SELWOOD of SLEEPY CAT

by FRANK H. SPEARMAN

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"If there's any human scum in the whole blamed United States that ain't landed in Sleepy Cat," grim lifted Carpy, "it must be because they ain't heard of it yet."

Doctor Carpy was an educated man, who knew quite well how to speak good English. But, like many another frontiersman of his kind, he had caught the slovenly English of the men with whom he was thrown in contact.

"Now look at that coat," he continued, entirely approved. "I bought it new at an auction yesterday. Last night I rode down to see a sick team mate at the backbone—one of your men, Selwood. While I was fixing him up at Sequoia Ranch, the boys started for home I put on the coat. By Judy time I was raising all-fired hard. I lifted my whip to touch up the horses, and the whole sleeve part off at the shoulder. Joint! When I reached camp to see what the matter was, the other sleeve fell clean off. When I stepped out of the buggy the coat come in two right across the back! Look at it!"

With each silent punctuation of his complaint, the doctor, who to Sleepy Cat was for any reason received more than the first syllable of his profession, and rarely his full surname, was telling John Selwood of how he had been cheated.

"Where did you buy the coat?" asked Selwood, who found sympathy as a listener than the doctor was as an orator.

"Down at that new place—opposite the warehouse—in the old blacksmow. A down Irish Hebrew is running a dry-goods store there. And Big Haynes is doing a rush auction sale on one side of the store. Come on down. You like Haynes and I'll fix Fyler."

Yet two men were talking in the one-story building adjoining and connected with the bank, that have been the most single-hearted in the Sleepy Cat valley. Fyler, with a hundred-dollar suspicion, had not known that he was being robbed, and Haynes had been surprised, but not whelmed, by the discovery of the forgeries. In spite of their differences, their respect and the benefits of a skilful foe still existed in all corners.

Selwood, tired and drenched to the bone, had left the trail, had ridden through Fyler's from a trip over the divides and not listening to the talk of the girl of a man who has more serious matters on his mind.

"How is Dave coming on?" he asked, after responding to Carpy's flippant invitation to help "clean up" the new store.

The doctor was asleep on the table, sawdust covered. "Hong Dave," he said, perplexed. "The stuff coming on. I can't put my life into him. It's close to the bone. He's going to get well. But you've got to remember, John, he's an old man. He's put in three years in the Army of the Potomac. Now look at that coat. That Irish Jew came to me a year ago to get some stuff for you he said you were in the last stages of consumption. Well, you're not, and you were headed that way all right. Look at that coat. Look at it!"

Selwood looked. "Good rare stuff," he said. His dry appreciation of the coat and skills neither—I mean, I'm not fooling. I'm not fooling," he added, hastily, as Carpy stood up, but just kind of grew purple. Nothing I can put in this room is to pull him up. If there is, I don't know what to get here. In twenty-four hours I'll be gone, and you'll be here. You're certainly tough—and getting tougher."

"It was a hard year, you and I saw it, Doctor," said Selwood, "and it will be tough after we get on the hill." He paused. Selwood instinctively "If you can pull him through you'll save one good man for it—if he be a politician."

"Down to the tent" Carpy understood what he meant—that he was going to see his wounded partner Tracy had been moved from the gambling hall to quieter quarters on the edge of the tent colony of the town.

As the two men parted and Selwood walked down the hotel steps, a tall, odd-looking man accosted him "Haynes," he said with a mysterious air, "I'm looking for John Selwood."

Selwood answered promptly if not definitely. "What do you want with John Selwood?"

"I'm a Russell and Wentworth man, stranger, from Medicine Bend. This man Selmer is our superintendent here."

"You're William Pardaloe—"

"Just plain Bill, stranger—Bill Pardaloe—what do they call you?"

"If dispatch somewhat, Bill, as who does the calling; my friends call me John Selwood."

"Then that's what I want to call you, stranger, and I've got a long job when you are or what your name is—we're friends."

Selwood looked Bill over with some curiosity.

He was an unusual man even among unusual men. In his left hand, with the thick resting on the ground, he held, as he talked, a double-barreled shotgun, of size and caliber unique to the mountain country. It was in fact, an old eight-gauge Belgian gun with barrels thirty-six inches long. Its normal charge, as Selwood afterward learned, was ten drams of powder and "a handful of buckshot" to each barrel. This extraordinary weapon was carried ostensibly as a protection against "hostiles" Indians —though Indians had for years ceased to molest freight wagons on that trail.

In size, Pardaloe matched up with his gun. He stood well above six feet in his moccasins—which he wore when he became confused as to where he had left his shoes—and he carried his arms and legs pretty much akimbo. He was long-limbed and gaunt of figure, with a bowed back drawn like canvas over a face as lean as a hound's. A sharp nose shot out like an interrogation point upside down; heavy hunting cheekbones, and his upper lip and lower face were covered with a scraggly growth of beard—a growth that in a beauty contest would have damned Adonis himself.

"Ben Wentworth spoke to me about you, Bill," returned Selwood; "said he was going to send you up here—"

"That wasn't what I looked you up for now—John McAlpin told me I'd find you at the hotel. I want to say, stranger—"

"Selwood," suggested the superintendent encouragingly.

"I'm a brother of Mrs. McCracken —Mose is my nephew. She wrote me how you got her money back from them river rats—"

"That was nothing."

"Well, I want to say—I'm with you, stranger! And I'll get your name set after a while."

"Wentworth told me he was transferring you to this district as a way they pasting you on the plains job?"

"Thirty five."

"Forty up here, Bill."

Pardaloe gradually caught the import of the words. "Much obliged, John," he said gravely. "Everything counts a quarter here."

"I see" said Selwood significantly, "you've found that out. Wait for the Big Haynes auction. It'll be a hot minute."

Pardaloe picking up his gun in the left hand and resting his right hand on the butt of a huge bowie knife, fashioned from a blacksmith's file and slung at his hip somewhat in his way. Selwood diverted his steps toward Tracy's tent.

To this tent Selwood had also come Christie Fyler and her father For Selwood's sensitive mind "Long Dave" was a problem. The stuff coming on. I can't put my life into him. It's close to the bone. He's going to get well. But you've got to remember, John, he's an old man. He's put in three years in the Army of the Potomac. Now look at that coat. That Irish Jew came to me a year ago to get some stuff for you he said you were in the last stages of consumption. Well, you're not, and you were headed that way all right. Look at that coat. Look at it!"

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