

Respectable Mr. Skimpall

“That was a blue day,” said old John Telbert, with a glance around, as much as to say:

“If you want to hear more, say so.”

“What was a blue day?” asked Dave Spang.

Old John drew a match across the sole of his moccasin, lit his corn-cob *chibouque*, and, after a few preparatory whiffs, answered:

“The day I got locked up in jail.”

There was a general murmur of surprise.

Having given our astonishment time to work itself in, old John proceeded:

“You see I made up my mind to move funder West. So, after sellin’ out what little I had, me and Polly and the baby pulled up stakes, and packin’ up a few light articles in a two hoss wagon, set out on our travels.

“’Twas along about noon on the second day, when four men come gallopin’ up, and filed off, two on each side, at the same time pullin’ out four pistols.

“‘Halt!’ says one of ’em.

“Now, I’d as good a rifle with me as ever drawn bead on buck or redskin, but I’d seen too many scrimmages not to know that four to one’s desp’rate odds, ’specially when they’ve got the draw on you. So, I jest asked what they wanted.

“‘You,’ says the one that’d spoke first.

“‘What for?’ said I.

“‘You know where you stopped to bait your hosses yesterday?’ said he.

“‘Yes,’ says I.

“‘Well, the money you paid there’s counterfeit, and so’s that you paid where you stopped last night?’

“‘Now I *know* you’re ly—jokin’,’ says I; ‘for the money I paid at both places, I got from Mr. Skimpall, the storekeeper at our crossroads, a standin’ candidate for the legislater, and the best jedge o’ money in the county. I got him to change me a fifty dollar bill—about all the money I had—jest afore I started. Polly here knows it, for I told her so.’

“‘Oh! of course,’ says t’other, and then they all laughed.

“Then they made me git out and sarched me. They took away the rest o’ my money, and said it was all counterfeit—‘all cut from the same piece.’

“After takin’ possession of my gun, they let me git into the wagon, and with two of ’em ridin’ on each side, like pallbearers at a fun’ral, we sot out for a neighborin’ Squire’s.

“The Squire was an awful wise-lookin’ chap.

“‘Where did you git all this bogus stuff?’ says he, when he’s looked my money over.

“‘It ain’t bogus,’ says I.

“The way he turned up his nose, spoke louder ’n words.

“‘I got it from Mr. Skimpall,’ says I, warmin’ up. ‘the leadin’est man in our parts, and a blamed sight better jedge o’ money than any in this crowd!’

“‘Kin you prove where you got it?’ says he.

“‘I kin.’ says I.

“‘How?’ says he.

“‘Well,’ says I, ‘jest you send for Mr. Skimpall, and if *he* don’t say he give me the money, and prove it’s good, besides, I’ll agree to go to State’s prison for life.’

“So the Squire made out a suppeny for Mr. Skimpall; but, as it was too late to git him that day, they kep’ me and Polly and the baby under guard till mornin’.

“Then they had me up again. Mr. Skimpall was there, but he treated me very distant; and when the Squire asked him to give his evidence, he not only denied point blank givin’ me the money, but pronounced it all bogus!

“‘Mr. Skimpall!’ says I, startin’ forrid and layin’ my hand on his arm, ‘for goodness’ sake, remember! I come into your store and got you to change me a fifty dollar bill the day I left home. You can’t, surely, have forgot it.’

“But he only turned his back on me and walked out.

“The Squire said I must give a thousand dollars bail.

“I had no bail to offer. All I could do was to let Polly take the hosses and wagon and drive back with the baby to a friend’s home in the old neighborhood; and that night I was locked up in jail.

“When the jailer come in with my supper, twirlin’ the key on his finger, a thought struck me.

“‘I’m an innocent man,’ says I, to myself, ‘without the means o’ provin’ it, and have a right to escape if I can, jest as I used to do from the Injins.’

“Snatchin’ the key out from the keeper’s hand, I darted out past him and locked him in, and, in a few minutes, was all out of danger.

“After a sharp run of some hours, I found myself in the heart of a thick forest. I’d been through it afore, and knowed where there was an old shanty some hunter’d built, where I might git a few hours’ shelter and rest.

“As I drew near it, I seed a light streamin’ through the chinks. I slipped up and peeped in, and soon seed and hearn enough to make me want to see and hear more. I didn’t have to wait long afore findin’ out enough to sarve my turn.

“I sot out on another run, faster’n ever this time; but instid o’ runnin’ to hide, I made for the nearest settlement, and got together half-a-dozen men with a constable.

“Then we hurried to the shanty. The light was still there. We crep’ up quietly and looked in and listened. There were three men inside, busy printin’ off bank-notes with a little machine they had. Chief among ’em was the respectable Mr. Skimpall. They was jokin’ and laughin’ over the sharp trick he’d played me, when the constable walked up an knocked at the door. In an instant the light was put out, and all was silent. But the door was soon battered down, and the counterfeiters and their tools captured.

“Mr. Skimpall was put in my place that night. He was forced to make good the money he’d swindled me out of, and instid o’ goin’ to the legislater that fall, as he’d made up his mind to, he was sent to sarve the State in another and most like a better way.”

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