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The Majesty of the Law

by Victor Lauriston

THERE was once upon a time a lawyer who died intestate and left his estate to be eaten up by litigation. At another time the seven children of a shoemaker ran barefoot, even in the depth of winter. Moreover, I once knew a tailor whose family were the shabbiest in town.

But the gaunt, muscular giant, writhing in the relentless grip of Policeman Pantz, was neither lawyer, shoemaker, nor tailor. He was just plain bad man.

Policeman Pantz, sore buffeted, clung till he conquered; and, stolidly unexcited, snapped the bracelets on the wrists of his bigger antagonist.

"I've got a warrant," droned Policeman Pantz. "You've got to come. And I warn you that whatever you say may be wrote down and used in evidence against you."

That is the time-honored formula of arrest in Canada. Whatever else is omitted, the culprit must be solemnly "warned." Canadian jurors dislike the third degree, and a hint that it has been used is often sufficient to secure acquittal.

Policeman Pantz was the pride of the Carisford force. He was forty-five, five feet eight, with the mental capacity of a dead bulldog and the physical grip of a live one.

He knew only one thing—getting his man.

When Black Bill Vrooman and his sons shot the air full of holes around County Officer Hildredson, and barricaded themselves in their shack, Policeman Pantz was promptly summoned by the county authorities. He sat, stolid as a wooden Indian, till the question of his jurisdiction was settled. Then he drove out to the Vrooman shack on the Middle Road.

A squad of county constables followed.

Police Chief Dan Soames sat in his office at Carisford and wondered who he could get to fill the impending vacancy on the force.

Undertaker Yankey heard, rubbed his hands together, mumbled "Too bad, too bad!" and drove at top speed out the Middle Road. But even he waited out of

earshot, eyeshot, and gunshot.

Presently Black Bill Vrooman emerged from the Vrooman shack, accompanied by his three sons. All four were manacled. Policeman Pantz followed with his baton.

Undertaker Yankey first saw them coming up the road, mumbled "Too bad, too bad!" mechanically, then whipped up his horses and drove disappointed]y back to Carisford.

"How did you do it, Pantz?" asked the magistrate.

Pantz regarded him stolidly, scratched his head and said:

"I just went an' got 'em, y'r honor. Here's the warrant."

When the desperado, Kirst, ran amuck in a drunken frenzy and shot Sailor Bowen, it was Policeman Pantz who marched into the saloon where the murderer had barricaded himself, faced a revolver that luckily missed fire, and five minutes later lugged forth into the light the manacled wreck that had been Kirst.

When—but why recapitulate?

"You simply can't kill a fool," explained the puzzled public. Pantz had simply one quality. He knew no fear. He was too stupid. He got his man every time, because he was too dull to comprehend the risks. He was stupidity incarnate, made immortal by its achievements.

Pantz had been married for twenty years, and had been in mortal awe of Septima Pantz for nineteen years, three hundred and sixty-four days, twenty-three hours and fifty-nine minutes—not to mention seconds.

At home he ran the washing-machine and hung out the clothes. It was whispered that he did the ironing and made the beds. His awed submission to the exactions of Septima was the wonder of Cherokee Street.

Septima had a low, penetrating, sneering voice, and an amazing bulk. Policeman Pantz, the silent terror of Carisford's evildoers, in Septima's presence was more than ever silent, but no longer a terror. He quailed before the woman who owned him. There was one tacit understanding between them. She must not bruise him where the bruises would show, nor make noises loud enough for Cherokee Street to hear. For twenty years she respected this understanding, and wherever she hit or kicked Policeman Pantz, Septima saw to it that—under daylight conditions, at least—substantial concealing fabric covered the spot!

And Policeman Pantz respected his side of the tacit understanding. Never, outside the walls of 11 Cherokee Street, Carisford, did he whisper a word of what befell within. It might be relief for him to shake the dust of home, sweet home from his feet and face a murderer armed to the teeth. Put Pantz never sighed relief. And always he came home promptly when he went off his beat.

He knew Septima; and contrary to the familiar saying—knowledge was weakness.

Barrister Bob Craig sat one morning in Police Chief Dan Soames's office, his feet cocked on the chief's desk. He and the chief were smoking, and discussing with the magistrate the case of a suspected bootlegger who ought, according to Bob, to be given the benefit of the doubt.

"But there ain't no doubt," argued Chief Soames. "Bob, we caught Jim Bungey with the goods on him."

He told the truth dubiously; for Craig had almost convinced him.

Into this argument marched Policeman Pantz, very erect, very steady of gaze—except that one eye didn't gaze.

It was completely closed, and surrounded by a blackly devastated no-man's land.

"Pantz!" drawled Craig. "Where—in—dry—Ontario—did—you—get—that—jag?" Pantz saluted the chief.

"Well, where's your prisoner, Pantz?" asked the chief, after a wait.

"I ain't got none, chief."

"Then how'd you get the black eye, if you weren't making an arrest? Did an auto hit you?"

"No." From the recesses of his one good eye, Pantz regarded the chief stolidly.

"Septima," he added. "Septima, she raised that black eye. She done it outside the house!" He grew almost emotional. "A nose-rag dropped out of the clothes-basket when I was bringing it in. She never waited till the proper time and place. She never waited till I got indoors. She never even waited for me to wipe my feet on the mat. She just jumped out and yelled: 'You doddering old fool, see what you've went and done.' She hit me, Septima did—she hit me right in the yard!"

Behind half-closed lids, Craig's gray eyes twinkled mischievously.

"At the side door?"

"Yes, Mr. Craig."

"Within view of the street?"

"Yes, Mr. Craig."

"How long have you been doing the washing?"

"Ever since I married Septima."

"You mean, ever since Septima married you?"

"See here, Bob," interpolated Soames, "ain't it the man marries the woman?"

"Not where Septima's the woman," retorted Craig cheerily. He turned to Policeman Pantz, still standing at attention. "How long has she been beating you up?"

"Ever since I married her."

"What other names did she call you?"

"Nothing much, Mr. Craig. She just called me a blithering idiot and an immortal ass and an unbelievable ignoramus, and—"

"Could you swear to that?"

"Ain't I heard it, day in and day out, for twenty years?"

"Septima," remarked Craig, in an aside to the magistrate, "is evidently a mistress—nay, a master—of accurate description."

At this point Chief Soames cut short the empty colloquy.

"Anything to report, Pantz?"

"No, sir." And Policeman Pantz again saluted, and retired to the lounging-room.

Craig eyed the magistrate. The magistrate looked at the chief. Soames regarded Craig.

"Well, I'll be blessed!" ejaculated the magistrate. "The shoemaker's wife goes the worst shod. The man who is his own lawyer has a fool for a client. The—"

"The pitcher," put in Craig inconsequentially, "which goes too oft to the well, comes home broken at last."

He leaned across the desk, whispered to the others—and, amid violent cachinnations, Chief Soames reached for a pen.

"You," said Craig to the chief. "will swear out the information."

Ten minutes later the chief pressed his push-button. Policeman Pantz dutifully responded.

"Pantz," remarked the chief solemnly, " I have here a warrant for the arrest of this party on three distinct charges assault and battery, abusive language, and creating a disturbance. You

will execute this warrant, and forthwith bring the accused to the police station."

Pantz took the paper, read the name on the indorsement, and stolidly marched out.

"Twenty years!" mused Craig.

"The woman is an unreasonable virago," reflected the magistrate.

"Maybe I should have sent another officer or—or two—" Soames's tone was dubious.

In response to Policeman Pantz's knock, Septima came to the front door, armed with the rolling-pin.

"You blithering ass," she shrilled, "what are you doing here? Go around to the basement door, can't you? And wipe your feet on the mat when you come in. What are you back here for, anyway?"

"Madam," said Pantz, "I have here a warrant for your arrest on three charges—of assault and battery on one Joseph Pantz, of using abusive language toward said Joseph Pantz, and of creating a disturbance. Kindly accompany me quickly, or I shall be compelled to use force."

Septima Pantz poised her rolling-pin.

"You—you—"

She was too breathlessly angered even, for invective.

Pantz stolidly folded his papers. "You are under arrest. I have to warn you," he droned, "that whatever you say may be wrote down and used in evidence against you at your trial. Come—"

Septima Pantz came. The rolling-pin came, too. The officer went down, and staggered to his feet and went down again.

Ten minutes later Barrister Bob Craig, having cajoled the magistrate into releasing his suspected bootlegger, stepped out the police-station door.

"Ye gods!" he gasped.

For Policeman Pantz, quite unaware of the sensation he was creating, tottered up the steps of the police station.

His helmet was a wreck, his remaining eye was half closed, one ear hung loose, his uniform was in rags, his face was scratched and scarred as though he had been grappling with a nest of wildcats.

In front of him, handcuffed, sullen, but conquered, marched Septima.

Awe of Septima had become a chronic state of mind with Policeman Pantz.

But getting his man was a fixed habit.

It's hard, sometimes, to break a habit—even with a rolling-pin.