it over—the concrete and tangible evidence of a great day now mentioning money to the Wild Rose. He thought