

Guard^{and} Tackle

COMMENCEMENT NUMBER

1914



COMMENCEMENT



To
Mr. Cardinal Goodwin,
friend and teacher, we respectfully
dedicate this Our Commencement
"Guard and Tackle"

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:: Sue Jane's Romance ::



SUE JANE flung herself down into the dusty seat on the old train and turned disconsolately toward the window.

"I hope you're satisfied," she said, half sobbing, "now I'm going home."

"I'm sorry, Sue Jane," I answered.

"You ought to be," she threw over her shoulder. "You spoiled my whole vacation."

"I did?"

"Yes, you!" She turned to me accusingly. "Didn't you hide him in the cave? Didn't you take him sandwiches twice a day?"

"I couldn't let him starve, could I? And who was it," I ended triumphantly, "who was it that made the sandwiches?"

Sue Jane did not answer. She was weeping.

"Good-bye," I said, for the train had started.

"Good-bye," she answered, dabbing her cheeks with her handkerchief. "You won't see me any more, David. I don't think I'll ever come back."

She ended with a sob and buried her face in her hands. That was my last glimpse of her. Poor Sue Jane! She had had her romance early in life, and the long bleak years stretching far ahead looked dark indeed.

From the same dusty car, just a week before, had stepped Sue Jane, all eager to taste the open life of a California ranch. It was a proud boy who had met her at the station and driven her through the little town, pointing out the things of interest on the way. This was the house people said was haunted—lights were seen in it on stormy nights; this was the creek where, last week, Cousin Sally's cat had been drowned; and this—this was the one sight the town boasted. This was the reform school! Sue Jane sat in rapt attention while I told of the school, its fire brigade, its swimming tank, its carpenter shop, where fifty of the boys worked, and of the big bell up in the tower which rang whenever there was an escape.

"I don't blame them for running away," said Sue Jane. "I wouldn't stay long in a place like that."

"And if you were caught, Sue Jane," said I, "you would be put in a four-by-four room for a month and have bread and water at breakfast, dinner and supper."

"That's awful," said Sue Jane. "Do they do that?"

We reached the ranch at dusk where at the door of the old house were waiting grandmother and grandfather. That evening when Sue Jane opened her trunk, the first thing she brought to light was a scarlet and gold book, the kind which was wholly unfamiliar to us. It was called "The Fugitive Lover," and was, according to Sue Jane, "Bobbs Merrill's latest best seller." Just six nights later grandmother without any ceremony, poked the same book into the glowing coals in the big stove. But it didn't do any good then. It was too late. Everything had happened and Sue Jane was packing her trunk for home.

For the first two days Sue Jane roamed over the ranch, inspecting objects of interest. The third morning he came. We were sitting on the bank of the little river where it had paused a moment in its flight

to the sea, Sue Jane beneath an old pine and utterly lost in the pages of "The Fugitive Lover," myself trying to hook a sleepy turtle from under a rock. Suddenly, there was a rattle and crackle in the thick underbrush and out rushed a figure, disheveled and dusty. The intruder stopped short at sight of a girl and boy staring at him in amazement. He glanced around, frightened, and then rushing to the river bank threw himself down and plunged his face into the cool water.

Sue Jane had dropped her book and had come over to me. "Who is he?" she whispered.

"How should I know?" I snapped, for I had seen my turtle glide away from the shadowy bank.

The figure by the water's edge suddenly straightened himself and turned to us. He was a young man, certainly not yet twenty. His face was scratched and his clothing torn as if he had been running through the chaparral. Nevertheless, he appeared, as Sue Jane later confided to me, her "ideal type of manly beauty."

"Is there a house near here?" he asked. I thought he was going to add "kids," but he didn't—luckily for him.

"Half a mile up the ravine," said I.

He glanced around again, speaking quickly, "I'm in a terrible fix. I'm going to throw myself on your mercy. Will you help?"

"Sure," said I with alacrity.

"We will be pleased to," added Sue Jane.

"I was hunting on Echo Mountain with some friends," he continued, "and got lost. Haven't had a bite to eat all day. Couldn't you get me something?"

"Grandmother will be glad to entertain you," said Sue Jane. "Come up to the house."

"No, I'd better not," he objected. "Too tired. Want some sleep. I'll wait here."

Both Sue Jane and I could see he was in need of rest. "Let him go in the cave," I whispered.

"If you won't go to grandmother's, then enter my house," she said, leading the way to a big willow. Here she pulled back the shrubbery.

"Behold!" she cried dramatically. "Ali Baba's secret cave, known only to the favored few."

"And may I go in, Miss Ali Baba?"

"You may enter, sir. You are now one of the band."

Sue Jane held back the willow branches while he entered. It was a small cave in the bluff which ran down to the river bank. I had discovered it months before and had told no one, thinking it a great secret. Sue Jane had, upon my revealing it to her, taken possession of the cave in the name of Alladin, Ali Baba, and Harun El-Raschid. Now the stranger who had so suddenly come upon the scene, entered and threw himself down on the mossy carpet.

"You can sleep here in peace," said I. "No one knows about this place but we three. Sue Jane and I will go and get you something to eat."

"All right," said he gratefully. "But if I were you, I shouldn't say anything about me. We'll keep it a secret. I'll be one of Ali Baba's forty thieves."

Then we two left him.

"There is something mysterious about him," said Sue Jane on our way home, "and I simply adore mysteries."

We reached home where Sue Jane silently vanished into the pantry, to reappear later with a small package which she thrust into my hands.

"Sandwiches," she whispered, "and fudge! Tell him I made them myself."

I sneaked out the side door, leaving her standing on the steps. Through the ravine and down to the river I hurried, knowing the sandwiches would bring a hearty welcome. But he was sound asleep, stretched full length on the floor of the cave. I put Sue Jane's package of sandwiches and fudge on the ground beside him and departed.

That night at supper grandfather unwittingly threw a bomb into our midst. "The children should be kept near the house for a few days," he said. "One of the worst boys at the school has escaped. David, what are you choking over?"

"The fish is so full of bones," excused grandmother.

As soon as supper was over, Sue Jane and I sneaked away to the porch.

"What are you going to do," I whispered.

"Do?" said Sue Jane. "Why, nothing."

"Aren't you going to feed him any more?" I persisted.

"Of course, silly! But we have got to be more careful. We must not let anyone suspect. Hush! You can hear the bell!"

And as we listened there in the twilight, floating up from the valley came the distant sound of the bell, telling the whole countryside to be on the lookout for an escape from the school. And we two solemnly swore a bond of secrecy, defying every officer in the county to find the fugitive, who was securely hidden in Aladdin's magic cave.

"Sue Jane," I said, breaking the silence, "did you know that grandfather was sheriff?"

"Heavens!" she cried. "I didn't know that!"

But it didn't alter our plans. Dawn the next morning found me on my way to the cave, carrying a package of food and a dainty little scented letter from Sue Jane to the cave man. When I arrived, he was already awake and as hungry as a bear.

"I was wondering if you'd forgotten me," he said. "What's this?"

"That's a letter from Sue Jane. I think she wants an answer."

Sue Jane was waiting for me when I got back. "Did he——" she began.

I handed her the note. Her face lighted up with sudden joy and immediately she flew to her room and closed the door. For the next three days I carried back and forth similar letters twice, and sometimes three times, a day. We were busy making plans for the escape of the fugitive, when the officers had finished scouring the valley and things had quieted down. He was to fly on grandfather's fleetest steed (which was lame and blind in one eye), and escape to another land and begin life anew. Sue Jane never told me so, but I think he was to return later for her. Thus we lived in a continual state of excitement. I wonder now if grandfather and grandmother did not both suspect something from our mysterious signs and beckonings.

It happened the third night. I had taken the sandwiches and Sue Jane's note as usual and started for the ravine. Suddenly grandfather appeared at the back door.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

I stopped in dismay. Wild excuses flitted through my brain, but all appeared hopeless. Then I looked up. There in the doorway behind grandfather stood Sue Jane, her eyes imploring, her hands making mystic characters. Suddenly I received an inspiration—or rather, what to me appeared to be an inspiration.

I slowly unwrapped the package. "I've got some old bread and meat for the dog," I answered.

Under grandfather's piercing eye I somehow managed to whistle for Shep. Around the corner of the house he came bounding. He barked eagerly and sat up waiting. Into his open mouth I dropped one by one, Sue Jane's chicken sandwiches.

There was a rush from the doorway and before me stood Sue Jane, her little hands clenched, her eyes blazing.

"David!" she cried. "How could you! How could you!"

Then she broke down, crying. Grandfather came slowly over to us, and silently stood looking down accusingly.

"Children," he said at last and his voice was stern, "what does this mean?"

We told. Both of us stammered out parts of the story and he pieced it together. When we had finished, he left us without a word and entered the house. He was slipping his pistol into his belt when he reappeared.

"Where are you going, grandfather?" cried Sue Jane.

"To get him," he answered. He walked straight to the ravine and was soon lost to sight.

"Oh, David," sobbed Sue Jane. "He will be killed!"

"Who?"

"Grandfather! We must save him. Hurry!"

Sue Jane started off at a run. I followed. We plunged down the ravine, bounding over stones and brush, around the bends, and down to the river. There we caught up with grandfather.

Sue Jane's cave man was sleeping on the banks of the stream. In the open! When we had told him he must be careful! Grandfather walked up and stood above him.

"Get up!" he commanded.

The figure stirred and stretched himself sleepily. Slowly he arose.

"David," said Sue Jane in a frightened whisper, "what shall we do?"

"Nothing," I answered.

The cave man was staring at grandfather somewhat insolently. Grandfather never said a word, but turned back the lapel of his coat, showing his sheriff's badge. The look of insolence suddenly vanished from the face of the fugitive. In its place shone amazement, fright, dismay. It was like the transformation scene from "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." One moment he was arrogant and disdainful, the next, cowering and sheepish. Grandfather calmly slipped a pair of handcuffs on his prisoner and slowly led him away. Not once did our cave man look at us; his eyes were fastened on the ground. I wonder which of us three felt most ashamed, he, Sue Jane, or myself.

Poor Sue Jane! She had erected a marble altar before which she worshipped, and, suddenly, before her very eyes, it had been smashed to a thousand pieces. It had proved to be common clay, after all. No wonder she packed her trunk that night and left for home the next day. But her last letter was rather cheerful. "Since I've met Jack," she wrote, "I have forgotten about our cave man. Try to forget him, too. But David, it was tragic, wasn't it?"

Yes, Sue Jane, it was.