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The Ballad of Idwal Slabs

by

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revised

I'll tell you the tale of a climber; a drama of love on the crags;  
A story to pluck at your heart-strings, and tear your emotions to rags.  
He was tall, he was fair, he was handsome; John Christopher Brown was his name;  
The Very Severes nearly bored him to tears -- and he felt about girls much the same.

Till one day, while climbing at Ogwen, he fell (just a figure of speech)  
For the President's beautiful daughter, named Mary Jane Smith-- what a peach!  
Her figure was slim as Napes Needle, her lips were as red as Red Wall;  
A regular tiger, she'd been up the Eiger North Wall, with no pitons at all!

Now Mary had several suitors, but never a one would she take,  
Though it seemed that she favoured one fellow, a villain named Reginald Hake;  
This Hake was a cad who used pitons, and wore a long silken moustash,  
Which he used, so they say, as an extra belay -- but perhaps we are being too harsh.

John took Mary climbing on Lliwedd, and proposed while on Mallory's Slab;  
It took him three pitches to do it, for he hadn't much gift of the gab.  
He said: "Just belay for a moment--there's a little spike close to your knee--  
And tell me, fair maid, when you're properly belayed, would you care to hitch up with me?"

Said Mary, "It's only a toss-up between you and Reginald Hake,  
And the man I am going to marry must perform some great deed for my sake.  
I will marry whichever bold climber shall excel at the following feat--  
To climb headfirst down Hope, with no rubbers or rope,  
At our very next climbing-club Meet!"

Now when Mary told the Committee, she had little occasion to plead,

For she was as fair as a jug-handle hold at the top of a hundred-foot lead.  
The Club ratified her proposal, and the President had to agree;  
He was fond of his daughter, but felt that she oughter Get married, between you and me.

There was quite a big crowd for the contest, lined up at the foot of the Slabs;  
The Mobs came from Bangor in Buses, and the Nobs came from Capel in Cabs.  
There were Fell and Rock, Climbers', and Rucksack, and the Pinnacle Club (in new hats)  
And--sight to remember! -- an Alpine Club Member, in very large crampons and spats!

The weather was fine for a wonder; the rocks were as dry as a bone.  
Hake arrive with a crowd of his backers, but John Brown strode up quite alone;  
A rousing cheer greeted the rivals; a coin was produced, and they tossed.  
"Have I won?" cried John Brown as the penny came down.  
"No, you fool!" hissed his rival. "You've lost!"

So Hake had first go at the contest; he went up by the Ordinary Route,  
And only the closest observer would have noticed a bulge in each boot.  
Head first he came down the top pitches, applying his moustache as a brake;  
He didn't relax till he'd passed the Twin Cracks, and the crowd shouted, "Attaboy, Hake!"

At the foot of the Slabs Hake stood sneering, and draining a bottle of Scotch;  
"Your time was ten seconds," the President said, consulting the Treasurer's watch.  
"Now Brown, if you'd win, you must beat that." Our hero's sang froid was sublime;  
He took one look at Mary, and -- light as a fairy -- ran up to the top of the climb.

Now though Hake had made such good going, John wasn't discouraged a bit,  
For that he was the speedier climber even Hake would have had to admit.  
So, smiling as though for a snapshot, not a hair of his head out of place,  
Our hero John Brown started wriggling down -- but look! what a change in his face!

Prepare for a shock, gentle ladies; gentlemen, check the blasphemous word;  
For the villainy I am to speak of is such as you never have heard!  
Reg. Hake had cut holes in the toes of his boots, and filled up each boot with soft soap!  
As he slid down the climb, he had covered with slime every handhold and foothold on Hope!

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