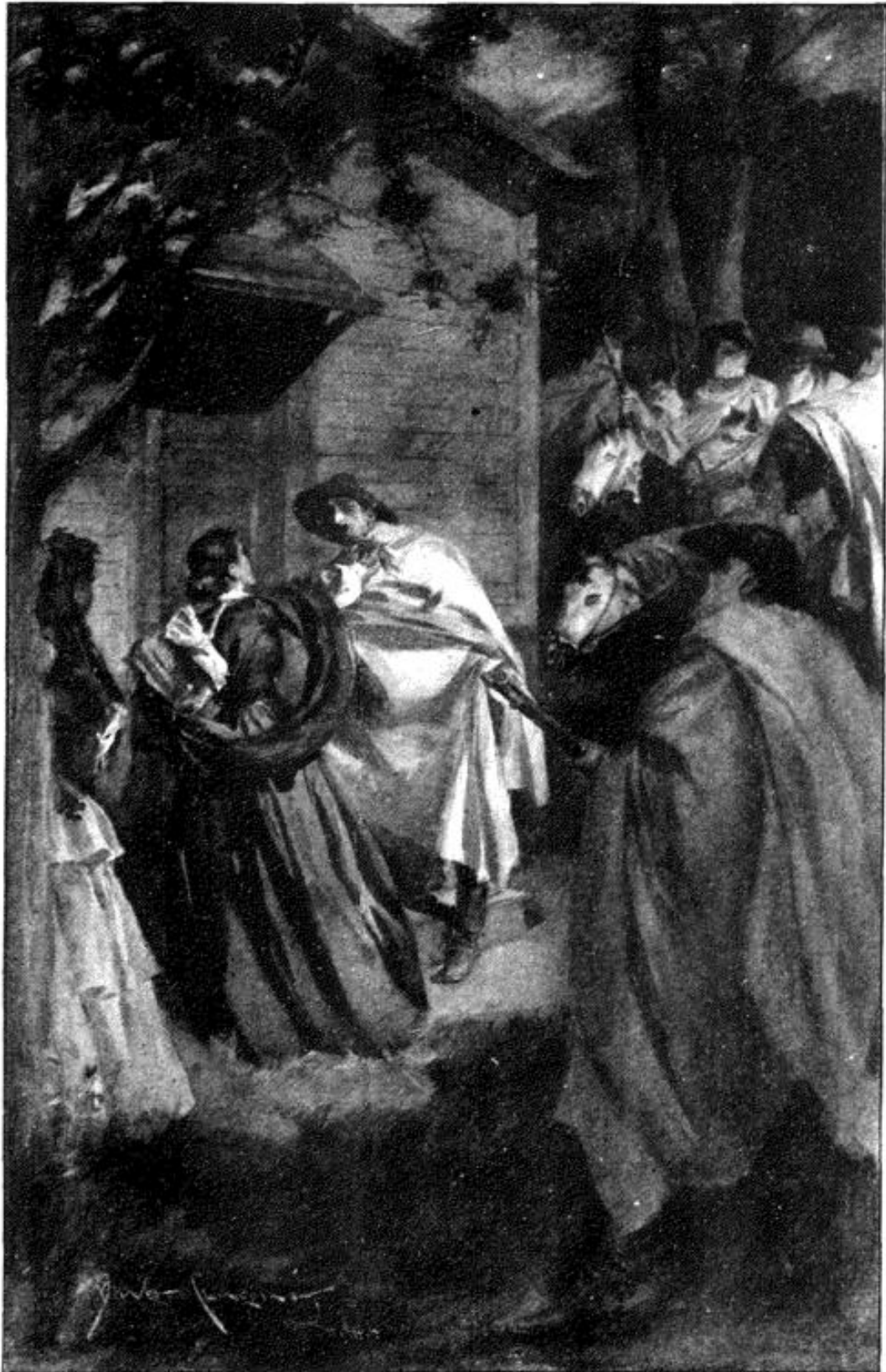


PLANTATION

EDITION



VOLUME V



**She gave a step forward and with a quick movement
pulled the mask from his face.**

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✦ THE NOVELS, STORIES,
SKETCHES AND POEMS OF
THOMAS NELSON PAGE ✦

RED ROCK

A CHRONICLE OF RECONSTRUCTION

II

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK, ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ 1906

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RED ROCK

CHAPTER XXV

THE TRICK-DOCTOR

RUTH WELCH, on awaking, still, perhaps, had some little feeling about what she understood to be her hosts' attitude on the question of Northerners, but when on coming downstairs she was greeted on the veranda by her young hostess, who presented her with a handful of dewy roses, and looked as sweet as any one of them, or all of them put together, her resentment vanished, and, as she expressed it to her mother afterward, she "went over to the enemy bag and baggage." As she looked out through the orchard and across over the fields, glowing after the last night's rain, there came to Ruth for the first time that tender feeling which comes to dwellers in the country, almost like a sweet odor, and compensates them for so much besides, and which has made so many a poet, whether he has written or not. Her hos-

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tess took her around the yard to show her her rose-bushes, particularly one which she said had come from one which had always been her mother's favorite at their old home.

"We have not always lived here?" Her voice had a little interrogation in it as she looked at Ruth, much as if she had said, "You know?" And just as if she had said it, Ruth answered, softly, "Yes, I know."

"It was almost entirely destroyed once during the war when a regiment of cavalry camped in the yard," continued the young hostess, "and we thought it gone; but to our delight a little sprig put up next spring, and some day I hope this may be almost as good as the old one." She sighed, and her eyes rested on the horizon far away.

Ruth saw that the roses she had given her had come from that bush, and she would have liked to stretch out her arms and take her into a bond of hearty friendship.

Just then Major Welch appeared, and a moment later, breakfast was announced. When they went into the little plain dining-room there were other roses in an old blue bowl on the table, and Ruth saw that they not only made the table sweet, but were arranged deftly to hide the

THE TRICK-DOCTOR

cracks and chipped places in the bowl. She was wondering where Dr. Cary could be, when his daughter apologized for his absence, explaining that he had been called up in the night to go and see a sick woman, and then, in his name, invited them to remain as their guests as long as might be convenient to them. They "might find it pleasanter than to stay at Mr. Still's?" This hospitality the travellers could not accept, but Ruth appreciated it now, and she would have appreciated it yet more could she have known that her young hostess, sitting before her so dainty and fresh, had cooked their breakfast that morning. When they left after breakfast, Miss Cary came out to their vehicle, giving them full directions as to their road. Had her father been at home, she said, he would have taken pleasure in conducting them himself as far as the river. Uncle Tarquin would tell them about the ford.

The horse was held by an old colored man, of a dark mahogany hue, with bushy gray hair, and short gray whiskers. On the approach of the visitors he took off his hat and greeted them with an air as dignified as Dr. Cary's could have been. As he took leave of them, he might have been a host bidding his guests good-by, and he

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seconded his mistress's invitation to them to come again.

When they drove off, Ruth somehow felt as if she were parting from an old friend. Her little hostess's patched table-cover and darned dress, and cracked china hidden by the roses, all seemed to come before her, and Ruth glanced at her father with something very like tears in her eyes. They had been in her heart all the morning. Major Welch, however, did not observe it. The fresh, balmy air filled his lungs like a draught of new life, and he felt an interest in the country about him, and a right to criticise it. It had been rich enough before the war, he said, and might be made so now if the people would but give up their prejudices and go to work. He added many other criticisms, abstractly wise and sensible enough. Ruth listened in silence.

As the travellers drove along they passed a small house, just off the road, hardly more than a double cabin, but it was set back amid fruit-trees, sheltered by one great oak, and there was an air of quietude and peace about it which went to Ruth's soul. A lady in black, with a white cap on her gray hair, and a white kerchief on her shoulders, was sitting out on the little ve-

THE TRICK-DOCTOR

randa, knitting, and Ruth was sure that as they drove by she bowed to them.

The sense of peace was still on the girl when they came on a country store, at a fork in the road a mile below. There was a well, off to one side, and a small group of negroes stood around it, two or three of them with muskets in their hands, and one with a hare hung at his waist. Another, who stood with his back to the road and had a twisted stick in his hand, and an old army haversack over his shoulder, was, at the moment the wagon drew up, talking loudly and with vehement gesticulation; and, as Major Welch stopped to ask a question, Ruth caught the end of what this man was saying:

“I’m jest as good as any white man, and I’m goin’ to show ’em so. I’m goin’ to marry a white ’ooman and meck white folks wait on me. When I puts my mark agin a man he’s gone, whether he’s a man or a ’ooman, and I’s done set it now in a gum-tree.”

His hearers were manifestly much impressed by him. An exclamation of approval went round among them.

The little wagon stopping attracted attention, and the speaker turned, and then, quickly, as if to make amends for his loud speech, pulled off

RED ROCK

his hat and came toward the vehicle with a curious, cringing motion.

“My master, my mistis,” he said, bowing lower with each step until his knee almost touched the ground. He was a somewhat strongly built, dark mulatto, perhaps a little past middle age and of medium height, and, as he came up to the vehicle, Ruth thought she had never seen so grotesque a figure, and she took in by an instinct that this was the trick-doctor of whom Dr. Cary had spoken. His chin stuck so far forward that the lower teeth were much outside of the upper, or, at least, the lower jaw was; for the teeth looked as though they had been ground down, and his gums, as he grinned, showed as blue on the edges as if he had painted them. His nose was so short and the upper part of his face receded so much that the nostrils were unusually wide, and gave an appearance of a black circle in his yellow countenance. His forehead was so low that he had evidently shaved a band across it, and the band ran around over the top of his flat head, leaving a tuft of coarse hair right in the middle, and on either side of it were certain lines which looked as if they had been tattooed. Immediately under these were a pair of little furtive eyes which

THE TRICK-DOCTOR

looked in quite different directions, and yet moved so quickly at times that it almost seemed as if they were both focussed on the same object. Large brass earrings were in his ears, and about his throat was a necklace of blue and white beads.

Major Welch, having asked his question, drove on, the mulatto bowing low at each step as he backed away with that curious motion toward his companions by the well; and Ruth, who had been sitting very close to her father, fascinated by the negro's gaze and strange appearance, could hardly wait to get out of hearing before she whispered: "Oh, father, did you ever see such a repulsive-looking creature in all your life?"

The Major admitted that he was an ugly fellow, and then, as a loud guffaw came to them from the rear, added, with that reasonable sense of justice which men possess and are pleased to call wisdom, that he seemed to be very civil and was, no doubt, a harmless good-natured creature.

"I don't know," said Ruth, doubtfully. "I only hope I shall never set eyes on him again. I should die if I were to meet him alone."

"Oh, nonsense!" said her father, reassur-

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ingly. "They are the most good-natured, civil poor creatures in the world. I used to see them during the war."

The Major was still contesting Dr. Cary's prejudices.

CHAPTER XXVI

MAJOR WELCH AND RUTH BECOME RESIDENTS

IT was yet early in the day, when the travellers drove up to Red Rock, and though there were certain things which showed that the place was not kept up as it had formerly been, it was far handsomer, and appeared to be more extensively cultivated, than any plantation they had yet seen. A long line of barns and stables lay at some little distance behind the mansion, half screened by the hill, and off to one side stretched a large garden with shrubbery, apparently somewhat neglected, at the far end of which was a grove or great thicket of evergreens and other trees.

A tall man with a slight stoop in his shoulders came down the broad steps, and advanced to meet them as they drove up.

“Is this Colonel Welch?” he asked.

“Well, not exactly, but Major Welch,” said that gentleman, pleasantly, wondering how he could know him, “and you are—Mr. Still?”

RED ROCK

“Yes, sir, I’m the gentleman: I’m Mr. Still — Colonel Still, some of ’em calls me; but I’m like yourself, Colonel, I don’t care for titles. The madam, I suppose, sir?” he smiled, as he handed Ruth down.

“No, my daughter, Miss Welch,” said the Major, a little stiffly, to Ruth’s amusement.

“Ah! I thought she was a leetle young for you, Colonel; but sometimes we old fellows get a chance at a fresh covey and we most always try to pick a young bird. We’re real glad to see you, ma’am, and to have the honor of entertainin’ so fine a young lady in our humble home. My son Wash, the Doctor, ain’t at home this mornin’, but he’ll be back to-night, and he’ll know how to make you have a good time. He’s had advantages his daddy never had,” he explained.

There was something almost pathetic, Major Welch thought, in this allusion to his son, and his recognition of his own failure to measure up to his standard. It made Major Welch overlook his vulgarity and his attempt to be familiar. And the Major decided anew that Hiram Still was not half as black as he had been painted, and that the opposition to him which he had discovered was nothing but prejudice.

MAJOR WELCH AND RUTH

As they entered the house, both Major Welch and Ruth stopped on the threshold, with an exclamation. Before them stretched one of the most striking halls Ruth had ever seen. At the other end was an open door with a glimpse of green fields and blue hills in the distance; but it was the hall itself that took Ruth's eye. And it was the picture of the man in the space just over the great fireplace that caught Major Welch. The "Indian-killer" again stood before him. Clad in his hunter's garb, with the dark rock behind him, his broken rifle at his feet, his cap on the back of his head, and his yellow hair pushed from under it, his eyes fastened on Major Welch with so calm and yet so intense a look that Major Welch was almost startled. That figure had suddenly obliterated the years. It brought back to him vividly the whole of his former visit.

Ruth, impressed by the expression of her father's face, and intensely struck by the picture, pressed forward to her father's side, almost holding her breath.

"I see you're like most folks, ma'am; you're taken first thing with that picture," said Still; then added, with a half laugh, "and it's the only picture in the batch I don't really like. But I

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jist mortally dislikes that, and I'd give it to anybody who'd take it down from thar, and save me harmless."

He went off into a half reverie. The Major was examining the frame curiously. He put his finger on a dim, red smear on the bottom of the frame. Memory was bringing back a long train of recollections. Hardly more than ten years before, he had stood on that same spot and done the same thing. This hall was thronged with a gay and happy and high bred company. He himself was an honored guest. His gracious host was standing beside him, telling him the story. He remembered it all. Now—they were all gone. It was as if a flood had swept over them. These inanimate things alone had survived. He ran his hand along the frame.

The voice of his host broke in on his reflections.

"That thar red paint I see you lookin' at, got on the frame one day the picture fell down before the war. A nigger was paintin' the hairth right below it; it wa'n't nailed then—and a gust of wind come up sudden and banged a door and the picture dropped right down in the paint. Mr. Gray, who used to own this place, was a settin' right by the winder where his secretary,

MAJOR WELCH AND RUTH

used to stand, and I had jest come back from the South the day befo' and was talkin' to Mr. Gray about it in the hall here that minute. 'Well,' says I to him, 'if I was you, I'd be sort o' skeered to see that happen';—because thar's a story about it, that whenever it comes down the old fellow in the graveyard gits up, and something's goin' to happen to the man as lives here. 'No,' he says, 'Hiram (he always called me Hiram), I'm not superstitious; but if anything should happen, I have confidence in you to know you'd still be faithful—a faithful friend to my wife and boys,' he says, in them very words. And I says to him, 'Mr. Gray, I promise you I will, faithful.' And that's what I've done, Major, I've kept my word and yet, see how they treat me! So after I got the place I nailed the picture in the wall—or rather just before that," he said in his former natural voice, "and it ain't been down since, an' it ain't comin' down neither."

"But does that keep him from coming on his horse as they say? Has he ever been seen since you nailed the frame to the wall?" Ruth asked.

"Well, ma'am, I can only tell you that I ain't never seen him," said their host, with a faint, little smile. "Some says he's still ridin', and

RED ROCK

every time they hears a horse nicker at night around here they say that's him; but I can't say as I believes it."

"Of course you cannot," said the Major, a little abruptly, "for you know it isn't he; you have too much sense. A good head and a good conscience never see apparitions." The Major was still thinking of the past.

"How like he is to a picture I saw at Dr. Cary's, that they said was of a young Mr. Gray who still lives about here," said Ruth, recurring to the picture. She turned and was surprised to see what a change had come over her host's face. He suddenly changed the subject.

"Well, I'm glad you've come down, Colonel. Only I'm sorry I didn't know just when you were coming. I'd have sent my carriage for you. I've been lookin' out for you, and I've got the prettiest place in the country for you," he said. He nodded over in the direction of the garden. "I want to take you to see it. It will just suit you. The house ain't big, but the land's as rich as low grounds.

"And you're the very sort of a man we want here, Major. Your name will be worth a heap to us. Between ourselves, you can conjure with a Gover'ment title like a trick-doctor. Now, this

MAJOR WELCH AND RUTH

fall, if you just go in with us—How would you like to go to the Legislature?” he asked, his voice lowered the least bit, and interrupting himself in a way he had.

“Not at all,” said Major Welch. “No politics for me. Why, I’m not eligible—even if I settle here. I suppose there are some requirements in the way of residence and so forth?”

“Oh! requirements ain’t nothin’. We’ve got the Legislature, you see, and we—There’s some several been elected ain’t been here as long as you’ll been when the election comes off.” He glanced at Major Welch and interrupted himself again. “The fact is, Major,” he explained, in a somewhat lower key, “we’ve had to do some things a leetle out of the regular run—to git the best men we could. But if we could get a gentleman like yourself——”

“No, I’m not in politics,” said Major Welch, decisively. “I’ve neither experience nor liking for it, and I’ve come for business purposes——”

“Of course, you are quite right, Major, you’re just like me; but I didn’t know what your opinion was. Well, you’ve come to the right place for business, Major,” he said, in so changed a voice that he seemed to be two persons speaking. “It’s the garden spot of the world—the money’s

RED ROCK

jest layin' round to waste on the ground, if the folks jist had the sense to see it. All it wants is a little more capital. Colonel Leech and them's been talkin' about runnin' a railroad through this region. You know after all's said and done, Colonel, I ain't nothin' but a plain farmer. I talks about railroads, but, fact is, I'd ruther see cotton and corn grow 'n the finest railroad's ever run. My son Wash, the Doctor, he's got education, and he's got city ways and wants a railroad, and I says to him, that's all right, Wash, you have yer railroad and enjoy it, but jist let yer old pappy set on his porch and see the crops grow. I've made ten thousand dollars a year clear money on this place, and that's good enough for me, I says. That may sound like foolishness to you, Major, but that's my raisin', and a man can't git over his raisin'."

This was a philosophic fact which the Major had often been struck with, and it appeared to him now that he had a most excellent example of it before him.

As Major Welch was desirous to get settled as soon as possible, he and Ruth rode over that afternoon to take a look at the place Still had spoken of. A detour of a mile or so brought them around to a small farm-house with peaked

MAJOR WELCH AND RUTH

roof and dormer windows, amid big locust-trees, on top of a hill. Behind it, at a little distance, rose the line of timbered spurs that were visible through the hall-door at Red Rock, and in front a sudden bend brought the river in view, with an old mill on its nearer bank, and the comb of water flashing over the dam. Ruth gave an exclamation of delight. She sketched rapidly just what they could do with the place. Still observed her silently, and when Major Welch inquired what price was asked for the place, told him that he could not exactly say that it was for sale. The Major looked so surprised at this, however, that he explained himself.

“It is this way,” he said, “it is for sale and it ain’t.”

“Well, that’s a way I do not understand. Whose is it?” said Major Welch, so stiffly that the other changed his tone.

“Well, the fact is, Colonel, to be honest about it,” he said, “this here place belongs to me; but I was born on this here place, not exactly in this house, but on the place, an’ I always thought ’t if anything was to happen—if my son Wash, the Doctor, was to git married or anything, and take a notion to set up at Red Rock, I might come back here and live—you see?”

RED ROCK

The Major was mollified. He had not given the man credit for so much sentiment.

“Of course, if you really wants it—?” began Still, but the Major said, no, he would not insist on one’s making such a sacrifice; that such a feeling did him credit.

So the matter ended in Still’s proposing to lease the place to the Major, which was accepted, Major Welch agreeing to the first price he named, only saying he supposed it was the customary figure, which Still assured him was the case. He pointed out to him that the land was unusually rich.

“What’s the name of the place?” asked Ruth.

“Well, ’tain’t got any special name. We call it Stamper’s,” Still said.

“Stamper—Stamper?” repeated the Major. “Where have I heard that name?”

“You might ’a’ heard of him in connection with the riot ’t took place near here a few years ago, when a dozen or so soldiers was murdered. ’Twas up here they hatched the plot and from here they started. They moved away from here, and I bought it.”

It was not in this connection that the Major recalled the name.

“What was ever done about it?” he asked.

MAJOR WELCH AND RUTH

“Nothin’. What could you do?” demanded Still, tragically.

“Why, arrest them and hang them, or send them to prison.”

Still gave an ejaculation.

“You don’t know ’em, Major! But we are gittin’ ’em straight now,” he added.

On their return to Red Rock they found that Still’s son, the Doctor, had arrived. He was a tall, dark, and, at a distance, a rather handsome young man; but on nearer view this impression vanished. His eyes were small and too close together, like his father’s, but instead of the good-humored expression which these sometimes had, his had a suspicious and ill-contented look. He dressed showily and evidently took great pride in his personal appearance. He had some education and was fond of making quotations, especially in his father’s presence, toward whom his attitude was one of censoriousness and ill-humor.

His manner to the Major was always polite, and to Ruth it was especially so; but to the servants it was arrogant, and to his father it was little short of contemptuous. The Major heard him that evening berating someone in so angry a tone that he thought it was a dog he was scold-

RED ROCK

ing, until he heard Hiram Still's voice in mild expostulation; and again at the table that evening Dr. Still spoke to his father so sharply for some little breach of table etiquette that the Major's blood boiled. The meekness with which the father took his son's rebuke did more to secure for him the Major's friendship than anything else that occurred during their stay with him.

CHAPTER XXVII

HIRAM STILL GETS A LEGAL OPINION AND CAPTAIN
ALLEN CLIMBS FOR CHERRIES

AS Major Welch was anxious to be independent, he declined Still's invitation to stay with him, and within a week he and Ruth were "camping out" at the Stamper place, which he had rented, preparing it for the arrival of Mrs. Welch and their furniture.

As it happened, no one had called on the Welches while they remained at Still's; but they were no sooner in their own house than all the neighbors round began to come to see them.

Ruth found herself treated as if she were an old friend, and feeling as if she had known these visitors all her life. One came in an old wagon and brought two or three chairs, which were left until Ruth's should come; another sent over a mahogany table; a third came with a quarter of lamb; all accompanied by some message of apology or friendliness which made the kindness appear rather done to the senders than by them.

RED ROCK

In the contribution which the Carys brought, Ruth found the two old cups she had admired. She packed them up and returned them to Blair with the sweetest note she knew how to write.

As soon as he was settled, Major Welch went to the Court-house to examine the records. He had intended to go alone and had made arrangements, the afternoon before, with a negro near by to furnish him a horse next day; that evening, however, Still, who appeared to know everything that was going on, rode over and asked if he could not take him down in his buggy. He had to go there on some business, he explained, and Colonel Leech would be there and had told him he wanted to see the Major and talk over some matters, and wanted him to be there too.

The Major would have preferred to go first without Still. However, there was nothing else to do but to accept the offer he made of his company; and the next morning Still drove over, and they set out together, Ruth saying that she had plenty to occupy her until her father's return.

They had not been gone very long and Ruth was busying herself, out in the yard, trimming the old rose-bushes into some sort of shape, when

HIRAM STILL GETS AN OPINION

she heard a step, and looking up saw coming across the grass, the small man they had met in the road, who had told them the way to Dr. Cary's.

He wasn't "so very busy just then," he said, and had come to see if they "mightn't like to have a little hauling done when their furniture came."

Ruth thought that her father had arranged with Mr. Still to have it done.

"I ain't particularly busy jest now, and I'd take feed along—I jest thought I'd like to be neighborly," repeated the man. "Hiram, I s'pect, he's chargin' you some'n?"

Ruth supposed so.

"Well, if he ain't directly, he will some way. The best way to pay Hiram is to pay him right down."

He asked Ruth if she would mind his going in and looking at the house, and, when she assented, he walked around silently, looking at the two rooms which she showed him: their sitting-room and her father's room; then asked if he could not look into the other room also. This was Ruth's chamber, and for a second she hesitated to gratify curiosity carried so far; but reflecting that he was a plain countryman, and

RED ROCK

might possibly misunderstand her refusal and be wounded, she nodded her assent, and stepped forward to open the door. He opened it himself, however, and walked in, stepping on tip-toe. He stopped in the middle of the room and looked about him, his gaze resting presently on a nail driven into a strip in the wall just beside the bed.

“I was born in this here room,” he said, as much to himself as to her; then, after a pause: “right in that thar cornder—and my father was born in it before me and his father befo’ him, and to think that Hiram owns it! Hiram Still! Well—well—things do turn out strange—don’t they? Thar’s the very nail my father used to hang his big silver watch on. I b’lieve I’d give Hiram a hoss for that nail, ef I knowed where I could get another one to plough my crop.” He walked up and put his hand on the nail, feeling it softly. Then walked out.

“Thankee, miss. Will you tell yo’ pa, Sergeant Stamper’d be glad to do what he could for him, and ef he wants him jist to let him know?” He had gone but a few steps, when he turned back: “And will you tell him I say he’s got to watch out for Hiram?”

The next moment he was gone, leaving Ruth

HIRAM STILL GETS AN OPINION

with a sinking feeling about her heart. What could he mean?

She had not long to think of it, however, for just then she heard the sound of wheels grinding along outside, and she looked out of the door just as a rickety little wagon drew up to the door. She recognized the driver as Miss Cary and walked out to meet her. Beside Blair in the wagon sat, wrapped up in shawls, though the day was warm, an elderly lady with a faded face, but with very pleasant eyes, looking down at Ruth from under a brown veil. Ruth at first supposed that she was Blair's mother, but Blair introduced her as "Cousin Thomasia." As they helped the lady out of the vehicle, Ruth was amused at the preparation she made. Every step she took she gave some explanation or exclamation, talking to herself, it appeared, rather than to either of the girls.

"My dear Blair, for heaven's sake don't let his head go. Take care, my dear, don't let this drop." (This to Ruth, about a package wrapped in paper.)

When at length she was down on the ground, she asked Blair if her bonnet was on straight: "Because, my dear"—and Ruth could not for her life tell to whom she was speaking—"no-

RED ROCK

thing characterizes a woman more than her bonnet.”

Then having been assured that this mark of character was all right, she turned to Ruth, and said, with the greatest graciousness:

“How do you do, my dear? You must allow me to kiss you. I am Cousin Thomasia.”

Ruth’s surprised look as she greeted her, perhaps, made her add, “I am everybody’s Cousin Thomasia.”

It was indeed as she said, she was everybody’s Cousin Thomasia, and before she had been in the house ten minutes, Ruth felt as if she were, at least, hers. She accepted the arm-chair offered her, with the graciousness of a queen, and spread out her faded skirts with an air which Ruth noted and forthwith determined to copy. Then she produced her knitting, and began to knit so quietly that it was almost as if the yarn and needles had appeared at her bidding. The next instant she began a search for something—began it casually, so casually that she knit between-times, but the search quickened and the knitting ceased.

“Blair?—!”

“You brought them with you, Cousin Thomasia.”

HIRAM STILL GETS AN OPINION

“No, my dear, I left them, I’m sure I left them——” (searching all the time) “right on—Where can they be?”

“I saw you have them in the wagon.”

“Then I’ve dropped them—Oh, dear! dear! What shall I do?”

“What is it?” asked Ruth.

“My eyes, my dear—and I cannot read a word without them. Blair, we must go right back and hunt for them.”

But Blair was up and searching, not on the floor or in the road; but in the folds of Miss Thomasia’s dress; in the wrappings of the little parcel which she still held in her lap.

“Here they are, Cousin Thomasia,” she exclaimed, triumphantly drawing them out of the paper. “Right where you put them.”

Miss Thomasia gave a laugh as fresh as a girl’s.

“Why, so I did! How stupid of me!” She seated herself again, adjusted her glasses and began to unwrap her parcel.

“Here, my dear, is a little cutting I have fetched you from a rose which my dear mother brought from Kenilworth Castle, when she accompanied my dear father to England. I was afraid you might not have any flowers now, and

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nothing is such a panacea for loneliness as the care of a rose-bush. I can speak from experience. The old one used to grow just over my window at my old home and I took a cutting with me when we went away—General Legaie obtained the privilege of doing so—and you have no idea how much company it has been to me. I will show you how to set it out.”

The glasses were on now, and she was examining the sprig of green in the little pot with profound interest, while her needles flew.

“Where was your old home?” Ruth asked, softly.

“Here, my dear—not this place, but all around you. This was Mrs. Stamper’s—one of our poor neighbors. But we lived at Red Rock.”

“Oh!” said Ruth, shocked at having asked the question.

“No matter, my dear,” the old lady went on. “Since we moved we have lived at a little place right on the road. You must come over and let me show you my roses there. But I don’t think they will ever be equal to the old ones—or what the old ones were, for I hear they are nearly all gone now—I have never been back since I left. I do not think I could stand seeing that—person

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in possession of my father's and my brother's estate." She sighed for the first time, and for the first time the needles, as she leant back, stopped.

"I wrapped up my glasses to keep from seeing it as we drove up the hill. I wish they might let me lie there when I die, but I know they will not." Her gaze was out of the open door. In the silence which followed her words the sound of a horse's hoofs was heard.

"There is someone outside, my dear," she said, placidly. Both Ruth and Blair looked out.

"Why, it is the General," said Blair, and Ruth wondered who the General was, and wondered yet more to detect something very much like a flutter in Miss Thomasia's manner. Her hand went to her bonnet; to her throat; she smoothed her already smooth skirts, and glanced around—ending in a little appealing look to Blair. It was almost as if a white dove, represented in some sacred mystery, had suddenly lost tranquillity. When, however, the new visitor reached the door, Miss Thomasia was quietude itself.

He stepped up to the door and gave a tap with the butt of his riding-switch before he was aware

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of the presence of the three ladies; then he took off his hat.

“Ladies,” he said, with quite a grand bow. At the same moment, both of the ladies who knew him, spoke, but Ruth heard only Miss Thomasia’s words:

“My dear, this is General Legaie, of whom you have often heard, our old and valued friend.” Ruth had never heard of him, but she was struck by him. He was not over five feet three inches high: not as tall by several inches as Ruth herself; but his head, with curling white hair, was so set on his shoulders, his form was so straight and vigorous, and his countenance, with its blue eyes and fine mouth, so handsome and self-contained, that Ruth thought she had never seen a more martial figure. She thought instinctively of a portrait she had once seen of a French Marshal; and when the General made his sweeping bow and addressed her with his placid voice in old-fashioned phrase as, “Madam,” the illusion was complete. Why, he was absolutely stately. Then he addressed Miss Thomasia and Blair, making each of them a bow and a compliment with such an old-fashioned courtesy that Ruth felt as if she were reading a novel.

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He had hoped to call and pay his respects before, he told Ruth, when he had finished his greetings; but had been unavoidably delayed, and it was a cause of sincere regret that he should be so unfortunate as to miss her father. He had learned of his absence several miles below, but he would not delay longer paying his devoirs to her; so had come on. "And you see the triple reward I receive," he said, with a glance which included all three ladies, and a little laugh of pleasantry over himself.

"See what an adept he is," said Blair: "he compliments us all in one breath."

The General looked at Miss Thomasia as if he were going to speak directly to her, but she was picking up a stitch, so he shifted his glance to Blair, and, catching her eye, laughed heartily.

"Well? Why didn't you say it?"

Miss Thomasia knitted placidly.

He shrugged his shoulders, laughed again, and changed his bantering tone.

"Have you seen Jacquelin?" asked Miss Thomasia, who had calmly ignored the preceding conversation.

"Yes, he's all right—he came back yesterday and has gone in with Steve Allen. They'll get along. He's just the sort of man Steve needed;

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he'll be his heavy artillery. He is looking into the matter of the bonds."

Miss Thomasia sighed.

"Two young gentlemen of the County who are great friends of ours, Miss Welch," explained the General.

Meanwhile, Major Welch and Mr. Still had reached the county seat. During their ride, Still had given Major Welch an account of affairs in the County, and of most of those with whom he would come in contact. Steve Allen he described as a terrible character. It had been a dreadful struggle that he himself and other Union men had had to wage, he said. Leech was the leading Northern man in the County, and was going to be Governor. But he was disposed to caution Major Welch somewhat against even him. Leech did not exactly understand things; he did not rely enough on his white friends. He would have turned out all the white officials and filled their places with negroes. But Still had insisted on keeping, at least, Mr. Dockett, the Clerk, in; because he had charge of all the records. But Mr. Dockett had not acted exactly right, he said, and he was afraid at the next election "they'd have to let him go." He had

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been "getting mighty unreasonable." Some people wanted his son, Wash, the Doctor, to run, but he "didn't know about it?" he said, with an interrogation in his voice.

Major Welch had supposed that the Doctor would find his profession more profitable, or at least that it would take up all his time if he proposed to follow it; but Still explained that there was not a great deal of practice, and that the clerk's place was a "paying office."

When they arrived at Leech's house Major Welch found it a big, modern affair with a mansard roof, set in the middle of a treeless lot. To Major Welch's surprise, Leech was not at home. Still appeared much disconcerted.

As they crossed the yard, the Major observed a sign over a door: "ALLEN AND GRAY. LAW OFFICE."

"If necessary we could secure their services," he said, indicating the sign.

Still drew up to his side, and lowered his voice, looking around: They were the lawyers he had told him of, he said. That was "that fellow Allen, the leader in all the trouble that went on."

"Who's Gray?" The Major was still scanning the sign.

Still gave a curious little laugh.

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“He’s the one as used to own my place—Mr. Gray’s son. He’s a bad one, too. He’s just come back and set up as a lawyer. Fact is, I believe he’s set up as one, more to devil me than anything else.”

Major Welch said, dryly, that he did not see why his setting up as a lawyer should bedevil him. Still hesitated.

“Well, if he thinks he could scare me—”

“I don’t see how he could scare you. I would not let him scare me,” said Major Welch, dryly.

“You don’t know ’em, Colonel,” said Still. “You don’t know what we Union men have had to go through. They won’t let us buy land, and they won’t let us sell it. They hate you because you come from the North, and they hate me because I don’t hate you. I tell you all the truth, Colonel, and you don’t believe it—but you don’t know what we go through down here. We’ve got to stand together. You’ll see.” The man’s voice was so earnest and his face so sincere that Major Welch could not help being impressed.

“Well, I’ll show him and every one else pretty quickly that that is not the way to come at me,” said Major Welch, gravely. “When I get ready

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to buy, I'll buy where I please, and irrespective of anyone else's views except the seller's." And he walked up to the door, without seeing the look on Still's face.

The only occupants of the clerk's office were two men; one was an old man, evidently the clerk, with a bushy beard and keen eyes gleaming through a pair of silver spectacles. The other was a young man and a very handsome one, with a broad brow, a strongly chiselled chin, and a very grave and somewhat melancholy face. He was seated in a chair directly facing the door, examining a bundle of old chancery papers which were spread out on his knee and on a chair beside him, and as the visitors entered the door he glanced up. Major Welch was struck by his fine eyes, and the changed look that suddenly came into them. Still gave his arm a convulsive clutch, and Major Welch knew by instinct that this was the man of whom Still had just spoken.

If Jacquelin Gray was really the sort of man Still had described him to be, and held the opinions Still had attributed to him, he played the hypocrite very well, for he not only bowed to Major Welch very civilly, if distantly, but to do so even rose from his seat at some little incon-

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venience to himself, as he had to gather up the papers spread on his knee. It is true that he took not the least notice of Still, who included him as well as the clerk in his greeting, the only evidence he gave of being aware of the presence of his former manager, being contained in a certain quiver of the nostrils, as Still passed him.

Major Welch was introduced by Still to the clerk, and stated his errand, wondering at the change in his companion's voice.

“He's afraid of that young man,” he thought to himself, and he stiffened a little as the idea occurred to him; and at the first opportunity he glanced again at Jacquelin, who was once more busy with his bundle of papers, in which he appeared completely absorbed. Still was following the clerk, who, with his spectacles on the tip of his long nose, was looking into the files of his deed-books; but Major Welch saw that Still was not attending to him; his eyes were turned and were fastened on the young lawyer, quite on the other side of the room. As the Major looked he was astonished to see Still start and put out his hand as though to support himself. Following Still's gaze he glanced across at Jacquelin. He had taken several long, narrow slips of paper out of the bundle, and was at the instant examin-

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ing them curiously, oblivious of everything else. Major Welch looked back at Still, and he was as white as a ghost. Before he could take it in, Still muttered something and turned to the door. As he walked out he tottered so that Major Welch, thinking he was ill, followed him.

Outside, the air revived Still somewhat, and a drink of whiskey which he got at the tavern bar, and told the bar-keeper to make "stiff," set him up a good deal. He had been feeling badly for some time, he said; thought he was a little bilious.

Just as they came out of the bar, they saw young Gray cross the court-green and go over to his office.

They returned to the clerk's office, and Major Welch was soon running through the deeds, while Still, after looking over his shoulder for a moment or two, took a seat near Mr. Dockett and began to talk to him. He appeared much interested in the old fellow, his family, and all that belonged to him, and Major Welch was a little amused at the old man's short replies.

His attention was attracted by Still's saying casually that he'd like to see the papers in that old suit of his against the Gray estate, if he could lay his hands on them, and the clerk's dry

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answer that he could lay his hands on any paper in the office, and that the papers in question were in the "ended-causes" case. "Mr. Jacquelin Gray was just looking over them as you came in," he said, as he rose to get them.

"Well, let him look," Still growled, with a sudden change of tone. "He can look all he wants, and he won't git around them bonds."

"Oh, no! I don't say as he will," the old officer answered.

"I'd like to take 'em home with me—" Still began; but the clerk cut him short.

"I can't let you do that. You'll have to look at 'em here in the office."

"Why, they're nothin' but—I want Colonel Welch here to look at 'em—they'll show him how the lands come to me—I'll bring 'em back——"

"I can't let you take 'em out of the office." His tone was as dry as ever.

"Well, I'd like to know why not? They don't concern nobody but me, and they're all ended."

"That's the very reason you can't take 'em out; they're part of the records of this office——"

"Well, I can take the bonds out, anyway," Still persisted; "they is mine, anyhow."

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“No, you can’t take them, either.”

Still did not often lose his temper, or show it, if he did; but this time he lost it.

“Well, I’ll show you if I can’t, before the year is out, Mr. Dockett. I’ll show you who I am!” He rose with much feeling.

“I know who you are.” The old fellow turned and shot a piercing glance at him over his spectacles, and Major Welch watched complacently to see how it would end.

“Well, if you don’t, I mean to make you know it. I’ll show you you don’t own this County. I’ll show you who is the bigger man, you or the people of this County. You think because you been left in this office that you own it; but I’ll——”

“No, I don’t,” the old man said, firmly; “I know you’ve got negroes enough to turn me out if you choose; but I want to tell you that until you do I’m in charge here, and I run the office according to what I think is my duty, and the only way to change it is to turn me out. Do you want to see the papers or not? You can look at ’em here just as everybody else does.”

“That’s right,” said Major Welch, meaning to explain that it was the law. Still took it in a different sense, however, and quieted down. He

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would look at them, he said, sulkily, and, taking the bundle, he picked out the same slips which young Gray had been examining.

“You’re so particular about your old papers,” he said, as he held up one of the slips, “I wonder you don’t keep ’em a little better. You got a whole lot o’ red ink smeared on this bond.”

“I didn’t get it on it.” The clerk got up and walked across the room to look at the paper indicated, adjusting his spectacles as he did so. One glance sufficed for him.

“That ain’t ink, and if ’tis, it didn’t get on it in this office. That stain was on that bond when Leech filed it. I remember it particularly.”

“I don’t know anything about that—I know it wa’n’t on it when I give it to him, and I don’t remember of ever having seen it before,” Still persisted.

“Well, I remember it well—I remember speaking of it to him, because we thought ’twas finger-marks, and he said ’twas on it when you gave it to him.”

“Well, I know ’twant,” Still repeated, hotly. “If ’twas on thar when he brought it here he got ’t on it himself, and I’ll take my oath to it. Well, that don’t make any difference in the bond,

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I s'pose? It's just as good with that on it as if 'twant?"

"Oh, yes; that's so," said Mr. Dockett. "If it's all right every other way, that won't hurt it."

Still looked at him sharply.

As they drove home, Still, after a long period of silence, suddenly asked Major Welch, within what time after a case was ended a man could bring a suit to upset it.

"Well, I don't know what the statutes of this State are, but he can generally bring it without limit, on the ground of fraud," said the Major, "unless he is estopped by laches."

"What's that?" asked Still, somewhat huskily, and the Major started to explain; but Still was taken with another of his ill turns.

That same afternoon, a little before Major Welch's return, Ruth was walking about the yard, looking, every now and then, across the hill, in the direction of Red Rock, from which her father should soon be coming, when, as she passed near a cherry-tree, she observed that some of the fruit was already ripe. One or two branches were not very high. She had been feeling a little lonely, and it occurred to her that it would be great fun to climb the tree. She had

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once been a good climber, and she remembered the scoldings she had received for it from her mother, who regarded it as “essentially frivolous,” and had once, as a punishment, set her to learn all the names of all the branches of a tree which hung on the nursery wall, and represented, allegorically, all the virtues and vices, together with a perfect network of subsidiary qualities. She could remember many of them now—“Faith, Hope, Temperance,” and so on.

“Dear mamma,” she thought, with a pang of homesickness, “I wish she were here now.” This reflection only made her more lonely, and to overcome the feeling she turned to the more material and attractive tree.

“I could climb that tree easily enough,” she said, “and there’s no one to know anything about it. Even mamma would not mind that much. Besides, I could see papa from a greater distance and I’ll get him some cherries for his tea.”

These last two considerations were sufficient to counterbalance the idea of maternal disapproval. So Ruth turned up the skirt of her dress, pinned it so that it would not be stained, and five minutes later was scrambling up the tree. Higher and higher she went up, feeling

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the old exhilaration of childhood as she climbed. What a fine view there was from her perch! the rolling hills, the green low-grounds, the winding river, the blue mountains behind and, away to the eastward, the level of the tide-water country almost as blue at the horizon as the mountains to the westward. How still it was too! Every sound was distinct: the lowing of a cow far away toward Red Rock, the notes of a thrush in a thicket, and the chirp of a sparrow in an old tree. Ruth wished she could have described it as she saw it, or, rather, as she felt it, for it was more feeling than seeing, she thought. But the best cherries were out toward the ends of the limbs, so she secured a safe position and set to work, gathering them. She was so engrossed in this occupation that she forgot everything else until she heard the trampling of a horse's feet somewhere. It was quite in a different direction from that in which she expected her father, but supposing that it was he, Ruth gave a little yodel, with which she often greeted him when at a distance, and climbed out on a limb that she might look down and see him. How astonished and amused he would be, she thought. Yes, there he was, coming around the slope just below her, but how was he going to get across

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the ditch? If only that bough were not in the way! Ah! now she had the bough and could pull it aside. Heavens! it was a stranger, and he was near enough for her to see that he was a young man. What should she do? Suppose he should have heard her! At the moment she looked he was putting his horse at the ditch—a splendid jump it was. She let the bough go and edged in toward the body of the tree, listening and half seeing the rider below through the leaves as he galloped up into the yard. Perhaps he had not seen her? She crouched down. It was a vain hope, for the next instant he turned his horse's head toward the tree and drew him in almost under her.

“I say—Is anyone at home?” he asked. The voice was a very deep and pleasant one. Although Ruth was sure he was speaking to her, she did not answer.

“I say, little girl, are Colonel Welch and his daughter at home?”

This time he looked up. So Ruth answered. No, they were not at home. Her voice sounded curiously quavering.

“Ah! I'm very sorry. When will they be at home? Can you tell me?”

“Ah! ur—not exactly,” quavered Ruth,

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crouching still closer to the tree-trunk and gathering in her skirts.

“You have some fine cherries up there!”

Oh, heavens! why didn't he go away!

To this she made no answer, hoping he would go. He caught hold of a bough, she thought, to pull some cherries; wrapped his reins around it, and the next moment stood up in his saddle, seized a limb above him and swung himself up. In her astonishment Ruth almost stopped breathing.

“I believe I'll try a few—for old times' sake,” he said to himself, or to her, she could not tell which, and swung himself higher. “I don't suppose Colonel Welch would object.”

The next swing brought him up to the limb immediately below Ruth, and he turned and looked up at her where she sat in the fork of the limb. Her face had been burning ever since she had been discovered, and was burning now; but she could not help being amused at the expression which came into the stranger's eyes as he looked at her. Astonishment, chagrin, and amusement were all stamped there, mingled together.

“What on earth!—I beg your pardon—” he began, his eyes wide open with surprise, gazing

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straight into hers. The next instant he burst out laughing, a peal so full of real mirth that Ruth joined in and laughed with all her might too.

“I’m Captain Allen, Steve Allen—and you are——?”

“Miss Welch—when I’m at home.”

He pulled himself up to the limb on which Ruth sat and coolly seated himself near her.

“I hope you will be at home—Miss Welch; for I am. I used to be very much at home in this tree in old times, which is my excuse for being here now, though I confess I never found quite such fruit on it as it seems to bear to-day.”

The twinkle in his gray eyes and a something in his lazy voice reminded Ruth of Reely Thurston. The last part of his speech to her sounded partly as if he meant it, but partly as if he were half poking fun at her and wished to see how she would take it. She tried to meet him on his own ground.

“If you had not made yourself somewhat at home you would not have found it now.” She was very demure.

Steve lifted his eyes to her quickly, and she was rather nettled to see that he looked much amused at her speech.

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“Exactly. You would not have had me act otherwise, I hope? We always wish our guests to make themselves at home. You Yankees don’t want to be behind us.”

She saw his eyes twinkle, and felt that he had said it to draw her fire, but she could not forbear firing back.

“No, but sometimes it does not seem necessary, as you *Rebels* appear inclined to make yourselves at home—sometimes even without an invitation.” Her chin went up a point.

Steve burst out laughing.

“A good square shot. I surrender, Miss Welch.”

“What! so easily? I thought you Rebels were better fighters? I have heard so.”

Steve only laughed.

“‘He that fights and runs away,’ you know. I can’t run, so I surrender. May I get you some cherries? The best are out on the end of the limbs, and I am afraid you might fall.” His voice had lost the tone of badinage and was full of deference and protection.

Ruth said she believed that she had all the cherries she wanted. She had, perhaps, a dozen—. She was wondering how she should get down, and was in a panic lest her father

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should appear and find her up in the tree with this strange young man.

In reply to her refusal, however, Steve looked at her quizzically.

“You want to get down.” This in assertion rather than in question.

“Yes.” Defiantly.

“And you can’t get down unless I let you?”

“N—n—” She caught herself quickly, “I thought you had surrendered?”

“Can’t a prisoner capture his captor?”

“Not if he has given his parole and is a gentleman.”

Steve whistled softly. His eyes never left her face.

“Will you invite me in?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Because——”

“I see.” Steve nodded.

“Because my father is not at home.”

“Oh! All the more reason for your having a protector.”

“No. And I will make no terms with a prisoner.”

With a laugh Steve let himself down to the

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limb below. Then he stopped and turning looked up at her.

“May I help you down?” The tone was almost humble.

“No, I thank you, I can get down.” Very firmly.

“I must order your father to remain at home,” he smiled.

“My father is not one to take orders; he gives them,” she said, proudly.

Captain Allen looked up at her, the expression of admiration in his eyes deepened. “I think it likely,” he said with a nod. “Well, I don’t always take them so meekly myself. Good-by. Do you require your prisoner to report at all?” He held out his hand.

“Good-by—I—don’t know: No.”

He smiled up at her. “You don’t know all your privileges. Good-by. I always heard you Yankees were cruel to prisoners.”

It was said in such a way that Ruth did not mind it, and did not even wish to fire back. The next minute Steve was on his horse, cantering away without looking back, and curiously, Ruth, still seated on her leafy perch, was conscious of a feeling of blankness.

“I hate that man,” she said to herself, “he

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has been doing nothing but make fun of me. But he is amusing—and awfully handsome. And what a splendid rider! I wonder if he will have the audacity to come back?"

As she reached the ground she saw her father far across the field, coming up the same road along which her visitor was going away. When the two men met they stopped and had a little talk, during which Ruth watched with curiosity to see if Captain Allen would return. He did not, however. It was only a moment and then he cantered on, leaving Ruth with a half disappointed feeling, and wondering if he had told her father of their meeting.

When Major Welch arrived, Ruth waited with some impatience to discover if he had been told. He mentioned that he had met Mr. Allen and thought him a striking-looking and rather nice fellow; had invited him to return, but he said he could not, that he had seen her, and would call again.

"He is a gentlemanly fellow, but is said to be one of the most uncontrolled men about here, the leader in all the lawlessness that goes on."

Ruth thought of what the old mammy at Dr. Cary's had told her. She wished to change the subject.

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“Did he say where we met?” she asked, laughing and blushing.

“No, only said he had met you.”

“He caught me up in a cherry-tree.”

“What! Well, he’s a nice fellow,” said her father, and Ruth had begun to think so too.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MRS. WELCH ARRIVES AND GIVES HER FIRST LESSON IN ENTERPRISE

THE next day, Still called to see Major Welch and made him a proposition to sell him a part of the Red Rock place. On thinking it over, he said, he believed he'd rather have the Major as a near neighbor than to have him farther off, and he also believed that the Major would find it safer to buy from him a place he had got under decree of court, and had already held quietly for some time, than to buy a place about which there might be a question and where he'd be sure to incur the enmity of the old owners.

This reason, to judge from Major Welch's expression, did not make much impression on him. He did not wish to incur anyone's enmity, he said. But if he bought honestly and became the lawful owner of a place, he should not mind what others thought.

Still shook his head. Major Welch did not

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know these people, he said. "And to be honest with you, Major, I feel as if having you right here by me was a sort of protection. They daresn't touch a gentleman who's been in the Union army, and who's got big friends. And that's one reason I'd like to have you right close to me."

His manner had something so sincere in it that it was almost pathetic. So, as he made Major Welch what appeared to be really a very reasonable proposal, not only as to the Stamper place, but also as to several hundred acres of the Red Rock land adjoining, the Major agreed to take it under advisement, and intimated that if the title should prove all right, and Mrs. Welch should like the idea when she arrived, he would probably purchase.

Within a week or two following Major Welch's trip to the county seat, and Still's offer to sell him the Stamper place and a part of Red Rock, Mrs. Welch arrived. Mrs. Welch, in her impatience, could not wait for the day she had set and arrived before she was expected. The telegram she had sent had miscarried, and when she reached the station there was no one present to meet her.

A country station is a sad place at best to one

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who has just left the bustle and life of a city; but to be deposited, bag and baggage, in a strange land and left alone without anyone to meet you, and without knowing a soul, is forlorn to the last degree.

Strong as she was, Mrs. Welch, when the train whirled away, and no one came to her, felt a sense of her isolation strike her to the heart. A two-horse carriage, the only one in sight, stood near a fence at some little distance, and for a short while she thought it might have come for her, and she waited for some moments; but presently a tall colored man and a colored woman got into it. The man was glittering with a shining silk hat and a long broadcloth coat; and the woman was in a brand-new silk, and wore a vivid bonnet. Even then, it occurred to Mrs. Welch that, perhaps, the man was the coachman, and, for a moment, she was buoyed by hope, but she was doomed to disappointment. The man was talking loudly, and apparently talked to be heard by all around him. Mrs. Welch could hear something of what he said.

“We’re all right. We’ve got ’em down, and we mean to keep ’em down, too, by ——!” A shout followed this. “Yes, the bottom rail is

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on top, and we mean to keep it so till the fence rots down, by ——!” Another burst of laughter. “You jest stick to me and Leech, and we’ll bring you to the promised land. Yas, we’re in the saddle, and we mean to stay there. We’ve got the Gov’ment behind us, and we’ll put a gun in every colored man’s hand and give him, not a mule, but a horse to ride, and we’ll dress his wife in silk and give her a carriage to ride in, same’s my wife’s got.”

“Ummh! heah dat! Yes, Lord! Dat’s what I want,” cried an old woman, jumping up and down in her ecstasy, to the amusement of the others.

“A *mule’s* good ’nough for me—I b’lieve I ruther have mule ’n hoss, I’s e fotchted up wid mules,” called out someone, which raised a great laugh, and some discussion.

“Well, all right; you shall have your ruther. Everyone shall take his pick. We’ll do the ridin’ now.”

Mrs. Welch was listening with keen interest. The speaker, who was Nicholas Ash, the member from Red Rock, gathered up the reins. As he did so, someone called:

“You better watch out for de K. K.’s,” at which there was a roar of laughter.

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“They’s the ones I’m lookin’ for. I’m just fixed for ’em, by ——!” shouted the statesman.

“Dee ain’ gwine meddle wid him,” said someone in the crowd, admiringly.

“Don’ know. I wouldn’ drive roun’ heah and talk ’bout ’um like he does, not for dat mule he gwine gi’ me.” The laughter that greeted this showed that others besides the speaker held the same views.

As the carriage drove off, Mrs. Welch’s heart sank. Her last hope was gone. She was relieved somewhat by the approach of the station-agent, who up to that time had been engaged about his duties, and who now, seeing a lady standing outside, came up to her. Mrs. Welch told who she was. He had heard that Mrs. Welch was expected, but did not know the day. No telegrams, such as she spoke of, had passed through his office, and it was an all-day’s ride up to Red Rock when the roads were bad. He invited her to remain as his guest. “People right often did so when they came, unexpected-like.”

Mrs. Welch thanked him, but thought she would prefer to go on, if she could get a conveyance, even if she could go that night only as far as Brutusville.

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“Can’t I get some sort of wagon?” she inquired.

The agent gazed at her with a serenity that was in strong contrast with her growing decisiveness. He did not know as she could, the mail-wagon went over in the morning after the early train; people generally went by that. Dill Herrick had a sort of a wagon, and folks sometimes took it if they got there too late for the mail-wagon and were in too big a hurry to wait till next day. But Dill was away that day. The wagon was there, but Dill had gone away on his horse and would not be back till next day.

And all this was told in the most matter-of-fact way, as if it was quite as much a thing of course as any other order of nature. Mrs. Welch was on her metal. She would for once give this sleepy rustic an illustration of energy; she would open his eyes.

“Well, is that the *only* horse anywhere about here?” Her tone was energetic, perhaps even exasperated. The agent was unmoved.

“No’m; Al Turley’s got a *sort* of a horse, but he don’t work very well. And Al ain’t got any wagon.”

This was too much for Mrs. Welch.

“Don’t you think we might get a horse of one

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man and the wagon and harness of the other, and put them together?" she laughed.

The agent was not so sure. Al might be going to use his horse, and he "didn't work so well, anyhow."

"But he does work?" Mrs. Welch persisted.

"Oh, yes'm—*some*. Al ploughs with him."

"Well, now, let's see what a little enterprise will do. I'll pay well for both horse and wagon."

The agent went off, and after a time came back. Al would see what he could do. But again he renewed his invitation to her to wait until to-morrow. He was almost urgent; he painted the difficulties of the journey in the gloomiest colors. Mrs. Welch now, however, had set her mind on carrying out her plans. It had become a matter of principle with her. She had come down here to show what energy would accomplish, and she might as well begin now.

While she waited, she passed her time watching the negroes who were congregated about a small building which seemed to be part store, part bar-room, though from her observation the latter was its principle office.

They were a loud and slovenly set, but appeared to be good-humored, and rather like

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children engaged in rough horse-play; and when their voices sounded most like quarrelling they would suddenly break out in loud guffaws of laughter.

They were so boisterous at times that Mrs. Welch was glad when the station-agent returned and asked if she wouldn't go over and sit in his house till Al came. She would have done so, but, as he evidently intended to remain in the office, she thought it would be a good opportunity to learn something about the negroes, and perhaps also to teach him a little on her part.

Were the negroes not improving? she asked. Her companion's whole manner changed. She was surprised to see what a keen glance was suddenly shot at her from under his light brows.

"Not as I can see—You can see 'em yonder for yourself."

"Do they ever give you trouble?"

"Me?—No'm; don't never give *me* trouble," he answered, negligently. "Don' give nobody as much trouble as they did."

Mrs. Welch was just thinking this corroborative of her own views when he, with his back to her, stooped for something, and the butt of a pistol gleamed in his trousers pocket. Mrs. Welch froze up. She could hardly refrain from

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speaking of it. She understood now the significance of his speech. Just then there was quite a roar outside, followed by the rattle of wheels, and the next instant Mrs. Welch's vehicle drew up to the door. For a moment Mrs. Welch's heart failed her, and she regretted the enterprise which had committed her to such a combination. In the shafts of a rickety little wagon—the wheels of which wobbled in every direction and made four distinct tracks—was a rickety little yellow horse which at that moment, to the great diversion of the crowd of negroes outside, was apparently attempting to back the wagon through a fence. One instant he sat down in the shafts, and the next reared and plunged and tried to go any way but the right way. Two negroes were holding on to him while the others were shouting with laughter and delight. The driver was a spare, dingy-looking countryman past middle age, and was sitting in the wagon, the only creature in sight that appeared to be unmoved by the excitement. Mrs. Welch's heart sank, and even after the plunging little animal was quieted she would have declined to go; but it was too late now. She had never put her hand to the plough and turned back.

“I can manage him,” said the driver serenely,

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seeing her hesitation. And as there were many assurances that he was "all right now," and everyone was expecting her to get in, she summoned the courage and climbed in.

It was a wearying drive. The roads were the worst Mrs. Welch had ever seen, but, in one way, there was excitement enough. The tedium was relieved by the occasional breaking of the harness and the frequent necessity of dismounting to walk up the hill when the horse balked.

The day before had been very warm, and Mrs. Welch's journey had not been a comfortable one, and this last catastrophe capped the climax. But she did not complain—she considered querulousness a sin—it was a sign of weakness. Perhaps, she even found a certain satisfaction in her discomfort. She had not come for comfort. But when the harness broke for the half-dozen time, she asked:

"Why don't you keep your harness in good order?"

The somewhat apathetic look in the driver's face changed.

"'Tain't my harness."

"Well, whosever it is, why don't he keep it in order?"

"You'll have to ask Dill that," he said, dryly.

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When, a few minutes later, they came to their next stand she began again:

“Why don’t you keep your roads repaired and rebuild your fences?”

“I don’t live about here.” This time the tone was a little shorter.

“Well, it’s the same all the way. It’s been just as bad from the start. What is the reason?” she persisted.

“Indeed, ma’am, I don’t know,” he drawled, “some says it’s the Yankee carpet-baggers steals all the money—”

“Well, I don’t believe it—I believe it’s that the people are just shiftless,” Mrs. Welch fired back.

The man, for answer, only jerked his horse: “Git up!”

“A dull fellow,” thought Mrs. Welch, and presently she essayed again:

“The Yankees are thrifty enough. In all the North there is not such a road as this. I wish you could see their villages, how snug and trig and shipshape they are: houses painted, fences kept up, everything nice and neat.”

“Maybe, that’s where they puts the money they steals down here,” said the driver, more dryly than before.

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Mrs. Welch grew hot, but she could not help being amused too.

“It must be an accident, but I’ll write that home,” thought she. She, however, had not much time to think. For just then they were descending a steep hill and the breeching gave way, the wagon ran down on the horse, and, without a second’s warning, the little steed, like the Gadarine swine, ran violently down the steep hill, and on up the road. The driver, who was swinging to him for life, was in the act of assuring Mrs. Welch that she need not be scared, as he could hold him, when the rein broke and he went out suddenly backward over the wheel, and Mrs. Welch herself must soon have followed him, had not a horseman unexpectedly dashed up from behind and, spurring his fleet horse beside the tearing little beast in the wagon, seized the runaway by the bridle and brought it to a stand-still.

The transition from the expectation of immediate injury, if not death, to absolute security is itself a shock, and even after the vehicle was quite still, Mrs. Welch, who had been holding on to its sides with all her might, could hardly realize her escape. Her first thought was for the driver.

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“Oh! I’m afraid that poor man is killed!” she exclaimed.

“Oh! he’s all right. I hope you are not hurt, madam?” said her rescuer, solicitously. “I think I’d better hold the horse, or I would come and take you out.”

Mrs. Welch assured him that she was not at all hurt, and she sprang out and declared that she would go back at once and look after the driver. Just then, however, the driver appeared, covered with dust, but not otherwise injured.

“Well, I was just sayin’ I’d saved Al, anyhow,” he said as he came up. “And I’m glad to find, Cap’n, you saved the others.”

“What are you going to do now?” Mrs. Welch asked when the driver had finished talking to the gentleman, and begun to work at the harness.

“I’m going to take you to the Cote-house. I told you I’d do it.”

“Behind that horse!”

“Ain’t nothin’ the matter with the hoss—it’s the gear.”

“I think I’d better take her,” the young man who had rescued her said, though with a little hesitation. “I can take her behind me, and get her there by the through way.”

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“What! On that horse? I can’t ride that creature,” declared Mrs. Welch with wide-open eyes, looking at his handsome horse which was still prancing from excitement.

“Why, he’s as quiet as a lamb—he’s carried double many a time, and several ladies have ridden him. I could get you there much quicker than you can drive. All you have to do is to hold on to me. Whoa, boy!”

“I know that sort of lamb,” declared Mrs. Welch. “What shall I do with my trunk?”

The young man’s confidence was telling on her and she was beginning to yield. The choice was between the two horses and she had had experience with one.

“Oh! your trunk’s all right. I’ll carry your trunk on,” agreed the driver. He had finished his mending and was gathering up his reins.

“Do you mean that you are going to get in there and try to drive that horse again?”

“That’s what I’m agoin’ to do, ’m.”

“Then I’ll get in, too,” declared Mrs. Welch, firmly. Her face was pale, but there was a light in her eyes that made her suddenly handsome. The two men looked at her and both began to expostulate.

“I made him come, and I don’t mean that he

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shall risk his neck for me alone," she declared, firmly, gathering up her skirts. But the horse-man suddenly interfered.

"I couldn't let you be run away with again under my very eyes," he said, smiling, "I might be held accountable by your dau—— by your fam—— your Government."

Mrs. Welch was not accustomed to being talked to in this way; but she liked him none the less for it. However, she would not yield.

It was finally agreed that a trial should be made first without her, and then, if the horse went all right, she could get in. Both men insisted on this, and as they explained that the driver could manage the horse better without her, she temporized. Indeed she was obliged to do so, for the young man who had rescued her told her plainly, though politely, that he would not allow her to get in the wagon again until the experiment had been made.

After a little time, as the horse appeared to have been sobered by his unwonted exertion, she was allowed to mount once more, and so proceeded, the young gentleman riding close beside the horse, to prevent any further trouble.

Mrs. Welch at last had time to look at her deliverer. He was a tall, fine-looking young

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fellow, with the face and address of a gentleman. A slouch hat, much weather-stained, and a suit of clothes by no means new, at first sight made his dress appear negligent, but his voice was as refined as any Mrs. Welch had ever heard; his manner was a mixture of deference and protection, and his face, with clear, gray eyes, firm mouth, and pleasant smile, gave him an air of distinction and was one of the most attractive she had ever seen.

He had introduced himself to her when he first spoke; Captain Somebody, he said, but as she had been rather agitated at that moment she had not caught the name, and she waited until he should mention it again or she should get a chance to ask the driver. When she did ask him, she understood him to say Captain Naline.

After a time, as the horse was now quiet and there were no more bad hills, the gentleman said he had an engagement, and would have to ride on. So, as Mrs. Welch declared herself now entirely easy in her mind, he bade her good-evening and galloped on, and soon afterward Mrs. Welch was met by her husband on his way over to the station with a carriage.

CHAPTER XXIX

MRS. WELCH ENTERS THE HARVEST

MRS. WELCH had not been in the County forty-eight hours before she was quite satisfied that this was the field for her work, and that she was the very laborer for this field.

In three days the signs of her occupation and energy were unmistakable. Every room in the little cottage was scoured afresh, and things were changed within the old house, and were undergoing a change without, which would have astonished the departed Stampers.

A gang of darkies, of all ages and sizes, was engaged by her or collected somehow (perhaps, no one knew just how, unless Hiram, who distributed the contents of the boxes, knew), who, Andy Stamper said, looked like harvesters and got harvest-wages. The rooms were turned inside out, the yard was cleared up, the fences repaired and whitewashed, and the chambers were papered or painted of a dark maroon or other

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rich color, then the fashion, by Doan, whom Hiram Still sent over for the purpose—Mrs. Welch not only superintending actively, but showing, with real skill, how it ought to be done; for one of the lady's maxims was, "What your hands find to do, do with all your might." Ruth, during the repairs, took occasion to pull out carefully the nail on which Andy had told her his father used to hang his watch, and sent it wrapt in a neat little parcel to Andy, with a note saying how much pleasure she had in sending it. She did not dream that by this little act she was making one of the best friends of her life. Sergeant Stamper drove the nail in a strip beside his own bed. And as he struck the last blow he turned to his wife, who with sympathetic eyes was standing by, and said:

"Delia, if I ever fail to do what that young lady asks me, I hope God will drive the nails in my coffin next day."

On the arrival of Mrs. Welch there was a repetition of those visits of mingled friendliness and curiosity which had been paid Major Welch and Miss Ruth. And as Major Welch and Ruth formed their opinions, so now, Mrs. Welch formed hers. She prided herself on her reasoning faculty. She repudiated the idea that wo-

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man's intuition was a substitute for man's reason. She was not going to hang on any such wretched makeshift. She judged men and things precisely as men did, she said, and the only difference was that she was quicker than most men.

Dr. Cary and Mrs. Cary called with Miss Thomasia and Blair; and General Legaie and Jacquelin Gray and Steve Allen rode up together one afternoon. The two former paid only a short visit, but Captain Allen stayed to tea. Steve treated her with that mingled deference and freedom which, in just the right proportion, make—at least, in a young and handsome man—the most charming manners. He even dared to tease Mrs. Welch on the serious sentiments she expressed, and on her appearance that day in the wagon, a liberty that neither Ruth nor Major Welch ever ventured to take; and to Ruth's exceeding surprise, her mother, so far from resenting it, actually appeared to like it. As for Ruth, her mother surprised a look of real delight in her eyes.

It gave her food for thought. "That young man talked to me; but he looked at Ruth. What does it mean? It might mean one thing—yes, it might mean that? But it is impossible!" She

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put the idea aside as too absurd to consider. However, she determined to be on her guard.

Mrs. Welch had no time to spend in the sort of hospitality practised by her neighbors. The idea of going over to a neighbor's to "spend the day," as most of the invitations she received ran, or of having them come and "spend the day" with her as they did with others, was intolerable. It might have done, she held, for an archaic state of society, but it was just this terrible waste of time that made the people about her what she saw them: indolent, and shiftless, and poor. She had "work to do," and she "meant to do it." So, having called formally at Dr. Cary's, Miss Gray's, and the other places, the ladies from which had called on her, she declined further invitations and began her "work." She wrote to her Society back at home, that as she looked around her spirit groaned within her. The harvest was ripe—already too ripe, and the over-ripened wheat was falling, day by day, to the earth and being trampled in the ground. She wrote also her impressions of her new neighbors. She was charmed with Miss Thomasia and the General. The former reminded her of her grandmother, whom she remembered as a white-haired old lady knit-

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ting in her armchair, and the General was an old French field-marshal, of the time of Bayard or Sidney, who had strayed into this century, and who would not surprise her by appearing in armor with a sleeve around his helmet, "funny, dear, old fossil that he is." She was pleased with Miss Cary and the Doctor, though the former appeared to have rather too antiquated views of life, and the Doctor was unpractical to the last degree. They were all densely prejudiced; but that she did not in the least mind; they were also universally shiftless, but she had hope. They must be enlightened and aided (Mrs. Welch was conscious of a feeling of virtuous charitableness when she penned this. It was going farther than she ever deemed it possible she could go). When it came to the question of the poor blacks, the whites were all alike. They had not the least idea of their duty to them: even those she had mentioned as the most enlightened, regarded them yet as only so many chattels, as still slaves. Finally, she wrote, she could not but admit that nothing but kindness had been shown to themselves since their arrival. One could not but appreciate such cordiality, even if it were the result of mere impulse rather than of steady principle. But Mr. Still, the

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Union man of whom the Society knew, had intimated that it was only a concerted effort to blind them to the true state of affairs, and that if they exhibited any independence it would soon change. As to this she should be watchful. And she appealed for help.

Such was the substance of the first letter that Mrs. Welch wrote back to her old Reform and Help Society at home, which was regarded by some of her friends as a roseate-colored statement of the case. It was even intimated that it contained evidence that Mrs. Welch was already succumbing to the very influence she repudiated.

“But they all do it. I never knew anyone go down there who did not at once abandon all principles and fall a victim to the influences of those people,” declared Mrs. Bolter, who, now that Mrs. Welch had left, represented the earnest and most active wing of the society.

“May not that prove that perhaps there is something on their side that we do not understand?” hazarded one of the young ladies of the society, Mrs. Clough, who, as a daughter of Senator Rockfield, was privileged to express views.

“Not at all,” declared Mrs. Bolter. “I knew that Major Welch and Ruth were both hope-

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lessly weak; but I confess I did think better things of Mrs. Welch.”

“Do you know, now that she has gone, I confess that I always did think Ruth Welch had more sense—more practical sense, I mean, than her mother,” said Mrs. Clough.

“Of course, you do,” replied the older lady. Mrs. Clough colored.

“And my husband thinks so, too.”

“Oh! if your husband thinks so—of course!” Mrs. Bolter looked sympathetic and superior. “I supposed *he* thought so.” The younger lady colored deeply.

“And my sister thinks so,” she added, with dignity.

“Oh! indeed! I knew she thought some of the younger members of the connection very attractive,” said Mrs. Bolter.

Mrs. Clough rose, and, with a bow, left the assembly.

She was comforted that evening by hearing her husband not only commend her views warmly, but abuse Mrs. Bolter as a “stuck-up and ill-bred woman, as vain and vulgar as Bolter himself,” whom he would not trust around the corner.

“If she is that now, what will she be after she

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marries her daughter to Captain Middleton?"
Mrs. Clough said. "She's had him in tow ever
since he came home a week ago. I do think it is
vulgar, the way some women run after men for
their daughters nowadays. She has not given
that poor man an hour's rest since he landed."

"I don't believe there's anything in that.
Larry would not marry one of that family. He
knows Bolter too well. I always thought he
would end by marrying Ruth Welch, and he told
me to-day at the club he was going South."

"Oh! all you men always were silly about
Ruth Welch. You all thought she was the most
beautiful creature in the world," said little Mrs.
Clough, with an air not wholly reconcilable with
her attitude at the Aid Society meeting just
recorded.

"No, I know one man who made one excep-
tion," said her husband, leaning over and kiss-
ing her, and thereupon, as is the way with lov-
ers, began "new matter."

"Captain Middleton is not going South," said
Mrs. Clough, suddenly. "That is, he's going
south; but not to the South."

"He is not! Why, he told me he was."

"Well, he's not. He's going to Washington."
She spoke oracularly.

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“What’s he going there about? About that old affair? You seem to know his plans better than he does. I see by the papers it’s up again. Or about that railroad scheme Bolter’s working at? He’s down there now. Larry said he had to see the Senator.”

“No, about a new affair—Larry Middleton is in love with Alice,” said Mrs. Clough, with entire unconsciousness of the singularity of her sudden and unexpected bouleversement. Her husband turned round on her in blank amazement.

“Wha-at!” He strung the word out in his surprise.

“Yes—you men are so blind. He’s in love with Alice; was with her abroad and came home to see her.” She was suddenly interested in a very small baby-garment she was sewing on.

“Why, you just said he was in love with Ruth Welch!”

“Did I?” she asked, quietly, as calm as a May morning, and apparently with perfect indifference.

“—And you said Mrs. Bolter would catch him for her loud, sporty daughter!”

“Oh! I believe I did.” She was turning a hem. “One, two, three,” she counted. “Well,

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she won't get him." She was interested only in
the baby-garment.

"Are they engaged?"

"Not yet—quite—but almost— Will be in a
week. Isn't that a darling?" She held up the
garment, and spanned it with her pink fingers.

"Well, you women are curious," said her
husband, almost with a gasp. "Here you have
been abusing Ruth Welch and Mrs. Bolter and
every woman Larry Middleton knew in the
world, and all the time he was dead in love with
your own sister!"

"Umhm!" She looked up and nodded
brightly, then broke into a laugh. "And you
think that's curious?"

"Well, I'm glad of it. Larry's a good fellow.
Now I see it all. I thought he was uncommonly
glad to see me to-day, and when I undertook to
chaff him a little about Ruth Welch, looked
rather red and silly."

"You didn't!" said his wife, aghast. "What
in the world——!"

"Oh! I'll make it all right the next time I see
him. How was I to know? I'll write to Alice
and congratulate her."

"Indeed, you'll not. Not a word. You'll ruin
everything!"

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“Why?”

“Why, he hasn’t spoken yet——!”

“Why, you just said—” He lapsed into reflection.

“Oh! You men are so stupid!” sighed Mrs. Cloud. “But come, promise me.”

And he promised—as we all do—always.

Having despatched her appeal, Mrs. Welch did not waste time waiting for a response, but was as good as her word and, like an energetic soul, without waiting a day, sickle in hand, entered the field alone. Her first step was what she termed “informing herself.” She always “informed herself” about things; it was one of the secrets of her success, she said.

Her first visit on this tour of inspection was to the Bend. She selected this as the primary object of her visitation, because she understood it was the worst place in the community, and she proposed to go at once to the very bottom. Dr. Cary had spoken of it as “a festering spot”; General Legaie had referred to it as “a den of iniquity.” Well, if it were a festering sore it ought to be treated; if it were a den it ought to be opened to the light, she declared. She found it worse than she had expected; but this did not

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deter her. She forthwith set to work to build a school-house near the Bend, and sent for a woman to come down and take charge of it.

She was no little surprised one day, when she called at a cabin where she had been told a woman was ill, to have the door opened by Mrs. Cary. Mrs. Cary invited her in and thanked her for calling, quite as if she owned the house. Mrs. Welch had her first gleam of doubt as to whether she had stated the case to her Society with entire correctness. She observed that the woman's sheets were old and patched, and she said she would have her Society make new ones. How could she know that Maria's old mistress had just brought her these and that she and Blair had mended them with their own hands?

It does not require an earthquake to start talk in a rural community—and Mrs. Welch had not been in her new home a month, or, for that matter, a week, before she was the most talked-of woman in the County.

Notwithstanding Hiram Still's desire to keep secret the fact that he was trying to sell a part of Red Rock to Major Welch, it was soon rumored around that Major Welch was to buy the Stamper place and a considerable part of the old Gray estate. Leech, it was reported, had

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come up from town, given a clean title and prepared a deed which was to be delivered on a certain day. Allowing for exaggerations, it is astonishing how accurate the bureau of advanced rumor often is.

Steve Allen and Jacquelin Gray held sundry conferences in the clerk's office, with the papers in Still's old suit before them, and it got abroad that they were not going to permit the sale.

The day before that set by this exact agency for the final consummation of the purchase, a letter was brought for Major Welch. The messenger who brought it was a handsome, spirited-looking boy of seventeen or eighteen, evidently a gentleman's son. Major Welch was away from home; but Ruth happened to be in the yard when the boy rode up. He was mounted on a handsome bay with white feet, which Ruth recognized as that which Captain Allen rode. Ruth loved a fine horse, and she went up to him. As she approached, the boy sprang to the ground and took off his hat with a manner so like Captain Allen's that Ruth smiled to herself.

"Is—is Major Welch at home?" he asked. He had pulled a paper from his pocket and was blushing with a boy's embarrassment.

Ruth said her father was not at home, but ex-

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plained that she would take any letter for him —or—would not he tie his horse and come in and wait for her father?

This invitation quite overthrew the little structure of assurance the boy had built up, and he was thrown into such a state of confusion that Ruth's heart went out to him.

He thanked her; but he was afraid his horse would not stand tied. He was stuffing the paper back in his pocket, hardly aware of what he was doing.

Ruth was sure the horse would stand; she had seen him tied; but she respected the boy's confusion, and offered again to take the letter for her father. He gave it to her apparently with reluctance. His cousin, Steve Allen, had told him to give it to Major Welch himself, he half stammered.

"Well, I am his daughter, Miss Welch," Ruth said, "and you can tell Captain Allen that I said I would certainly deliver it to my father. Won't you tell me who you are?" she asked, smiling.

"I'm Rupert Gray, Jacquelin Gray's brother."

"Oh! You have been off at school?"

"Yes'm. Jacquelin would make me go, but I've come back for good, now. He says I

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needn't go any more. He hasn't got anything to send me any more, anyhow." This in a very cheery tone. He was partly recovering from his embarrassment. "Steve wanted to send me to college, but I won't go."

"You won't? Why not?"

"Steve hasn't got any money to send me to college. Besides, they just want to get me away from here—I know 'em—and I won't go." (With a boy's confidingness.) "They're afraid I'll get—" He stopped short.—"But I'm not afraid. Just let 'em try." He paused, his face flushed with excitement, and looked straight at her. He evidently wanted to say something else to her, and she smiled encouragingly.

"You tell your father not to have anything to do with that Still and that man Leech." His tone was a mixture of sincerity and persuasiveness.

"Why?" Ruth smiled.

"Because—one's a carpet-bagger and t'other a scalawag."

"Why, we are carpet-baggers, too."

"Well—yes—but—. Steve he says so, too. And he don't want you to get mixed up with 'em. That's the reason." His embarrassment returned for a moment.

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“Oh! Captain Allen says so? I’m very much obliged to him, I’m sure.” Ruth laughed, but her form straightened and her color deepened.

“No, no, not that way. Steve is a dandy. And so is Jacquelin. He’s just as good as Steve. Never was anybody like Jacquelin. You ought to know him. That fellow Leech imprisoned him. But I knocked him down—I could die for Jacquelin—at least, I think I could. That’s the reason I hate ’em so!” he broke out, vehemently. “And I don’t want you to get mixed up with ’em. You aren’t like them. You are more like us.”

Ruth smiled at the ingenuousness of this compliment.

“And you tell your father, won’t you?” he repeated. “Good-evening.” He held out his hand, shook hers, sprang on his horse, and, making her a flourishing bow, galloped away, evidently very proud of his horsemanship.

He left Ruth with a pleasant feeling round her heart, which she could scarcely have accounted for. She wondered what it was that his brother and Captain Allen were afraid the boy would do.

As for Rupert, when he returned to Captain Allen he was so full of Miss Welch that Steve declared he was in love with her, and guilefully

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drew him on to talk of her and tell, over and over, every detail of his interview. The charge of being in love the boy denied, of course, but from that time Ruth, without knowing it, had the truest blessing a girl can have—the ingenuous devotion of a young boy's heart.

When her father came home the current of Ruth's thoughts was changed.

The letter Rupert had brought contained a paper, or rather two papers, addressed to Major Welch. One was a formal notice to him that the title by which Still held Red Rock was fraudulent and invalid, and that he would buy at his peril, as a suit would be brought to rip up the whole matter and set aside the deed under which Still held. The paper was signed by Jacquelin Gray and witnessed by Stevenson Allen as counsel, in whose handwriting it was. In addition to the formal notice, there was a note to Major Welch from Captain Allen, in which he stated that having heard the rumor that Major Welch was contemplating buying the place in question, he felt it his duty to let him know at once that such a step would involve him in a lawsuit, and that possibly it might be very unpleasant for him.

This letter was a bombshell.

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Mrs. Welch took it not as a legal notice, but as a declaration of war, and when that gage was flung down she was ready to accept it. She came of a stock equally prompt to be martyrs or fighters. She urged Major Welch to reply plainly at once. It was just a part of the persecution all loyal people had to go through. Let them see that they were not afraid. Major Welch was for moving a little deliberately. He should certainly not be bullied into receding from his purchase by anything of this kind, but he would act prudently. He would look again into the matter and see if there was any foundation for the charge.

Ruth rallied to the side of her mother and father, and felt as angry with Mr. Allen and everyone else concerned in the matter as it was in the nature of her kind heart to be.

Major Welch's investigation did not proceed exactly on the lines on which he would have acted at home. He had to rely on the men he employed. Both Still and Leech insisted that the notice given was merely an attempt to bully him. They further furnished him an abstract of the title, which showed it to be perfectly clear and regular, and when Major Welch applied in person to the old clerk, he corroborated this and

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certified that at that time no cloud was on the title.

He was, however, by no means as gracious toward Major Welch as he had been the first time he saw him—was, on the contrary, rather short in his manner, and, that gentleman thought, almost regretted to have to give the certificate.

“Yes, it’s all clear to date as far as the records show,” he said, with careful limitation, in reply to a request from Major Welch for a certificate, “but if you’ll take my advice——”

Still, who was sitting near, wriggled slightly in his chair.

Major Welch had been a little exasperated. “My dear sir, I should be very glad to take your advice generally, but this is a matter of private business between this gentle——between Mr. Still and myself, and I must be allowed to act on my own judgment. What I want is not advice, but a certificate of the state of those titles.”

A change came over the old clerk’s countenance. He bowed stiffly. “All right, sir; I reckon you know your own business,” he said, dryly, and he made out the certificate and handed it to Major Welch almost grimly.

Major Welch glanced at it and turned to Still.

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“You can have your deeds prepared, Mr. Still. I am going to town to-morrow and shall be ready to pay over the money on my return.” He spoke in a tone for the clerk to hear and intended to show his resolution.

Still followed him out and suggested that he'd as lieve give him the deeds to put to record then, and he could pay him when he came back. He was always willing to take a gentleman's word. This, however, Major Welch would not consent to.

Still stayed with Major Welch all the rest of the day and returned home with him: a fellowship which, though somewhat irksome to the Major, he tolerated, because Still, half-jestingly, half-seriously, explained that somehow he “felt sort of safer” when he was with the Major.

Two or three days afterward Major Welch, having returned from the capital, paid Still the money and took his deed; and it was duly recorded.

The interview in the clerk's office, in which Major Welch had declined to hear the old clerk's advice, was reported by Mr. Dockett to Steve Allen and Jacquelin Gray that same evening. The only way to save the place, they agreed, was to institute their proceedings and file a notice

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of a pending suit, or, as the lawyers call it, a *lis pendens*.

“He’ll hardly be big enough fool to fly in the face of that,” said Mr. Dockett.

So the very next day a suit was docketed and a *lis pendens* filed, giving notice that the title to the lands was in question.

The summonses were delivered to the sheriff, Mr. James Sherwood; but this was the day Major Welch spent in the city, and when the sheriff handed the summons to Still and showed the one he had for Major Welch, Still took it from him, saying he would serve it for him.

Thus it happened that when Major Welch paid down the money he was in ignorance that two suits had already been instituted to declare the title in Still fraudulent.

Meantime, copies of Mrs. Welch’s letter to her friends had come back to the County, and the effect was instantaneous.

When Mrs. Welch wrote the letter describing her new home and surroundings, she gave, as has been said, what she considered a very favorable account of her neighbors. She had not written the letter for publication, yet, when the zeal of her friends gave it to the public, she was sensible of a feeling of gratified pride. There

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were in it a number of phrases which, as she looked at them in cold print, she would in a milder mood have softened; but she consoled herself with the reflection that the individuals referred to in the letter would never see it. Alas! for the vain trust of those who rely on their obscurity to hide their indiscretions. The *Censor* was as well known, even if not so extensively known, in the old County as in Mrs. Welch's former home. It had long been known as Leech's organ, and was taken by more than one of the Red Rock residents.

When the issue containing Mrs. Welch's letter first appeared it raised a breeze. The neighborhood was deeply stirred, and what appeared most curious to Mrs. Welch was, that what gave most offence was her reference to individuals which she had intended to be rather complimentary. She made up her mind to face boldly the commotion she had raised and to bear with fortitude whatever it might bring. She did not know that it was her patronizing attitude that gave the most serious offence.

"I don't mind her attack on us, but blame her impudent, patronizing air," declared the little General—"General Fossil," as Steve called him—"and to think that I should have put my-

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self out to be especially civil to her! Steve, you are so fond of Northern cherries, I shall let you do the civilities for us both hereafter.” To the General’s surprise, Steve actually reddened.

The next time Mrs. Welch met her neighbors she was conscious of the difference in their bearing toward her. It was at old St. Ann’s. When she had been there before, the whole congregation had thronged about her with warm greetings and friendly words. Now there was a marked change. Though Steve Allen and Rupert and Blair and a few others came up and spoke to her, the rest of the congregation contented themselves with returning her bows coldly from a distance, and several ladies, she was sure, studiously avoided her greeting.

“Well, sir, I knew she was a oner as soon as I lay my eye ’pon her,” said Andy Stamper to a group of his friends in the court-yard at the county seat the next court day, “but I didn’t know she was goin’ to take that tack. She’s done fixed up the place till you wouldn’t know it from a town place. She has painted them old rooms so black that Doan had to git a candle to see how to do it, and I was born in one of ’em.

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I told her I never heard o' paintin' nothin' that black befo' but a coffin, but she said it was her favorite color."

"'Pears like that's so too, Sergeant," laughed someone. "Is Hiram there much?"

"Oh! he goes there; but you know I don't think she likes him; and it's my opinion that Hiram he's afeard of her as he is of Jacquelin Gray. He talks that soft way o' his'n aroun' her which he uses when he's afeard o' anyone. She's gin them niggers the best clo'es you ever see—coats better than me or you or anyone aroun' heah has seen since the war. What's curious to me is that though she don't seem to like niggers and git along with 'em easy-like and nat'ral as we all do, in another way she seems to kind o' want to like 'em. It reminds me of takin' physic: she takes 'em with a sort o' gulp, but wants to take 'em and wants to make everybody else do it.

"Now she's been over yonder to the Bend and got 'em all stirred up, diggin' dreens and white-washin' and cuttin' poles for crosslay."

"She'll be tryin' to whitewash them," said one of his auditors.

"Well, by Jingo! if she sets her mind to it she'll make it stick," said Andy. "What gits

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me is the way she ain't got some'n better to work on."

Report said that Jacquelin was blossoming into a fine young lawyer. Steve Allen declared that his practice was doubling under Jacquelin's devotion to the work—which was very well, as Steve, whether from contrariness or some other motive, was becoming a somewhat frequent visitor at Major Welch's, these days.

The General asserted that if Jacquelin stuck to his office and studied as assiduously as he was doing, he would be the most learned lawyer in the State. "But he'll kill himself if he does not stop it. Why, I can see the difference in him already," he declared to Miss Thomasia, solicitously. Miss Thomasia herself had seen the change in Jacquelin's appearance since his return home. He was growing thin again, and, if not pale, was at least losing that ruddy hue of health which he had had on his arrival, and she expostulated with him, and tried even to get Blair to do the same; for Blair always had great influence with him, she told her. Blair, however, pooh-poohed the matter and said indifferently, that she could not see any difference in him and thought he looked very well. Miss

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Thomasia shook her head. Blair did not use to be so hard-hearted.

But, however this was, Jacquelin did not alter his course. The negroes had become so unruly, that, as Rupert was often away from home, and his aunt was left alone, he came home every night, though it was often late before he arrived; but early in the morning he returned to the Court-house and spent the day there in his office, rarely accepting an invitation or taking any holiday.

When he and Blair met, which they did sometimes unavoidably, there was a return of the old constraint that had existed before he went away, and even with Steve he appeared to be growing silent and self-absorbed.

Blair had become the mainstay of her family. Unconsciously she had slipped into the position where she was the prop on which both her father and mother leaned. She taught her little colored school, and at home was always busy about something. She vied with Mrs. Andy Stamper in raising chickens, and with Miss Thomasia in raising violets. Under her skilful management, the little cottage amid its wilderness of fruit-trees, in which old Mr. and Mrs. Bellows had lived, became a rose-bower, and the fruit-

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trees became an orchard with its feet buried in clover. Her father said of her that she was a perpetual reproduction of the miracle of the creation—that she created the sun and followed it with all the plants and herbs after their kind.

Yet, with all these duties, Blair found time to run over to see Miss Thomasia almost every day or two; at first shyly and at rare intervals, but, after she found that Jacquelin was always at his office, oftener and more freely. She always declared that a visit to Miss Thomasia was like reading one of Scott's novels; that she got back to a land of chivalry and drank at the springs of pure romance; while Miss Thomasia asserted that Blair was a breath of May.

Jacquelin, after a time, came to recognize the traces of Blair's visits, in the little touches of change and improvement about the house: a pruned rosebush here, a fold of white curtain there, and he often had to hear her praises sung by Miss Thomasia's guileless tongue, and listen to the good lady's lament because Blair and Steve did not proceed a little more satisfactorily with their affairs. Miss Thomasia had an idea that it was on account of Steve's former reputation for wildness. "It would have such a good

MRS. WELCH ENTERS THE HARVEST influence on Steve," she declared, "would be just what he needed. I quite approve of a young lady being coy and maidenly, but, of course, I know there is an understanding between them, and I must say, I think Blair is carrying it too far." She bridled as she always did at the thought of anyone opposing Steve. "I know that a man is sometimes driven by a young lady's cruelty—apparent cruelty—for I am sure Blair would not wittingly injure anyone—into courses very sad and injurious to him." Miss Thomasia heaved a sigh and gazed out of the window, and a moment later resumed her knitting.

"Do you see anything of that—young lady, Miss Welch?" she asked Jacquelin, suddenly.

Jacquelin said he had not seen her for some time, except at church, and once or twice in the village, at a distance.

"I did not suppose you had," said Miss Thomasia. "She is a very nice, refined girl—has always been very sweet to me when I have met her—but of course—" Her lips closed firmly and she began to knit vigorously, leaving Jacquelin to wonder what she meant.

"I only wanted to know," she said, presently, and that was the only explanation she gave.

CHAPTER XXX

SOME OF THE GRAIN MRS. WELCH REAPED

THE difference in the attitude of their neighbors toward them was felt deeply by Major and Mrs. Welch. Even Dr. Cary's wonted cordiality had given place, when he met Mrs. Welch, to grave and formal courtesy. Toward Major Welch the formality was less marked, while toward Ruth there was almost the same warmth and friendliness that had existed before Mrs. Welch's letters were seen. Ruth received quite as many invitations as before, and when she met her neighbors they were as cordial to her as ever. She was conscious that this difference in her case was intentional, that the old warmth toward her was studied, and that they meant her to feel that the change in their attitude did not extend to her. Ruth, however, was far too loyal to her own to accept such attentions; so far from accepting, she resented the overtures made her, and was not slow in letting

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it be understood. There were one or two exceptions to this general attitude. For Blair Cary her liking deepened. Blair was sweeter than ever to her, and though Ruth felt that this was to make up to her for the coolness of others, there were a real warmth and a true sympathy in Blair, and a delicacy and charm about her manner of showing them that touched Ruth, and she was conscious that day by day she became drawn more and more closely to her. She felt that Blair understood her and sympathized with her, and that, if she ever chose to speak, she had in her a friend on whose bosom she could fling herself and find consolation. Such friendships are rare. The friend with whom one does not have to make explanations is God-given.

With her other neighbors Ruth stood on her dignity, in armed guardfulness. She carried her head higher than she had ever done in her life, and responded to their advances with a coldness that soon gained her a reputation for as much pride as she could have desired, if not for a good deal of temper. Mrs. Dockett attempted a sympathetic manner with her, and if subsequent rumors were any indication, that redoubted champion did not come off wholly unscathed.

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“The little minx has got her mother’s tongue,” sniffed the offended lady. “Why, she actually snubbed me—*me!* Think of her daring to tell me, when I was giving her to understand that we knew she was not responsible for any of the insulting things that had been said about us, that she always agreed with her mother and father in everything!—Which I’ll wager she doesn’t, unless she’s different from all the other girls I know! And away she marched with her little mouth pursed up and her head held as high as Captain Allen’s. She’ll know when I try to be civil to her again! She’s getting her head turned because Captain Allen said she had some pretension to good looks.”

It must be said, though, on behalf of Mrs. Dockett, that after the first smart of the rebuff she had received was over, she liked Ruth none the less, and after a little while used to tell the story of Ruth’s snubbing her, with a very humorous take-off of Miss Welch’s air and of her own confusion. And long afterward she admitted that the first time she really liked Ruth Welch was when she resented her condescension. “It takes a good woman—or man either—to stand up to me, you know!” she said, with a twinkle of pride and amusement in her bright eyes.

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Mrs. Dockett was not by any means the only one to whom the young lady showed her resentment. Ruth felt her isolation keenly, though she did not show this generally, except in a new hauteur. She not only gave up visiting, and immersed herself in the home duties which devolved upon her in consequence of her mother's absorption in her philanthropical work, but she suddenly began to take a much deeper interest than ever before in that work itself, riding about and visiting the poor negroes in whom her mother was interested, and extending her visits to the poorer whites as well. She was surprised at the frequency with which she met Mrs. Cary and Blair, or, if she did not meet them, heard of their visits to the people she was attending. Once or twice she met Miss Thomasia, also, accompanied by old Peggy as her escort. "I heard that the fence was going to be put up between us and old Mrs. Granger," explained Miss Thomasia, "and I am such a poor hand at climbing fences, I am trying to see her as often as I can before it is done. I do hope the old woman will die before it is put up." She saw the astonished look on Ruth's face and laughed heartily. "You know what I mean, my dear, I am always getting things wrong. But, are you alone, my dear?"

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Ruth said she was alone.

“I don’t think it quite right,” said Miss Thomasia, shaking her head. “Steve, I am sure, would be very glad to accompany you on any of your visitations, and so would Jacquelin.” She was perfectly innocent, but Ruth was incensed to find herself blushing violently.

It happened that on these visitations, more than once, Ruth fell in with Captain Allen. She treated him with marked coldness—with actual savageness, Steve declared afterward, but at the time, it must be said, it appeared to have little apparent effect upon that gentleman. Indeed, it appeared simply to amuse him. He was “riding about on business,” he explained to her. He seemed to have a great deal of business “to ride about on” of late. Ruth always declined, with much coolness, his request to be allowed to escort her, but her refusal did not seem to offend him, and he would turn up unexpectedly the next time she rode out alone, cheerful and amused. (One singular thing was that she rarely saw him when she was accompanied by her father.) Still she did not stop riding. She did not see why she should give up her visits of philanthropy, simply because Captain Allen also happened to have business to attend to. She began

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to be conscious that sometimes she even felt disappointed if on her rides she did not see him somewhere, and she hated herself for this, and took to disciplining herself for it by riding on unfrequented roads. Yet even here, now and then, Captain Allen passed her, and she began to feel as if he were in some sort doing it to protect her. On one occasion when he found her on a somewhat lonely road, he took her to task for riding so much alone, and told her that she ought not to do it. She was secretly pleased, but fired up at his manner.

“Why?” She looked him defiantly in the eyes.

He appeared confused.

“Why—because— Suppose you should lose your way, what would you do?” She saw that this was not his reason.

“I should ask someone,” she answered, coolly.

“But whom would you ask? There is no one—except one old woman, my old Mammy Peggy who lives down in this direction—who lives anywhere between the old road that is now stopped up and the creek, and farther back is a through-cut to the Bend, which you crossed, along which some of the worst characters in the County travel. They do not come this side of the creek,

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for they are afraid; I assure you that it is not safe for you to be riding about through the woods in this way at this time of the evening, by yourself."

"Why, I see this path—someone must travel it?" Ruth said. She knew that somewhere down in that direction was the old hospital-place, which the negroes said was haunted, and which was rumored to be the meeting-place of the Ku Klux. Steve looked a little confused.

"Yes——"

"And if no one is down here, there cannot any harm come to me." She enjoyed her triumph.

"Yet—but you don't understand. People pass this way going backwards and forwards from—from the Bend—and elsewhere, and—" He broke off. "You must trust me and take my word for it," he said, firmly. "It is not right for you; it is not safe." He was so earnest that Ruth could not help feeling the force of what he said, and she was at heart secretly pleased, yet she resented his attitude.

"Whom should I be afraid of? Of the Ku Klux?" She was pleased to see him flush. But when he answered her he spoke seriously:

"Miss Welch, there are no Ku Klux here—

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there never were any—except once for a little while,” he corrected himself, “and there is not one in the County or in the South who would do you an injury, or with whom, if you were thrown, you would not be as safe as if you were guarded by a regiment.”

Ruth felt that he was telling the truth, and she was conscious of the effect he had on her. Yet she rebelled, and she could not resist firing a shot at him.

“Thank you,” she said, mockingly. “I am relieved to know they will not murder ladies.” Steve flushed hotly, and, before he could answer, she pressed her advantage with delight.

“Could you not persuade them to extend their clemency to other poor defenceless creatures? Poor negroes, for example? You say there never were any Ku Klux in this County; how about that night when the State militia were raided and their arms taken from them, and when poor defenceless women were frightened to death. Were the men who did that really ghosts?”

She looked at Steve and was struck with a pang that she should have allowed herself to be carried so far. She had meant only to sting him and revenge herself, but she had struck deeper

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than she had intended. The look on Steve's face really awed her, and when he spoke the tone in his voice was different from any she had ever heard in it.

“Miss Welch, I did not say there had never been any Ku Klux in this County—you misunderstood me. I said there had never been any but once. I myself organized a band of Ku Klux regulators—‘a den,’ as we called it, in this County—and we made one raid—the raid you speak of, when we took the arms from the negroes. I led that raid. I organized it and led it, because I deemed it absolutely necessary for our protection at the time—for our salvation. No one was seriously hurt—no women were frightened to death, as you say. It is true that some women were frightened, and, no doubt, frightened badly, at the pranks played that night. We meant to frighten the men; if necessary we should have killed them—the leaders—but never to frighten the women. Under the excitement of such an occasion, where there were hundreds of young men, some full of fun, others wild and reckless, some unauthorized acts were committed. It had been attempted to guard against them, but some men overstepped the bounds and there were undoubtedly unjustifiable acts com-

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mitted under cover of the disguise adopted. But no lives were taken and no great violence was done. The reports you have heard of it were untrue. I give you my word of honor as to this. That is the only time there has been a raid by Ku Klux in this County—and the only time there will be one. We accomplished our purpose, and we proved what we could do. The effect was salutary. But I found that the blackguards and sneaks could take advantage of the disguise, and under the disguise wreak their private spite, and by common consent the den was disbanded soon after that night. There have been ruffianly acts committed since that time by men disguised as Ku Klux; but not one of the men who were in that raid, so far as I know, was concerned in them or has ever worn the disguise since then. They have sworn solemnly not to do so. At least only one—I am not sure as to one,” he said, almost in reverie; “but he is an outsider. The place where they met is the old plantation down here on the river; this path leads to it, and at the top of the next hill I can show you the house. It is only a ruin, and was selected by me because the stories connected with it protected it from the curiosity of the negroes, and in case of invasion the woods

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around, with their paths, furnished a ready means of escape.

“I have told you the whole story and told you the truth absolutely, and I hope you will do me the honor to believe me.” His manner and voice were so grave that Ruth had long lost all her resentment.

“I do,” she said, “and I beg your pardon for what I said.”

He bowed. They had reached the crest of the hill.

“There is the house.” He held a bough aside and indicated a large rambling mansion below them, almost concealed on one side by the dense growth, while the other side appeared to be simply a ruin. It lay in a cleft between two wooded hills around the base of which ran the river, and seemed as desolate a place as Ruth had ever seen.

“My showing it to you is a proof that ‘the den’ is broken up. Now we will go back.”

“I did not need it,” she said, “and I will never tell anyone that I have ever seen it.”

To this Captain Allen made no response.

“I must see you safely back to the main road,” he said, gravely.

Ruth felt that she had struck him deeply, and

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as they rode along she cast about in her mind for some way to lead up to an explanation. It did not come, however, and at the main road, when her gate was in sight, Captain Allen pulled in his horse and lifted his hat.

“Good-by.”

“Good-evening. I will think of what you said,” she began, meaning what he had said about her riding out alone.

“I would at least like you to think of me as a gentleman.” He bowed gravely, and lifting his hat again, turned and rode slowly away.

Ruth rode home, her mind filled with conflicting emotions. Among them was anger, first with herself and afterward with Captain Allen.

Miss Welch, on her arrival at home that evening, was in a singular frame of mind, and was as nearly at war with everyone as it is possible for a really sweet-tempered girl to be. Dr. Washington Still had called in her absence and proffered his professional services for any of her patients. She broke out against him vehemently, and when her mother, who was in a mollified state of mind toward the young man, undertook to defend him, Ruth attacked the whole Still family—and connections—except Virgy, whom she admitted to be a poor little kind-

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hearted thing, and shocked her mother by denouncing warmly the stories of the Ku Klux outrages and declaring openly that she did not believe there had ever been any Ku Klux in the County, except on the one occasion when they had disarmed the negro militia—and that she thought they had done exactly right, and just what she would have had them do.

Mrs. Welch was too much shocked to do anything but gasp.

“Oh! Ruth, Ruth,” she groaned. “That ever my daughter should say such things!” But Miss Ruth was too excited for control just then. She launched out yet more warmly and shocked her mother by yet more heretical views, until suddenly, moved by her mother’s real pain, she flung herself into her arms in a passion of remorse and tears, and declared that she did not mean half of what she had said, but was a wicked, bad girl who did not appreciate the best and kindest of mothers.

A few days afterward, the man known as the trick-doctor, who called himself “Doctor Moses,” came to Major Welch’s and told a pitiful story of an old woman’s poverty. Mrs. Welch gave him some sugar, coffee, and other things for her, but he asked the ladies to go and

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see her. She lived "all by herself, mostly, and hones to see the good white folks," he said.

"Ef my young Mistis would be so kind as to go and see her some evenin' I will show her de way." He looked at Ruth, with a low bow and that smile and uneasy look which always reminded her of a hyena in a cage.

They promised to go immediately, and he undertook to describe the road to them.

It was too bad to drive a carriage over—you had to ride on horseback; but his young Mistress would find it, she was such a good rider.

Ruth could never bear the sight of the negro; he was the most repulsive creature to her that she had ever seen. Yet it happened, that from his description of the place where the old woman lived and of the road that led there, she was sure it was the same old woman whom Captain Allen had mentioned to her, that afternoon, as having been his mammy, and as the one person who lived on the deserted plantation. And this, or some other reason—for the writer by no means wishes to be positive in assigning a woman's reason—determined Ruth to go and see her. She had expected her father to accompany her, as he frequently did so, but it happened that day that he was called away from home, and as her

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mother received another urgent call that morning to go and see a sick child, Ruth had either to postpone her visit or go alone. She chose the latter alternative, and as soon as the afternoon had cooled a little, she started off on horseback.

Ever since her interview with Captain Allen, she had been chafing under the sense of obeying his command that she should not ride through the woods alone. It was less a request than a command he had given her. She had not ridden out alone since that evening—at least, she had not ridden through the wood-roads; she had stuck to the highways, and she felt a sense of resentment that she had done so. What right had Captain Allen to issue orders to her? She would now show him that they had no effect on her. She would not only go against his wishes, but would go to the very place he had especially cautioned her against. She would see that old woman who had once belonged to him, and perhaps the old woman would some time tell him she had been there.

Ruth had no difficulty in finding her way. She knew the road well as far as the point where the disused road led off from the highway, and she had a good idea of direction. There she turned into the track that took her down toward the

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abandoned plantation, and crossed the zigzag path that she knew cut through the pines and led down to the Bend. She remembered Captain Allen's pointing it out to her that afternoon, and as she approached the path she galloped her horse rapidly, conscious of a feeling of exhilaration as she neared it. A quarter of a mile farther on, the thought occurred to her that it was cowardice to ride rapidly. Why should she do so? And though there was a cloud rising in the west, she pulled her horse down to a walk. The woods were beautiful and were filled with the odors of grape-blossoms; the path was descending, which assured her that she was on the right track. A little farther on, as it had been described to her, it should cross a stream; so she was pleased to see below her, at the bottom of a little ravine, the thicket through which the stream ran. She rode down into the ravine and to the stream. To her surprise the path appeared suddenly to stop at the water's edge. There was no outlet on the other side; simply a wall of bushes. Suddenly her horse threw up his head and started violently. At the same moment a slight noise behind her attracted Ruth's attention. She turned, and in the path behind her stood the negro, Moses.

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The blood deserted Ruth's face. He had always made her flesh creep, as if he had been a reptile. She had often found him on the side of the road as she passed along, or had turned and seen him come out of the woods behind her, but she had never been so close to him before when alone. And now to find herself face to face with him in that lonely place made her heart almost stop. After regarding her for a moment silently, the negro began to move slowly forward, bowing and halting with that peculiar limp which always reminded Ruth of a species of worm. She would have fled; but she saw in an instant that there was no way of escape. The bushes on either side were like a wall. The same idea must have passed through the man's mind. A curious smirk was on his evil face.

"My Mistis," he said, with a grin that showed his yellow teeth and horrid gums.

"The path seems to end here," said Ruth, with an effort commanding her voice.

"Yes, my Mistis; but I will show you de way. Old Moses will show you de way. He-he-he." His voice had a singular feline quality in it. It made Ruth's blood run cold.

"No—thank you—I can find it—I shall go

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back up here and look for it." She urged her horse back up the path to pass him. But the negro stepped before the horse and blocked the way.

"Nor'm—dat ain't de way. I'll show you de way. Jes' let Doctor Moses show you." He gave his snicker again, moved closer and put his hand on her bridle.

This act changed the girl's fear to anger. "Let go my bridle, instantly!" Her voice rose suddenly. The tone of command took the negro by surprise and he dropped his hand; the next second, however, he caught her bridle again, so roughly that her horse reared and started back, and if Ruth had not been a good rider she would have fallen from the saddle.

"I'm *gwine* to show you." His tone was now different. He clung to the bridle of the frightened horse. His countenance had changed.

Raising her riding-whip, Ruth struck him with all her might across the face.

"Let go my bridle!" she cried.

He gave a snarl of rage and sprang at her like a wild beast; but her horse whirled and slung him from his feet and he missed her, only tearing her skirt. It seemed to Ruth at that moment that she heard the sound of a horse galloping

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somewhere, and she gave a scream. It was answered instantly by a shout back over the hill on the path along which she had come, and the next moment was heard the swift rush of a horse tearing along on the muffled wood-path back in the woods.

The negro caught the sound, as he turned to seize Ruth's bridle again, stopped short and listened intently, then, suddenly wheeling, plunged into the bushes and went crashing away. That same instant, the horseman dashed over the crest of the hill and came rushing down the path, scattering the stones before him. And before Ruth could take it in, Steve Allen, his face whiter than she had ever seen it, was at her side.

"What is it? Who was it?" he asked.

"Nothing. Oh! He frightened me so," she panted.

"Who?" His voice was imperious.

"That negro."

"What negro?"

"The one they call Moses—Doctor Moses."

The look that came into Steve's face was for a second almost terrifying. The next moment, with an effort, he controlled himself.

"Oh! it was nothing," he said, lightly. "He is an impudent dog, and must be taught man-

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ners ; but don't be frightened. No one shall hurt you." His voice had suddenly grown gentle and soothing, and he led Ruth from the subject, talking lightly, and calming her.

"I told you not to come here alone, you know?" he said, lightly.

His manner reassured Ruth, and she almost smiled as she said:

"I thought that was a woman's revenge."

"I did not mean it for revenge ; but I want you to promise me now you will never do it again. Or if you will not promise me, I want you to promise yourself."

"I will promise you," said Ruth. She went on to explain why she came.

"The old woman you speak of wants nothing," he said, "and you have passed the path that leads to her house. That negro misled—you did not take the right road to reach her place. You should have turned off, some distance back. It was a mere chance—simple Providence, that I came this way and saw your track and followed you. If you wish to see my old Mammy I will show you the way. It is the nearest house, and the only one we can reach before that storm comes, and we shall have to hurry even to get there."

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Ruth looked over her shoulder, and was frightened at the blackness of the cloud that had gathered. There was a dense stillness, and the air was murky and hot. Almost at the moment she looked, a streak of flame darted from the cloud and a terrific peal of thunder followed immediately, showing that the storm was close on them."

"Come," he said, and, catching her bridle, Captain Allen headed her horse up the hill. "Mind the bushes. Keep him well in hand; but put him out."

Ruth urged the horse, and gave him the rein, and they dashed up the hill, Steve close at her horse's flank. It was to be a close graze, even if they escaped at all; for the rising wind, coming in a strong blast, was beginning to rush through the woods, making the trees bend and creak. The bushes swept past her, and dragged Ruth's hat from her head. "Keep on! I'll get it!" called Steve, and leaning from his saddle he picked it from the ground, and in a moment was up with her again. The thunder was beginning to crash just above their heads, and as they dashed along, the air was filled with flying leaves and small boughs, and big drops were beginning to spatter on them as if driven from a gun. Ruth

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heard Steve's voice, but could not, in the roar of the wind, tell what he said. The next instant he was beside her, his hand outstretched to steady her horse. She could not distinguish his words; but saw that he meant her to pull in, and she did so. The next second they were at a path which led off at an angle from that they were on. Steve turned her horse into it, and a moment later there appeared a small clearing, on the other side of which was an old cabin. That instant, however, the cloud burst upon them, and the rain came in a sheet. Before Ruth could stop her horse at the door, Steve was on the ground and had lifted her down as if she had been a child.

“Run in,” he said, and it never occurred to her to oppose him. Holding both horses with one hand, Steve reached across and pushed open the door, and put her in. An old negro woman, the only occupant, was facing her, just as she had risen from her chair by the fire, her small black eyes wide with surprise at the unexpected entrance. The next moment she advanced toward Ruth.

“Come in, Mistis. Is you wet?” she asked.

“Thank you — why, yes — I am rather — But——” Ruth turned to the door. She was

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thinking of her companion, who was still out in the storm that was driving against the house.

“Yes, to be sho’ you is. I’ll shet de do’.” The old negress moved to push it closer to.

“No, don’t!” cried Ruth. “He is out there.”

“Who? Don’t you go out dyah, Mistis.”

She restrained Ruth, who was about to go out again. But the door was pushed open from the outside, and Steve, dripping wet, with a pile of broken pieces of old rails in his arms and Ruth’s saddle in his hand, came in.

“Marse Steve! My chile! ’Fo’ de L—d!” exclaimed the old woman. “Ain’t you mighty wet?” She had left Ruth, and was feeling Steve’s arms and back.

“Wet? No, I’m as dry as a bone,” laughed Steve. “Here—make up a good fire.” He threw the wood on the hearth and began to pile it on the fire, which had been almost extinguished by the rain that came down the big chimney. “Dry that young lady. I’ve got to go out!” He turned to the door again.

“No—please! You must not go out!” cried Ruth, taking a step toward him.

“I have to go to see after the horses. I must fasten them.”

“Please don’t. They are all right. I don’t

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want you to go!" She faced him boldly. "Please don't, for my sake!" she pleaded.

Steve hesitated, and looked about him.

"I shall be wretched if you go out." Her face and voice proved the truth of her assertion.

"I must go. I am already soaking wet; but I'll come back directly." His voice was cheerful, and before Ruth could beg him again, with a sign to the old woman he was gone, and had pulled the door close to behind him.

"Heah, he say I is to dry you," said the old Mammy, and she set a chair before the fire and gently but firmly put Ruth in it, and proceeded to feel her shoes and clothing. "Dat's my young master—my chile," she said, with pride, and in answer to Ruth's expostulations. "You're 'bliged to do what he say, you know. He'll be back torectly."

Ruth felt that the only way to induce Captain Allen to come in out of the storm was to get dried as quickly as possible; so she set to work to help the old woman. Steve did not come back directly, however, nor for some time, and not until Ruth sent him word that she was dry, and he must come in or she would go out. Then he entered, laughing at the idea that a rain meant anything to him.

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“Why, I am an old soldier. I have slept in such a rain as that, night after night, and as soundly as a baby. I enjoy it.” His face, as he looked at Ruth sitting before the fire, showed that he enjoyed something. And as the girl sat there, her long hair down, her eyes filled with solicitude, and the bright firelight from the blazing, resinous pine shining on her and lighting up the dingy little room, she made a picture to enjoy.

Old Peggy, bending over her and ministering to her with pleased officiousness, caught something of the feeling. A gleam of shrewdness had come into her sharp, black eyes.

“Marse Steve, is dis your lady?” she asked, suddenly, with an admiring look at Ruth, whose cheeks flamed.

“No—not—” Steve did not finish the sentence. “What made you think so?” He looked very pleased.

“She so consarned about you. She certainly is pretty,” she said, simply.

Ruth was blushing violently, and Steve said:

“I’m not good enough, Mammy, for any lady.”

“Go ’way, Marse Steve! You know you good ’nough for anybody. Don’t you b’lieve him,

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young Mistis. I helt him in dese arms when he wa'n't so big;" she measured a length hardly above a span, " and I knows."

Ruth thought so too just then, but she did not know what to say. Fortunately Steve came to her rescue.

"Mammy, you're the only woman in the world that thinks that."

"I know better 'n dat!" declared the old woman, emphatically. "You does too, don't you, my Mistis?" At which Ruth stammered, "Why, yes," and only blushed the more. She looked so really distressed that Steve said:

"Come, Mammy, you mustn't embarrass your young Mistress."

"Nor, indeed—dat I won't. But you see dyah, you done call her *my* young Mistis!" laughed the old woman, enjoying hugely the confusion of both her visitors.

It was time to go, Steve said. So as the storm had passed, they came out and he saddled Ruth's horse and handed her into the saddle. He spoke a few words to the old woman, to which she gave a quick affirmative reply. As they rode off, she said, "You mus' come again," which both of them promised and doubtless intended to do.

The woods were sparkling with the raindrops,

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and the sky was as if it had just been newly washed and burnished, and the earth was covered with water which shone in the light of the setting sun, like pools of crystal.

Steve bade Miss Welch good-by at her gate. He had scarcely gotten out of sight of her when he changed his easy canter to a long gallop, and a look of grim determination deepened on his face. At the first byway he turned off from the main-road and made his way by bridle-paths back to the point where he had rescued Miss Welch. Here he tied his horse and began to examine the bushes carefully. He was able at first to follow the track that the negro had made in his flight; but after a little distance it became more difficult. The storm had obliterated the traces. So Steve returned to the point where he had left his horse, remounted and rode away. He visited Andy Stamper's and several other plantations, at all of which he stopped, but only for a few moments to speak a word or two to the men at each, and then galloped on to the next, his face still grim and his voice intense with determination.

That night a small band of horsemen rode through the Bend, visiting house after house. They asked for Moses, the trick-doctor. But

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Moses was not there. He had left early the morning before, their informant said, and had not been back since. There was no doubt as to the truth of this. There was something about that body of horsemen, small though it was, riding in pairs, that impressed whomever they accosted, and it was evident that their informants meant to tell the truth. If, on the first summons at a door, the inmates peered out curious and loud-mouthed, they quieted down at the first glance at the silent horsemen outside.

“What you want with him?” asked one of the men, inquisitively. Almost instantly, as if by machinery, two horsemen moved silently in behind him and cut him out from the group behind. “You know where he is? Come along.” Their hands were on his collar.

“Nor, suh, b’fo’ Gord I don’t, gentmens,” protested the negro, almost paralyzed with fright. “I didn’t mean nuttin’ in the worl’, gentmens.”

At a sign from the leader he was released, and was glad to slip back into obscurity behind the rest of the awe-struck group, till the horsemen rode on.

It was, no doubt, well for the trick-doctor that his shrewdness had kept him from his accus-

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tomed haunts that night. He visited the Bend secretly a night or two later ; but only for a short time, and before morning broke he was far away, following the woodland paths, moving at his swift, halting pace, which hour by hour was placing miles between him and the danger he had discovered. Thus the County for a time, at least, was rid of his presence, and both white and blacks breathed freer.

CHAPTER XXXI

JACQUELIN GRAY LEARNS THAT HE IS A FOOL, AND
STEVE ASTONISHES MAJOR WELCH

THE bill in Jacquelin's suit against Mr. Still was not filed for some time after the notice was sent and the suit instituted. But this period was utilized by Steve and Jacquelin in hunting up evidence; and by Mr. Still in holding conferences with Leech and the officers of the court. Meanwhile Steve Allen had met the Welches several times, and although there was a perceptible coolness in their manner to him, yet civilities were kept up. As for Steve himself, he went on just as he had done before, ignoring the change and apparently perfectly oblivious of the chilliness with which he was received.

Yet Steve appeared to have changed. His old cheerfulness and joviality seemed to have gone, and he was often in a state bordering on gloom. As, however, most of those in that part of the world were at this time in a state of actual

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gloom, Steve's condition was set down to the general cause. Occasionally it occurred to Jacquelin that some trouble with Blair Cary might have a part in it. His Aunt Thomasia's words had stuck in his memory. Steve did not go to Dr. Cary's as often as he used to go; and when he did go, on his return to the Court-house he was almost always in one of his fits of depression. Jacquelin set it down to another exhibition of Blair's habitual capriciousness. It was that Yankee Captain that stood in the way. And Jacquelin hardened his heart, and vowed to himself that he would not see Blair again.

At length the bill in Jacquelin's suit was ready.

It was at the end of a hard day's work that Jacquelin had put the finishing touches to it, and as he completed the copy from a draft that Steve had made, he handed it across to Steve to read over. It was a bill to reopen, on the ground of fraud, the old suit in which Still had become the purchaser of Red Rock, and to set aside the conveyance to him and the subsequent conveyance of a part of his purchase to Major Welch. It went somewhat into a history of the confidential relation that Still had borne to Jacquelin's and Rupert's father; charged that

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Still's possession of the bonds was fraudulent, and that even, if not so, the bonds had been discharged by proceeds of the estate that had come to the steward's hands. It charged Still with gross fraud in his accounts, as well as in the possession of the bonds. It ended by making Major Welch a party, as a subsequent purchaser, and charged constructive knowledge on his part of Still's fraud. Actual knowledge of this by him was expressly disclaimed, but it was stated that he had knowledge of facts which should have put him on inquiry. It was alleged that a formal notice had been served on Major Welch before he became the purchaser, and it asked that "an issue out of chancery," as the lawyers term it, might be awarded to try the question of fraud.

When Steve finished reading the paper, he laid it on his desk and leaned back in his chair, his eyes fixed on the ceiling, in deep thought. Jacquelin did not disturb him; but watched him in silence as the expression on his face deepened into one almost of gloom. Presently Steve stirred.

"Well, is that all?" asked Jacquelin.

"Yes." He actually sighed.

"You don't think it will hold?"

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“No. I am sure we shall show fraud—on that rascal’s part—at least, so far as his accounts are concerned. We have followed up some of his rascality, and I am equally sure that his possession of the big bond was fraudulent. Your father never owed him all that money, in the world; but how did he get hold of it? The man in the South in whose name it was made out is dead, and all his papers burned. Still turns up with the bond assigned to him, and says it was given him for negroes he sold. Now, how shall we meet it? We know he made money negro-trading. Rupert’s story of hearing the conversation with your father is too vague. He can’t explain what your father meant by his reference to the Indian-killer, and his threats against Hiram will weaken his testimony. Hiram’s afraid of him, though, and he’d better be. We’ll have to send him away. He’s with McRaffle too much.”

Jacquelin’s face sobered, and he sighed. The thought of Rupert cost him many sighs these days.

“I am not sure that we have been specific enough in our charges,” Steve continued, “and I am sure the judge will be against us. He has never gotten over the peeling I gave him when

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he first turned Rad, and he and Hiram are as thick as thieves.”

“Yes; but, as you say, we’ll get at something, and it is all we can do. I am willing to take the risk for Rupert, if not for myself. Will you sign as counsel? And I’ll go over to the office and file it. Mr. Dockett said he’d wait for us.”

Steve took the pen and dipped it in the ink; then again leaned back in his chair, and then, after a second’s thought, sat up and signed the paper rapidly, and Jacquelin took it and went out. In a few minutes he returned.

“Well, the Rubicon is crossed,” he said, gayly.

Steve did not answer. He was again leaning back in his chair, deep in thought, his eyes on the ceiling, his face graver than before.

“Steve, don’t bother about the thing any more. We’ve done the best we could, and if we fail we fail, that’s all.”

But the other did not respond in the same vein.

“Yes, we’ve crossed the Rubicon,” he said, with something between a sigh and a yawn.

“Steve, what’s the matter?”

“Oh, nothing.”

“Yes, there is—tell me.”

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“Nothing—I assure you, there’s not.”

“And I know better. Confound it! can’t I see something is going on that I don’t understand? You couldn’t be gloomier if you had broken with—with your sweetheart.”

“Well, I have.” Steve turned and looked out of the window to where the light in the clerk’s office shone through the trees.

“What!” Jacquelin was on his feet in a second.

“Jack, I’m in love.”

“I know that. But what do you mean by—by—that you have broken with——?”

“That I’m in love with Ruth Welch.” He spoke quietly.

“What—what do you mean?” Jacquelin’s voice faltered.

“What I say—that I’ve been in love with her ever since I met her.” He was still looking out of the window.

“Steve!” Jacquelin’s tone had changed and was full of deep reproach. As Steve was not looking at him and did not answer, he went on: “Steve, I don’t understand. Does she know?” His throat was dry and his voice hard.

“I don’t know——”

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“Steve Allen!” The tone was such that Steve turned to look at him.

“What’s the matter with you?”

“That’s what I have to ask you,” said Jacquelin, sternly. “Are you crazy?”

“I don’t know whether I am or not,” Steve said, half bitterly. “But that’s the fact, anyhow.”

Jacquelin’s face had paled, and his form was tense.

“Steve, if anyone else had told me this of you, he’d not have stood to complete his sentence. I thought you were a gentleman,” he sneered.

“Jacquelin Gray!” Steve sprang to his feet, and the two young men stood facing each other, their faces white and their eyes blazing. Jacquelin spoke first.

“As Blair Cary has no brother to protect her, I will do it. I never thought it would have to be against you.”

“Blair Cary? Protect her against me? In God’s name, what do you mean?”

“You know.”

“I swear I do not!”

Jacquelin turned from him with a gesture of contempt; but Steve seized him roughly.

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“By Heaven! you shall tell me. I feel as if the earth were giving way before me.”

Jacquelin shook him off, but faced him, his whole expression full of scorn.

“Haven’t you been engaged to—engaged to—or as good as engaged to—or, at least, in love with Blair Cary for years?”

Steve gazed at him for a moment with a puzzled look on his face, which gave place the next instant to one of inexpressible amusement, and then, with a shove which sent Jacquelin spinning across the room, flung himself into his chair and burst into a ringing laugh.

“You fool! you blamed fool!” he exclaimed. “But I’m a fool, too,” he said, standing and facing Jacquelin.

“I think you are.” Jacquelin was still grave.

“Why, Blair knows it.”

“Knows what?”

“Knows that I’m in love with Ruth Welch. She divined it long ago and has been my confidante.”

“What!—Steve—” The expression on Jacquelin’s face underwent a dozen changes in as many seconds. Astonishment, incredulity, memory, reflection, regret, hope—all were there, chasing each other and tumbling over one an-

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other in wild confusion. "Steve," he began again in hopeless amazement, with a tone almost of entreaty, but stopped short.

"You double-dyed, blind idiot!" exclaimed Steve, "don't you know that Blair Cary don't care a button for me? never has cared and never will care but for one man——?"

"Middleton!" Jacquelin turned away with a fierce gesture.

"No, you jealous fool!"

"Then, in Heaven's name, who is it?" Jacquelin again faced him.

"A blind idiot."

The effect was not what Steve had anticipated. Jacquelin made a wild gesture of dissent, turned his back, and, walking to the window, put his forearm against the sash, and leaned his forehead on it.

"You don't know what you're talking about," he said, bitterly. "She hates me. She treats me like——She has always done it since that cursed Middleton——"

"I don't say she hasn't. I simply say she——" Steve broke off. "She ought to have treated you badly. You made a fool of yourself, and have been a fool ever since. But I know she cared for you—before that, and if you had gone

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about it in the right way, you'd have won her." (Jacquelin groaned.) "Instead of that, you must get on a high horse and put on your high and mighty airs and try to hector a spirited girl like Blair Cary." (A groan from the window.) "Why, if I were to treat my horse as you did her, he'd break my neck."

"Oh, Steve!"

"And then after she had tried to prove it to you, for you to go and put it on another's account, of course she kicked—and she ought to have done so, and has treated you coldly ever since."

Jacquelin faced him.

"Steve, I loved her so. I have loved her ever since I was a boy—ever since that day I made her jump off the barn. It was what kept me alive in prison many a time when otherwise I'd have gone. And when I came home, ready to go down on my knees to her—to die for her, to find her given to another, or, if not——" He stopped and turned away again.

"Then why didn't you tell her so, instead of outraging her feelings?" demanded Steve.

"Because—because I thought you loved her and she loved you, and I would not——!" He turned off and walked to the window.

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Steve rose and went up to him.

“Jacquelin,” he said, putting his hand on his shoulder, and speaking with a new tenderness, “I never knew it—I never dreamed it. You have been blind, boy. And I have been worse. I was never in love with her and she knew it. At first, I simply meant to bedevil you, and—Middleton—and then afterward, used to tease her to see her let out about you; but that was all. She has known ever since Ruth Welch came here that I liked her, and now—that I have become a fool like the rest of you.” He turned away.

Jacquelin stood for a moment looking at him, a light dawning on his face.

“Steve, I beg your pardon for what I said.” He stood lost in thought. The next second he rushed out of the door. In a moment he was back, and held the bill he had just filed, in his hand. Steve rose as he entered.

“What have you done?”

“I may be a fool—but—” He held up the bill and glancing at it, caught hold of the last sheet and began to tear it. Steve made a spring, but was too late; Jacquelin had torn the signature from the paper.

“I’m not such a selfish dog as to let you do it and bar your chance of happiness. I did not

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know. Do you suppose Miss Welch would ever marry you if you signed that bill?"

"No. But do you suppose I will not tell her of my part in bringing the suit?"

"Of course you will—but she'll forgive you for that."

It was late in the night before their disagreement was settled.

Steve insisted that he would sign the bill; he had brought the suit and he would assume the responsibility for it. But he had met his match. Jacquelin was firm, and finally declared that if Steve still held to his decision he would not press the suit at all. Steve urged Rupert's interest. Jacquelin said Rupert would still have six months after he came of age, in which to save his rights. In this unexpected turn of the case, Steve was forced to yield; and Jacquelin re-copied the whole bill in his own hand and filed it the next morning. It was signed by Jacquelin and Rupert personally, and by General Legaie as counsel.

It created a sensation in at least two households in the County.

When Still read the bill, he almost dropped to the floor. The attack was made on the ground of fraud, and Major Welch had said the statute

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of limitations did not apply. After a conference, however, with Leech, who happened to be at home, he felt better. Leech assured him that the bill would not hold good against his possession of the bonds.

“They’ll hold against all creation,” said that counsellor, “if they weren’t stolen and ain’t been paid.”

This declaration did not seem to relieve Still much.

“And they’ve got to prove both of ’em,” added Major Leech, “and prove ’em before our judge.”

Still’s face cleared up.

“Well, Welch is obliged to stand by us. We’ll go and see him.”

So, that evening they took a copy of the bill to Major Welch. Mrs. Welch and Miss Ruth both were in a state of great excitement and indignation. The idea of fraud being charged against Major Welch was an outrage that they could not tolerate.

Major Welch alone was calm and unmoved. It was, after all, expressly stated that no actual fraud was attributed to him, and though, of course, he felt keenly having his name mixed up with such a matter, he had no anxiety as to the

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result. He could readily prove that he had had no knowledge whatever of anything to arouse the slightest suspicion. He should, of course, have to employ counsel. He began to canvass their names.

“Papa, why don’t you get Mr. Allen to represent you? They say he is the best lawyer in this part of the country,” said Ruth. She was conscious that her color came as Still quickly looked at her.

“He’s the one that started the whole matter, ma’am.”

“Why, I don’t see his name to the bill!” the Major said.

“Ain’t it? Well, anyhow he’s the main one. If it hadn’t been for him the suit never would ’a’ been brought. Colonel Leech saw a copy of the bill in his hand-writing in his office this morning, didn’ you, Colonel?”

Leech declared that he had seen the copy, and corroborated his client in his statement that Captain Allen had inspired the suit.

Mrs. Welch gave an exclamation of indignation.

“Well, I did not think he would have played the sneak!”

Ruth’s face flamed and turned white by turns.

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“You don’t know him yet,” said Still, plaintively. “Does she, Colonel?”

“No—he’s a bad man,” said Leech, unctuously.

“He is that,” said Still. He dropped his voice. “You look out for him, Major. He’s after you. If I was you I’d carry a pistol pretty handy.” Major Welch gave a gesture of impatience.

Ruth’s eyes flashed a sudden gleam, and her face flamed again. She rose, walked to the window, and pressed deep in between the curtains. Still addressed himself to Major Welch.

“The Colonel says ’tain’t goin’ to be any trouble to beat the suit; that he can git it dismissed on demurrer—if that’s the word? You know I ain’t any book-learnin’—I’m nothin’ but a plain farmer. And he says the judge is sure to——”

“Yes—that’s it,” said Leech, quickly, with a glance of warning at him. “I don’t cross a bridge till I get to it; I’ve got several in this case, but, as Mr. Bagby says, I believe in making every defence.”

“That may be so; but I’m going to fight this case on its merits,” declared Major Welch, firmly. “I don’t propose, when a question of

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fraud is raised, to shelter myself behind any technicalities. I mean to make it as clear as day that I had no connection with any fraud. I spoke to Mr. Bagby when the rumor of a suit was first started, and told him so." Though he spoke quietly his voice had a ring in it and his face a light on it which made both Mrs. Welch and Ruth proud of him, and Ruth squeezed her mother's arm, in her joy. How different he looked from those other men!

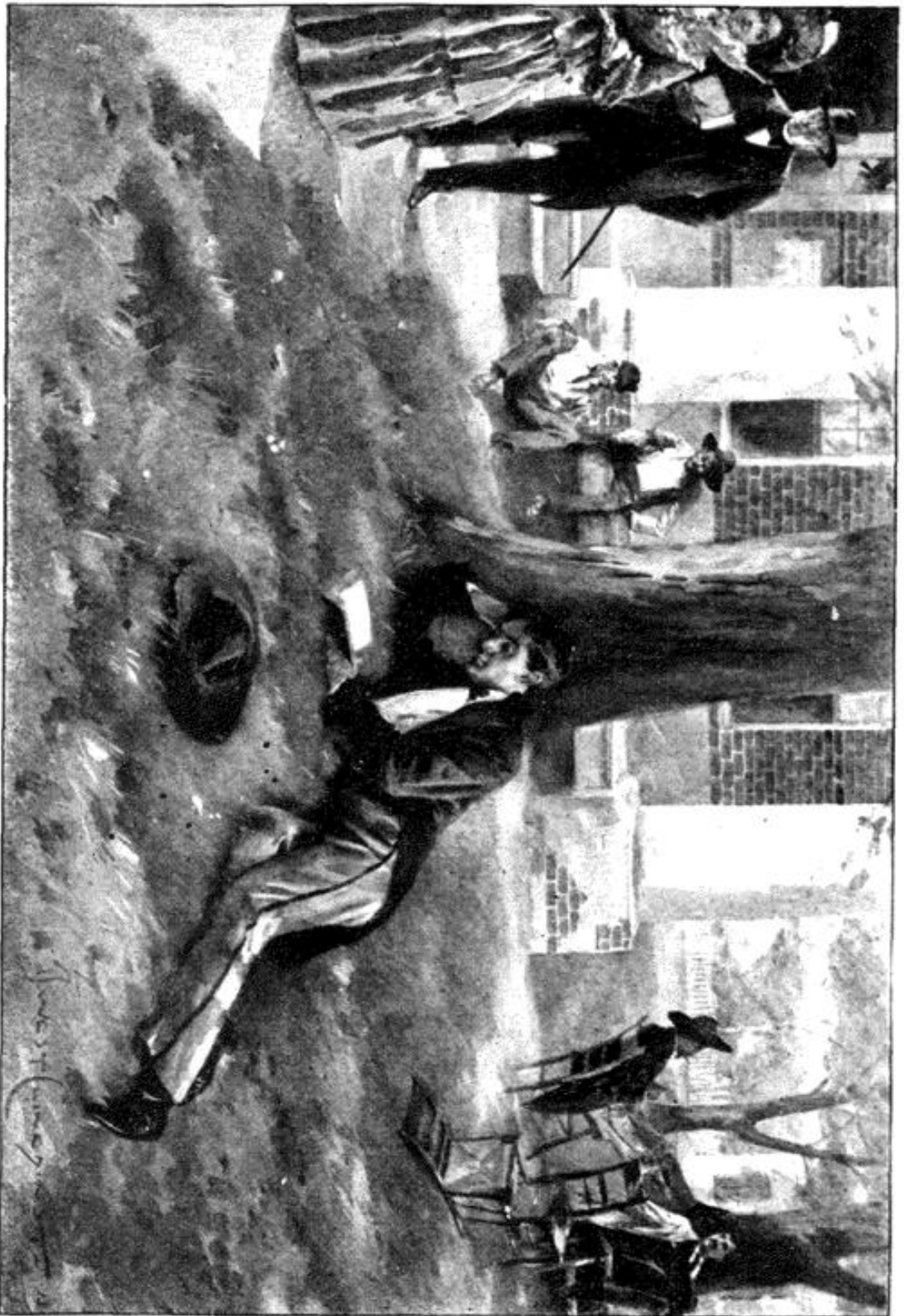
Meantime the change in Steve Allen was perceptible to many who had no idea of the true reason it was so.

Jacquelin set it down to the wrong cause. Miss Thomasia, like Jacquelin, laid Steve's dependency at Blair's door, and the good lady cast about in her mind how she might draw Blair into a discussion of the subject and give her some affectionate advice. But as often as she touched on the subject of love, even in the most distant way, bringing in Jacquelin as a sort of introduction, Blair shied off from it, so that Miss Thomasia found it more difficult to accomplish than she had anticipated.

Steve, however, was working on his own lines. His present situation was intolerable to him. The fact that his name had not appeared on

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Steve stretched, and, picking up his book, dived once more into the "Idylls of the King."

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Jacquelin's bill stuck in his memory like a thorn. He was lying on the grass under a tree in the court-green one afternoon reading a book, not a law-book either, when the sound of horses' feet caught his ear. He looked up lazily as it came nearer, and soon in view appeared two riders, a girl and a young man. They cantered easily along the little street, their laughter coming across to Steve where he lay, his book neglected on the ground beside him. Steve stretched, and picking up his book dived once more into the "Idylls of the King." But the spell was broken. A line from Dante flashed through his mind. Launcelot and Guinevere; Tristram and Isolt; Geraint and Enid, interested him no more. The reality had passed before him. Resting his head against the tree, he tried to go to sleep; but the minute denizens about in the grass bothered him, the droning of bees in the locust boughs above failed to lull him.

" 'I am half sick of shadows,' " he murmured to himself, and he sat up and, resting against the tree, thought deeply. Another line came to him:

" On burnished hooves his war-horse trode."

He suddenly sprang to his feet and walked straight to his office, his face resolute and his

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step determined. He was not a girl to be caught in a mesh! He would be the other. Jacquelin was at his desk, deep in a big law-book. Steve shut the door behind him and stood with his back against it looking down at his partner.

“Jacquelin, I am going to marry Ruth Welch.”

“What!” Jacquelin looked up in blank amazement. “Oh!” he laughed. “I thought you meant you had asked her.”

“You misunderstand me. It is not conceit. It is determination. I have no idea she will accept me now; but she will in the end. She shall, I will win her.” He was grave, and though his words spoke conceit, his voice and face had not a trace of it. Jacquelin too became grave.

“I believe you can win her if you try, Steve—unless someone else is in the way; but it is a long chase, I warn you.” Steve’s brow clouded for a second, but the shadow disappeared as quickly as it came.

“You don’t think there’s anything in that story about Wash Still?” His tone had a certain fiery contempt in it. “I tell you there isn’t. I’ll stake my salvation on that. An eagle does not mate with a weasel!”

“No—I do not believe she would, but how

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about her mother? You know what she thinks of us, and what they say of her missionary ideas, and Wash Still has been playing assiduously on that string of late. He is visiting all her sick, free—he says. Besides they have not the same ideas that we have about family and so on, and they don't know the Stills as we do."

"Not pride of family! You don't know her. She's one of the proudest people in the United States, of her family. I tell you she could give General Legaie six in the game and beat him. By Jove! I wish one could do the old-fashioned way. I'd just ride up and storm the stronghold and carry her off!" burst out Steve, straightening up and stretching out his arms, half in jest, half in earnest, his eyes flashing and his color rising at the thought.

"Now you have to storm the stronghold all the same, without carrying her off," Jacquelin laughed.

"No, I'll carry her away some day," asseverated Steve, confidently. "It's worth all my worthless life and a good deal more too."

"I think if you get into that spirit you may win her; but I'm afraid they'll hardly recognize you in the rôle of humility. I doubt if they have heard much of you in that character. How are

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you going about it? You have not seen her since the suit was brought, and I doubt if she will speak to you.”

“She will not? I’ll make her. Whether she speaks or not, I’ll win her.”

“There goes your robe of humility. You have to win her parents first—for you have to ask their permission.”

Steve relapsed into thought for a moment, during which Jacquelin watched him closely.

“Do you think that’s necessary?” he asked, doubtfully, almost as if to himself.

“I do, under the circumstances—for you; not for Wash Still.”

“The gorgon will refuse me——”

“Probably—All the same, you have to do it.”

Suddenly, with a sigh, Steve came out of his reverie as if he were emerging from a cloud. His countenance cleared up and he spoke with decision.

“You are right. I knew you were right all the time. But I did not want to do it. I will, though. I’ll do it if I lose her.” He turned to go out.

“When are you going to do it?”

“Right now.” In the presence of contest Steve’s face had got back all its fire, his voice all its ring.

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“I believe you’ll win her,” said Jacquelin.

“I know I shall, some day,” said Steve. And a little later Jacquelin heard him in his room, whistling “Bonny Dundee,” and calling to Jerry to saddle his horse.

Major Welch was sitting on his veranda that afternoon about sunset when a rider came out of the woods far below, at a gallop, and continued to gallop all the way up the hill. There was something about a rapid gallop up hill and down that always bore Major Welch’s mind back to the war. As the horseman came nearer, Major Welch recognized Captain Allen. He remembered the advice Still had recently given him, always to have a pistol handy when he met Allen. He put the thought away from him with almost a flush of shame that it should even have crossed his mind. Should he meet a man at his own door, with a weapon? Not if he was shot down for it. So, as the rider approached, Major Welch walked down to meet him at the gate, just as Steve, dismounting, tied his horse.

The young man’s face was pale, his manner constrained, and he was manifestly laboring under more emotion than he usually showed. Wondering what could be the object of his call, Major Welch met him gravely. Steve held out

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his hand and the Major took it formally. At any rate the mission was peaceful.

“Major Welch, I have come to see you—” he began hesitatingly, his hat in his hand, and his face flushed.

“Won’t you walk up on the veranda and sit down?” The Major did not mean to be outdone in civility.

“Not until I have stated the object of my visit. Then, if you choose to invite me, I shall be very glad to accept.” He had recovered his composure.

The Major was more mystified.

“I have come this evening for a purpose which, perhaps, will—no doubt will—surprise you.” The Major looked affirmative, and wondered more and more what it could mean.

“I have come to ask your permission to pay my addresses to your daughter.”

If the Major was expecting to be surprised, he was more than surprised; he was dazed—he almost gasped.

“What?”

“I am not surprised that you are astonished.” The younger man, now that the ice was broken, was regaining his composure. “It is, however, no sudden impulse on my part.” How melo-

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dious his deep voice had grown! Major Welch was sensible of the charm growing upon him that he had seen exercised in the case of others.

“I have loved your daughter”—(his voice suddenly sank to a pitch as full of reverence as of softness)—“a long time; perhaps not long in duration, but ever since I knew her. From that evening that I first met her here, I have loved her.” His glance stole toward the tree in which he had found Ruth that afternoon. “If I can obtain your consent, and shall find favor in her eyes, I shall be the happiest and most blessed of men.” He gave a deep sigh of relief. He stood suddenly before Major Welch a different being—modest and manly, not without recognition of his power, and yet not for a second presuming on it. Major Welch could not help being impressed by him. A wave of the old liking that he had had for him when he first met him came over him.

“Does my daughter know of this?” he asked.

“I hardly know. I have never said anything of it to her directly, but I do not know how much a girl’s instinct can read. My manner has seemed to myself always that of a suitor, and at times I have wondered how she could help reading the thoughts of my heart; they have seemed

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to me almost audible. Others have known it for some time; at least one other has. I thought your daughter knew it. Yet now I cannot tell. She has never given me the slightest encouragement.”

“I thought you were in love with—with someone else; with your cousin, and her accepted lover? Rumor has so stated it?” The elder gentleman’s manner cooled again as the thought recurred to him.

Steve smiled.

“Blair Cary? I do love her—dearly—but only as an admirer and older brother might. I am aware of the impression that has existed, but her heart has long been given to another who has loved her from his boyhood. From certain causes, which I need not trouble you with and which occurred before you arrived, differences grew up between them, and they became estranged; but the affection remains. Jacquelin does not know it, but in time he will succeed, and it is one of my most cherished hopes that some time he will realize that great happiness in store for him. Meantime, I feel sure that you will consider what I have said of this as confidential. I have, perhaps, said more than I should have done.”

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Major Welch bowed. "Of course I will. And now I wish to say that I am so much taken by surprise by what you have told me that I scarcely know just what answer to give you at this time. I appreciate the step you have taken. But it is so strange—so unexpected—that I must have time for reflection. I must consult my wife, who is my best adviser and our daughter's best guardian. And I can only say that we wish for nothing but our child's best and most lasting happiness. I cannot, of course, under the circumstances renew my invitation to you to come in." He paused and reflected. "Nor can I hold out to you any hope. And I think I must ask you not to speak to my daughter on the subject until I have given my consent."

"I promise you that," said Steve. "I should not have come to you at all unless I had been prepared to give that promise."

The young man evidently had something more that he wished to say; he hesitated a moment and then began again.

"One other thing I should tell you. I brought the suit for Jacquelin and Rupert Gray. Although my name was not signed to the bill, I brought the suit, and have the responsibility."

Major Welch could not help a graver look

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coming into his face—he felt almost grim, but he tried to choke down the sensation.

“I was aware of that.”

“There is one word more I would like to say, but—not now—I should possibly be misunderstood. Perhaps the day may come— May I say in the meantime that I am not one who changes or is easily disheartened? I know that even if I should secure your consent I should have to make the fight of my life to win your daughter—but I should do it. I think the prize well worth all, and far more than all, I could give.”

He stood diffidently, as though not knowing whether Major Welch would take his hand if offered. The Major, however, made the advance and the two men shook hands ceremoniously and Steve mounted his horse and without looking back rode off, while Major Welch returned slowly to the house. The only glance Steve gave was one up toward the old cherry-tree in the yard.

Mrs. Welch had seen Steve ride up and had watched with curiosity and some anxiety the conference that had taken place at the gate. When the Major stated to her the object of Mr. Allen's visit she was too much surprised to

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speak. She, however, received the announcement somewhat differently from the way the Major had expected. She was deeply offended. Without an instant's hesitation she was for despatching an immediate and indignant refusal.

“Of course, you at once refused him and told him what you thought of his effrontery?” she said.

“Well—no, I did not,” said Major Welch. In fact, though the Major had been astonished by Steve's proposal and had supposed that it would be rejected, it had not occurred to him that his wife would take it in just this way.

“You did not! Oh, you men! I wish he had spoken to me! It was an opportunity I should not have lost. But he would not have dared to face me with his insulting proposal.”

“Well, I don't think he intended it as an insult, and without intention it cannot be an insult. I think if you had seen him you would have felt this.”

“Do you think I would entrust my daughter's happiness to a desperado and a midnight assassin?”

“No, I cannot say that I thought you would—nor would I. But I am not prepared to say I think him either an assassin or a desperado.”

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“Well, I am,” asserted Mrs. Welch. “I was deceived in him once and I will not give him a chance again.”

“I simply told him that I would confer with you and give him our answer.”

“He will take that as encouragement,” declared Mrs. Welch, “and will be pursuing Ruth and persecuting her.”

“No, he will not. He gave me his word that he would not speak to her without my—without our consent——”

“He will not keep it.” Mrs. Welch’s words were not as positive as her manner.

“Yes, he will. I will stand sponsor.” Major Welch was thinking of the young man as he had just stood before him.

“Well, I am glad you extracted that much of a pledge from him. He will not get my consent in this life, I can assure him.”

“Nor mine without yours and Ruth’s,” said Major Welch, gravely. “I will write him and tell him what you say. Shall I mention it to Ruth?”

“No, of course not.”

Major Welch did not see why it should be “of course”; but he considered that his wife knew more of such things than he did, and he

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accordingly accepted her opinion without question.

“Where is Ruth?” he asked.

“She went with Dr. Still to see a sick woman he wanted me to see. I was not able to go this afternoon when he called, so I sent her. I don’t think there is much the matter with her.”

Major Welch sat for a moment in deep reflection. He was evidently puzzled. Suddenly he broke the silence.

“Prudence, you don’t mean that you wish that—that you think that young fellow is a suitable—ah—companion for our daughter?” That was not the word Major Welch meant.

“William!” exclaimed Mrs. Welch. She said no more, and it was not necessary. Major Welch felt that he had committed a great mistake—a terrible blunder. A moment before, he had had the best of the situation, and he had been conscious of a feeling of somewhat exalted virtue; now he had thrown it away. He felt very foolish, and though he hoped he did not show it, he did show it plainly. He began to defend himself: a further blunder.

“Well, my dear, how could I know? That young fellow has been coming over here day after day, with his horses and buggies, on one

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pretext or another—tagging after—not after you or me certainly—and you are as civil to him as if he were the—President himself, and actually send the child off with him——”

“William! Send the child off with him!—I!”

“Well, no—not exactly that, of course,” said her husband, rather embarrassed, “but permitting her to go, and thus giving him an opportunity to declare himself, which he would be a stick not to avail himself of.”

“I am glad you retracted that, William,” said Mrs. Welch, with the air of one deeply aggrieved. “Of course, I am civil to the young man. I hope I am civil to everyone. But you little know a mother’s heart. I have always said that no man can understand a woman.”

“I believe that’s so,” said her husband, smiling. “I know I have often heard your Royal Highness say so. But did it ever occur to you that it may be because men are somewhat direct and downright?”

“Now don’t go and insult my sex to cover the density of yours,” said Mrs. Welch. “Confine your attack to one. If you think that I would allow my daughter to marry that—that young upstart, you don’t know me as well as you did the first day we met.”

“Oh, yes, I do! I know you well enough to

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know you are the best and most devoted wife and mother and friend in the world," declared her husband. "But, you see, I misunderstood you. I reason simply from the plain facts that lie right before my eyes——"

"And you always will misunderstand, my dear. Your sex always will misunderstand until they learn that woman is a more complex and finer organism than their clumsy, primary machine, moved by more delicate and complicated motives."

"Well, I agree to that," said her husband. "And I am very glad to find you agree with me—that I agree with you—" he corrected, with a twinkle in his eye, "as to that young man."

Mrs. Welch accepted his surrender with graciousness and left the room, and the Major sat down and wrote his reply to Captain Allen.

He expressed his unfeigned appreciation of the honor done, but gave him to understand that after conference with Mrs. Welch they felt it their duty to state to him that his suit for their daughter would not be acceptable to them, and he requested him to consider the matter closed.

As soon as he had finished the letter the Major despatched it to Mr. Allen by a messenger.

He had hardly sent it off when Mrs. Welch returned. Her first question was whether the

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answer had gone. She was manifestly disappointed to learn that it had been sent.

“I wish you had let me see it,” she said.

“Oh! I made it positive enough,” declared the Major.

“Yes, I was not thinking of that,” Mrs. Welch said, thoughtfully. “I was afraid you would be too—Men are so hasty—so up and down—they don’t know how to deal with such matters as a woman would.”

Major Welch turned on her in blank amazement—a little humor lighting up his face. Mrs. Welch answered as if he had made a charge.

“You men will never understand us.”

“I believe that’s so. You women are curious, especially where your daughters are concerned. I set the young man down pretty hard, just as you wished me to do.”

Mrs. Welch made a gesture of dissent.

“Not at all—I have reflected on what you said about—about his not intending to be insulting, and I think you are right. I no more wish to accept his proposal now than before; all I want is to—?” She made a gesture—“Oh! you understand.”

“Yes, I think I do,” laughed her husband. “Why cannot women let a man go?”

CHAPTER XXXII

A CUT DIRECT AND A REJECTED ADDRESS

THE revelation that Steve made to Jacquelin in their law-office the night the bill was filed, seemed suddenly to have opened life again to Jacquelin. Looking back over the past, he could now see how foolish he had been. Incidents which he had construed one way now, in the light of Steve's disclosure, took on a new complexion. He appeared to have sprung suddenly into a new and rarer atmosphere. Hope was easily worth everything else in Pandora's box. When he began to visit at Dr. Cary's again, it must be said, that he could discern no change in Blair. Easy and charming as she always was to others, to him she was as constrained as formerly. She treated him with the same coldness that she had always shown him since that fatal evening when he had taken her to task about Middleton, and then had alleged that it was on Steve's account. However, he was not to be

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cast down now. With the key which Steve had given him he could afford to wait and was willing to serve for his mistake, and he set down her treatment of him simply to a woman's caprice. He would bide his time until the occasion came and then he would win her. According to Steve, she had no idea that he was still in love with her, and according to the same expert authority, this was what she waited for. He had first to prove his love, and then he should find that he had hers. So through the long summer months he served faithfully. Each time that he saw Blair he found himself more deeply in love than before; and each time he feared more to tell her of it, lest Steve's diagnosis should possibly prove wrong. He knew that the next time he opened the subject it must be final. He even stood seeing McRaffle visiting Dr. Cary's, though he fumed and smouldered internally over a man like McRaffle being in Blair's presence, however smooth he was. Steve declared that McRaffle was in love with Miss Welch, but Jacquelin knew better. Steve was such a jealous creature that he thought everyone was in love with Miss Welch—even that Wash Still was, whom Miss Welch would not so much as look at. No, McRaffle was in love with

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Blair. Jacquelin knew it—just as he knew that Middleton was. She could not bear McRaffle, of course; but the thought of Middleton often crossed Jacquelin's mind, and discomposed him. He had heard of the honors Middleton had won in the Northwest and of his retirement from the service. Blair had told him of it with undue enthusiasm. Confound him! When that Indian bullet hit him most men would have died. Then as his thought ran this way Jacquelin would haul himself up short, with a feeling of hot shame that such an ignoble idea could even enter his mind, and next time he saw Blair would speak of Middleton with unmeasured admiration.

At length he could wait no longer. He would tell her how he had always loved her. Steve was his confidant, as he was Steve's, and Steve agreed that this was the thing to do.

Alas! for masculine wisdom! The way of a serpent on a rock is not harder than that of a maid with a man. An opportunity presented itself one afternoon in which everything appeared so propitious that Jacquelin felt as though the time were made for his occasion. He and Blair had been to ride. The summer woods had been heavenly in their peacefulness and

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charm. Blair had insensibly fallen into a softer mood than she usually showed him, and, as they had talked of old times, she had seemed sweeter to him than ever before. He had spoken to her of Rupert, and of his anxiety about the boy; of his association with McRaffle, and of the influence McRaffle seemed to have obtained over him; and Blair had responded with a warmth which had set his heart to bounding. Mr. McRaffle was a dangerous, bad man, she declared, and she was doing all she could to counteract his evil influence over Rupert. Her sweetness to Jacquelin was such that he had hardly been able to restrain himself from opening his heart to her then and there, and asking her to let the past be bygones and accept his love. But he had waited until they should reach home, and now they were at the door. She invited him to stay to tea. Her voice thrilled him. Jacquelin suddenly began to speak to her of what was in his heart. She dropped her eyes and he was conscious that she was trembling. In his constraint he referred to the past, and faltered something about Steve having set him right. She looked up quickly. He did not heed it, but went on and said all he had so often rehearsed, with a good deal more than he had planned

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to say. Perhaps he gathered confidence as he went on—perhaps he showed it a little too much; for he became conscious somehow that she was not as responsive as she had been just before.

When he was quite through, he waited. She also waited a moment, and then began.

She did not care for him, except as a relative, and she never expected to marry at all. She was not looking at him, and was evidently speaking under strong feeling.

Jacquelin's hopes were all dashed to the ground. His throat felt parched, and when he tried to speak again his lips did not frame his words easily.

“May I ask if you care for anyone else?” he demanded, in a constrained voice.

She did not know that he had any right to ask her such a question. She had already told him that she never expected to marry anyone. She had grown more formal.

Jacquelin was sure now that she cared for Middleton, and she had simply misled Steve.

“What did you tell Steve?” he asked.

She faced him, her figure quite straight and strong, her flashing eyes fastened searchingly on his face.

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“So that’s the reason you have come! Steve told you to come, and you have come to say what he told you to say. Well, go back to him and tell him I say he was mistaken.” Her lip curled as she turned on her heel.

“No—no—Blair—wait one moment!” But she had walked slowly into the house, and Jacquelin saw her climb the stair.

A moment later he mounted his horse, and came slowly away down the road he knew so well, the road to Vain regret, beyond which, somewhere, lies Despair.

He knew now it was Middleton who had barred his way, and that to keep her secret, Blair had misled Steve. He might have forgiven her all else, but he could not forgive that.

When Jacquelin announced the result of his proposal to Steve, that wise counsellor laughed at him. He could make it up in ten minutes, he declared, and he rode up to see Blair next day. His interview lasted somewhat longer than he had expected, and most of the time he had been defending himself against Blair’s scathing attack. When he left, it was with a feeling that he had done both Blair and Jacquelin an injury, and when he saw Jacquelin, he summed up his position briefly: “Well, Jack, I

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give it up. I thought I knew something of men and women; but I give up women.”

After his interview with Major Welch, Captain Allen had appeared to be in better spirits than he had been in for some time. Even the letter he received from that gentleman did not wholly dash his hopes, and though they occasionally sank, they as often rallied again. We know from the greatest of novelists that when a man is cudgelling his brains for other rhymes to “sorrow” besides “borrow” and “to-morrow,” he is nearer light than he thinks. Steve found this safety-scape.

Jacquelin did not write poetry or even “poems” on the subject of his disappointment; but his cheek-bones began to show more, and his chin began to take on a firmer set.

But Captain Allen was soon plunged as deep in the abyss as Jacquelin.

He was sitting in his office looking out of the window one afternoon, a habit that had grown on him of late, when a pair of riders, a lady and her escort, rode up the street, in plain view of where he sat. At sight of the trim figure sitting her horse so jauntily, Steve’s heart gave a bound and a light came into his eyes. The next instant a cloud followed as he recognized Miss

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Welch's companion as Dr. Washington Still. Rumor had reported that Dr. Still was with her a good deal of late. Miss Thomasia and Blair had met them one evening visiting a poor woman together. McRaffle had taken the trouble to state that he had frequently met them.

Steve could not believe that such a girl as Ruth Welch could be accepting the addresses of such a man as young Dr. Still. She could not know him. He followed the girl with his eyes, as long as she was in view. For some moments afterward he sat with a dogged resolution on his face; but it gradually faded away, and he rose and went out, passing down to the street. He had not seen Ruth Welch face to face since the filing of Jacquelin's suit. But she had never been absent from his thoughts for a moment. He had heard that both she and Mrs. Welch had a great deal of feeling about the suit, and that both had spoken bitterly of him; but Major Welch had received him civilly, even though he had denied his request to be allowed to offer himself as Ruth's suitor.

With a combination of emotions, rather than with any single idea in his mind, Steve strode into the village and up the street. He wanted to get away, and he wanted to be near her and

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have a look in her face; but he had no definite intention of letting her see him, none, at least, of meeting her. But as he turned a corner into a shady street they were coming back and Steve saw that even at a distance Ruth Welch knew him. He could not turn back; so kept on, and as they passed him he raised his hat. Miss Welch's escort, with a supercilious look on his face, raised his hat; but the girl looked Steve full in the eyes and cut him dead. The blood sprang into Steve's face. For any sign she gave, except a sudden whitening, and a contraction of the mouth, she might never have seen him before in all her life. The next second Steve heard her voice starting apparently a very animated conversation with her escort, and heard him reply:

“Hurrah! for you, that will settle him;” and break into a loud laugh.

Steve did not return to his office that evening. He spent the night wandering about in blind and hopeless gloom. But had Mr. Allen known what occurred during the remainder of that ride he might have found in it some consolation.

Miss Ruth had hardly gotten out of hearing of Captain Allen, and her escort had scarcely had time to turn over in his mind his enjoyment

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of his rival's discomfiture and his own triumph, when the young lady inexplicably changed and turned on him so viciously and with so biting a sarcasm that he was almost dumfounded. The occasion for her change was so slight that Wash Still was completely mystified. It was only some slighting little speech he made about the man she had just cut dead.

“Why don't you say that to Captain Allen?” she asked, with a sudden flush on her face and a flash in her eyes. “You, at least, have not the excuse of not speaking to him.”

Women have this in common with the Deity, that their ways are past finding out. The young doctor was completely mystified; but he could not comprehend how Miss Welch could have cut Captain Allen without it, in some way, redounding to his own advantage, and, notwithstanding her fierceness and coldness toward him, he believed it was a favorable time for him.

The ride home through the woods in the soft summer afternoon presented an opportunity he had been seeking for some time, and the attitude Ruth had shown toward his rival appeared to him to indicate that everything was propitious. Even her attack he construed as only a flash of feminine caprice. After her

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little explosion, Miss Welch had lapsed into silence, and rode with her eyes on her horse's mane and her lips firmly closed. The young man took it for remorse for her conduct, and drawing up to her side, began to talk of himself and of his affairs. Ruth listened in silence—so silently, indeed, that she scarcely seemed to be listening at all—and the young doctor was moved to enlarge somewhat eloquently on his prospects as the owner of both Birdwood and Red Rock, the handsomest places in the County. Presently, however, he changed, and as they reached a shady place in the road, began to address her. He stated that he thought she had given him reason to hope he might be successful. The change in Ruth was electric. She gave suddenly a vehement gesture of wild dissent:

“Oh! No! no! Don't!” she cried, and drew her horse to a stand, turning in the road and facing the young man. “No! no! You have misunderstood me! How could you think so? I have never done it! I never dreamed of it! It is impossible!” The deep color sprang to her face, but the next moment she controlled herself by a strong effort, and faced the young man again. “Dr. Still,” she said, calmly and with deep earnestness, “I am sure that, wit-

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tingly, I never gave you the least warrant to think—to suppose that I could—that you might say to me what you have said. My conscience tells me this; but if I have ever done or said anything that appeared to you to be a ground to build a hope on, I am deeply sorry, and humbly beg your pardon. I beg you to believe me, I never intended it. I do not wish to appear hard or—cruel, but I must tell you now that there is not the slightest hope for you, and never will be. I do not love you, I never could love, and I will never marry, you, never.” She could not have spoken more strongly.

The young man’s face, which had begun by being pale, had now turned crimson, and he broke out, almost violently—reiterating that she had given him ground to think himself favored. He cited the rides she had taken with him. Ruth’s eyes opened wide and her form straightened:

“I do not wish to discuss this further. I have told you the simple truth. I should prefer that you go on ahead of me—I prefer to ride home alone.”

“Why did you cut Steve Allen this evening?” Dr. Still persisted, angrily.

Ruth’s face hardened.

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“Certainly not on your account,” she said, coldly, “or for any reason that you will understand. Go; I will ride home alone.”

“I used to think you were in love with him, and so did everybody else,” persisted he; “but it can’t be him. Is it that young jackanapes, Rupert Gray? He’s in love with you, but I didn’t suppose you to be in love with a boy like that.”

Ruth’s face flamed with indignation.

“By what right do you question me as to such things? Go, I will ride home alone.” She drew her horse back and away from him. The young man hesitated for a moment, but Ruth was inexorable.

“If you please—go!” she said, coldly, pointing down the road.

“Well, I will go,” he burst out, angrily. “But Rupert Gray and the whole set of ’em had better look out for me,” and with a growl of rage, he struck his horse and galloped away.

Miss Welch rode on alone, her heart moved by conflicting emotions—indignation, apprehension—and yet others, deeper than these. What right had this man to treat her so? She flushed again with indignation as she thought of his insolence. It seemed to her almost an insult to

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have been addressed by him. She went over in her mind her conduct toward him. There never was one thing of which he could have a right to complain. Of this she was sure. It could not be otherwise, for she had never for a moment been free from a consciousness of antipathy to him. Then she went over her present situation, the situation of her father and mother, now so lonely and cut off from everyone. The cool, still woods, the deserted road, the far-reaching silence, were such as to inspire loneliness and sadness, and Ruth was on the verge of tears when the gallop of a horse came to her from ahead. She wondered if it could be Wash Still returning, and a momentary wave of apprehension swept over her. The next instant Rupert Gray cantered in sight. Ruth's first thought was one of relief, the next was that she ought to be cool to him. But as the boy galloped up to her, his young face glowing with pleasure, and reined in his horse, all her intended formality disappeared, and she returned his greeting cordially.

“Well, I am in luck,” he exclaimed. “Mayn't I ride home with you?” He had assumed her consent, and turned his horse without waiting for it.

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“I am afraid you may be going somewhere and I may detain you.”

“No, indeed; I am my own master,” he said, with a toss of his head. “Besides, I don’t like you to be riding so late all by yourself.”

The imitation of Steve Allen’s protecting manner was so unmistakable that Ruth could not help smiling.

“Oh! I’m not afraid. No one would interfere with me.”

“They’d better not! If they did, they’d soon hear from me,” declared the boy, warmly, with that mannish toss of the head which boys have. “I’d soon show ’em who Rupert Gray is. Oh! I say! I met Washy Still up the road yonder, a little way back, looking as sour as vinegar, and you ought to have seen the way I cut him. I passed him just like this” (giving an imitation of his stare), “and you just ought to have seen the way he looked. He looked as if he’d have liked to shoot me.” He burst into a clear, merry laugh.

The boy’s description of himself was so exactly like the way Ruth had treated Steve, that she could not forbear smiling. The smile died away, however, and an expression of seriousness took its place.

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“Rupert, I don’t think it well to make enemies of people——”

“Who? Of Washy Still? Pshaw! He knows I hate him—and he hates me. I don’t care. I want him to hate me. I’ll make him hate me worse before I’m done.” It was the brag-gadocio of a boy.

Ruth thought of the gleam of hate that had come into the man’s eyes. “He might do you an injury.”

“Who? Washy Still? Let him try it. I’m a better man than he is, any day. But he’d never try it. He’s afraid to look me in the eyes. You don’t like him, do you?” he asked with sudden earnestness.

“No, but I think you underestimate him.”

“Pshaw! He can’t hurt you—not unless you took his physic—no other way. I asked if you liked him, because—because some people thought you did, and I said you didn’t—I knew you didn’t. I say, I want to ask you something. I wish you wouldn’t let him come to see you.”

“Why?”

“Why, because he is not a man you ought to associate with—he is not a gentleman. He’s a sneak, and his father’s a thief. He stole our

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place—just stole it—besides everything else he's stolen.”

“Why, you say we—my father had something to do with that,” said Ruth, quietly.

“What! You! Your father?—I said he stole!” He reined up his horse, in his amazement.

“In your suit or bill, or whatever you call it.” Ruth felt that it was cruel in her to strike him such a blow, yet she enjoyed it.

“I never did—we never did—you are mistaken,” stammered the boy. “Why, I wouldn't have done it for the whole of Red Rock—no more would Steve. Let me explain. I know all about it.”

Ruth looked acquiescent, and as they walked their horses along under the trees the boy tried to explain the matter. He was not very lucid, for he was often confused; but he made clear the desire they had had to keep Major Welch out of the matter, and the sincerity of their motive in giving him the notice before he should buy, and the anxiety they had had and the care they had taken to make it clear in their suit that no charge of personal knowledge by him was intended. He also informed Ruth of Steve's action in the matter, and of the episode in the office

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that night when the bill was signed, or, at least, of as much of it as he had heard.

“But why did he do that?” asked Ruth.

“Don’t you know?”

“N—o.” Very doubtfully and shyly.

“Steve’s in love with you!”

“What? Oh, no! You are mistaken.” Ruth was conscious that her reply was silly and weak, and that she was blushing violently.

“Yes, he is—dead in love. Why, everybody knows it—at least Jack does, and Blair does, and I do. And I am, too,” he added, warmly. The boy’s ingenuous declaration steadied Ruth and soothed her. She looked at him with a pleased and gratified light on her face.

“I am—I am dead in love with you, too. I think you are the prettiest and sweetest and kindest young lady in the whole world—just as nice as Blair, every bit; and I just wish I was older—I just wish you could marry me.” He was blushing and turning white by turns, and the expression on his young face was so ingenuous and sweet and modest, and the light in his eyes so adoring, that the girl’s heart went out to him. She drew her horse over to his side, and put her hand softly on his arm.

“Rupert, you are a dear, sweet boy, and, at

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least, you will let me be your best friend, and you will be mine," she said, sweetly.

"Yes, I will, and I think you are just as good as you can be, and I'll be just like your own brother, if you will let me."

"Indeed, I will, and we will always be sister and brother to each other."

"Thank you," he said, simply. A moment later he said, reining in his horse, "I say, if you think that suit means anything against your father, I'll have it stopped."

"No, no, Rupert; I am satisfied," Ruth protested, with a smile.

"Because I can do it; Jack and Steve would do anything for me, and I would do anything for you. It was mainly on my account, anyhow, that they brought it, I believe," he added. "They said I was a minor; but, you know, I'll soon be of age—I'm seventeen now. I don't know why boys have to be boys, anyhow! I don't see why they can't be men at once."

"I think I know," Ruth smiled, gazing at him pleasantly.

"And, I say, I want to tell you one thing about Steve. He isn't what people take him to be. You know?—Just clever and dashing and wild and reckless. He's the best and kindest fellow

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in the world. You ask Aunt Thomasia and Blair and Aunt Peggy and Uncle Waverley and old Mrs. Turley, and all the poor people about the County. And he's as brave as Julius Cæsar. I want to tell you that of him, and you know I wouldn't tell you if 'twa'n't so."

"I know," said Ruth, looking at him more pleasantly than ever.

They were at the gate now, and Ruth invited him in; but Rupert said he had an engagement.

"There is one thing I want to ask you to do," said Ruth, rather doubtfully.

"What is it?" he asked, brightening; and then, as she hesitated: "Anything! I'll do it. I'll do anything for you, Miss Ruth; indeed, I will."

"No; it is not for me, but for yourself," said Ruth, who was thinking of a report that Rupert had been associating lately with some very wild young men, and she had it in her mind to ask him not to do so any more. "But, no; I'll ask you next time I see you, maybe," she added, after a pause.

"All right; I promise you I'll do it."

He said good-by, and galloped away through the dusk.

Ruth stood for some time looking after him,

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and then turned and entered the house, and went softly to her room.

Ruth did not think it necessary to tell her mother or father of the incidents of her ride, except that Rupert had ridden home with her. She shrank instinctively from speaking even to her mother of what had occurred on the ride. She felt a certain humiliation in the fact that Dr. Still had ventured to address her. Her only consolation was that she knew she had never given him any right to speak so to her. She had never gone anywhere with him except from a sense of duty, and had never been anything but coldly polite to him. She was relieved to hear a few days later that Dr. Still had left the County, and, rumor said, had gone to the city to practise his profession. Anyhow, he was gone, and Ruth felt much relieved, and buried her uncomfortable secret in her own bosom.

CHAPTER XXXIII

BLAIR CARY SAVES A RIVAL SCHOOL

A NEW cause of grievance against Mrs. Welch had arisen in the County in her conduct of her school near the Bend. Colored schools were not a novelty in the County. Blair Cary had for two years or more taught the colored school near her home. But Mrs. Welch had made a new departure. The other school had been talked over and deliberated on until it was in some sense the outcome of the concert of the neighborhood. Dr. Cary gave the land and the timber. "Whether it will amount to anything else, I cannot say; but it will amount to this, sir," said the Doctor to General Legaie, "I shall have done the best I could for my old servants." And on this, General Legaie, who had been the most violent opponent of it all, had sent his ox-team to haul the stocks to the mill. "Not because I believe it will accomplish any good, sir; but because a gentleman can do no

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less than sustain other gentlemen who have assumed obligations.”

Thus Miss Blair's school was regarded in part as representative of the old system. When, however, Mrs. Welch started her school, she consulted no one and asked no assistance—at least, of the county people. The aid she sought was only from her friends at the North, and when she received it, she set in, chose her place and built her school, giving out at the same time that it was to be used for sewing classes, debating societies, and other public purposes. Thus this school came to be considered as a foreign institution, conducted on foreign principles, and in opposition to the school already established by the neighborhood. Mrs. Welch not only built a much larger and handsomer structure than any other school-house in that section, but she planted vines to cover the porch, and introduced a system of prizes and rewards so far beyond anything heretofore known in the County, that shortly not only most of the scholars who had attended Blair's school left, but those from other schools much farther off began to flock to Mrs. Welch's seminary.

The first teacher Mrs. Welch secured to take charge of the institution was a slender, delicate

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young woman with deep eyes, thin cheeks, and a worn face, who by her too assiduous devotion to what she deemed her duty and an entire disregard of all prudence, soon reduced herself to such a low condition of health that Dr. Cary, who was called in, insisted that she should be sent back to her old home. The next teacher, Miss Slipley, was one who had testimonials high enough to justify the idea that she was qualified to teach in Tübingen.

She was a young woman of about thirty, with somewhat pronounced views and a very pronounced manner; her face was plain, but she had a good figure, of which Mrs. Welch, who herself had a fine figure, thought she was much too vain, and as her views relating to the conduct of the school by no means coincided with those of Mrs. Welch, matters were shortly not as harmonious between the two as they might have been. She soon began to complain of the discomforts of her situation and her lack of association. Mrs. Welch deplored this, but thought that Miss Slipley should find her true reward in the sense of duty performed, and told her so plainly. This, Miss Slipley said, was well enough when one had a husband and family to support her, but she had had no idea that she was to live in a wilder-

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ness, where her only associates were negroes, and where not a man ever spoke to her, except to bow distantly. So after a little time, she had thrown up her position and gone home, and shortly afterward had married. This, to Mrs. Welch, explained all her high airs. Just then Mrs. Welch received a letter from a young woman she knew, asking her to look out for a position for her. During the war this applicant had been a nurse in a hospital, where Mrs. Welch had learned something of her efficiency. So when Miss Slipley left, Mrs. Welch wrote Miss Bush to come.

“She, at least, will not have Miss Slipley’s very objectionable drawbacks—for, if I remember aright, Miss Bush has no figure at all,” said Mrs. Welch. “Heaven save me from women with figures! When an ugly woman has nothing else, she is always showing her figure or her feet.”

When Miss Bush arrived Mrs. Welch found her impressions verified. She was a homely little body, yet with kind eyes and a pleasant mouth. She acceded cheerfully to all Mrs. Welch’s views. She was perfectly willing to live with the woman at whose house it had been arranged that she should board; she wished, she

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said, to live unobtrusively. She was in deep mourning and wore a heavy veil.

Miss Bush had not been in her position long before Mrs. Welch felt that at last she had found the very person for the place. She was as quiet as a mouse, and not afraid of any work whatever. She not only taught, but wholly effaced herself, and, in fact, proved a perfect treasure.

By the negroes she was called Miss May (a contraction for Mary), which went abroad as her family name.

Miss May proved to be a strict disciplinarian, and a firm believer in the somewhat obsolete, but not less wise doctrine, that to spare the rod is to spoil the child, and as this came to be known, it had the effect of establishing her in the good esteem of the neighborhood. Thus, though no one visited her, Miss May received on all hands a respectful regard. This was suddenly jeopardized at the opening of the new campaign, by a report that the school-house, in addition to its purposes as a school-building, was being used as a public hall by negroes for their Union-league meetings. Leech, whose headquarters were now in the city, had come up to take charge of the canvass, and had boasted that he would make it hot for his opponents—a boast

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he appeared likely to make good. He attended the meetings at the new school-house, and it was reported that he had made a speech in which he said that the whites owed the negroes everything; that the time had come for payment, and that matches were only five cents a box, and if barns were burned they belonged to them. The report of this speech was carried through the County next day. One night shortly afterward Andy Stamper's store was burned to the ground, and this was followed by the burning of several barns throughout Red Rock and the adjoining counties.

The reappearance of the masked order that had almost disappeared followed immediately in some places. A meeting was held in Brutusville, denouncing the outrage of such speeches as those of Leech, at which Dr. Cary presided, and Steve Allen and General Legaie, Jacquelin Gray and Captain McRaffle spoke, but there was no reappearance in this County of the masked men. McRaffle denounced the patrons and teacher of the new school with so much heat that Steve Allen declared he was as incendiary as Leech.

McRaffle sneered that Steve appeared to have become very suddenly a champion of the carpet-

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bagger, Welch; and Steve retorted that at least he did not try to borrow from people and then vilify them, but that Captain McRaffle could find another cause to quarrel with him if he wished it. For a long time there had been bad blood between Steve and McRaffle. Among other causes was McRaffle's evil influence over Rupert.

Rupert Gray had been growing of late more and more independent, associating with McRaffle and a number of the wildest fellows in the County, and showing a tendency to recklessness which had caused all his friends much concern. Jacquelin tried to counsel and control him, but the boy was wayward and heedless. Rupert thought it was hard that he was to be under direction at an age when Jacquelin had already won laurels as a soldier.

When his brother took him to task for going off with some of the wilder young men in their escapades, Rupert only laughed at him.

“Why, Jack, it's you I am emulating. As Cousin John Cary would say, ‘The trophies of Miltiades will not let me sleep.’” And when Captain Allen tried to counsel him seriously, he floored that gentleman by saying that he had learned both to drink and to play poker from

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him. He was, however, devoted to Blair, and she appeared to have much influence with him; so Steve and Jacquelin tried to keep him with her as much as possible.

One evening shortly after the public meeting at which Steve and McRaffle had had their quarrel, Rupert appeared to be somewhat restless. Blair had learned the signs and knew that in such cases it was likely to be due to Rupert's having heard that some mischief was on foot, and she used to devise all sorts of schemes to keep the boy occupied. She soon discovered now what was the matter. Rupert had heard a rumor that a movement was about to be directed against Miss May's school. None of the men he was intimate with knew much about it. It was only a rumor. Steve and Jacquelin were both away from the County attending Court in another county. Blair was much disturbed.

"Why, they are going to do it on your account," said Rupert. "They say this school was started to break up your school."

"Nonsense! Do they think that's the way to help me? The teacher is a woman," urged Blair. Rupert's countenance fell.

"They aren't going to trouble her—are just going to scare the negroes so there won't be any

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more meetings held there. Some say she's kin to Leech—or something.”

“She is nothing of the kind,” asserted Blair. “Ruth Welch told me she had never seen Mr. Leech, and declined positively to see him. When is it to be?”

“To-night.”

Blair lamented the absence of Jacquelin and Steve. If they were but at home they would, she knew, prevent this outrage.

“Oh! Jacquelin and Steve! They are nothing but old fogies,” laughed Rupert. “McRaffle, he's the man!” With a toss of his head he broke into a snatch of “Bonnie Dundee.”

Blair watched him gravely for a moment.

“Rupert,” she said, “Captain McRaffle is nothing but a gambler and an adventurer. He is not worthy to be named in the same breath with—with Steve and—your brother any more than he is to be named with my father. This is the proof of it, that he is going to try to interfere with a woman. Why does he not go after Colonel Leech, who made the speech there?” Rupert's face grew grave. Blair pressed her advantage.

“He is a coward; for he would never dare to undertake such a thing if your brother and Steve

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were at home. He takes advantage of their absence to do this, when he knows that Miss May has no defender.”

Rupert's eye flashed.

“By George! I never thought of that,” he burst out. “She has got a defender. I'll go there and stand guard myself. You needn't have any fear, Blair, if I'm there.” He hitched his coat around in such a way as to display the butt of a huge pistol. Blair could not help smiling. But this was not what she wanted. She was afraid to send Rupert to guard the place. He had not judgment enough. If what the boy had heard were true, something might happen to him if he went there. She knew that he would defend it with his life; but she was afraid of the consequences. So she set to work to put Rupert on another tack. She wanted him to go down to the county seat and learn what he could of the plans, and try to keep the men from coming at all. This scheme was by no means as agreeable to Rupert as the other, but he finally yielded, and set out. Blair watched him ride away through the orchard, the evening light falling softly around him as he cantered off. She sat still for a little while thinking. Suddenly she rose, and going into the house found her mother

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and held a short consultation with her. A few moments later she came out with her hat on, and disappeared among the apple-trees, walking rapidly in the same direction Rupert had taken. Her last act as she left the house was to call softly to her mother:

“When Rupert comes back send him after me. I will wait for him at Mr. Stamper’s.”

It had occurred to her that Andy Stamper would do what she was afraid to have a rash boy like Rupert attempt. Andy hated Leech, to whom he charged the burning of his store; but he was devoted to Miss Welch. And he had told Blair of seeing Miss May once pull down her veil to keep from looking at Leech.

When, however, Blair arrived at the Stampers’ Mr. Stamper was absent. But she found an heroic enough ally in his representative, Mrs. Delia, to make up for all other deficiencies. The idea of the possibility of an injury to one of her sex fired that vigorous soul with a flame not to be quenched.

“I jest wish my Andy was here,” she lamented. “He’d soon straighten ’em out. Not as I cares, Miss Blair, about the school or the teacher,” she said, with careful limitation; “for I don’t like none of ’em, and I’d be glad if they’d

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all go back where they come from. The old school was good enough for me, and them as can't find enough in white folks to work on, outdoes me. But—a man as can't git a man to have a fuss with and has to go after a woman, Delia Stamper jist wants to git hold of him. I never did like that Cap'n McRaffler, anyhow. He owes Andy a hundred and twenty-nine dollars, and if I hadn't stopt Andy from givin' him things—that's what I call it—jest *givin'* 'em to him—sellin' on credit, he'd 'a' owed us five hundred. He knows better th'n to fool with me." She gave a belligerent shake of her head. "I'll tell you what, Miss Blair," she suddenly broke out. "Our men folks are all away. If they are comin' after women, let's give 'em some women to meet as know how to deal with 'em. I wants to meet Captain McRaffler, anyhow." Another shake of the head was given, this time up and down, and her black eyes began to sparkle. Blair looked at her with new satisfaction.

"That is what I wish. That is why I came," she said. "Can you leave your children?"

"They are all right," said Mrs. Stamper, with kindling eyes. "I ain't been on such an expedition not since the war. I'll leave word for Andy to come as soon as he gits home."

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As they sallied forth, Mrs. Stamper put into her pocket a big pistol and her knitting. "One gives me courage to take the other," she said.

It was a mile or two through the woods to the school-house, and the novel guards arrived at their posts none too soon. As they emerged from the woods into the little clearing on one side of which stood the church and on the other the new school-house, the waning moon was just rising above the tree-tops, casting a ghostly light through the trees and deepening the shadows. The school-house was considerably larger than any other in the neighborhood, and over one end of the porch Miss May had trained a Virginia creeper. The two guards took their seats in the shadow of the vine. They were both somewhat awed by the situation, but from different causes. Blair's feeling was due to the strangeness of her situation out there, surrounded by dark woods filled with the cries of night insects and the mournful call of the whip-poor-will. Mrs. Stamper confessed that the graves amid the weeds around the church were what disquieted her. For she boasted that she "was not afeared of that man living." But she admitted mournfully, "I am certainly afeared of ghosts."

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The two sentinels had but a short time to wait. They had not been there long before the tramp of horses was heard, and in a little while from the woods opposite them emerged a cavalcade of, perhaps, a dozen horsemen. Mrs. Stamper clutched Blair with a grip of terror, for men and horses were heavily shrouded and looked ghostly enough. Blair was trembling, but not from fear, only from excitement. The presence of the enemy suddenly strung her up, and she put her hand on her companion encouragingly. Just then one of the men burst into a loud laugh. Mrs. Delia's grip relaxed.

"I know that laugh," she said, with a sigh of deep relief. "Jest let him ride up here and try some of his shenanigin!" She began to pull at her pistol, but Blair seized her.

"For heaven's sake, don't," she whispered; and Mrs. Stamper let the pistol go, and they squeezed back into the shadow. Just then the men rode up to the school-house door. They were discussing what they should do. "Burn the house down," declared the leader. "Drive the old hag away." But this met with fierce opposition.

"I didn't come out here to burn any house down," said one of the men, "and I'm not going

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to do it. You can put your notice up and come along.”

“Ah! you’re afraid,” sneered the other.

There was a movement among the horsemen, and the man so charged rode up to the head of the column and pulled his horse in front of the leader. There was a gleam of steel in the light of the moon.

“Take that back or I’ll make you prove it,” he said, angrily. “Ride out there and draw your pistol; we’ll let Jim here give the word, and we’ll see who’s afraid.”

Their companions crowded around them to make peace. The leader apologized. The sentiment of the crowd was evidently against him.

“Now get down and fix up your notice to Leech, and let’s be going,” said one of the peace-makers.

The leader dismounted and started up to the door. As he did so, one of the two young women stepped forward.

“What do you want?” asked Mrs. Stamper. The man positively staggered from surprise, and a murmur of astonishment broke from the horsemen. Mrs. Stamper did not give them time to recover. With true soldierly instinct she pressed her advantage. “I know what you

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want," she said, with scorn. "You want to scare a poor woman who ain't got anybody to defend her. You ain't so much against niggers and carpet-baggers as you make out. I know you."

"You know nothing of the kind," growled the man, angrily, in a deep voice. He had recovered himself. "What business have you here? Go home, wherever that may be, and leave the Invisible Empire to execute its dread decrees."

"Dread fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Mrs. Stamper. "I don't know you, don't I?" She gave a step forward and, with a quick movement, caught and pulled the mask from his face. "I don't know you, Captain McRaffle? And you don't know me, do you?" With an oath the man made a grab for his mask, and, snatching it from her, hastily replaced it. She laughed triumphantly. "No, I didn't know you, Captain McRaffle. I've got cause to know you. And you ought to be ashamed of yourself coming out here to harm a poor woman. So ought all of you; and you are, I know, every mother's son of you. If you want to do anything, why don't you do it to men, and openly, like Andy Stamper and Capt'n Allen?"

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“It hasn’t been so long since they were in the order,” sneered McRaffle.

“Yes, and, when they were, there were gentlemen in it,” fired back Mrs. Stamper; “and they went after men, not women.”

“We didn’t come to trouble any woman; we came to give notice that no more night-meetings and speeches about burning houses were to be held here,” growled McRaffle.

“Yes; so you set an example by wanting to burn down houses yourself? That’s the way you wanted to give notice, if it hadn’t been for those gentlemen there.”

“She’s too much for you, Captain,” laughed his comrades.

“We’re trying to help out our own people, and to keep the carpet-baggers from breaking up Miss Cary’s school,” said McRaffle, trying to defend himself.

“No doubt Miss Cary will be much obliged to you.”

“No doubt she will. I have good reason to know she will,” affirmed McRaffle; “and you’ll do well not to be interfering with our work.” There was a movement in the corner behind Mrs. Stamper.

“Ah! Well, I’ll let her thank you in person,”

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said Mrs. Stamper, falling back with a low bow, as Miss Cary herself advanced from the shadow. The astonishment of the men was not less than it had been when Mrs. Stamper first confronted them.

Blair spoke in a clear, quiet voice that at once enforced attention. She disclaimed indignantly the charge that had just been made by the leader, and seconded all that Mrs. Stamper had said. Her friends, if she had any in the party, could not, she declared, do her a worse service than to interfere with this school. She knew that its patrons had reprobated the advantage that had been taken of their action in allowing the building to be used as a public hall.

When she was through, several of the riders asked leave to accompany her and Mrs. Stamper home, assuring her that the school-house would not be interfered with.

This offer, however, they declined. They were "not afraid," they said.

"We don't think you need tell us that," laughed several of the men.

Just then there was the sound of horses galloping at top speed, and in a second Rupert Gray and Andy Stamper dashed up breathless.

Mrs. Stamper and Miss Cary explained the

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situation. Hearing from Mrs. Stamper what McRaffle had said about Blair, Rupert flashed out that he would settle with Captain McRaffle about it later.

For a moment or two it looked as if there might be a serious misunderstanding. But Blair, seconded by the men who had offered to conduct them home and by Mrs. Stamper, quieted matters; and the cavalcade of masked men rode away in one direction, whilst Andy and Rupert rode off in the other with the two young women behind them, leaving the little school-house as peaceful in the moonlight as if there had never been a sound except the cicadas' cry and the whip-poor-will's call within a hundred miles.

The incident had some far-reaching consequences. Only a day or two later Captain McRaffle went to town; and a short time after there was quite a sensation in the county over a notice in Leech's organ, announcing that Colonel McRaffle, long disgusted with the brutal methods of the outlaws who disgraced the State, had severed his connection with the party that employed such methods; that, indeed, he had long since done so, but had refrained from making public his decision in order that he might obtain information as to the organization, and thus

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render his country higher service than he could otherwise do.

The next issue of the paper announced the appointment of "the able counsellor, Colonel McRaffle," to the office of Commissioner of the Court, in which position, it stated, his experience and skill would prove of inestimable benefit to the country!

It was, perhaps, well for the new commissioner that his office was in the city.

CHAPTER XXXIV

LEECH AND STILL MAKE A MOVE, AND TWO WOMEN CHECK THEM

THE departure of Leech and Still from the County was followed by the quieting down which always signalized their absence. The County breathed the freer and enjoyed the calm, knowing that when they returned there would be a renewed girding of loins for the struggle which the approaching campaign would inevitably bring. It was not even disquieted over the rumors of some unusual move which, it was reported, the Government, on the application of Leech and Still, would make to strengthen their hands. These rumors had been going on so long that they were hardly heeded now. It would be time enough to meet the storm when it came, as it had met others; meanwhile, the people of Red Rock would enjoy the calm that had befallen. The calm would be broken when Leech and Still returned for the trial of the Red Rock case at the approaching term of court. Steve Allen and

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Jacquelin, meanwhile, were applying all their energies to preparation for the trial. Rupert, filled with the desire to do his part, was riding up and down the County notifying their witnesses, and, it must be said, talking with a boy's imprudence of what they were going to do at the trial. "They were going to show that Still was a thief, and were going to run him and Leech out of the County," etc.

Rupert left home one morning to go to the railway, promising to return that evening. Jacquelin sat up for him, but he did not come; and as he did not appear next morning, and no word had come from him, Jacquelin rode down in the evening to see about him. At the station he learned that Rupert had been there, but had left a little before dark, the evening before, to return home. He had fallen in with three or four men who had just come from the city on the train, and were making inquiries concerning the various places and residents in the upper end of the County, something about all of which they had appeared to know. They said they were interested in timber lands and had a good deal of law business they wished attended to, and they wanted advice as to who were the best lawyers of the County; and Rupert said he could tell

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them all about the lawyers: that General Legaie and Mr. Bagby were the best old lawyers, and his brother and Steve Allen were the best young lawyers. They asked him about Leech and McRaffle.

Leech wasn't anything. Yes, he was—he was a thief, and so was Still. Still had stolen his father's bonds; but wait until he himself got on the stand, he'd show him up! McRaffle was a turncoat hound, who had stolen money from a woman and then tried to run her out of the County.

One of the men who lived about the station told Jacquelin that he had gone up and tried to get Rupert away from the strangers, and urged him to go home, but that the boy was too excited by this time to know what he was doing.

“He was talking pretty wildly,” he said, “and was abusing Leech and Still and pretty much all the Rads. I didn't mind that so much, but he was blowing about that old affair when the negro soldiers were shot, and about the K. K.'s and the capture of the arms, and was telling what he did about it. You know how a boy will do! And I put in to stop him, but he wouldn't be hearsaid. He said these men were friends of his and had come up to employ you all in a lawsuit, and knew

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Leech and Still were a parcel of rascals. So I let him alone, and he went off with 'em, along with a wagon they'd hired, saying he was going to show them the country, and I supposed he was safe home."

By midnight the whole population of that part of the County was out, white and black, and the latter were as much interested as the former. All sorts of speculation was indulged in, and all sorts of rumors started. Some thought he had been murdered, and others believed he and his companions had gotten on a spree and had probably gone off together to some adjoining county, or even had turned at some point and gone to the city; but the search continued. Meantime, unknown to the searchers, an unexpected ally had entered the field.

That evening Ruth Welch was sitting at home quietly reading when a servant brought a message that a man was at the door asking to see Major Welch. It happened that Major Welch was absent in town, and Mrs. Welch had driven over that afternoon to see a sick woman. So Ruth went out to see the man. He was a stranger, and Ruth was at once struck by something peculiar about him. He was a little unsteady on his feet, his voice was thick, and, at

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first, he did not appear to quite take in what Ruth told him. He had been sent, he repeated several times, to tell "Mazhur Welth" that they had taken his advice and had made the first arrest, and bagged the man who had given the information that started that riot, and had gotten evidence enough from him to hang him and to haul in the others too.

"But I don't understand," said the girl. "What is all this about? Who's been arrested, and who is to be hung? My father has never advised the arrest of anyone."

"Tha's all I know, miss," said the man. "At least, tha's all I was to tell. I was told to bring him that message, and I guess it's so, 'cause they've got the young fellow shut up in a jail since last night and as drunk as a monkey, and don't anybody know he's there—tha's a good joke, ain't it?—and to-morrow mornin' they'll take him to the city and lodge him in the jail there, and 't 'll go pretty hard with him. Don't anybody know he's there, and they're huntin' everywheres for him." He appeared to think this a great joke.

"But I don't understand at all whom you mean?"

"The young one. They bagged him, and

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they're after the two older ones too," he said, confidentially. He was so repulsive that Ruth shrank back.

"The one they calls Rupert; but they're after the two head devils—his brother and that Allen one. Them's the ones the colonel and your friend over there want to jug." He jerked his thumb in the direction of Red Rock.

It all flashed on the girl in a moment.

"Oh! They have arrested Mr. Rupert Gray, and they want Mr. Jacquelin Gray and Captain Allen? Who has arrested him?"

"The d—tectives. But them's the ones had it done—Major Leech and Mist' Still." He winked elaborately, in a way that caused Ruth to stiffen with indignation.

"What was it for?" she asked, coldly.

"For murder—killin' them men three or four years back. They've got the dead wood on 'em now—since the young one told all about it."

"Has he confessed? What did he say?"

"Enough to hang him and them too, I heard. You see they tanked him up and led him on till he put his head in the noose. Oh! they're pretty slick ones, them detectives is. They got him to pilot 'em most to the jail door, and then they slipped him in there, to keep him till they take

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him to the city to-morrow. He was so drunk—don't nobody know who he was, and he didn't know himself. And they huntin' all over the country for him!" He laughed till he had to support himself against the door.

The expression on Ruth's face was such that the man noticed it.

"Oh! don't you mind it, miss. I don't think they're after the young one. They're after the two elder ones, and if he gives it away so they ever get them they'll be easy on him."

Ruth uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"He'll never give it away——" She checked herself.

"Don't know—a man'll do a heap to save his own neck." He made a gesture, drawing his hand across his throat significantly.

"I know that young man, and I say he'll die before he'd betray anyone—much less his cousin and brother."

"Well, maybe so."

Just as the messenger turned away Ruth caught sight of someone standing in the shrubbery, and as the man went out of the gate the person came forward. It was Virgy Still. She appeared to be in a state of great agitation, and began to tell Ruth a story in which her father

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and Rupert Gray and Major Leech were all mixed up so incoherently that, but that Ruth had just heard the facts, she could never have been able to unravel it. At length Ruth was able to calm her and to get her account. She had sent a man over to tell Ruth, but she was so afraid he had not come that she had followed him. "They want to get rid of Mr. Rupert. It has something to do with the case against pa and your father. They are afraid Mr. Rupert will give evidence against them, and they mean to put him in jail and keep him from doing it. Do you know what it is?"

Ruth shook her head.

"I do not either. I heard them talking about it, but I did not understand what it was. They ain't after Mr. Rupert; they're after Mr. Jacquelin and Captain Allen."

She suddenly burst into tears.

"Oh, Miss Ruth," she sobbed, "you don't know—you don't know——"

"I don't know what?" asked Ruth, gently.

"He is the only one that was always kind to me."

"Who?"

"Mr. Jacquelin. He was always good to me; when I was a little bit of girl he was always

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kind to me. And now he hates me, and I never wanted the place!”

“Oh, I don’t think he does,” said Ruth, consolingly.

“Yes, he does; I know he does,” sobbed the girl. “And I never wanted the place. I have been miserable ever since I went there.”

Ruth looked at her with new sympathy. The idea that the poor girl was in love with Jacquelin had never crossed her mind. She felt an unspeakable pity for her.

“And now they want me to marry Mr. Leech,” moaned the girl, “and I hate him—I hate him! Oh, I wish we never had had the place. I know he would not want to marry me if pa did not have it, and could not help him get the governorship. And I hate him. I hope we’ll lose the case.”

“I would not marry anyone I did not want to marry,” said Ruth.

“Oh, you don’t know,” said Virgy. “You don’t know Wash. And pa wants me to marry him too; he says he’ll be Governor. Pa loves me, but he won’t hear to my not marrying. And I’ll have to do it—unless we lose the case,” she added.

She rose and went away, leaving Ruth with a new idea in her mind.

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Ruth sat still for a few moments in deep thought. Suddenly she sprang up, and, calling a servant, ordered her horse. While it was being got she seized a pencil and scribbled a few lines on a piece of paper, which she put in her pocket.

She blushed to find what an interest she took in the matter, and how warmly her feeling was enlisted on the side opposed to that which she felt she ought to espouse. And she hated herself to recognize the cause. She tried to think that it was on account of the poor wild boy, or on account of Blair Cary and Miss Thomasia; but no, she knew it was not on their account—at least, not mainly so—but on account of another.

When her horse came, Ruth muttered something to the servant about telling her mother that she would be back in a little while; sprang into the saddle and galloped away, leaving the negro gazing after her with wonderment, and mumbling over the message she had given him.

Blair Cary was one of the best horsewomen in the State, and it was fortunate for Ruth Welch's project that night that, emulating her friend, she also had become a capital horsewoman, self-possessed and perfectly fearless; else she could not have managed the high-mettled, spirited horse she rode.

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Ruth knew her road well, and as soon as she turned into the highway that led to the county seat she let her horse out, and they fairly flew. She passed a number of men, riding all of them toward the court-house, but she dashed by them too rapidly for them to speak to her or to recognize her in the dark. As she came near the village the riders increased in numbers, so she drew in her horse and turned into a by-lane which skirted the back of the court-green and led near the lawyers' offices. Jumping her horse over the low fence, she tied him to a swinging limb of a tree where he would be in the shadow, and, with a pat or two to quiet him and keep him from whinnying, she made her way on foot into the court-green. There were a number of lights and many men moving about over across the street that ran between the tavern and the court-green; but not a light was visible in any of the offices. Ruth walked down as far as she dared, keeping close beside the fence, and tried to recognize some of the men who were moving about on the tavern veranda or in the road before it; but there was not one that she knew. While she was listening the sound of a horse galloping rapidly came from the direction of the road that led to the railway, and the next minute the rider

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dashed up. Ruth's heart gave a bound as she recognized Captain Allen. His coming seemed to give her a sense of security and protection. She felt reassured and certain that now everything would be all right. As Steve sprang from his horse, he was surrounded by the crowd with eager questions. His first words, however, damped Ruth's hopes.

No, no trace had been found of Rupert. Jacquelin and many others were still searching for him, and would keep it up. No, he felt sure he had not been murdered by any negro—that he had not been murdered at all. He would be found in time, etc. All this in answer to questions.

Suddenly he singled out one man and drew him away from the crowd, and to Ruth's horror they came across the road straight toward where she stood. She gave herself up for lost. She turned and would have fled, but she could not. Instead, she simply dropped down on the ground and cowered beside the fence. They came and leant against the fence within ten feet of her, on the other side, and began to talk. The other person was a stranger to Ruth; but his voice was that of an educated man, and Steve Allen called him Helford, which

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Ruth remembered to have heard somewhere before.

“Well, where is he?” the stranger asked Steve, as soon as they were out of earshot of the crowd.

“Somewhere, shut up—hidden,” said Allen.

“Drunk?”

“Yes, and that’s not the worst of it.”

“What do you mean? He’ll turn up all right.”

“You think so! He’ll turn up in jail, and you and I shall too, if we don’t mind. He’s been trapped and spirited away—by detectives, sent up here on purpose.”

“What! Oh, nonsense! You’re daft about the boy. Many another young fellow’s gone off and disappeared, to turn up with nothing worse than a splitting head and somewhat damaged morals. You yourself, for instance, when you were not much older than he——”

“Never mind about that,” interrupted Steve; “wait until I tell you all, and you’ll see. I’m not given to being scary, I think.”

He went on to tell of Rupert’s falling in with the men at the station, and of his disappearance, including all that his friends had learned of him both before and after he left. The man gave a low whistle of amazement and dismay.

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“The little fool! What makes you think they were detectives?” He was groping for a shred of encouragement.

“I know it,” said Steve; and he gave his reasons.

Ruth was astonished to see how closely his reasoning followed and unravelled the facts as she knew them.

“Well, where is he now? Back in the city?”

“No. They haven’t got him there yet. They have hid him somewhere and are keeping him drunk, and will try taking him off by night.”

“Well, what are you going to do?”

“Find him and take him away from them,” said Steve. “If Leech or Still were in the County I’d find him in an hour; but they’re both in the city—been away a fortnight hatching this thing.”

“All right, I’m with you. But where’ll we look? You say Leech and Still are both away in the city, and you don’t think he’s at either of their places? Where can he be?”

“I don’t know, but I’ll find out if he’s above ground,” said Steve, “and some day I’ll call Jonadab Leech and Hiram Still to a settling.”

“I’ll tell you, Allen, where you may find him, or, at any rate, find a trace of him. At that new carpet-bagger’s, Mr. Welch’s.”

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“Nonsense! Why don't you look in my office?”

“You may say so; but I'll tell you you'd better look. You all over here think he's different from the rest: but I tell you he isn't. When it comes to these questions, they're all tarred with the same stick, and a d——d black stick it is.”

Ruth stirred with indignation. She wished she could have sprung up and faced him.

“We won't discuss that,” said Steve, coldly. “Major Welch certainly differs widely from you and me on all political questions—perhaps on many other questions. But he is a gentleman, and I'll stake my life on his being ignorant of anything like this. Gentlemen are the same the world over in matters of honor.”

“Well, maybe so—if you think so,” said the other, impressed by Steve's seriousness. “But I don't see why you should think he's so different from all the rest of them. You didn't use to find one Yankee so much better than another.”

Steve declared haughtily that he did not wish to discuss that question further, and that he would have his horse fed and go to his office to make out a few notices and be ready to start off again in an hour.

“The roads are all picketed, and if they get

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him to the city it will be by a route they won't want to take themselves," he said grimly, as he turned away.

"Suppose he's already in jail somewhere?" asked his friend.

"We'll take him out," said Steve, stopping short. "There isn't a jail in this commonwealth that will hold him, if I discover where he is."

"All right, we'll be with you, old fellow," said his friend, his good-humor restored; "and if we could get a pull at some of your carpet-bag friends at the same time so much the better. You are not the only one who holds a due-bill of McRaffle's, and has a score against Leech. He arrested my father and kept him in jail a week." His voice had suddenly grown bitter.

When they moved off, Ruth rose and crept hurriedly away, stealing along by the fence until she was in the shadow of the offices. She knew she had not a moment to lose. She went up to the offices and scanned the doors. Fortunately, by even the faint glimmer of the stars she could make out the big names on the signs. She tried the door on which was the name of "Allen and Gray," and, finding it locked, slipped her envelope under it and crept quickly away.

She was just in time, for she heard steps be-

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hind her and caught sight of a tall figure striding across the green toward the door she had just left. She found and mounted her horse and rode away, keeping well in the shadow of the trees. As she turned into the road at a sharp canter she almost ran over an old negro who was walking rapidly toward the village. It was so close that she could not avoid calling out to him; but she was not quite in time, for her horse touched him enough to topple him over. Ruth pulled in instantly and, turning around, went back to the man, who was scrambling to his feet grumbling and mumbling to himself:

“Who d’name o’ King dat ridin’ over me?”

Ruth recognized old Waverley.

“Oh! Are you hurt, uncle? I hope not. I’m so sorry. It was so dark I couldn’t see you,” she said, solicitously. The tone removed the old man’s irritation immediately.

“Yes’m—’tis mighty dark, sho ’nough. Nor’m, I ain’ hut none—jes kind o’ skeered, dat’s all. I didn’ hut yo’ hoss, did I? Ken you tell me, is dee done heah anything o’ my young marster? I jes hurryin’ down heah to git de lates’ wud ’bout him.”

Ruth told him that his young master had not been seen yet; but that he would certainly be

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found within the next twenty-four hours, and that she was sure he would be discovered to be all right.

“Well, I certney is glad to heah you say dat, mistis,” said the old fellow, “’cause my mistis is almost distracted, and so is he mammy and all de fam’ly. I done walked down heah three times to-day to git de news, an’ I know I ain’ gwine shet my eyes till he found. Hits all de wuck of dat Cun’l Leech an’ dat debble, Hiram Still, an’ he son. I knows ’em,” he broke out, fiercely, “and I’ll git at de bottom of it yit.” He came near and gazed up at Ruth with a look of such keen scrutiny, that to get away from him Ruth made her horse start. “I shall have to let him go,” she said, and at a touch of her heel her horse bounded away.

“I knows your hoss and I knows you too, now,” said the old man, looking after her as she dashed away in the darkness. “Well, well!” and he went on into the village.

When Ruth reached home, to her relief she found that her mother had not yet returned. A message had come that Miss Bush was ill and she would be detained until very late, but would certainly be back by bed-time.

CHAPTER XXXV

CAPTAIN ALLEN FINDS RUPERT AND BREAKS THE LAW

WHEN Steve Allen stepped across his threshold he caught the gleam of something white lying on the floor just inside the door-sill. He picked up the slip of paper and, striking a light, looked at it. The writing on it was in a cramped backhand that Steve did not know and could hardly read. At last, however, he made it out:

“Your friend is in jail here on charge of murder. Will be taken to city to-night for trial.” It had been signed, “A Friend,” but this had been much scratched over and was almost illegible. Steve read the words again and again. Suddenly he left his office and walked quickly around the back part of the court-green, looking in all the corners and dark places. It had occurred to him that he had heard someone retreating as he approached his office. Everything, however, was quiet, and the only sound he heard

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was that of a horse galloping on the road some distance away. As he stood still to listen again it died away. In a few minutes he had called his friend Helford into his office and laid before him his information. Helford received it coldly—thought it might be a trick to throw them off the track and obtain delay. He argued that even if it would have been possible for Rupert Gray to be put in jail right under their noses, he could not have been kept there all day without its being discovered. Steve was of a different opinion. Perdue, the jailer, was a creature of Leech's and Still's. Something assured him that the information was true, and he laid his plans accordingly. The men who were at the county seat were requested to wait, without being told what was the reason; riders were sent off to call in the searchers who were still engaged, a rendezvous near the village being appointed. Steve, leaving the men present under charge of Helford, rode off as if to continue the search; but a short distance down the road he turned, and, riding back by another way, tied his horse and returned to the court-green. He entered at the rear, walked up to the jail and rang the bell. After some delay a man peeped at him through the wicket and asked who it was. Steve gave his name, and

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said he wanted to see the prisoner who had been brought in the night before. The man hesitated a second, then said there was no such prisoner there. He took a half step backward to close the shutter, but Steve was too quick for him. He was sure from the jailer's manner that he was lying to him. The next second there was a scraping sound on the grating and the man found a pistol-barrel gleaming at him through the bars, right under his nose.

“Stir, and you are a dead man,” said Steve.
“Open the door.”

“I ain't got the keys.”

“Call for them. Don't stir! I'll give you till I count five: one—two—three——”

“Here they are, sir.” The pistol-barrel was shining right in his face, and Steve's eyes were piercing him through the bars. He unlocked the door, and Steve stepped in.

“Take me to Mr. Gray's cell instantly, and remember a single word from you means your death.” Steve expected to be taken to one of the front rooms in which the prisoners of better condition were usually kept; but his guide went on, and at length stopped at the door of one of the worst cells in the place, where the most abandoned criminals were usually confined. Two ne-

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gro prisoners, in another cell, seeing Captain Allen, howled at him in glee through their bars.

“You don’t mean to say that you’ve put him in here?” Steve asked, sternly.

“That’s orders,” said the man, and added, explanatorily, as he fumbled at the lock. “You see, he was pretty wild when they brought him here.”

“Don’t defend it,” said Steve, in a voice which brought the turnkey up shaking.

“No, suh—no, suh—I ain’ defendin’ it. I jest tellin’ you.” He unlocked the door.

“Walk in,” said Steve, and, pushing the other ahead, he stepped in behind him and took his light. It was so dark that he could not at first make out anything inside; but after a moment a yet darker spot in the general gloom became dimly discernible.

“Rupert?” Steve called. At the voice the dark shadow stirred. “Rupert Gray?”

There was a cry from the dark corner.

“Steve! Oh, Steve! Steve!”

“Come here,” said Steve, who was keeping close beside the jailer.

“I can’t. Oh, Steve!”

“Why not?—Over there!” he said, with a motion to the jailer, to walk before him.

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“I’m chained.”

“What!” The young man turned and caught the jailer by the shoulder, and with a single twist of his powerful arm sent him before him spinning into the corner of the room. Stooping, Steve felt the boy and the chain by which he was bound to a great ring in the wall. The next second he faced the keeper.

“Dog!”

For a moment the man thought he was as good as dead. Steve’s eyes blazed like coals of fire, and he looked like a lion about to spring. The man began to protest his innocence, swearing with a hundred oaths that he had nothing to do with it; that it was all Leech’s doings—his orders and other men’s work. He himself had tried to prevent it.

Steve cut him short.

“Liar, save yourself the trouble. What are their names? Where are they?”

“I don’t know. They’ve gone, I don’t know where. They went away this mornin’ before light.”

“Get the key and unlock that chain.”

The man swore that he did not have it—the men had taken it with them.

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Steve reflected a moment. He had no time to lose.

“Oh, Steve! never mind me,” broke in Rupert, his self-possession recovered. “Go—I’m not worth saving. Oh, Steve! if you only knew! I have done you an irreparable injury. I don’t mind myself, but——” His voice failed him and his words ended in a sob. “I’m not crying because I’m here or am afraid,” he said, presently. “But if you only knew——”

Steve Allen leant down over him and, throwing his arm around him, kissed him as if he had been a child.

“That’s all right,” he said, tenderly, and whispered something which made the boy exclaim:

“Oh, Steve! Steve!” The next moment he said, solemnly, “I promise you that I will never touch another drop of liquor again as long as I live.”

“Never mind about that now,” said Steve.

“But I want to promise. I want to make you that promise. It would help me, Steve. I have never broken my word.”

“Wait until you are free,” said Steve, indulgently. He turned to the keeper, who still stood cowering in the corner.

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“Come—walk before me.” As they left the cell he said to him: “In a half-hour two hundred men will be here. These doors will go like paper. If they find that boy chained and you are here, your life will not be worth a button. Nothing but God Almighty could save you.” He left him at the front door and went out. A number of men were already assembling about the jail. It transpired afterward that old Waverley had seen Steve enter the jail, and, fearing that he might not get out again, had told Andy Stamper, who had just arrived. As Steve came out of the door Andy stepped up to him.

“We were going in after you,” he said.

Steve took him aside and had a talk with him, telling him the state of the case and putting him in charge until his return.

“If Perdue wants to come out, let him do so,” he said, as he left him. As he walked across the green he fell in with Waverley, who gave an exclamation of joy.

“I sutney is glad to see you. I was mighty feared dee’d keep you in dyah.” He was very full of something he wanted to tell him. Steve did not have time to listen then, but said he wanted him, and took him along.

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“Well, jes’ tell me dis, Marse Steve; is you foun’ my young marster?”

“Yes, we have.”

“Well, thank Gord for dat!” exclaimed old Waverley. “Whar is he?”

Steve pointed back to the jail. “In there.”

The old man gave an outcry.

“In dyah! My young marster? My marster and mistis’ son! Go ’way, Marse Steve—you jokin’; don’t fool me ’bout dat.”

“He’s in there, and in chains; and I want you to cut them off him,” said Steve.

The old man broke out into a tirade. He ended:

“Dat I will! De’s a blacksmiff shop yonder. I’ll git a hammer and cole chisel d’rectly.” He started off. When he arrived, the shop had already been levied on for sledges and other implements.

The crowd was beginning to be excited. Steve took charge at once. He spoke a few words in a calm, level, assured tone; stated the fact of Rupert Gray’s arrest by Leech’s order, not for his own offence, but more for that of others, of his imprisonment in irons in the jail, and of his own intention to take him out. And he declared his belief that it was the desire of those

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assembled, that he should command them, and expressed his readiness to do so.

The response they gave showed their assent.

Then they must obey his orders.

They would, they said.

“The first is—absolute silence.”

“Yes, that’s right,” came from all sides.

“The second is, that we will release our friend, but take no other step—commit no other violence than that of breaking the doors and taking him out.”

“Oh, h—l! We’ll hang every d—d nigger and dog in the place,” broke in a voice near him. Steve wheeled around and faced the speaker. He was a man named Bushman, a turbulent fellow. As quick as thought the pistol that had been shining under Perdue’s nose a little before was gleaming before this man’s eyes.

“Step out and go home!” Steve pointed up the road.

The man began to growl.

“Go,” said Steve, imperiously, and the crowd applauded.

“That’s right, send him off.” They opened a path through which the ruffian slunk, growling, away.

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“Now, men, fall in.”

They fell in like soldiers, and Steve marched them off to the spot he had appointed as the place for others to join them.

The rendezvous was in a pine forest a little off the road, and only a quarter of a mile or so back of the village. Near the road the pines were thick, having sprung up since the war; but here, in a space of some hundreds of yards each way, the trees, the remnants of a former growth, were larger and less crowded, leaving the ground open and covered with a thick matting of “tags,” on which the feet fell as noiselessly as on a thick carpet, and where even the tramp of horses made hardly a sound. It was an impressive body assembled there in the darkness, silent and grim, the stillness broken only by the muffled stamping and tramping of a restless horse, by an almost inaudible murmur, or an order given in a low, quiet tone. By a sort of soldierly instinct the line had fallen into almost regimental form, and, from time to time, as new recruits came up, directed by the pickets on the roads outside, they, too, fell into order.

Just as they were about to move, a horseman galloped up, and a murmur went through the ranks.

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“Dr. Cary!”

Whether it was surprise, pleasure, or regret, one at first could scarcely have told.

“Where is Captain Allen?” asked the Doctor, and pushed his way to the head of the line. A colloquy took place between him and Steve in subdued but earnest tones, the Doctor urging something, Steve replying, while the men waited, interested, but patient. The older man was evidently protesting, the other defending. At length Dr. Cary said:

“Well, let me speak a word to them.”

“Certainly,” assented Steve, and turned to the men.

“Dr. Cary disagrees with us as to the propriety of the step we are about to take and urges its abandonment. He desires to present his views. You will hear him with the respect due to the best and wisest among us.” He drew back his horse, and the Doctor rode forward and began to speak.

“First, I wish you to know that I am with you, heart and soul—for better, for worse; flesh of your flesh, and bone of your bone. Next to my God and my wife and child, I love my relatives and neighbors. Of all my relatives, perhaps, I love best that boy lying in yonder jail, and

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I would give my life to save him. But I could not kneel to my God to-night if I did not declare to you my belief—my profound conviction—that this is not the way to go about it. I know that the wrongs we are suffering cry to God, but I urge you to unite with me in trying to remedy them by law, and not by violence. Let us unite and make an appeal to the enlightened sense of the American people, of the world, which they will be forced to hear. Violence on our side is the only ground which they can urge for their justification. It is a terrible weapon we are furnishing them, and with it, not only can they defeat us now, but they can injure us for years to come.”

He went on for ten or fifteen minutes, urging his views with impressive force. Never was a stronger appeal made. But it fell on stony ears. The crowd was touched by him, but remained unchanged. It had resolved, and its decision was unaltered. When he ended, there was, for a moment, a low murmur all through the ranks, which died down, and they looked to their captain. Steve did not hesitate. In a firm, calm voice he said:

“For the first time in my life almost, I find myself unable to agree in a matter of princi-

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ple with the man you have just heard. At the same time, this may be only my personal feeling, and recognizing the force of what he has said, I wish all who may think as he does to fall out of line. The rest will remain as they are. If all shall leave, feeling as I do I shall still undertake to rescue Rupert Gray. Those who disagree with me will ride forward.”

There was a rustle and movement all down the ranks, but not a man stirred from his place. As the men looked along the line and took in the fact, there went up a low, suppressed sound of gratification and exultation.

“Silence, men,” said the captain. He turned his horse to face Dr. Cary.

“Dr. Cary, I beg you to believe that we all recognize the wisdom of your views and their unselfishness, and we promise you that no violence shall be offered a soul beyond forcing the doors and liberating the boy.”

A murmur of assent came from the ranks. Dr. Cary bowed.

“I shall wait at the tavern,” he said, “to see if my services may be of any use.”

Steve detailed two men to conduct him through the guards, and he rode slowly away.

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A few minutes later Captain Allen gave the order, and, wheeling, the column marched off through the dusk.

Steve had made the men disguise themselves by tying strips of cotton across their faces. He himself wore no mask. When he arrived at the jail he learned from Andy Stamper that Perdue had taken advantage of the hint given him and had escaped.

“I had hard work at first to git him out,” said Andy. “I had to go up to the door and talk to him; but when he found what was comin’, he was glad enough to go. I let him slip by, and last I seen of him, he was cuttin’ for the woods like a fox with the pack right on him. If he kept up that lick he’s about ten miles off by this time.”

The breaking into the jail was not a difficult matter. It meant only a few minutes’ work bursting open the outer door with a heavy sledge-hammer, and a little more in battering down the iron inner doors. During the whole time the crowd without was as quiet as the grave, the silence broken only by the orders given and the ringing blows of the iron hammers. But it was very different inside. The two or three negroes confined within were wild

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with terror. They all thought that the mob was after them, and that their last hour was come; and they who an hour before had hooted at the visitor, yelled and prayed and besought mercy in agonies of abject terror. When the squad detailed by Steve passed on to the cell in which Rupert was confined and began to break down the door, these creatures quieted a little, but even then they prayed earnestly, their faces, ashy with fear in the glare of the torches, pressed to the bars and their eyeballs almost starting from their sockets. When the door gave way the low cry that came up from the party sent them flying and trembling back into the darkness of their cells.

It took a considerable time to cut the irons that bound the prisoner, who, under the excitement of the rescuing party's entrance, had been overjoyed, but a moment later had keeled over into Andy Stamper's arms. Under the steady blows of the old blacksmith's hammer, even that was at length accomplished, and the rescuers moved out bearing Rupert with them. As they emerged from the building with the boy in their arms, the long-pent-up feeling of the crowd outside burst forth in one wild cheer, which rang through the village and was heard miles away

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on the roads. It was quickly hushed; the crowd withdrew into the woods, and in a few minutes the jail was left in the darkness as silent as the desert.

The news of the assault on the jail and the liberation of the prisoner thrilled through the County next morning, and the thrill extended far beyond the confines of the section immediately interested. The party of detectives who were waiting to take their prisoner to the city made their way by night through the country to a distant station, to take the cars; and Leech and McRaffle, who had come on the morning train to meet them, deemed it prudent to catch it on its way back and return to the city.

Ruth, the morning after her visit to the courthouse and the rescue of Rupert, was in a state of great unrest. Finally she mounted her horse and paid a visit to Blair Cary. They were all in intense excitement. Ruth herself was sensible of constraint; but she had an object in view which made it necessary to overcome it. So she chatted on easily, almost gayly. At length she made an excuse to get Blair off by herself. In the seclusion of Blair's room the secret came out. Ruth, on her part, learned that Rupert was to be sent off; Blair did not

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know where. One difficulty was the want of means to send him. This Ruth had divined. With a burning face, she told Blair she had a great favor to ask of her; and when Blair wonderingly assented, she took from her pocket a roll of money—what seemed to Blair an almost vast amount. It was her own, she said; and the favor was: that Blair would help her to get that money to Rupert without anyone knowing where it came from. She wanted Rupert to go out to the West and join Reely Thurston there. Blair demurred at this. Captain Thurston was an army officer, and Rupert was——. She paused. Ruth flushed. She would be guaranty that Thurston would stand his friend.

There was also another thing which Blair discovered, though she did not tell Ruth that she had done so. She simply rose and kissed her. This discovery decided her to accept Ruth's offer. It seemed to draw Ruth nearer to her and to make her one with themselves. So she told Ruth where Rupert was. He was at that time at the house of Steve's old mammy, Peggy. He was to be conducted out of the County that night. Whether he could be persuaded to go to Captain Thurston, Blair did not know; but she promised to aid Ruth so far as to suggest it,

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and try to persuade him to do so. There were two difficulties. One was that she might be watched, and it might lead to Rupert's re-arrest. She did not state what the other was. But Ruth knew. She, too, could divine things without their being explained. If, however, Blair could not meet Jacquelin Gray, there was no reason why Ruth herself could not. And she determined to go. Suddenly Blair changed. She, too, would go. She could not let Ruth go alone.

That evening, toward dusk, old Peggy was "turning about" in her little yard, when the sound of horses' feet caught her ear. As quick as thought the old woman ran to her door and spoke a few words to some one inside, and the next moment the back door opened and a figure sprang across the small cleared space that divided the cabin from the woods, and disappeared among the trees. In a little while the riders appeared in sight, and when the old negress turned, to her surprise, they were two ladies. When they took off their veils, to old Peggy's still greater astonishment, they were Miss Blair and the young lady who had visited her with her young master the evening of the rain-storm.

The old woman greeted them pleasantly, but

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when they said they wanted to see Rupert Gray, her suspicions returned again.

“He ain’t heah,” she said, shortly. “What you want wid him?” Her eyes gleamed with shrewdness.

“We want to see him.”

“Well, you won’ see him heah.”

They began to cajole.

“Can’t you trust me?” asked Blair.

But old Peggy was firm.

“I don’ trus’ nobody. I ain’ got nothin’ ’t all to do wid it. Why n’t you go ax Marse Steve?” she asked Ruth, suddenly. Ruth’s face flushed.

The dilemma was unexpectedly relieved by the appearance of Rupert himself. From his covert he had recognized the visitors, and could not resist the temptation to join them. Old Peggy was in a great state of excitement at his appearance. She began to scold him soundly for his imprudence. But the boy only laughed at her.

Blair and Ruth took him aside and began to broach the object of their visit. At first he was obstinate. He would not hear of the plan they proposed. In fact, he was not going away at all, he declared. He would not be run out of

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the County. He would stay and fight it out, and let them try him, if they wished to get all they wanted. He showed the butt of a pistol, with boyish pride.

In this state of the case, Ruth began to plead with him on his brother's account, and Blair, as her argument, took Steve. They said he was bound in honor to go, if they wished it. Ruth deftly put in a word about Thurston, and the opportunity the trip would give Rupert to see the world. He could join in the campaigns against the Indians out there, if he wished; and, finally, she begged him to go and join Thurston, as a favor to her.

These arguments at length prevailed, and Rupert said he would go.

As his friends were soon to come for him, the girls had to leave, which they did after binding old Peggy over with many solemn promises not to breathe to a single soul a word of their visit. "If she does," said Rupert, "I'll come back here and make her think the Ku Klux are after her." The old woman laughed at the threat.

"Go, 'way from heah, boy! What you know 'bout Ku Klux? You done told too much 'bout 'em now."

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This home-thrust shut Rupert up. Blair put into his hand the package that Ruth had given her and kissed him good-by, and he turned to Ruth.

Ruth said, as she took his hand, "Rupert, I am going to ask you to grant me that favor you once promised me you would grant."

The boy's eyes lit up.

"I will do it."

"I want you to promise me you will not drink any more."

"I promise," he said, softly, and bent over and kissed her hand. As he stood up, the girl leant forward and kissed him. He turned to Blair and, throwing his arms around her neck, suddenly burst into tears.

"Oh, Blair, Blair," he sobbed, "I can't go."

The girls soothed him, and when they left a little later he was calm and firm.

Within a little time other detectives came, and some who were not known as detectives performed the functions of that office. But no trace of the rescued boy was found. The nearest approach to a clew was a report that Andy Stamper and old Waverley, a short time after the breaking into the jail, took a long journey with Andy's covered wagon into another State,

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“selling things,” and that Steve Allen and several other men were about the same time in the same region, and even rode with the wagon for some days.

However, this was not traced up. And it illustrates the times, that two accounts of the affair of the rescue were published and given circulation: one that the prisoner was rescued by his friends, the other that he was taken from the jail by a band of Ku Klux outlaws and murdered, because he had confessed to having taken part in some of their outrages and had given information as to his accomplices. This was the story that was most widely circulated in some parts of the country and was finally accepted.

CHAPTER XXXVI

MR. STILL OFFERS A COMPROMISE, AND A BLUFF

THE term approached at which the Red Rock suit was to be tried, and both parties made preparations for it. A number of the prominent members of the Bar had volunteered as Jacquelin's counsel. They knew the character of the new judge, Bail, and they considered Jacquelin's cause that of every man in the State. Leech, on his side, had associated with him as counsel for Still several lawyers of well-known ability, if of less recognized integrity; and Major Welch had retained old Mr. Bagby to represent his interest. As the term drew near, Still applied to Mr. Bagby to represent him too. The old lawyer declined. The interest of his client, Major Welch, might in some way conflict, though he could not see how; in a way he already represented Still, since to protect his client he had to look after Still's title also. " Besides, Still already had lawyers

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enough to ruin his case," he said, "and he would charge him a big fee." But these reasons were not sufficient for Still. He wished Mr. Bagby to represent him. He told him Leech had employed those others; but he wanted a man he knew. "There wasn't a man in the State could carry a jury like Mr. Bagby, and he did not mind the fee."

Flattery is a key that fits many locks. So the old lawyer consented, after consulting Major Welch, and notifying Still that if at any time or at any point in the case he found his interest conflicting with Major Welch's he would give him up. Still grew more anxious and sought so many interviews with the old counsellor that finally his patience wore out, and he gave his new client to understand that he had other business, and if he wanted so much of his time he must increase his fees. Still consented even to this, with the effect of arousing suspicion on the old lawyer's part that there must be something in his client's case which he did not understand. "Something in it he has not let out," reflected the old lawyer. "I must get at it."

Not very long after this arrangement, Still asked Mr. Bagby to come and see him at his home on business of great importance, alleging

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as a reason for his not going to see Mr. Bagby that he was too unwell to travel. The note for some reason offended Mr. Bagby. However, as he had to go to Major Welch's that night, he rode by Red Rock to see Still. He found him in a state of great anxiety and nervousness. Still went over the same ground that he had been over with him already several times; wanted to know what he thought of the bill, and of the Grays' chances of success. The old lawyer frowned. Up to the time of beginning a suit he was ready to be doubtful, prudent, cautious, even anxious, in advising; but the fight once begun he was in it to the end; doubt disappeared; defeat was not among the possibilities. It was an intellectual contest and he rejoiced in it; put into it every nerve and every power he possessed, and was ready to trample down every adversary from the sheriff who served the writ, to the Supreme Court itself. So now, when Still, almost at the entrance of the term, was whimpering as to his chances, the old lawyer answered him with scant courtesy.

“The bill? I think the same of it I thought when you asked me before; that it is a good bill in certain respects and a poor one in others;—good as to your accounts showing rents and

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profits, and too general as to the bonds. It's a good thing you got hold of so much of Gray's paper. I knew he was a free liver and a careless man; but I had no idea he owed so much money." He was speaking rather to himself.

"What do you mean?" faltered Still, his face flushing and then growing pale.

"That if they can prove what they allege about the crops in the years just before and after the war, they'll sweep you for rents and profits, and you'll need the bonds." He reflected for a minute, then looked at Still.

"Mr. Still, tell me exactly how you came by that big bond." He shut his eyes to listen, so did not see the change that came over his client's face.

"What do you think of a compromise?" asked Still, suddenly.

"Have they offered one?"

"Well, not exactly," said Still, who was lying; "but I know they'd like to make one. What'd you think of our kind of broaching the subject?"

"What! You? After that bill aspersing your character!" He looked at Still keenly. "Do as you please! But Major Welch will offer no compromise." He rose and walked off

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from Still for a moment, formulating in his mind some sentence that would relieve him from his relation of counsel to him. It was the first time he had been in the house since Still's occupancy; and as he paced across the hall, the pictures lining the walls arrested his attention, and he began to examine them. He stopped in front of the "Indian-killer," and gazed at it attentively.

"Astonishingly like him!" he muttered, musingly; and then after another look he asked, "Do you know whether there really was a cabinet behind that picture or not?" Still did not answer, but his face turned a sudden white. The old lawyer had his back to him. He stepped up nearer the picture and began to examine the frame more closely. "I believe there is," he said, musingly. "Yes, that red paint goes under." He took out a large pocket-knife. "Those nails are loose. I believe I'll see." He inserted the blade of his knife and began to prize at the frame.

"My G—d! don't do that!" exclaimed Still; and, giving a bound, he seized the old lawyer's arm.

The latter turned on him in blank amazement. Still's face was as white as death.

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“What in the d—l is the matter with you?” demanded Mr. Bagby.

“Don’t! for God’s sake!” stammered Still, and staggered into a chair, the perspiration standing out on his forehead.

“What’s the matter with you, man?” Mr. Bagby poured out a glass of whiskey from a decanter on the table and gave it to him. The liquor revived him, and in a moment he began to talk.

It was nothing, he said, with a ghastly attempt at a smile. He had of late been having a sort of spells; had not been sleeping well—his son was giving him some physic for it; ’twas a sort of nervousness, and he supposed he just had one, and couldn’t help thinking of that story of the picture coming down always meaning bad luck, and the story of the old fellow being seen on horseback at night. Some of the niggers had been saying that he had been seen at night once or twice lately riding around, and he supposed that had got in his mind. But of course he didn’t believe any such lies as that.

“I hope not,” sniffed the old lawyer. He rose and took up his hat and saddle-bags. Still urged him to stay; he had had his horse put in the stable and fed; but Mr. Bagby said he must

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go, he wished to see Major Welch. He had made up his mind that he would not remain in the case as Still's counsel. He could not get over the feeling that there was something in Still's case which Still had not confided to him, or the idea of his wishing to compromise after a charge of fraud; and the rough way in which Still had seized his arm and had spoken to him had offended him. So he would not be his guest. He told Still that he felt that he could not act further as his counsel, in association with his other counsel. Again Still's face blanched. He offered to throw them all over—except Leech. He was obliged to keep Leech; but the others he would let go. This, however, Mr. Bagby would not hear of.

As it was late, and the servants had retired, Still walked with Mr. Bagby to the stable to get his horse. He continued to urge him to remain in the suit as his counsel. But the old lawyer was firm.

As they approached the stables there came to them from the field over beyond the gardens and toward Major Welch's the distant neigh of a horse. Still clutched Mr. Bagby's arm.

“My G—d! did you hear that?”

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“What? Yes—one of your horses over in your pasture?”

“No, there ain’t no horses over in that field, or in a field between here and Stamper’s house. It’s all in crop. That’s over toward the graveyard.”

“Oh! the d—l!” the old man exclaimed, impatiently.

But Still seized him.

“Look! Look yonder!” he gasped. The lawyer looked, and at the moment the outline of a man on horseback was clearly defined against the skyline on the crest of a hill. How far away it was he could not tell; but apparently it was just behind the dark clump of trees where lay the old Gray burying-ground. The next second the moon was shrouded and the horseman faded out.

When Mr. Bagby reached Major Welch’s, the latter came out to meet him: he had sat up for him.

“I thought you had come a half-hour ago. I fancied I heard your horse neigh,” he said.

As he went to call a servant, he picked up from a small side-porch a parcel wrapped around with

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paper. He took it in to the light. It was a large bunch of jonquils, addressed to Ruth.

“Ah!” thought the old lawyer, with a chuckle, “that is what our ghostly horseman was doing.”

The next morning, when Major Welch and his guest came to breakfast, the table was already decorated with jonquils, which were lighting it up with their golden glow; and one or two of them were pinned on Miss Ruth’s dainty white dress.

Both Major Welch and the guest remarked on the beauty of the flowers, and the Major mentioned his surprise that Ruth should have left them out on the porch over night. The remark was quite casual, and the Major was not looking at Ruth at the moment; but the old lawyer was looking, and his eyes twinkled as he noticed the deep color that rushed up into the girl’s cheeks. No age is too great to be stirred by the sight of a romance, and the old fellow’s countenance softened as he looked at the young girl.

“Lucky dog,” he thought, “that night rider! I wonder who he is? I’d give my fee in this case to be able to call up that blush. I remember doing that same thing once—forty odd years ago. The flowers faded, and the girl—My dear, will you give me one of those jonquils?” he

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broke off, suddenly, addressing Ruth. Ruth, with a smile, pinned it on him, and the old man wore it with as proud a mien as he had ever had after a successful verdict.

The apparition was too much for Hiram Still. A few days after his interview with Mr. Bagby, Still, without consulting any of his counsel, took the step on his own account which he had suggested to the lawyer. If it went through, he could put it on the ground of friendship for Jacquelin's father. He selected his opportunity.

Steve Allen was away that day and Jacquelin Gray was sitting in his office alone, when there was a heavy, slow step outside and, after a moment's interval, a knock at the door. "Come in," Jacquelin called; and the door opened slowly and Hiram Still walked half-way in and stopped doubtfully. He was pale, and a simper was on his face. Jacquelin did not stir. His face flushed slightly.

"Good-mornin', Mr. Jacquelin," said the visitor, in his most insinuating tone.

"What do you want?" Jacquelin asked, coldly.

"Mr. Jacquelin, I thought I'd come and see you when you was by yourself like, and see if

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me and you couldn't come to a understandin' about our suit."

Jacquelin was so taken by surprise that he did not try to answer immediately, and Still took it for assent and moved a step farther into the room.

"I don't want no lawyers between us; we're old friends. I ain' got nothin' against you, and you ain' got nothin' against me; and I don't want no trouble or nothin'. Your father was the best friend I ever had; and I jist thought I'd come like a friend, and see if we couldn't settle things like old friends—kind of compromise, kind o'——?" He waved his hands expressively.

Jacquelin found his voice.

"Get out," he said, quietly, with a sudden paling of his face. Still's jaw dropped. Jacquelin rose to his feet, a gleam in his eyes.

"Get out." There was a ring in his voice, and he took a step toward Still. But Still did not wait. He turned quickly and rushed out of the room, never stopping until he had got out of the court-green.

He went to the bar of the tavern and ordered two drinks in rapid succession.

"D—n him!" he said, as he drained off his

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glass the second time. "If he had touched me I'd have shot him."

"You're lookin' sort o' puny these days. Been sick?" the man at the bar asked.

"Yes—no—I don' know," said Still, gruffly. He went up and looked at himself in a small fly-speckled, tin-like mirror on the wall. "I ain't been so mighty well."

"Been ridin' pretty hard lately 'bout your suit, I reckon?" said the bar-keeper.

"I don' know. I ain't afeared 'bout it. If they choose to fling away money tryin' to beat me out o' my property, I've got about as much as they have, I reckon."

"I reckon you have." The man's manner was so dry that Still cut his eye at him. "Why don't you try him with a compromise?" Still looked at him sharply; but he was washing a glass, and his face was as impassive as a mask.

"D—n him! I wouldn't compromise with him to save his life," said Still. "D' you think I'd compromise with a man as is aspersed my character?"

"I d'n' know. I hear there's to be a jury; and I always heard, if there's one thing the L—d don' know, it's how a jury's goin' to decide."

"I ain't afeared of *that* jury," said Still,

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on whom the whiskey was working. "I've got——" He caught a look of sharpness on the man's face and changed. "I ain't afeared o' no jury—that jury or no other. And I ain't afeared o' Jacquelin Gray nor Mr. Steve Allen neither. I ain't afeared o' no man as walks."

"How about them as rides?" asked the bar-keeper, dryly.

The effect was electric.

"What d'you know about them as rides?" asked Still, surlily, his face pale.

"Nothin' but what I hear. I hear they's been a rider seen roun' Red Rock of nights, once or twice lately, ain't nobody caught up with."

"Some o' these scoundrels been a tryin' to skeer me," said Still, with an affectation of indifference. "But they don't know me. I'll try how a bullet 'll act on 'em next time I see one of 'em."

"I would," said the bar-keeper. "You'se seen him, then? I heard you had."

Hiram saw that he had been trapped into an admission. Before he could answer, the man went on:

"They say down this away it means something's goin' to happen. How's that old picture been standing of late?"

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Still burst out in a rage, declaring that it had been standing all right, and would continue to stand till every man against him was in the hottest region his imagination could picture. It seemed to him, he said, that everybody in the County was in league against him. The bar-keeper heard him unmoved; but, when his customer left, he closed his door and sauntered over to the office of Allen and Gray.

When Steve returned next day, Jacquelin told him of the interview with Still. Steve's eyes lit up.

"By Jove! It means there's something we don't know! What did you do?"

"Threatened to kick him out of the room."

"I supposed so. But, do you know, Jack," he said, after a moment's reflection, "I am not sure you did right? As a man I feel just as you did; but as a lawyer I think we should try and compromise. The case as it stands is a doubtful one on the law; but what show do we stand before his new judge. You know he is hand in glove with them, and they say was appointed to try this very case. Remember, there is Rupert."

"I tell you what I will do," said Jacquelin, "and it is the only compromise I will make.

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You can go to him and say I will agree to dismiss the case. If he will give Rupert the full half of the place, including the house, and me the graveyard and Birdwood, with three hundred acres of land, I will dismiss the suit. You can go to him and say so. It will still leave him more than the value of Birdwood.”

“Birdwood! What do you want with Bird——?” asked Steve, in amazement; but at the moment his eye rested on Jacquelin’s face. Jacquelin was blushing. “Oho!” he exclaimed. “I see.”

“Not at all!” said Jacquelin. “I have no hope whatever. Everything has gone wrong with me. I feel as if as soon as I am interested, the very laws of nature become reversed!”

“Nonsense! The laws of nature are never reversed!” exclaimed Steve. “It’s nothing but our infernal stupidity or weakness. Have you ever said anything to her since?”

“No, I am done. She’s an iceberg.”

“Iceberg? When I saw her she was a volcano. Besides, ice melts,” said Steve, sententiously. “I’m engaged in the process myself.”

Jacquelin could not talk lightly of Blair, and he rose and quietly walked out of the office. As his footsteps died away, Steve sat back in his

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chair and fell into a reverie, induced by Jacquelin's words and his reply.

Jacquelin had just left the office when there was a step outside, and a knock so timid that Steve felt sure that it must be a woman. He called to the person to come in; the knock, however, was repeated; so Steve called out more loudly. The door opened slowly, and a young colored woman put her head in and surveyed the office carefully. "Is dat you, Marse Steve?" she asked, and inserted her whole body. Then turning her back on Steve, she shut the door.

Steve waited with interest, for his visitor was Martha, Jerry's wife, who was a maid at Major Welch's. It was not the first time Martha had consulted him. Now, however, Steve was puzzled, for on former occasions when she came to see him, Jerry had been on a spree; but Steve had seen Jerry only the evening before, and he was sober. Steve motioned the girl to a seat and waited.

She was so embarrassed, however, that all she could do was to tug at something which she held securely tied up in her apron. Steve tried to help her out.

"Jerry drunk again? I thought I had given

RED ROCK

him a lesson last time that would last him longer.”

“Nor, suh, he ain’ drunk—yit. But I thought I’d come to ’sult you.” Again she paused, and looked timidly around the room.

“Well, what is it? Has he threatened to beat you?” he asked, a shade gathering on his brow. “He knows what he’ll get if he tries that again.”

“Nor, suh,” said Martha, quickly; “I ain’ feared o’ dat. He know better ’n dat now—sence you an’ my gran’mother got hold o’ him; but”—her knot came untied, and suddenly she gained courage—“what I want to ’sult you about is dis: I want to ax you,—is Mr. Spickit—’lowed to write ‘whiskey’ down in my sto’-book?” She clutched her book, and gazed at Steve as if the fate of the universe depended on the answer.

Steve took the book and glanced over it. It was a small, greasy account-book, such as was kept by persons who dealt at the little country-stores about the County. Many of the items were simply “Mdse.,” but on the last two or three pages, the item “Whiskey” appeared with somewhat undue frequency.

“What do you mean?” asked Steve.

“Well, you see, it’s disaway. Jerry, he gits

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his whiskey at Mr. Spickit's—*some* o' it—an' he say Mr. Spickit *shell* write hit down on de book dat way, an——”

“Oh! You don't want him to have it?” said Steve, a light breaking on him.

“Nor, suh—dat ain't it. I don' mine he havin' de *whiskey*—I don' mine he gittin' all he want—cuz I know he gwine *drink* it. But I don' want him to have it put down dat away on de *book*. I is a member o' de chutch, and I don' want whiskey writ all over my book—dat's hit!”

“Oh!” Steve smiled acquiescingly.

“An' I done tell Jerry so; an' I done tell Mr. Spickit so, an' ax him not to do it.”

“Well, what do you want?”

“I wants him to put it down ‘merchandise,’ dat's all; an' I come to ax you, can't you meck Jerry do it dat away.”

“Ah! I see. Why, certainly I can.”

“An' I want to ax you dis: Jerry say, ef I don' stop meddlin' wid he business, he won' let me have no sto'-book, an' he gwine lef' me; dat he'll meck you git a divo'ce from me—an' I want to ax you ef he ken lef' me jes cuz I want him to mark it merchandise? Kin he git a divorce jes for dat?” She was far too serious for Steve to laugh now. Her face was filled with anxiety.

RED ROCK

“Of course, he cannot.”

“Well, will you write me dat down, so I ken show it to him?”

Steve gravely wrote a few lines, which, after reading to her, he folded with great solemnity and handed her.

They read as follows:

“LEGAL OPINION.

“I am of opinion that it is not a cause for divorce, either *a vinculo matrimonii* or *a mensâ et thoro*, when a woman insists that the whiskey which her husband drinks, and which she pays for, shall be entered on her account-book as *Mdse.* Given under my hand this — day of —, 18—.

“STEVENSON ALLEN,
“*Attorney and Counsellor-at-law.*”

The young woman received the paper with the greatest reverence and relief.

“Thankee, Marse Steve,” she said, with repeated bows and courtesies. “Dis will fix him. I knowed dat if I come to you, you’d tell me de law. Jerry talk like he know all de law in the wull!” Armed with her weapon, her courage was returning. “But I’ll straighten him out

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wid dis." She tied her letter up in her apron with elaborate care. Suddenly her face grew grave again.

"'Spose Jerry say he'll trick me cuz I come to you?"

"Trick you——!" began Steve, in a tone of contempt.

"Not he himself; but dat he'll git Doct' Moses to do it?" Her face had grown quite pale.

"If he says he'll trick you, tell him I'll lick him. You come to me."

"Yes, suh." She was evidently much relieved, but not wholly so. "I cert'ny is feared o' him," she said, plaintively. "He done tricked Jane—Sherrod's wife—and a whole lot o' urrs," she said. Steve knew from her face that the matter was too serious to be laughed at.

"You tell Jerry that if he dares to try it, or even threatens you with it, I'll lick the life out of him and discharge him. And as for Moses——" His face darkened.

"I don't want you to do that," she said, quickly.

"Well, you tell him so, anyhow. And if I get hold of Moses, he won't trouble you."

"Yas, suh, I'll tell him ef he try to trick

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me. 'Cus I cert'ny is feared o' dat man.'" She was going out, when Steve called her back.

"Ah! Martha? How are they all at Major Welch's?"

"Dee's all right well, thankee, suh," said Martha. "Sept Miss Ruth—she ain' been so mighty well lately." Steve's face brightened.

"Ah! What is the matter with her?" His voice was divided between solicitude and feigned indifference.

"I don' know, indeed, suh. She's jes sort o' puny—jes heah lately. She don't eat nuttin'. Dee talk 'bout sen'in' her 'way."

"Indeed!" Steve was conscious of a sudden sinking of the heart.

"I think she ride 'bout too much in de hot sun," explained Martha, with the air of an authority.

"I have no doubt of it," said Steve.

"She come home tother evenin' right down sick, and had to go to bed," continued Martha.

"Ah! when was that? Why don't they send for a doctor?—Dr. Still?" asked Steve, guilefully.

"Go 'way, Marse Steve, you know dee ain' gwine let dat man practus on Miss Ruth. Dat's

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what de matter wid her now. He come dyah all de time teekin' her out ridin'——”

“Why, he's away from the County,” declared Steve, who appeared to have a surprising knowledge of the young Doctor's movement.

“Yas, suh; but I talkin' 'bout b'fo' he went 'way. He was wid her dat evenin'. Least, he went 'way wid her, but he didn't come back wid her.” Her tone was so significant that again the light came into Captain Allen's eyes.

“And he hasn't been back since?”

“Nor, suh, an' he ain't comin' back nurr.”

“And you don't know where Miss Welch is going, or when?”

“Nor, suh, she ain' goin' at all. I heah her say she wa'n't gwine; but she cert'ny look mighty thin, heah lately.” The conversation had ended. Steve was in a reverie, and Martha moved toward the door.

“Well, good-by, Marse Steve. I cert'ny is obliged to you, an' I gwine send you some eggs soon as my hens begins to lay again.”

But Captain Allen told her she did not owe him anything.

“Come again, Martha, whenever you want to know about anything—anything at all.”

When Martha went out she heard him singing.

RED ROCK

The story of Still's offer of a compromise to Jacquelin got abroad, and, notwithstanding the wise doctrine of the law that an offer of compromise shall not be taken as evidence in any case, this particular offer was so taken. Still found himself roundly abused by his counsel for being such a fool as to propose it. All sorts of rumors began to fly about. It was said that Mr. Bagby had declined to act as his counsel. To meet these reports it was necessary to do something, and Still's counsel held a consultation. It was decided that he should give an entertainment.

It would show his indifference to the claims of the Grays to his plantation, and would prove his position in the County. Leech thought that this would be a good thing to do; it would anger the Grays, if it did nothing else. He could invite Judge Bail up to it.

"Make it a fine one when you do have it," said the counsellor. "I've found champagne make its way to a man's heart when you couldn't get at it through his pocket."

Dr. Still also was eager to have such an entertainment. He, too, appreciated the fineness of the stroke that, on the eve of battle, would show their contempt for the other side. Besides which, the young physician had another motive.

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Soon after his removal from the County to the city Dr. Still had become an admirer of Governor Krafton's daughter. She was the Governor's only child, and even the Governor's bitterest enemies admitted that he was a devoted father; and in the press that was opposed to him, often side by side with the bitterest attacks on the Governor, was some admiring mention of his handsome and accomplished daughter. He would have given her the moon, someone said to General Legaie. "Yes, even if he had to steal it to do so," said the General. Miss Krafton had had the best education that the country could afford. This she had finished off with a year or two of travel abroad. She had just returned home. She idolized her father, and perhaps the Governor had not been sorry to have her out of the country where half the press was daily filled with the most direct and vehement accusations against him. The Governor's apologists declared that his most questionable acts were from the desire to build up a fortune for his daughter. It was for her that he had bought the old Haskelton place, one of the handsomest in the city, and, pulling down the fine old colonial mansion, had erected on its site one of the costliest and most bewildering structures in the State.

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It is often the case that the very magnitude of the efforts made to accomplish a design frustrates it; and Governor Krafton, with all his eagerness to be very rich, and his absolute indifference as to the means employed, was always involved pecuniarily, while the men with whom he worked appeared to be immensely successful. Until he fell out with Leech and Still, he had gone in with them in their railroad and land schemes; but while everything that they touched appeared to turn to gold (at least, it was so with Still; for there were rumors respecting Leech), the Governor was always hard pushed to meet his expenditures.

Still's explanation to his son was that he let others climb the trees and do the shaking, and he stayed on the ground and gathered the apples. "Krafton and Leech has both made more money than I have," he said, shrewdly; "but they have to pay it out to keep their offices, while I——" He completed the sentence by a significant buttoning of his pocket. "They think that because they get a bigger sheer generally than I do, they do better. But—it ain't the water that falls on the land that makes the crops; it's what sinks in. This thing's got to stop some time, my son—ground gets worked out—and when the crops

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are gethered I know who mine's for." He gazed at his son, with mingled shrewdness and affection. The young Doctor also looked pleased. His father's sharpness at times made up to him for his ignorance and want of education. Dr. Still was not lacking in smartness himself, and had been quick enough to see which way Miss Krafon's tastes lay. He had discovered that she was both proud and ambitious—Not politically. She said she detested politics; that her father never allowed politics to be talked before her; and when he gave a "political dinner," she did not even come downstairs. She was ambitious socially. Dr. Still promptly began to play on this chord. He had prevailed on his father to set him up a handsome establishment in the city, and he became deeply literary. He began to talk of his family—the Stills had originally been Steels, he said, and were the same family to which Sir Richard Steel belonged—and to speak of his "old place" and his "old pictures." He described them with so much eloquence that Miss Krafon said she wished she could see them. This gave Dr. Still an idea, and he forthwith began to plan an entertainment. As it happened, it was at the very time that Leech had suggested the same thing

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to Hiram Still; and as his son and Leech rarely agreed about anything these days, Still was impressed, and the entertainment was determined on. It was to be the "finest party" that had ever been given at Red Rock. On this all were united. Even Hiram yielded to the general pressure, and admitted that if you were "going to send for a man's turn of corn it was no good to send a boy to mill after it."

He entrusted the arrangements to the young Doctor, who laid himself out on them. A florist and a band were to be brought up from the city, and the decorations and supper were to surpass everything that had ever been seen. A large company was invited, including many guests from the city, for whom a special train was furnished, and Still, "to show his good feeling," extended the invitation to many of his neighbors. Major and Mrs. Welch and Ruth were invited. Still remembered that Major Welch had been to one entertainment in that house, and he wished to show him that he could excel even the Grays. Dr. Still was at first determined that Miss Welch should not come; but it was suggested that it would be a greater triumph to invite her, and more mature reflection decided him that this was so. He would show

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her Miss Krafton, and this would be a greater victory than to omit her from the list. He could not but believe that she would be jealous.

On the evening of the entertainment Major Welch and Mrs. Welch attended. But Miss Ruth did not accompany them. She was not very well, Mrs. Welch said in reply to Virgy, who, under Dr. Still's wing, was "receiving" in a stiff, white satin dress, and looking unfeignedly scared as she held her great bouquet, like an explosive that might "go off" at any time. Miss Virgy's face, however, on seeing Mrs. Welch's familiar countenance, lit up, and she greeted her with real pleasure, and expressed regret that Ruth had not come, with a sincerity that made Mrs. Welch warm toward her. Mrs. Welch liked her better than she did Miss Krafton, whom she had met casually and thought a handsome and intelligent, but rather conceited girl.

It was a curious company that Major and Mrs. Welch found assembled. The strangers from the city included the judge, who was a dark-looking man with a strong face, a heavy mouth, and a lowering gray eye; a number of people of various conditions, whom Mrs. Welch recognized as men whose names she had heard as connected with Leech; and a number of others

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whom she had never heard of. But there was not a soul whom she had ever met before socially. Not a member of the St. Ann congregation was present. Both the Stills were in an ill-humor, and Virgy, though she was kind and cordial, looked wretchedly unhappy. Mrs. Welch was glad that, for once, she had not permitted her principles to override her instincts, and had left Ruth at home. As she glanced about her, her gaze rested on her host. Hiram Still was talking to one of his guests, a small, stumpy, red-headed man with a twinkling eye and a bristly red mustache, whom Mrs. Welch recognized as an office-holder who had come down from one of the Northern States.

Still was talking in a high, complaining voice.

“Yes,” he said, evidently in answer to a speech by his guest, “it is a fine party—the finest ever given in this County. It ought to be; I’ve spent enough money on it to buy a plantation, and to show my friendliness I invited my neighbors. Some of ’em I didn’t have no call to invite,—and yet just look around you. I’ve got a lot of folks from the city I don’t know, and some from the County I know too well; but not one of my old neighbors has come—not one gentleman has put his foot here this night.”

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His guest glanced round the hall, and ended with a quizzical look up in Still's face. "Of course, what did you expect? Do you suppose, Still, if I were a gentleman I'd have come to your party? I'd have seen you d—d first. Let's go and have some more champagne."

It was the first time the fact had struck Mrs. Welch. It was true—there was not a gentleman there except her husband.

When Mrs. Welch left, shortly afterward, Still and his guest had evidently got more champagne. Still was vowing that it was the finest party ever given in Red Rock, even if there wasn't a gentleman present; and his guest was laughing and egging him on. As Major and Mrs. Welch waited for their carriage, Leech passed with Miss Krafton on his arm. Mrs. Welch drove home in silence. There were things she did not wholly understand.

CHAPTER XXXVII

IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT, IN A TRIAL, COUNSEL
MAY ASK ONE QUESTION TOO MANY

WHEN the Court met, at which the trial of Jacquelin's suit against Hiram Still was set, all other matters, even politics, were driven from mind.

It will not be needful to go in detail into the trial of the case. The examination of the plaintiffs' witnesses occupied two days. In the contest the defendant, to use the phraseology of another arena, was acknowledged to have "drawn first blood." On the morning of the trial the two sides, with their counsel, witnesses, and friends, thronged the court-house. The counsel, an imposing array, were ranged along the bar, fronting the bench and the jury-box which was off to one side, and in which sat seven solemn-looking negroes and five scarcely less solemn white men. Major Welch sat beside Mr. Bagby, and during a part of the time Mrs. Welch

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and Ruth had chairs behind them. By the time they were all settled it was announced that the Judge was coming.

It had been the practice in the County, when the Judge entered, for the Bar to rise and remain standing until he had mounted the bench, bowed to them, and taken his seat, when they bowed and resumed their places. It was a custom brought from the Supreme Court, before which Mr. Bagby, General Legaie, and others of that bar had practised in old times.

Now, when the Judge entered he was announced by Sherwood, the Sheriff, and came in preceded by Leech and McRaffle. And not a man rose. The Judge walked up the steps to his arm-chair, faced the crowd, and for a second stood still, as if waiting. Not a lawyer stirred, and the Judge took his seat. A half scowl was on his brow, but he banished it and ordered Court to be opened. The case was called, the parties announced themselves ready, the jury was impanelled, and the trial was begun. General Legaie was to open the case. It was the custom for a chair to be placed inside the bar, just at the feet of the jurors. This chair was usually occupied by one of the older members of the bar. And as the General had been growing

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a little deaf, he had been taking it of late. He had prepared himself with great care, and was dressed with the utmost scrupulousness—a black frock coat, white trousers, a high stock, and immaculate linen—and when the case was called he stood up. He presented a striking figure. The gravity of the occasion spoke in every line of his weather-beaten, high-bred face. To his mind it was not a mere question of title to property he was to argue; it was the question between the old and the new—it was civilization that was on trial. He took the papers in his hand, glanced with some curiosity along the lines of the jury, and faced the judge.

“If the Court please——” he began, in a calm, well-modulated voice that brought an instant hush over the whole court-room.

His words appeared to wake the judge from a lethargy. He, however, took no notice whatever of the General, but addressed the sheriff.

“Put that man behind the bar.”

The Sheriff was mystified, and looked first around him and then at the judge, in a puzzled way, to see whom he referred to.

“Suh?”

“Make that man get behind the bar.” He

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simply glanced at the General. This time the negro took in what he meant, and he approached the General doubtfully. The General had not caught all the words, but he had heard a part of it, and he also looked around. But seeing no one to be removed, and not understanding the cause of the order, he was just beginning again: "If the Court please——" when the negro came up to him. The General stopped and looked at him inquiringly.

"De Cote say you is to git behine de bar," said the Sheriff. The General leaned forward, his hollowed hand raised to his ear.

"De Cote say you is to git behine de bar."

The General turned sharply to the bench and shot one piercing look at the Judge; then, seeming to recollect himself, wheeled about, walked across to Steve and laid the papers of the suit on the bar before him, took up his hat, turned his back squarely on the Court, and faced the Bar:

"Good-morning, *gentlemen.*" He made them a low bow, clapped his hat on his head, and marched out of the court-room.

It made a sensation. Steve Allen rose and asked the Court to postpone the case until after dinner, the hour for which was approaching.

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General Legaie, he said, was the leading counsel on their side.

“Proceed with the case,” said the judge.

It was conceded that the action of General Legaie was a loss to the plaintiffs’ side, but every one on that side sustained him. They did not see how a gentleman could have done otherwise.

The case proceeded without him.

It was attempted to show that Mr. Gray could not have owed all the money Still claimed, and that, if he did owe it, before Still brought suit he must have received from Red Rock crops enough to reduce the amount largely, if not to discharge it.

The investigation was fought at every point by Still’s counsel, and the Judge almost uniformly ruled in favor of their objections, so that Steve Allen had hard work to maintain his composure. His eyes flashed and a cloud lowered on his brow as he noted exception after exception. At length the Court began to head him off from even this protection, by ruling, whenever Captain Allen rose, that he was out of order. When Court adjourned the second day it was felt that except for the suspicious fact that Still had not endorsed any credit on the bonds, no fraud had been shown in his title to

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them. Witnesses who had been put on the stand to show facts tending to prove that he could not have had any such amount of money had been ruled out. It was conceded that under the Court's ruling no sufficient ground had been established to upset Still's title. The defendant's counsel were jubilant, and that night debated whether they should put any witnesses on the stand at all. Leech was against it. The Judge was with them, he maintained. Mr. Bagby was acquiescent, but Major Welch insisted that, at least, he should go on the stand to state his connection with the case. He did not intend that it should appear of record that his name had been connected with a charge of fraud, and that, when he had had the opportunity to go on the stand and deny it, he had failed to do so. Mr. Bagby's eyes lit up with a gleam of satisfaction as he listened to him, partly because of pride in his client, and partly, perhaps, because of the discomfiture of Leech and his client. The old lawyer was content either way, for he did not see how he could possibly be hurt, whatever might happen. So, next morning, the defence began to take evidence, and after they began to introduce witnesses it was necessary to go fully into the case. It was, however, plain sail-

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ing: wind and tide, in shape of the sympathy of the Court, were with them, and as often as Captain Allen interposed objections they were ruled out. Witnesses were put up to show that Still had always been a keen business man, and had at various times lent money to his neighbors, including Mr. Gray. Mr. Gray's confidence in him was proved, and it was shown that he had relied on him so far as to send him South as his agent. Still was ostentatiously offered by Leech as a witness to prove everything, but was objected to on the ground that the other party to the transaction was dead, and was necessarily held incompetent. All the merit, however, of what he might prove was secured. An undisputed bond of Mr. Gray's was put in proof. It was dated at the outbreak of the war, and was the bond given for money to help equip the Red Rock Company. This bond was taken from the bundle of papers in the old suit which Still had brought, and whilst it was being examined the other papers in the file were left spread out on the bar before Leech, with the big bond lying by itself until it should be offered in evidence. In this way a presumption was raised as to Still's means and ability to lend money. Just then it became necessary to show the time when

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Still went South, in order to connect the large bond with that visit. An attempt was made to do this, but the witnesses put on the stand to prove it got confused on cross-examination and differed among themselves by several years. It was now night, and Leech was anxious to close the case. Things had been going so smoothly that he was impatient. He glanced around the court-room.

“Is there no one here who was present when you went or came back?” he asked Still, with a frown. Still looked about him.

“Yes, there’s a nigger. He was there both when I went away and when I came back. He used to work about the house.” He pointed to Doan, who stood behind the bar in the throng of spectators. “But I don’t want to put him on,” he whispered. “I don’t like him.”

“Oh! nonsense! It’s only a single fact, and if we can prove it by one witness, it’s as good as by a hundred.” He turned and spoke to Doan from his seat.

“Come around and be sworn.” Doan came to the clerk’s desk and was sworn. He was told by Leech that he need not sit down, as there was only one question to be asked. So he stood just in front of the bar, where the papers were

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spread on it, looking self-conscious and sheepish, but very self-important. Leech put his question.

“Do you know when Mr. Still was sent South by Mr. Gray?”

“Yes, suh. Cose I does. I was right dyah. See him de night he come back.”

“Well, tell those gentlemen when it was,” said Leech. A shade of impatience crossed his face as Doan looked puzzled. “What year it was?” He leaned over and touched the big bond lying on the bar before him, preparatory to putting it in evidence. The act seemed to arouse the negro’s intellect.

“Well, I don’ know nothin’ ’bout what year ’twuz,” he said, “but I knows *when* ’twuz.”

“Well, *when* was it? And how do you know when it was?” Leech asked, sharply.

“’Twuz when de big picture o’ de ghos’ in de gret hall fall down the lass’ time, jes b’fo’ de war. Mr. Still had jes come back from de Souf de day befo’, an’ him and marster wuz in the gret hall togerr talkin’ ’bout things, and Mr. Still had jes ontie he picket-book an’ gin marster back de papers, when de win’ blow ’em on de flo’ an’ de picture come down out de frame ’quebang, most ’pon top my haid.”

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“Stop him! For God’s sake! stop him,” muttered Still, clutching at Leech’s arm. The lawyer did not catch his words, and turned to him. Still was deadly pale. “Stop him!” he murmured. A stillness had fallen on the court-room, and the crowd was listening. Leech saw that something had happened.

“Hold on. Stop! How do you know this?” His tone was suddenly combative.

“Hi! I wuz right dyah onder it, and it leetle mo’ fall ’pon top my haid.” Doan gave a nod of satisfaction as he recalled his escape. “Yes, suh, I thought he had got me dat time ’sho’!” he chuckled, with a comical glance at the negroes before him, who roused up at the reminiscence and laughed at his whimsical look. “’Twuz in de spring, and I wuz paintin’ de hearth wid red paint, and marster an’ de overseer was talkin’ togerr at de secretary by de winder ’bout de new plantation down Souf; an’ I wuz doin’ mo’ lis’n-in’ ’n paintin’, cuz when I heah Mr. Still say he hadn’ buyed all de lan’ an’ niggers marster ’spected him to buy and had done bring he barn back, I wuz wonderin’ what that wuz an’ ef dee’d sen’ any o’ our blackfolks down Souf; and thunderstorm come up right sudden, an’ b’fo’ dee pull de winder down, blowed dem papers,

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what Mr. Still bring back an' teck out he pocket an' gi' to marster, off de secretary down on de flo', and slam de do' so hard de old Ingin-killer fall right out de frame mos' 'pon top my haid. Yas, suh, I wuz dyah sho'!" He was telling the incident of the picture and not of the papers, and the crowd was deeply interested. Even the Judge was amused. Still, with white face, was clutching Leech's arm, making him signals to stop the witness; and Leech, not yet wholly comprehending, was waiting for a pause to do so, without its being too marked. But Doan was too well launched to stop. He flowed on easily: "I holp Mr. Still to put de picture back in the frame an' nail 't up after marster had done put de paper what he call he 'barn,' in de hole behine it, an' I tell you I didn't like it much nohow. An' Mr. Still didn' like it much nurr."

"Stop him!" whispered Still, agonizingly.

"Here, this is all nonsense," broke in Leech, angrily. "You don't know what Mr. Still thought. You know that he came back from the South some year that there was a thunderstorm, and a picture was blown out of a frame or fell down. And that's all you know. You don't know what Mr. Still thought or anything else."

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But Doan was by this time at his ease, enjoying the taste of publicity.

“Yas, suh, I does, cuz I hear him say so. I holp him nail de picture back after marster had done put dem very papers Mr. Still gi’ him back in de hole behine it. An’ I hear Mr. Still tell marster ’t ef it wuz him he’d be skeered, cuz dee say ’twuz bad luck to anybody in de house ef de picture fall; and marster say he wa’n’t skeered, dat ef anything happen to him he could trust Mr. Still, an’ he’d put de papers in de hole behine de picture, so ef anyone ever fine ’em dee’d see what a faithful man he had; he had trus’ him wid he barn for thousan’s o’ dollars, an’ he brung it back, an’ he gwine nail de picture up now so ’twon’ come down no mo’.”

“Oh! Your master said he felt he could trust Mr. Still?” said Leech, brightening, catching this crumb of comfort.

“Yas, suh.”

“And what did Mr. Still say?”

“He say he could too.” The crowd laughed.

“And he nailed the picture up securely?”

“Yas, suh. I holped him. Marster sont me to teck Marse Rupert out, cuz he wuz dabblin’ he little byah foots in de paint on de hearth, trackin’ up de flo’, an’ had done step ’pon one o’

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de barns whar blow' down, an' mark it up; an' he tell me when I come back to bring hammer an' nails to nail de picture up, an' so I done."

Still was again squeezing his counsel's arm painfully, whispering him to stop the witness. But Leech had to ask one more question.

"You brought the nails and nailed it up?"

"Yes, suh, me an' Mr. Still. An' Marse Rupert he come back, and Mr. Jack dyah wid him, an' say he gwine help too. He wuz always pesterin' roun', dem days." This in pleasant reminiscence to the crowd.

"You can stand aside," said Leech, contemptuously. He gave a sigh of relief, and Doan was turning slowly to go.

"Hold on." Steve's deep voice broke in. Jacquelin was whispering to him eagerly. A new light had come into his eyes, and he was scanning Still's white face, on which the beads of sweat had stood during the whole examination. Steve, still listening to Jacquelin's rapid speech, rose slowly to get the bond lying on the bar. Before he could reach it, however, McRaffle, one of the counsel associated with Leech, partly resenting the neglect of himself and wishing to earn his fee, leant forward. He would, at least, ask one question.

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“You nailed it up securely, and that was the last time it fell.” He spoke rather in affirmation than question.

“Nor, suh; it done fall down two or three times since den. Hit fall de day marster wuz kilt, an’ hit fall de evenin’ Mr. Still dyah got de papers out de hole agin. Dat’s de evenin’ Mr. Leech dyah ’rest Marse Jack. Mr. Leech know ’bout dat.”

Suddenly a voice rang through the courtroom.

“It’s a lie! It’s all a d—d lie!” It was Hiram Still, and he had sprung to his feet in uncontrollable agitation, his face livid. Every eye was turned on him, and Leech caught him and pulled him down forcibly into his seat, rising in his place and addressing the Court.

“If your honor please,” he said, “all of this is irrelevant. I have no idea what it is all about; but it has no bearing whatever on this case: a lot of stuff about a picture falling down. I shall ask you to exclude it all from the jury——”

“But I will show whether or not it is relevant,” asserted Steve. He had picked up the bond from the bar and held it firmly. His voice had a new ring in it.

Leech turned on him angrily, but caught his

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eye and quieted down. He addressed the Court again.

“I will show how impossible it is for it to be accepted. Can you read or write?” he demanded of Doan, who stood much puzzled by what was going on.

“Nor, suh.”

“And you cannot tell one paper from another, can you?”

“Nor, suh. But ef de paper Mr. Still got out from behine de picture dat evenin’ I see him git up in de hole after you brung Marse Jack away, is de one I see him gi’ marster an’ see him put in dyah, hit’s got Marse Rupert’s foot-track ’pon it—least his toe-tracks—whar he’d been dabblin’ in de fresh paint on de hearth; cuz dat’s de reason marster meck me cyar him out, cuz he step ’pon de barn whar blown down on de hall-flo’ wid red paint, an’ track up de flo’ runnin’ after it.” (Here Steve, with a bow, handed the bond across to Major Welch.) “I see marster when he put de paper in de bundle an’ Mr. Still put it up in de hole behine de picture, an’ I see Mr. Still when he git up in de hole an’ teck it out de evenin’ de picture fall down after mistis an’ all de white folks come ’way to de cote-house after Marse Jack. Ef it’s de same

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barn hit's got he toe-marks on hit in red paint, cuz I can show you de tracks on de hall flo' now. Hit's dim, but hit's dyah on de flo' still. Ef you go dyah wid me I can show 't to you."

At this moment Major Welch, who had been holding the bond in his hand and had studied it carefully, leaned forward and held it out to the negro.

Still, with a gasp, made a grab for Leech, and Leech reached for the paper; but Major Welch put him aside without even looking at him.

"Did you ever see that paper before?" he asked Doan. Doan's face lit up, and he gave an ejaculation of surprise and pleasure.

"Yes, suh, dat's de very paper I'se talkin' 'bout." He took it and held it triumphantly, turning it so it could be seen. "Dyah's Marse Rupert's little toe-marks 'pon hit now, jes' like I tell you." And as the paper was viewed, there, without doubt, were the prints—incontestably the marks of five little toes, as the exclamation of the spectators certified. Doan was delighted at his justification. "I knowed he teck it out, cuz I see him when he cut de string up dyah an' put it in he pocket, an' I see de string when I put it back," he said, confidentially, to the crowd. "I see him, an' Unc' Tarquin see him

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too, cuz he had jes come over to see 'bout Marse Jack; an' he ax me afterwards what Mr. Still wuz doin' in de hole up dyah rummagin' papers."

"That's so!" exclaimed a deep voice back in the crowd. "I saw him in the hole, and I saw him take some papers out and put them in his pocket." It was old Tarquin, standing still and solemn in the front row of the negroes behind the bar.

The Judge roared for silence, and Leech rose and renewed his motion. He denounced the whole story as nonsensical and absurd.

Steve Allen started to contest the motion; but the Judge sustained it, and ruled out Doan's testimony, to which Steve excepted. Then Leech calmly offered the bond in evidence, and announced that they were through and wanted no argument.

Steve Allen offered to put Doan on the stand as his witness, but Leech objected; the plaintiffs had closed their case, he said. And so the Court ruled. Steve Allen claimed the right to put the witness on the stand, asserting that it was in rebuttal. But the Court was firm. The Judge declined "to hear ghost stories." Steve insisted, and the Court ordered him to take his

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seat. He was "out of order." The case was closed, and he wanted to hear no argument. In such a case the verdict of a jury was not obligatory on the Court, it was only to instruct the mind of the chancellor. He had heard all that the jury had heard, and his mind was clear. He would instruct them to bring in a verdict that no fraud had been shown, and the defendants would prepare a decree accordingly.

On this Steve suddenly flamed out. He would like to know, he said, when he had been in order in that court. It was an outrage on decency; the rulings of the Court were a cover for fraud.

He was certainly out of order now. The Judge was angry, but he was not afraid.

"Take your seat, sir," he shouted. "I will commit you for contempt." The anger of the Judge cooled Steve's.

"If you do, it will certainly be for *contempt*," he said, recovering his composure. He was looking the Judge squarely in the eyes.

"I will put you in jail, sir!"

"It has no terrors for me. It is more honorable than your court."

"I will disbar you!" roared the Judge.

"You have substantially done it in this case," said Steve.

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The Judge was foaming. He turned to the clerk and commanded him to enter an order immediately striking Steve's name from the roll of attorneys practising in that court, and ordered the Sheriff to take him into custody. The excitement was intense. Instinctively a number of men, Andy Stamper among them, moved up close to Steve and stood about him. The colored Sheriff, who had started, paused and looked at the Judge inquiringly. The Judge was just beginning to speak again to the Sheriff, but his attention was arrested.

At this moment Jacquelin rose. His calm manner and assured voice quieted the hubbub; and the Judge looked at him and waited. As his counsel was disbarred, Jacquelin said, he should ask the Court to allow him to represent himself at this juncture, and also his brother, who was still a minor. He calmly stated the series of events that had prevented their knowing before the facts that had just then been disclosed, and which made everything clear; and he asked leave to amend their bill, or to file a new one, on the ground of after-discovered evidence. With the new light thrown on the case, he traced Still's action step by step, and suddenly wound up with a charge that Still had arrested his brother to

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get him out of the way and destroy the danger of his testimony. A roar of applause burst from the white men present, in whom a ray of hope began to shine once more. Jacquelin sat down.

Of all the people in the court-room the Judge was the most calm. He was as motionless as a sphinx. As Jacquelin took his seat there was a brief pause of deathly stillness. The Judge looked at Leech and waited. The latter caught the signal and his face lit up. He put his hand on the bar, and leant forward preparatory to rising to his feet. Before he could make another motion Major Welch rose. Every eye was turned on him. Old Mr. Bagby gazed up at him, his lips slightly parted, his eyes filled with wonderment. Leech, with his hand resting on the bar and his body bent forward, waited. The Judge turned his gaze to Major Welch. The silence became almost palpable. Major Welch's face was pale, and the lines, as seen in the dim light, appeared to have deepened in it. His form was erect.

“If your honor please,” he began, “I am a defendant in this case, and hold as a purchaser under the other defendant a considerable part of the property sought to be recovered by the plaintiffs. I bought it honestly and paid for it,

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believing that it was the land of the man from whom I bought, and I still hold it. There have been a number of things since that I have not been able to understand until now. I have observed closely all that has gone on here to-day, and have heard all that has just been said. I wish to say that, as far as I am concerned—so far as relates to the part of the property formerly belonging to Mr. Jacquelin Gray and his brother now held by me—I am satisfied. It will not be necessary for the plaintiffs to take the step that has just been proposed, of filing a new bill. From certain facts within my own knowledge, and which I did not understand before, but on which, what has just taken place has thrown a full light, I am quite satisfied. And if the complainants will prepare a proper deed reconveying the land—my part of the land—to them, I will execute it without further delay, and will make such restitution as I can. I have lost what I put into it, which is a considerable part of all I possessed in the world. But”—he paused for a second—“there is one thing I have not lost, and I do not propose to lose it. I am not willing to hold another man’s property which he lost by fraud.” (For the first time he turned and faced the bar. His voice which,

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if firm, had been grave and low, suddenly became strong and full, with a ring in it of pride.) "I shall expect them to make a declaration of record that every transaction, so far as I at least was concerned, was free from any taint of suspicion." He sat down, amid a deathly silence. The next moment, from all through the court-room, there was a cheer that almost took the roof off. The Judge scowled and rapped, but it was beyond him; and in spite of his efforts to restore order, the tumult went on wildly, cheer after cheer, not only for the act, but for the man.

Ruth, who all through the scene had been sitting beside her mother, holding her arm tightly, her face as white as her handkerchief, in a fit of uncontrollable emotion burst into tears and threw herself into her mother's arms; and Mrs. Welch's eyes were glistening and her face was lit by a glow which she did not always permit to rest there.

Old Mr. Bagby had sat half-dazed by his client's action—wonder, dissatisfaction, and pride all contending in his countenance for mastery. Before his client was through, pride conquered, and as Major Welch took his seat the old lawyer leant forward, placed his hand on the back of

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Major Welch's and closed it firmly. That was all.

As Major Welch sat down Jacquelin sprang to his feet. His face was almost as white as Major Welch's.

"If the Court please——" he began. But it was in vain that he strove to speak. Cheers for Major Welch were ringing, and the Judge, his face livid with wrath, was rapping. Jacquelin was waving his hand to quiet the crowd. "If the Court please," he repeated, "I wish to make a statement."

"Sit down," said the Judge, shouting angrily to the Sheriff to restore order. Jacquelin sat down, and the cheers began to subside.

Leech and his associates had been struck dumb with astonishment. They gazed on Still in blank dismay, and, as Jacquelin resumed his seat, Leech leaned over and spoke to Still. Still sat motionless, his face ashy, his cheeks twitching, his eyes dull. Just at that moment there was a crash outside close to the window. A restive horse had broken loose. There was a shrill neigh and the sudden trample of feet as he dashed away through the darkness. Hiram Still sank forward and rolled from his chair in a heap on the floor.

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The court adjourned for the night, and the crowd poured from the court-room.

As Ruth and her mother came out, the darkened green was full of groups of men all eagerly discussing the occurrence and its probable effect on the case. Major Welch's name was on every lip.

“Danged if I believe he's a Yankee, anyway!” said a voice in the darkness as Ruth and Mrs. Welch passed by—a theory which gained this much credit: that several admitted that, “He certainly was more like our people than like Yankees.” One, after reflection, said:

“Well, maybe there's some of 'em better than them we know about.”

The ladies passed on in the darkness.

Hiram Still was taken over to the tavern, and Dr. Cary worked over him for hours; and later in the night the report was current that it was only a fit he had had, and that he was recovering.

Meantime Leech and Still's other counsel held a consultation, and after that Leech was closeted with the Judge in his room for an hour; and when he left, having learned that Major Welch had gone home, he mounted his horse and rode away in the darkness in the direction of Red Rock.

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The next morning the Judge adjourned his court for the term. The illness of Still, the chief party in the cause, was the ground assigned.

It soon became known that Still was not going to give up the suit. It was authoritatively announced by Leech. What Major Welch chose to do had nothing to do with Still.

“If Major Welch was fool enough,” Leech said, “to turn tail at a nigger’s lies, which he had been bribed to tell, and fling away a good plantation, it was none of their business. But they were going to fight and win their case.”

The Judge left the County, and Still, having recovered sufficiently, was moved to his home.

The day after the scene in the court-room Jacquelin Gray, Steve, and the General had a conference with old Mr. Bagby, and then together they called on Major Welch. They stated that, while they appreciated his action, they did not wish him to take such a step as he had proposed under the excitement of an impulse, and they would prefer to bring the proof and lay it before him to establish the facts they alleged as beyond question.

“It was this that I wished to say last night,”

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said Jacquelin; and then added that he was quite ready to make the entry of record at once that the Major's holding of the lands was entirely innocent.

Major Welch heard his visitors through, then said he preferred not to wait; he was quite satisfied.

“It might have been an impulse last night, gentlemen, but it is not an impulse now. I have reflected very deeply, you may be sure; but I am only confirmed in my intention, and my act now is that of mature deliberation. I only wish to say one thing more: that if I were capable of holding on to this land, my wife would not permit me to do so.”

He did not tell the visitors that, the night before, he had been followed home by Leech, who had just come from an interview with the Judge, and who urged him, on every ground that he could think of, to reconsider his action and retract his promise; assured him of the absolute certainty of success, and gave him finally the assurance of the Judge himself, who had promised to dismiss the suit and enter the decree.

Nor did he tell Jacquelin that the interview with Leech had come suddenly to an end by his telling Leech of what he knew personally, and

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that he considered him a proper counsel for Still, and the Judge a proper judge for him to try his case before.

This he did not mention, and they did not learn it until long afterward.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

IN WHICH MR. LEECH SPRINGS A TRAP WITH
MUCH SUCCESS

THE developments of the trial decided Jacquelin to offer immediately an amended bill, setting up all the facts that had come out. Steve Allen went South to follow up the fresh clew and obtain new evidence, and on his return it was rumored that he had been successful. Meantime Still had recovered sufficiently to be taken to a watering-place—for his health, it was said—and Leech was engaged in other parts of the State looking after his prospective canvass for the Governorship. Leech's candidacy and the final issue of the Red Rock case had become closely associated. It was charged that Leech had been engaged with Still in the attempt to perpetrate a fraud; and it was intimated that, if the Red Rock case should be won by the Grays, it would be followed by the prosecution of Still and possibly of Leech. Captain Allen's connec-

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tion with the case, together with the part he had taken in public matters, had brought him forward as the leader of the opposition to Leech, not only in the County, but throughout the State. Dr. Still was absent, dutifully looking after his father, and, rumor said, also looking after his own prospects in another field. Whether these reports were all true or not, the three men were all absent from the County, and the County breathed more freely by reason thereof. It was an unquestioned fact that when they were absent, peace returned.

It was, however, but the calm before the storm.

In the interval that came, Jacquelin once more brought his suit. It was based on the disclosure made at the first trial, and the bill was this time against Still alone. Major Welch, as stated, had insisted on reconveying his part of the land to Jacquelin. He said he could not sleep with that land in his possession. So Jacquelin and Rupert were the owners of it, and Major Welch took it on a lease.

The suit matured, and once more the term of court approached. The people of the County were in better spirits. The evidence that Steve had secured in the South was believed to fill the

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broken links. On the decision depended everything. It was recognized on both sides that it was not now a mere property question, but a fight for supremacy. The old citizens were making a stand against the new powers. There was talk of Rupert's coming home. He had been in the West with Captain Thurston, acting as a volunteer scout, and had distinguished himself for his bravery. One particular act of gallantry, indeed, had attracted much attention. In a fight with the Indians, a negro trooper belonging to one of the companies had been wounded and during a check had fallen from his horse. Rupert had heard his cries, and had gone back under a heavy fire and, lifting him on his horse, had brought him off. The first that was heard of it in the County was through a letter of Captain Thurston's to Miss Welch. When Rupert was written to about it, he said he could not let Steve and Jack have all the honors: "And the fact is," he added, "when I heard the negro boy calling, I could not leave him to save my life."

Within a month after the reinstatement of the suit, Captain Thurston's company had come back from the West, and there was talk of efforts being made to have the old prosecution

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against Rupert dismissed. It was reported that he would come home and testify at the trial. Since his memory had been refreshed he recollected perfectly the incident of stepping on the paper.

Rumors of what might follow the trial were increasing daily. It was even said that Leech was trying to make up with Governor Krafton, and that negotiations were pending between them by which one of them would become Governor and the other Senator.

Steve Allen asserted boldly that it was much more likely that one of them would be in the penitentiary, unless the other pardoned him. This speech was repeated to Leech, who blinked uneasily. He went North that night.

In view of these facts, the old County was in better spirits than it had enjoyed for some time.

Dr. Washington Still's attentions to his father, after the father's "attack" at the trial of the Red Rock case, were, however, not so filial as they were reported to be. Had the truth been known, he was not so attentive to his father's interest as he was to that of another member of the Still family. While the trial and its strange *dénouement* had affected the elder Still to the point of bringing on a slight attack of

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paralysis, it affected Dr. Still also very seriously, though in a different way.

After the entertainment at Red Rock, Dr. Still fancied that he saw much improvement in his chances with Miss Krafton. He had expected to impress her with Red Rock, and she had been impressed. The pictures had particularly struck her. He had told her of as many of the portraits as he could remember, inventing names and histories for most of them. He had not thought it necessary to go into any elaborate explanation, consequently he had not mentioned the fact that they were the ancestors of the man who was suing for the recovery of the place. Miss Krafton had heard of the suit and referred to it casually. Dr. Still scouted the idea of his title being questioned. His grandfather had lived there, and his father had been born on the place. He did not mention the house in which his father was born. He only intimated that in some way they had been straitened in their circumstances before the war, at some period which he made vaguely distant; and he spoke of their later success somewhat as of a recovery of their estate. The suit, he asserted, had been instigated purely by spite. It was simply one of the customary attempts

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to annoy Union men and Northern settlers—it was really brought more against Major Welch than his father. Miss Krafton had met Major Welch and had declared that she adored him. Dr. Still's eyes blinked complacently.

Miss Krafton was manifestly interested, and the Doctor after this began to have more hopes of his success than he had ever had. He allowed himself to fall really in love with her.

His father's connection with the bonds of his former employer suddenly threatened to overthrow the whole structure that Dr. Still was so carefully building. The story of the bonds was told, with all its accessories, in such newspapers as were conducted by the old residents; and although Miss Krafton might never have heard of it from them, as she had never seen a copy of such a journal in her life, the papers that were on her father's side undertook to answer the story. It was an elaborate answer—a complete answer—if true. It ought to have been complete, for Dr. Washington Still inspired it, if he did not write it. The trouble was, it was too complete. It was not content with answering, it attacked; and it by innuendo attacked Major Welch. Miss Krafton might not have believed the story, if it had been confined to Mr.

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Gray and Mr. Still; but when Major Welch had accepted the story, and, as was stated, had even reconveyed his property to Mr. Gray, it was a different matter.

Miss Krafton had conceived a high opinion of Major Welch. He was so different from all others whom she had seen at the entertainment at Red Rock or had met at her father's table. She knew of the Welches' high social standing. She had met Miss Welch, and had been delighted with her also. The partial similarity of their situations had drawn her to Ruth, and Ruth's sweetness had charmed her. When the story of the Red Rock suit came out, Miss Krafton's curiosity was aroused. She wrote to Miss Welch and asked her about it.

Dr. Still had now begun to press his suit in earnest. He too had schemes which a union with Governor Krafton would further. Leech was becoming too constant a visitor at the governor's mansion to suit the young physician, and the latter was planning to forestall him.

When Dr. Still called on Miss Krafton next, after she had made her inquiry of Miss Welch, as he waited in her drawing-room his eye fell on a letter lying open on a table. He thought he recognized the handwriting as that of Miss

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Welch; and as he looked at it to verify this, he caught the name "Red Rock." He could not resist the temptation to read what she had said, and, picking up the letter, he glanced at the first page. It began with a formal regret that she could not accept Miss Krafton's invitation to visit her, and then continued:

"As to your request to tell you the true story of Mr. Hiram Still's connection with the Red Rock case, which the papers have been so full of, I feel——" What it was that she felt, Dr. Still did not discover, for at this point the page ended, and just then there was a rustle of skirts outside the door. Dr. Still replaced the letter only in time to turn and meet Miss Krafton as she entered. He had never seen her so handsome; but there was something in her manner to him which he had never felt before. She was cold, he thought—almost contemptuous. He wondered if she could have seen him through the door reading her letter. Partly to sound her as to this, and partly to meet the statements which he feared Miss Welch had made, he turned the conversation to the Welches. He began to praise them mildly, at the same time speaking of their impracticability and prejudices, and incidentally hinting that Major

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Welch had sold out to the Grays. To this Miss Krafton replied so warmly that the young man began to try another tack. Miss Krafton, however, did not unbend. She launched out in such eulogy of Major Welch, of Mrs. Welch, and of Miss Welch that Dr. Still was quite overwhelmed. He mentioned the account that had appeared in her father's organ. Miss Krafton declared that she did not believe a word of it. Major Welch had stated that it was wholly untrue. She asserted with spirit, that if she were a man, she would rather starve than have a dollar that was not gotten honestly; and if ever she married, it would be to a man like Major Welch. Her color had risen and her eyes were flashing.

Dr. Still gazed at her in a half-dazed way, and a curious expression came over his face. It was no time for him to push matters to an extreme.

“Well, some women are innocent, he thought, as he came down the steps. And his eyes had an ugly look in them.

When he reached home his father was waiting for him. The young man attacked him so furiously that he was overwhelmed. He began to try to defend himself. He had done nothing,

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he declared feebly; but whatever he had done, had been for his sake. His voice was almost a whimper.

His son broke out in a fury:

“For my sake! That’s your plea! And a pretty mess you’ve made of it! Just as I was about to succeed—to make me the talk of the State!—to make me appear the son of a—thief! You’ve stood in my way all my life. But for you, I might have been anything. I am ashamed of you—I’ve always been ashamed of you. But I did not think you’d have been such a—fool!” He walked up and down the room, wringing his hands and clutching the air.

“Washy—Washy—hear me,” pleaded the father, rising totteringly from his arm-chair, and with outstretched hands trying to follow his son.

Wash still made a gesture, half of contempt and half of rage, and burst out of the door.

As his son slammed the door behind him, Hiram Still stood for a moment, turned unsteadily to his chair, threw up his hands, and, tottering, fell full length on the floor.

The newspaper of which McRaffle was one of the editors stated a day or two later that “our fellow-citizens will be glad to learn that the

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honored Colonel Hiram Still is rapidly recovering from his paralytic stroke, owing to the devoted attentions and skill of his son, the eminent young physician, Dr. Washington Still, for whom we are prepared to predict a remarkable career." It "further congratulated all honest men that Colonel Still would be well in time to attend the trial of the so-called suit, instituted against him by his political enemies, which suit, to the editor's *own personal knowledge*, was neither more nor less than a malicious persecution."

How much Dr. Still paid for this notice was known only to two men, unless Leech also knew; for Leech and McRaffle were becoming very intimate.

It had been supposed that Mr. Hiram Still's illness would put off the trial of the Red Rock case; but Mr. Leech, who had just returned from the North, declared publicly that the trial would come off as already scheduled, at the next term. He further intimated that those who were setting traps for him would learn that he could set a few traps himself. This declaration set at rest the fears that had been entertained that the Red Rock case would be postponed.

Leech made good his word, and when it was

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least anticipated sprang the trap he had prepared. It was a complete surprise and almost a complete success; and when Leech counted up his game, he had, with a single exception, bagged every man in the County from whom he had received an affront, or against whom he cherished a grudge.

One Sunday morning, about daylight, as Jerry was returning to Brutusville from some nocturnal excursion, when only a mile or two from the village, he was startled to come on a body of cavalry, on the march. They were headed toward Brutusville, and with them were Colonel Leech and Captain McRaffle. A shrewd guess satisfied Jerry that it must mean some mischief to Captain Allen. Curiosity and interest prompted him to fall in with them; but the men he addressed knew nothing, and were grumbling at having to take a long night-ride. Jerry pressed on to the head of the column, where he saw Leech. He touched his hat and passed on as if he were in a great hurry. Leech, however, called him, and began to question him, but soon discovered that he was drunk—too drunk to be wholly intelligent, but, fortunately, sober enough to give a good deal of valuable information. Leech gathered from him that no one had

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the slightest idea that troops were coming to Brutusville, unless Captain Allen had. The Captain, Jerry said, had left Brutusville the evening before, and had gone to a friend's in the upper end of the County to spend Sunday. Jerry knew this, because the Captain had told him to meet him there with his horse in time for church; but Jerry was not going. He "had had enough of that man," he said. He was not going to work for him any more. The Captain had threatened to beat him. Here Jerry, at the memory of his wrongs, fell into a consuming rage, and cursed Captain Allen so heartily that he almost propitiated Leech. It was a matter of regret to Leech that Steve Allen was not in Brutusville, and so could not be arrested at once. This, however, could be remedied if a part of the company were detailed to catch him before he learned of their arrival. Leech would himself go with the men who were to undertake this. He wished to be present, or almost so, when Captain Allen was arrested. He would have taken Jerry with him, but Jerry was suddenly so drunk that he could hardly stand. So, having directed that the negro should not be allowed to go until after all the contemplated arrests had been made, Colonel Leech, with a

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platoon, took a road that led to the place where, according to Jerry, he should find Captain Allen preparing to attend church.

It was just daybreak when the remainder of the company reached the outskirts of the county seat, and, in accordance with the instructions that had been received, began to post pickets to surround the village. This was done under the immediate supervision of Captain McRaffle. Jerry remained with one of the pickets. The morning air appeared to have revived him astonishingly, and in a little while he had ingratiated himself with the picket by telling a number of funny stories of Leech, who did not appear to be at all popular with the men. He presently insinuated that he knew where the best whiskey in town was to be secured, and offered to go and get some for the picket before the officers took possession. He could slip in and come right out again without anyone knowing it. On this, and with a threat of what would be done to him if he failed to return, he was allowed by the picket to go in. He started off like a deer. It was surprising how straight he could go when he moved rapidly!

As soon as he reached the village he struck straight for the court-green. Jacquelin had

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spent the night at the court-house with Steve, and was about to start for home in the first light of the morning, and, just as Jerry flung himself over the fence, Jacquelin came down from the rooms that he and Steve occupied. Jerry rushed up to him and began to tell him the story of Leech's return with the soldiers. He had come to arrest the Captain, Jerry declared.

At first Jacquelin thought that Jerry was merely drunk; but his anxiety on Captain Allen's account, and the cleverness of his rouse by which he had outwitted Leech, satisfied him; and Jerry's account of Leech's eagerness (for he did not stick at telling the most egregious lies as to what Leech had told him) aroused Jacquelin's anxiety for Steve. Jacquelin, therefore, took instant alarm and sent Jerry to saddle Steve's horse, while he himself hurried back to Steve's room and roused him out of bed. At first, Steve was wholly incredulous. Jerry was just drunk, he declared, sleepily. But when Jerry appeared, though certainly he was not sober, he told a story which made Steve grave enough. The whole expedition was, according to his account, to capture Steve. Leech and Captain McRaffle and the captain of the troop had all said so. Steve's horse was saddled at

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the door. Steve still demurred. He'd be condemned if he'd run away; he'd stay, and, if what Jerry said was true, would settle with Leech, the whole score then and there. He went back into his room and put his pistol in his pocket. This Jacquelin declared was madness. It would only bring down vengeance on the whole County. What could Steve do against Government troops? Jerry added another argument: "Colonel Leech ain' gwine to meet him. He done gone off with some other soldiers," he asserted.

Steve turned to Jacquelin. "How can I leave you, Jack? I'm not a dog."

"Why, what can they do with me?" laughed Jacquelin. "They are after you about the Ku Klux, and I was not even in the country." He was still hurrying him.

Thus urged, Steve consented to go, and mounting his horse rode out a back way. To his surprise, he found the lane already picketed. He turned to take another road. As he wheeled into it he saw a squadron of troops at either end riding into the village toward him. He was shut in between them, with a high fence on either side. The only chance of escaping was across the fields. He acted quickly. Breasting his

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horse at the fence, he cleared it, and, dashing across the court-green, cleared that on the other side, and so made his way out of the village, taking the fences as he came to them.

Ten minutes later Jacquelin was arrested on a warrant sworn out before McRaffle as a commissioner of the court, and so, during the morning, was nearly every other man in the village.

Jacquelin no sooner looked at Leech, than he knew that it was not only Steve that he had come for. As Leech gazed on him his eyes watered, if his mouth did not; and he spoke in a sympathetic whine.

Dr. Cary heard of the raid and of the arrest of his friends that morning as he came home from Miss Bush's sick bedside, by which he had spent the night. He was tired and fagged; but he said he must go down to the court-house and see about the matter. Mrs. Cary and Blair tried to dissuade him. He needed rest, they urged. And, indeed, he looked it. His face was worn, and his eyes glowed deep under his brows.

“My dear, I must go. I hear they have made a clean sweep, and arrested nearly every man in the place.”

“They may arrest you, if you go.”

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“They cannot possibly have anything against me,” he said. “But if they should, it would make no difference. I must go and see about my friends.” The ladies admitted this.

So he rode off. Mrs. Cary and Blair looked wistfully after him as he passed slowly down the road through the apple-trees. He rode more slowly now than he used to do, and not so erect in the saddle.

He was about half-way to the village when he met Andy Stamper riding hard, who stopped to give him the news. They had arrested nearly every man in the village, Andy said, and were now sending out parties to make arrests in the country. General Legaie, and Jacquelin Gray, and Mr. Dockett, and even Mr. Langstaff had been arrested. Leech had come with them, and the prisoners were being taken up to Leech’s house, where they were to be tried before McRaffle, the commissioner. Captain Steve had got away, and had tried to meet Leech; but Leech was too smart for that.

“And they are after you and me too, Doctor,” said Andy. “Where are you going?”

Dr. Cary told him. Andy tried to dissuade him. “What’s the use? You can’t do any good. They’ll just arrest you too. My wife

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made me come away. I tell you, Doctor, it's worse than the war," said Andy. "I never would have surrendered, if I'd thought it 'ud 'a' come to this." There was a sudden flash of wrath in his blue eyes. "I've often been tempted to git even with that Still and that Leech, and I've shut my ears and turned away; but if I'd known 't 'ud come to this, d—d if I wouldn't have done it!"

Dr. Cary soothed him with his calm assurance, and as the Doctor started to go, Andy turned.

"If you're goin', I'm goin' with you," he said. "But first I must go by and tell Delia Dove."

The Doctor tried to assure him that it was not necessary for him to surrender himself; but Andy was firm. "It might have been all right," he said, if he had not met the Doctor; but Delia Dove would never forgive him if he let the Doctor go into a trouble by himself and he stayed out — 'twould be too much like running away. "I tell you, Doctor," said Andy, "if Delia Dove had been where I was, she'd never 'a' surrendered. If there'd been her and a few more like her, there wouldn't 'a' been any surrender."

The Doctor smiled, and, leaving him to go by

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and make his peace with Mrs. Stamper, rode slowly on to town.

He found the roads picketed as in time of war; but the pickets let him through. He had scarcely entered the village when he met Leech. He was bustling about with a bundle of books under his thin arm. The Doctor greeted him coldly, and Leech returned the greeting almost warmly. He was really pleased to see the Doctor.

The Doctor expressed his astonishment and indignation at the step that had been taken. Leech was deprecatory.

“I have heard that I am wanted also, Colonel Leech,” said the Doctor, calmly. “I am present to answer any charge that can be brought against me.”

Leech smiled almost sadly. He had no doubt in the world that the Doctor could do so. Really, he himself had very little knowledge of the matter, and none at all as to the Doctor's case. The Doctor could probably find out by applying to the officer in command. He passed on, leaving the old gentleman in doubt if he could know what was going on. Within ten minutes Dr. Cary was arrested by an officer accompanied by a file of soldiers. When he reached Leech's

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house, he found more of his old friends assembled there than he could have found anywhere else in the County that day. It was with mingled feelings that they met each other. In one way they were deeply incensed; in another, it was so grotesque that they were amused as one after another they were brought in, without the slightest idea of the cause of their arrest.

However, it soon ceased to be a matter for hilarity. The soldiers who were their guards were simply coldly indifferent, and ordered them about as they would have done any other criminals. But Leech was feline. He oozed with satisfaction and complacency. Andy Stamper was one of the last to appear, and when he was brought in he was a sorry sight. He had not been given the privilege of surrendering himself. As he was taking leave of his wife a posse had appeared, with Perdue the jailer at their head, with a warrant for him. Andy had insisted that he would go and surrender himself, but would not be arrested. A fight had ensued, in which though, as Perdue's broken head testified, Andy had borne himself valorously. Andy had been overpowered; and he was brought to jail, fastened on his mule,

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with a trace-chain about his body and a bag over his head. The prisoners were first marched to Leech's big house, and were called out one by one and taken into a wing room, where they were arraigned before McRaffle, as a commissioner, on the charge of treason and rebellion. The specific act was the attack on the jail that night. The witnesses were the jailer, Perdue; a negro who had been in the jail that night, and Bushman, the man whom Steve Allen had ordered out of the ranks for insubordination and threats against the prisoners. Leech himself was present, and was the inspiration and director of each prosecution. He sat beside the Commissioner and instructed him in every case. Toward Jacquelin he was particularly attentive. He purred around him.

When Dr. Cary's turn came, neither he nor anyone else had any doubt that he would be at once discharged. He was one of the last to be called. He had taken no part whatever in the attack on the jail; all that he had done had been to try and dissuade from it those who made the assault, and, failing in that, he had waited, in case anyone should be injured, to render what professional aid might be necessary. When he was brought before Leech he was sensible at

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once of some sort of change in the man. Always somewhat furtive in his manner, the carpet-bagger now had something feline about him. He had evidently prepared to act a part. He was dressed in a long black coat, with a white tie which gave him a quasi-clerical touch, and his expression had taken on a sympathetic regretfulness. A light almost tender, if it had not been so joyous, beamed from his mild blue eyes, and when he spoke his voice had a singular whine of apparent self-abnegation. The Doctor was instantly conscious of the change in him.

“The tiger is loose in this man,” he said to himself. Leech called the Commissioner’s attention to the Doctor’s presence, and greeted him sadly. The Doctor acknowledged the salute gravely, and stated to the Commissioner his views as to the error that had led to his arrest. Before he was through, however, he was addressing Leech. A glint shone in Leech’s eyes for a second.

“Yes, it would seem so,” he said, reflectively, with a slight twang in his voice. “I should think that all that would be necessary would be for you to mention it to the Court.” He looked at the Commissioner as if for corroboration.

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McRaffle's sallow face actually flushed; but he kept his eyes on his paper.

"Why, you are the real power," said the Doctor; "you are the one who has authority."

Leech smiled almost wanly.

"Oh, no, my dear sir, you do me too much honor. I am but the humble instrument of the law. I bind and loose only as it is given me, my dear sir." His voice had grown more nasal and his blue eyes beamed. He laid his hand tenderly on the Doctor's shoulder and smiled half-sadly. The Doctor moved a step farther off, his thin nostrils quivering slightly.

"Very well. I am not afraid. Only don't my-dear-sir me, if you please. I shall state frankly all I know about the matter, and expect to be discharged now and at once."

"Yes, that's right. No doubt of it. I shall be glad to do what I can to further your wishes. I will speak to the Commissioner." He smiled blandly.

He did so, holding a long whispered conversation with McRaffle, and the Doctor's case was taken up. The Doctor made his statement, and made it fully and frankly, and it was taken down. When, however, it was finished, he was not discharged. He was asked to give the

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names of those who were in the crowd that night, and refused. Leech approached, and tenderly and solicitously urged him to do so. "My dear sir, don't you see how impossible it will be for me to assist you if you persist in what is really a contempt of court?"

"Do you suppose I would tell you to save my life?" said Dr. Cary.

Leech shook his head sadly. He was really grieved.

"Perhaps your Commissioner might supply you names," snapped General Legaie. McRaffle looked up at him and tried to face his gaze; but it was in vain. His eyes dropped before the General's withering scorn.

The Doctor was held "on his own confession," the commissioner said. Old Mr. Langstaff was sent on in the same way; and by nightfall the entire party were in jail, sent on to the next term of the court to be held at the capital.

It was late in the afternoon when the prisoners were conducted to prison. Leech himself headed the procession, walking with impressive solemnity a little in advance of the guard. Quite a large crowd had assembled, mostly negroes; though there were some white men on the edges, looking on with grim faces and glowing eyes,

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their hats drawn down and their speech low, hardly articulate mutterings. All day long, since the news of the arrival of the soldiery and their work, the negroes had been coming into the village, and they now lined the roadside and packed the court-green near the jail. As the procession made its way they followed it with shouts of derision. "Awe, my Lawd! Ef dee ain' gwine put 'em into de *jail!*" cried out a young slattern, shrilly; at which there was a shout of laughter.

"Amy, come heah, and look at *dis* one," shrieked another. "Look at dat ole one. Don't I hope dee'll hang de ole deble!"

"Shut your mouth, you black huzzy," said a tall old negro, sternly, in solemn rebuke. The girl gave a shrill, nervous laugh, and, pulling her friend by the hand, pushed her way nearer the prisoners.

"Dese heah young gals is too free wid dee moufs!" complained another old negro to the taller one. Old Tarquin vouchsafed no answer. His burning eyes were fastened on his master's tall form as the Doctor marched to the black door before him.

On the edge of the throng, though sufficiently disguised not to be recognized casually, was an-

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other form, also with burning eyes, which were, however, fastened not on Dr. Cary, but on Colonel Leech. Steve Allen had come back that day, determined if he met Leech to offer him a pistol and settle the questions between them, on the spot.

As Dr. Cary passed into the jail, he involuntarily stooped. As the heavy door closed behind the prisoners, there was such a wild shout of triumph from the ragged crowd that surged about the space outside that the dull, indifferent soldiers in line before the door looked up and scowled, with side glances and muttered speeches to each other; while on the outskirts the white men gathered together in groups and talked in low tones, their faces dark with impotent rage, but none the less dangerous because they, too, were bound by shackles.

Excitement was hardly the name for the extraordinary sensation the arrests had caused. It was a bolt from a clear sky. By some curious law, whenever a step was taken against the whites the negroes became excited; and the arrest of so many of the leading men of the County had thrown them into a condition of the wildest commotion. They came flocking into the village, forming and marching in a sort of order,

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with shouts and yells of triumph. They held meetings about the court-green, preached and prayed and sang hymns, shouting derisively about the jail, and yelling insults against the whites. Had anyone seen the throng, he would never have believed that the wild mob that hooted and yelled about the village were the quiet, orderly, and amiable people who but the day before tilled the fields or laughed about their cabins. It needed all the power of the troops stationed at the court-house to restrain them.

It, however, was not only the negroes who were excited. The news had spread rapidly. The whites also were aroused, and men from every direction were riding toward the county seat, their faces stern and grim. By nightfall the village was overflowing, and they were still arriving. As always, their presence awed and quieted the negroes. Many of them stopped outside the town. The presence of regular soldiers meant the presence of a force they were compelled to recognize. The two words head were "the Government" and "Leech." Suddenly the two had become one. Leech was the Government, and the Government was Leech: no longer merely the State—the Carpet-bag Gov-

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ernment—but *the* Government. He represented and was represented by the blue-coated, silent, impassive men who were quartered in the court-house and moved indifferently among the citizens—disliked, but careless whether it were so or not. The carpet-bagger had suddenly ceased to be a mere individual—he had become a power. For the first time he was not only hated, but feared. Men who had braved his militia, which had outnumbered them twenty to one, who had outscowled him face to face a hundred times, now glanced at him furtively and sank their voices as he passed. Leech was quick to note the difference, and his heart swelled with pride. He walked backward and forward through the throng many times, his long coat flapping behind him, his mild eyes peering through his spectacles, his wan smile flickering about his mouth, his book, “The Statutes of the United States,” clasped under his arm, his brow bent as if in meditation. He felt that he was feared, and it was unction to his spirit. He had bided his time and had triumphed. Waiting till they least expected it, he had at one blow struck down every enemy. He, Jonadab Leech, had done it; and they were under his feet. They knew it, and they feared him. He meant them

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to know it and fear him. For this reason he had sat by the Commissioner all day and instructed him; for this reason he had led the march to the jail.

But had he struck all down? No. One had escaped. At the thought, Leech's smile died away, and a dark, threatening look took its place. His chief enemy, the one he most hated and feared, had escaped. Those he had caught were well enough, but it was Steve Allen whom he was after chiefly—Steve Allen, who had scouted and braved and defied him so often, who had derided him and thwarted him and stung him. He had planned the whole affair mainly for Steve, and now the enemy had slipped through his fingers. It turned all the rest of his success into failure. His triumph changed to dust and ashes on his lips. He was enraged. He would catch him. One moment he denounced his escape as treachery, the next he boasted that he would find him and bring him in alive or dead. A rumor came to him that night that Captain Allen was not far off. Indeed, he was not, but Leech slept at the hotel, guarded by soldiers.

Leech headed, next day, a squad—not a small one—and visited every house in the neighbor-

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hood that Steve frequented, searching the houses and proclaiming his determination to have him, alive or dead. He had the pleasure of searching once more the cottage where Miss Thomasia lived. Miss Thomasia received him at the door. She was white with apprehension and indignation. Her apprehension, however, was not for herself, but for Steve, who had only just ridden over the hill, and who had left a message for Leech that he was looking for him, too. Leech assured her sympathetically that she need not be disturbed. He had to do his duty—a painful duty, but it was necessary to execute the law. “‘They who take the sword shall perish by the sword,’” he said, with a mournful smile and a shake of the head, and a side look at Miss Thomasia.

“Yes, I have heard that, and I commend it to you, sir,” Miss Thomasia declared, with unexpected spirit. “God is the avenger of the guiltless, and He sometimes employs those who are persecuted as His instruments.”

Leech left there and went to Dr. Cary’s. Here, too, however, he was doomed to disappointment. Mrs. Cary and Miss Blair had gone down to the court-house to look after the doctor, and the family was represented by Mammy Krenda,

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whose dark looks and hostile attitude implied too much for Leech to try her. He contented himself with announcing to her that he was hunting for Steve Allen, and had a warrant for his arrest.

“Yes, I heah you’ huntin’ for him,” said the old woman, quietly. “Well, you better mine some day he don’t go huntin’ for you. When he ready, I reckon you’ll fine him.”

“I mean to have him, alive or dead,” said Leech. “It don’t make any difference to me,” he laughed.

“No, I heah say you say dat,” replied the old woman, placidly. “Well, ’twould meck right smart difference to him, I spec’; an’ when you push folks dat fur, you’s got to have mighty sho stan’in’ place.”

This piece of philosophy did not strike home to Leech at the time; but a little later it came back to him, and remained with him so much that it worried him. He returned to the court-house without having accomplished his mission. He made up his mind that the old woman knew where Captain Allen had gone; but he had too vivid a recollection of his last contest with her to try her again. On his arrival at the court-house that evening, however, he found that Tarquin was

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there, having accompanied his mistresses, and he sent a file of soldiers to bring the old man before him. When Tarquin was brought in, he looked so stately and showed so much dignity that Leech for a moment had a feeling that, perhaps, he had made a mistake. McRaffle was present, sitting with that inscrutable look on his dark face. The Commissioner had already gained a reputation for as much severity in his new office as rumor had connected with his name in a less authorized capacity. And Leech had expected the old servant to be frightened. Instead, his head was so erect and his mouth so calm that Leech instinctively thought of Dr. Cary.

However, he began to question the old servant. He stated that he knew where Captain Allen was, and that Tarquin had just as well tell. He did not wish to be severe with him, he said, but it was his duty, as a representative of the Government, to ascertain; and while on one side was the penalty of the law, on the other was a high reward. The old fellow listened so silently that Leech, as he proceeded, began to think he had made an impression, and a gleam of satisfaction lit up his eyes. When he was through, there was an expression very like scorn on old Tarquin's face.

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“I don’t know where he is, Colonel Leech,” he said. “But do you suppose I would tell you if I did? If I betrayed a gentleman, I couldn’t look my master in the face.” Leech was taken aback.

“Here, that’s all nonsense,” he snarled. “I’m the Government, and I’ll make you tell.” But Tarquin was unmoved.

“You can’t terrify me with your threats, Colonel Leech,” he said, calmly. “I served with my master through the war.”

“If you don’t tell, I’ll send you to jail; that’s what I’ll do.”

“You have already sent better gentlemen there,” said the old servant, quietly, and with a dignity that floored the other completely. Leech remembered suddenly Hiram Still’s warning to him long ago, “With these quality niggers, you can’t do nothin’ that way.”

He suddenly tried another course, and began to argue with Tarquin. It was his duty to the Government which had set him free, and would pay handsomely. Tarquin met him again.

“Colonel Leech, my master offered me my freedom before the war, and I wouldn’t take it. You may get some poor creatures to betray with such a bribe, but no gentleman will sell himself.”

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He bowed. Leech could not help enjoying the scowl that came on McRaffle's face. But the old man was oblivious of it.

"I have voted with the Government since we were free, because I thought it my duty; but I tell you now, suh, what you are doin' to-day will hurt you mo' than 'twill help you. What you sow, you've got to reap."

"Ah, pshaw!" sneered Leech, "I don't believe you know where Captain Allen is?"

"I told you I did not," said the old man, with unruffled dignity.

Leech saw that it was useless to try him further in that direction, and, thinking that he might have gone too far, he took out his pocket-book.

"Here; I was just testing you," he said, with a well-feigned smile. He extracted a dollar note and held it out.

"Nor, suh; I don't want your money," said Tarquin, calmly. He bowed coldly, and, turning slowly, walked out.

Leech sat for some time in deep reflection. He was wondering what the secret was that controlled these people without threats or bribery. Here he was, almost on the point of attaining his highest ambition, and he was beginning to

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find that he was afraid of the instruments he employed. He had never seen a negro insolent to one of the old residents except under the instigation of himself or someone else like him, and yet to him they were so insolent that at times even he could hardly tolerate it. A strange feeling came to him, as if he were in a cage with some wild animal whose keeper he had driven away, and which he had petted and fed until it had gotten beyond him. He could control it only by continually feeding it, and it was steadily demanding more and more. Would the supply from which he had drawn give out? And then what would happen? He was aroused from his thoughts by McRaffle. He gave a short laugh.

“Called your hand, rather, didn't he?”

Leech tried hard to look composed.

“Why didn't you turn him over to me? I'd have got it out of him. Trouble about you is, you don't know the game. You are all right when your hand's full, but you haven't got the courage to bet on your hand if it's weak. You either bluster till a child would know you were bluffing, or else you funk and lay your hand down. I told you you couldn't do anything with these old fellows that have held on. If they'd

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been going to come over, they'd have done so long ago. But if you can't get them, you can others. You leave it to me, and I'll find out where your friend Allen is."

"Well, go on and do it, and don't talk so much about it," snarled Leech, angrily. "I mean to have him, alive or dead."

"And I rather think you prefer the latter," sneered McRaffle, darkly.

"No; vengeance belongeth unto God." His tone was unctuous.

"Look here, Leech," said the other, with cold contempt, "you make me sick. I've done many things, but I'm blanked if I ever quoted Scripture to cover my meanness. You're thinking of Still. I'm not him. You move heaven and earth to take your vengeance, and then talk about it belonging to God. You think you are a God, but you are a mighty small one. And you can't fool Steve Allen, I tell you. If you give me a thousand dollars, I'll get him for you, alive or dead."

"You said you'd get him for two hundred, and I have offered that reward," said Leech.

"The price has risen," said McRaffle, coolly. "You haven't got him, have you? If Allen runs across you, you'll wish you had paid me

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five thousand; and you better look out that he don't." He rose and lounged toward the door.

"Well, you get him, and we'll talk about the price," said Leech.

"We'll talk of it before that, Colonel," said McRaffle, slowly to himself.

Leech had some compensation next day when he superintended the arrangements for the transfer of his prisoners to the city. His office was besieged all day with the friends and relatives of the prisoners, offering bail and begging their release, or, at least, that he would allow them to remain in the County until the time for the term of court to begin. To all he returned the same answer—he was "only a humble minister of the law; the law must take its course." He found this answer satisfactory. It implied that he could if he would, and at the same time left an impression of the inscrutable character of the punishment to come. He had begun to feel very virtuous. From being a humble instrument of Providence, he had come to feel as if he were a part of Providence itself. The thought made his bosom swell. It was so sweet to find himself in this position, that he determined to lengthen out the pleasure; so, instead of sending all his prisoners down to the city at

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once, he divided them into two lots and shipped only half of them at first, keeping the others in jail in the County until another day. What his reason was no one knew at the time. It was charged around the County that he wanted to keep Jacquelin Gray until he could secure Steve Allen, so that he might march them down handcuffed together, and that he kept Andy Stamper and some of the others, so that he might hector them personally. However that was, he kept these in jail at Brutusville; and the others were marched down to the station handcuffed, under guard of the soldiers, and with a crowd of yelling, hooting negroes running beside them, screaming and laughing at them, until one of the officers drove them to a respectful distance. They were shipped to the city in a closed box-car, Leech superintending the shipment personally. Just before starting he approached Dr. Cary and General Legaie, and said that in consideration of their age he would have them sent down to the station in his carriage.

“Thank you. We wish no exemptions made in our cases different from those accorded our neighbors,” said Dr. Cary, grimly. The General said nothing; he only looked away.

“Now, my dear sirs, this is not Christian,”

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urged Leech. "I beg that you will allow me the pleasure——"

The little General turned on him so suddenly and with such a blaze in his eyes, that Leech sprang back, and his sentence was never finished.

"Dog!" was the only word that reached him.

So Dr. Cary and General Legaie went along with the rest, though they were not handcuffed. Old Mr. Langstaff was released on his recognizance, Leech kindly offering the Commissioner to go his bail himself.

On Leech's return from the railroad that night, he requested the officer in command to go through the jail with him, and gave him, in a high key, especial orders as to guarding it securely.

"It will be guarded securely enough," said the Captain, gruffly. He was beginning to find Leech intolerable. The last few days' work had sickened him.

"I'll soon have another prisoner," said Leech as he passed the door where Jacquelin was confined.—He raised his voice so that it might be heard by those within the cells.—"And then we shall relieve you."

"Well, I wish you'd do it quick, for I'm

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blanked tired of this business, I can tell you!" snapped the Captain.

"Oh, it won't be long now. A day or two at most. We'll have Allen, dead or alive. I had information to-day that will secure him. And the court will sit immediately to try them."

The Captain made no answer, except a grunt. Leech puffed out his bosom.

"A soldier's duty is to obey orders, Captain," he said, sententiously.

The Captain turned on him suddenly, his red face redder than ever. "Look here, you bully these men down here who haven't anybody to speak up for them; but don't you be trying to teach me my duty, Mister Leech, or I'll break your crooked neck, you hear?"

He looked so large and threatening that Leech fell back. In order to appease the ruffled officer and satisfy him that he was not a coward, Leech, just as he was leaving, said that he did not care for him to send guards up to his house that night, as he had been doing.

"All right."

"Of course, I mean until toward bedtime, Captain. I think it still better to keep them there until I leave. I have important documents there. You don't know these people as I do. I

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shall go to the city to-morrow or next day. I have business there, and I have the utmost confidence in your ability to manage things. I shall report your zeal to our friends in Washington.”

“All right,” grunted the Captain. And Leech went off.

Leech started toward his house. “I’ll have him recalled and get somebody else in his place,” he muttered.

He stopped, and, going to his office, lit a lamp and wrote a letter to the authorities urging a transfer of the present company, on the ground that the Captain did not appear very well adapted for managing the negroes, and that he feared it was giving encouragement to those they were trying to suppress.

When he had written his letter, he sat back and began to think. He had heard a name that day that had disquieted him. It was the name of the teacher at Mrs. Welch’s school. He had always supposed her name was Miss May, but it seemed that her name was Miss Bush.

One thing that had worried him in the past more than he had ever admitted even to himself had like the others, under the influence of his fortunate star, passed wholly away. He had

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married early in life. As his ambition rose, his wife had been a clog to him. He had tried to get a divorce; but this she resisted, and he had failed. She had, however, consented to a separation. And he had persuaded her to give up his name and resume her own, Miss Bush. He had not heard anything of her in a long time, and he was quietly moving to get a divorce on the ground of abandonment—of her having abandoned him. When this was done, why should he not marry again? Miss Krafton was a handsome girl. It would make Krafton his friend and ally instead of his enemy, and together they could own the State.

Just then there was a knock at the door. A servant entered. A lady wanted to see him. Who was it? The servant did not know. She wanted to see him at once. Curiosity prevailed. "Show her in," said Leech. She entered a moment later. Leech turned deadly white. It was Miss Bush. The next moment his fear gave way to rage. He sprang to his feet. "What are you doing here? Where did you come from?" he snarled.

She seated herself on a chair near the door.

"Don't be angry with me, John," she said, quietly.

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“I am angry. Why shouldn't I be angry with you? You have lied to me.”

“That I have not.” She spoke firmly.

“You have. What do you call it? Did you not promise never to bother me again?”

“I have not bothered you. I came here to try and protect you.”

“You have. You gave me your word never to come near me again. What do you want?”

“I want to talk to you.”

“Well, talk quick. I have no time to waste on you. I am busy.”

“I know you are, and I shall not bother you long. I want you to stop prosecuting Dr. Cary and Mr. Gray and Captain Allen.”

“What do you know about them?” asked Leech, in unfeigned astonishment.

“They are friends of friends of mine. Dr. Cary saved my life not long ago.”

“I wish he'd let you— I'll see you first where I wish they were now—in blank.”

“There is no use in speaking that way, John,” she said, quietly.

“I don't want you to ‘John’ me,” he snarled. “I tell you I want you to go away.”

“I am going,” she said, sadly. “I will go as soon as I can. I have no money.”

MR. LEECH SPRINGS A TRAP

“Where is your money?”

“I lent it to Captain McRaffle to invest.”

“More fool you!”

His manner changed.

“Will you go if I give you the money?”

“Yes”—his face brightened—“as soon as I have finished my year here.”

He broke out on her furiously.

“That’s always the way with you. You are such a liar, there’s no believing you. I wish you were dead.”

“I know you do, John; and I do, too;” she said, wearily. “But the issues of life and death belong to God.”

“Oh, that’s just a part of your hypocrisy. Here, if I give you money, will you go away?”

“Yes, as soon as I can.”

“And will you promise me never to breathe my name to a soul while you are here, or let anyone know that you know me? Will you give me your word on that?”

“Yes.”

He looked at her keenly for a moment.

“Does anyone know that you—that you ever knew me?”

She flushed faintly, with distress.

“Yes, one person—one only.”

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Leech sprang to her and seized her roughly.

“And he? Who is he?”

“Dr. Cary. I told him when I thought I was dying. He will not tell.”

He gave a cry of rage.

“He! I’d rather have had anyone else know it.” He flung her from him roughly and stood for a moment lost in thought. His countenance cleared up. If Dr. Cary had promised not to tell, he knew he would not do so, if his life hung on it.

When he spoke it was in a somewhat changed voice.

“Remember, you have sworn that you will never mention it again to a soul, and that you will never come near me again as long as you live!”

“Yes.” She looked at him with pleading eyes, interlacing her fingers. “Oh, John!” she gasped, and then her voice failed her.

For answer, Leech opened the door and glanced out into the empty passage, then seized her by the shoulder and put her outside, and, shutting the door, locked it.

A minute later she slowly and silently went down the dark stairs and out into the night.

CHAPTER XXXIX

CAPTAIN ALLEN CLAIMS THE REWARD LEECH OFFERED

LEECH had a bad half-hour; but when he left his office his spirits were rising again. He had weathered many a storm before. It would be hard if he could not weather this little trouble. He was satisfied that his wife would keep her word not to divulge his secret to anyone, and if he could but get her away everything would go all right. He would be free to marry a handsome and wealthy woman; and this alliance would give him complete control of the State. With this, what might he not have—wealth unlimited, position, unmeasured power—there was no end to it! It all stretched before him a shining track with, at the end—it appeared before him for only one brief moment—a dazzling point: at the far end of that long track a great white house, with the broad avenues reaching in every direction. Why not? Why should he

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not be ——? The vision made his head swim. He wiped his hand across his mouth, as though he tasted something actually material.

He returned to earth, and, locking his office-door, strolled up the hill. The village was all quiet except for the sentries pacing their beats.

As Leech walked up under the clear stars, the thought came into his mind once more; and this time he tried to follow it step by step. Yes, it was possible. He was rich, powerful, fortunate. He would be Governor. What might he not be! His enemies had fallen before him—all but one, and that one could not escape. He would find him, alive or dead; and then—wealth—power—revenge! He raised his clenched hand and brought it down in the intensity of his feeling.

“Yes, by G—d! I’ll have him, alive or dead!” he exclaimed. He was almost at his gate. Two steps brought him to it; and before him in the darkness, waiting for him, tall and silent, stood the man he wanted.

“I hear you are hunting for me,” said Steve Allen, quietly. “I am here.”

The blood rushed back and forth in Leech’s veins as cold as ice, as hot as fire. What would he not have given for his guards! Why had he been such a fool as to dismiss them! He thought

CAPTAIN ALLEN CLAIMS THE REWARD of his pistol; but he knew Steve was quicker with a pistol than he. So he resorted to craft. He would keep him until the guards arrived.

“How are you, Captain? Won’t you walk in?” he said, with a show of ease, though his voice quavered. He thought about offering his hand, but feared to do so. If he could only detain him!

“Thank you. I will.” Steve indicated with a wave of his hand that Leech should precede him; and Leech walked before him, knowing that he was his prisoner. Still he hoped help would come. They went into his library. Steve took a seat.

“What did you want with me?”

“I was only fooling,” said Leech, feebly. Steve looked so placid that he began to feel reassured. “You know there’s a warrant out for your arrest; and the best thing for you to do is to surrender quietly. You can clear yourself easy enough, and it’s just a form. You come with me, and I’ll do all I can for you.” His voice was cajoling, and he looked at Steve almost tenderly. “You know I was only fooling about what I said.”

Steve looked at him with cold contempt. “You’ll find it ill fooling with a desperate man.

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Let's drop our masks. You have made a mistake to push us so far. You have offered a reward for me, alive or dead. I am here to claim it. You are my prisoner, and you know it." He gave Leech a glance that made him shiver. "Sit there, and write what I tell you." He indicated Leech's desk. Leech, with blanched face, took his seat. As he did so he glanced furtively at the clock. Secret as the glance was, Steve saw it.

"Be quick about it, and don't waste a word. I have no time to spare. Remember, it was alive or dead you wanted me." He dictated the words of a safe-conduct:

"To the Commandant of the United States troops in District No. —. Pass the bearer and companions, and render them all the aid possible. For reasons of State," added Steve, with a twinkle in his eye, as he glanced over it. "Now sign it."

Leech signed slowly. He was listening with all his ears.

"Now another." Steve dictated the following to the commanding officer in the village: "I have been called away unexpectedly on business connected with the man I want, Captain Allen. Take no steps in my absence, and credit no re-

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ports not signed by me personally.” Now sign it, and add this postscript: “I have decided to pursue a more conciliatory policy toward the prisoners. Please make them entirely comfortable, and give their friends access to them.” Sign that, and mark it to be delivered in the morning, and leave it on your table.

“Leave it on my table?” Leech’s face blanched.

“Yes, you are going with me.”

Just then steps were heard on the walk outside, and the murmur of low voices reached them. A gleam of hope stole into Leech’s face. Steve Allen heard too, and he listened intently. As he turned his eyes again on Leech, a new light appeared in the latter’s eyes; fear had suddenly changed to joy.

“Aha! Captain Allen, our positions are reversed again. Let us drop our masks indeed! You are my prisoner now. Those are my sentries. The house is surrounded by soldiers. Ah! ha-ha-ha!” he laughed, leaning back in his chair, eying Steve, and rubbing his hands in glee.

Steve shifted his seat a little, displaying the butt of a revolver.

“You fool!” he said, with that coolness which

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was Leech's envy and despair, and which made him in a way admire Steve more than any other man he knew. "Suppose they are your men? You are going with me all the same. If they come in here, you are still my prisoner; and one word—one look from you—one bare suspicion on their part that I am not going on your invitation; that it is not voluntary on your part—and you are a dead man." He loosened his pistol, and, while he listened, sat looking at Leech with a cool assurance on his face that made Leech gasp.

There was a sharp knock at the outer door. As Steve listened his expression changed to one of amusement.

"Call to them to come in, and remember you were never in greater peril than at this moment."

Leech called, and there was the slow tramp of several men in the passageway.

"Call them in here."

Leech was becoming puzzled. But he could not keep down the hope that was dawning on his countenance. He called, and they approached the door. Steve did not even turn. He was keeping his eyes on a big gilt mirror that hung in front of him and showed both the door and Leech.

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The men reached the door and knocked again; then opened it, and three men in United States uniform stood in the doorway. Steve's hand left his pistol, and the eyes in the mirror were filled with a more amused smile as he glanced from them to Leech. A radiant joy sprang into Leech's face. He gave a dive behind his desk, shouting, "Seize that man. Shoot him if he lifts his hand!"

Nothing of the kind, however, occurred. At a sign from Steve, the three men came inside the room and closed the door behind them.

"Come out, Leech. These are my men, not yours," said Steve. "You are too big a coward to fool with; come out. Pull him out, one of you." And the man nearest Leech caught him by the arm and dragged him up on his feet, gasping and white with returning terror as he saw the trick that had been played him.

"Did you think I was such a fool as that?" Steve asked, contemptuously. "Come, we have no more time to lose. Fetch him along, men." He turned to the door, and the next moment Leech was seized and hustled out at a trot. The sight of a pistol in the hand of one of the men kept him quiet. At the door a gag was put into his mouth, a cap was pulled down over his eyes, and his arms were pinioned to his side. He was

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conscious that the lamps were extinguished, and the key turned in the lock behind him. Then he was borne to his gate, set on a horse, and carried off through the darkness at a gallop. He gave a groan of terror. "Remember Andy Stamper," said one of the men, and Leech remembered well enough. How far they went the prisoner had no means of knowing. After awhile the gag was taken from his mouth; but he was told that the least outcry would mean his death. They travelled at a brisk gait all night, and he knew that he had several men in his escort; but though they at times talked together in undertones, they did not address him and were deaf to his speeches. Much of the journey was through woods, and several times they forded rivers, and toward the end they must have left all beaten tracks, for they rode through bushes so dense as almost to sweep him from his horse; then they descended a steep hill, forded a stream, and, a little later, Leech was lifted from his horse, borne, half-dead with fright and fatigue, into a house, down a flight of steps, and laid on a bed. One of the men who brought him in lighted a candle and gave him a drink of whiskey, which revived him; and Leech found that he was in a large room with stone walls,

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furnished simply, like a bedroom, and venti-
lated from the top.

The man who was left with him was a stranger to him, and, as he turned to go, Leech asked him to tell him where he was and what they were going to do with him. He felt that it was his last chance.

“Maybe keep you as a hostage, maybe not.”

“As a hostage?”

“That’s the Commander’s idea. As a hos-
tage for those you’ve arrested, and I reckon
what the Capt’n says will prevail. Good-by.”
He shut the door and bolted it behind him,
leaving Leech alone.

This, then, explained what Steve Allen meant by what he said. He was a prisoner, to be held as a hostage for those he had arrested. There was a bed in the room; and Leech was so fatigued that he fell asleep, and slept until he was awakened by the guard bringing him something to eat. This man, like the others, was masked, and he refused to talk at all.

“What will they do with me?” asked Leech.

“Depends on what orders you’ve given about those you’ve arrested,” said the man in a voice which Leech knew was feigned. He was going. Leech determined to make one more effort.

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“Wait, please. I’m rich. No, I’m not rich; but I have friends who are who would pay well if you—if I were to get back to them.” His voice had grown confidential.

“Shouldn’t be surprised.” The tone was rather dry; but that might have been due to the fact that the voice was disguised. And as he appeared acquiescent, Leech took courage. He moved a little nearer to him. “I could make it worth your while to let me go,” he said, insinuatingly. The man waited. Leech’s hopes revived. McRaffle had sold out; why not buy this man? He was plainer. “Why not let me out?” The guard was considering. “Help me, and help me get hold of—just help me, and I will see that you and your friends receive full pardon, and will make you rich.”

The guard pulled off his mask. It was Steve Allen himself. “Good-night;” and he was gone, leaving Leech with his heart in his mouth.

There was great excitement in the County over the disappearance of Major Leech; but it was suppressed excitement, and, curious as it may seem, his absence had the immediate effect of quieting the negroes. They were struck with awe at either the boldness or the mystery of his abduction, and almost within a night after

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he disappeared they had subsided. One who had seen them parading and yelling with defiance and delight the day that Leech led his handcuffed prisoners to the station to ship them off to prison, would not have recognized the awe-struck and civil people who now went back and forth so quietly to their work. It seemed almost a miracle.

All sorts of tales were published in the public press as to this latest outrage, and there was much denunciation; but no action was taken immediately, and for a time, at least, the old County was once more under the rule of its own citizens.

Owing partly to the letter Leech had written just before his disappearance, and partly to the request of the Captain of the company, who was heartily tired of his work, an order had been issued transferring that officer's company to another post; and he had left with his company before the fact of Leech's abduction became known. An appeal was made to the Governor to declare the County under martial law; but though he talked about it loudly enough, and made many threats, he did not carry out his threats immediately. Perhaps the Governor was not too anxious to go into an investigation

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that might, instead of proving Leech to have been murdered, result in bringing back into the field his most formidable rival.

It, however, was deemed by the higher authorities that something must be done to vindicate the majesty of the law, and it was decided to send other troops to the County. The selection of troops, however, had been proved by the history of the County to be a matter of more than ordinary delicacy. Several different bodies had been sent there without accomplishing what had been hoped for.

It happened that Thurston's command had just returned from the Northwest and was awaiting some disposal. It was remembered that this same troop had once quieted things in the disturbed region, and had given, at least, more of a show of peace than any of their numerous successors had done. This was one view of the case. There was perhaps another view which may have influenced some. So Thurston was unexpectedly dispatched with his command to the place from which he had been ordered several years before. His appearance was a complete surprise to the old residents, and the effect was immediately apparent.

It was not known what it signified. Some

CAPTAIN ALLEN CLAIMS THE REWARD thought it meant the immediate placing of the County under martial law, and the arrest of the remaining citizens. Others held differently. Whatever it meant, the excitement quieted down. The whites had had experience with this company, and felt that they could be relied on. The blacks recognized that a stronger power had come among them, and that it meant order and obedience.

When Captain Thurston dismounted from his horse on the very ground on which he had dismounted a number of years before, he had a curious feeling of mingled pleasure and dissatisfaction. There, amid the big trees, stood the old court-house, massive and imposing as it had looked that day when he had geyed old Mr. Dockett about its architecture, and told him that it was finer than anything in Athens; there, were the same great trees; there the same rows of old offices, only a little more dilapidated; there the same moody faces of the few whites, and the same crowd of idling negroes lagging about his troop. He turned and looked at the clerk's office, almost expecting to see the same rosy, girlish face looking out at him defiantly. Instead, a brawny negro in black clothes, with a beaver hat cocked on the side of

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his head, was lounging in the door smoking a cigar. It gave the captain an unpleasant shock; and as he made arrangements about placing his camp he wondered where old Mr. Dockett was now, and how his pretty daughter was coming on. He had not heard from her since his last campaign. She was probably married. The idea gave him an unpleasant sensation. He always hated to hear of any pretty girl marrying. It seemed to make the world lonelier. The negro in the door sauntered across toward the camp and spoke to some of the soldiers familiarly, his silk hat on the side of his head, his cigar rolling in his mouth.

“What company is this, men?”

The words reached the Captain. One of the men who was working told him shortly.

“Who’s your Captain?”

“There he is.”

Thurston had grown stouter, and the negro did not recognize him.

“That little man? What’s his name?”

Thurston caught the speech and, before the soldier could answer, bawled at the negro, “Come here and take hold of these things, and don’t stand there interfering with the men.” The darky looked at him in blank amazement.

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“Who? Me?”

“Yes, you.”

“Not me; you don’t know who I am!” He reared himself back and stuck his thumbs in his armholes.

“No, and I don’t care a hang either,” said the little Captain. “Sergeant, make that man take hold of those things and put them in place.”

“I’m Senator Ash,” declared the man, surlily, swelling with importance, and turning to walk away.

“Halt, there,” said the soldier, coldly.

Nicholas Ash turned at the tone, to find the sergeant quietly taking his pistol from the holster.

“You come back here.”

“I’m Senator Ash.”

“Well, I don’t give a — who you are; if you are Captain Jack himself, you catch hold there, as the Captain says, or ’twill be the worse for you. He won’t stand no foolishness. I’ve seen him string a man up for less than you have said already.” And the weather-beaten soldier looked so coldly on the senator that the latter deemed it best to go through the form of obeying, and, swallowing his rage as best he

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might, took hold and did his first manual labor in some years.

This was the first official act of Captain Thurston on his return, and, though it was an accident, it, perhaps, saved him trouble in the future.

The Captain availed himself of the earliest opportunity to hunt up his old friends. When he had pitched his camp and got settled, he sauntered up to Mr. Dockett's. As he walked along he noted the changes that had occurred since he went away. The yards were more uncared for, the houses more dilapidated, and the fences more broken. As he entered the Dockett yard, he was pleased to observe that it was kept in its old trim order. The breath of flowers that he remembered so well, and had always associated with the place, met him as of old. When he opened the gate he saw that there were several persons on the porch; but as he approached they all rose and disappeared in the house. There were one or two white dresses in the party. He had not long to wait. At his knock Mrs. Dockett herself appeared, and he thought he could see the firm set of her mouth and the glint in her eyes as she bore down upon him. She looked much older. She did not ap-

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pear surprised to see him. She invited him in, but did not say anything about her daughter; and at length the Captain had to ask after her. She was very well, she thanked him. She had some young friends with her.

In this condition of affairs, Captain Thurston had recourse to stratagem. He adroitly turned the conversation to Rupert Gray, and began to tell of his success in the West, and of the incident when he had showed such bravery while acting as a scout with him. He was conscious at once of the change in the good lady's manner, and of the increased interest she betrayed; so he dilated on it at some length. No one ever had a warmer historian. He made Rupert out a hero, and was congratulating himself secretly on his success, when, with a sniff, Mrs. Dockett declared that she was not surprised at Rupert's acting so. It was only what she should have expected from one of their young men, and she was not surprised that the Yankees should have been obliged to call on him to help them. But she was surprised that Captain Thurston should have exposed a boy like Rupert, hardly more than a child, to such danger. Why had he not gone himself to rescue his men? Thurston could not help laughing at the turn

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she gave his story. This shot appeared, however, to have somewhat cleared the atmosphere. Mrs. Dockett began to unbend. She "would see her daughter; perhaps, she would come in; she would like to hear of Rupert." Just then, whether for this reason or one in which the visitor had a more personal concern, the door opened and Miss Dockett walked in unbidden. She, too, had grown older since Thurston went away; but the change was not to her disadvantage. The plump little figure had developed; the round face had in it more force; and she had become, if not a very pretty woman, at least a very comely one. She greeted the Captain distantly, but not coldly. She began by making war at once, and that the little officer was used to. It was only indifference that he could not stand.

"Well, and so you have come back, and I suppose you will expect us all to get down on our knees to you?" she said, her chin a little elevated.

"No, not you. I'll make a treaty with you, if you won't insist on my getting down on mine to you," he laughed.

"To me? I supposed Miss Welch was the only one you did that to."

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This was encouraging, and the little Captain was instantly at his ease.

“Miss Welch? Who is Miss Welch?”

“Come, now, don’t be trying that with me; I know all about it, so you might as well tell me. Perhaps, you’ll need my assistance. All the gentlemen seem to be victims to her charms. Captain Allen thinks there is no one like her. Some men, when they are discarded, take to drink, but here they seem to take to Miss Welch.”

“Well, some men need one kind of stimulant, and some another; now, I like mine with a proper mixture of spirit and sweetening.” The little Captain’s eyes were helping him all they could.

“I don’t know what you mean, I’m sure.” She looked down coyly.

“Say, a sort of peach and honey?”

“You men have such vulgar similes.” The little nose was turning up.

“Well, I’ll be literary, and say ‘a snow and rose-bloom maiden,’ ” said the Captain, who had been reading Carlyle. “I always think of you in connection with roses and snow.”

The little nose came down, and the Captain’s peace was made. He began to tell of Indian

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fights and long marches over parched or snow-swept plains, where men and horses dropped. Miss Elizabeth, like Desdemona, to hear did seriously incline, and the Captain was invited to supper.

CHAPTER XL

JACQUELIN GRAY AND ANDY STAMPER PAY AN OLD DEBT

THE disappearance of Leech had strangely affected Miss Bush. She was much agitated by it. Her host was sure at first that Leech had gone off; then he was sure he had been murdered. Miss Bush was accustomed to investigate for herself. Among her acquaintances was old Peggy, who lived in the cabin on the abandoned place. Miss Bush, in her round among the negroes, had found the old woman, and, in the face of some coldness on the latter's part, had persisted in showing her kindness, and had finally won her gratitude, if not her friendship. Soon after Leech's disappearance she paid old Peggy a visit. Then she went to see Miss Welch. If Miss Welch would only use her influence with Captain Allen! Miss Welch had none; they did not even speak. But she made a suggestion.

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So, one evening about dusk, just after the arrival of Thurston with his command, a visitor, deeply veiled, applied to the sentinel at the gate of the court-green, and asked leave to see Mr. Jacquelin Gray. The sergeant of the guard was called, and, after certain formalities, she was admitted to the clerk's office; and a few minutes later Jacquelin Gray came in. The visitor stated, with some nervousness, that she wished to see him privately, and Jacquelin, wondering what the stranger could want with him, walked with her into the inner office. Even there she appeared greatly embarrassed. She evidently did not know how to begin, and Jacquelin, to relieve her, asked her kindly what he could do for her.

"I have a great favor to ask of you," she said.

"Well, madam, I do not know what I can do for anyone, a prisoner like me," said Jacquelin, smiling half-grimly, half-sadly. "But I think I can say that whatever I can do I will do."

"I am sure you can. If you cannot, no one can. I want you to intercede for me with Captain Allen."

"With Steve! For you? Why, I do not know where he is! And I am sure if he knew you

AN OLD DEBT

wanted anything he could grant, he would do it on your own simple request. Who are you?"

The visitor, after a moment of hesitation, put back her veil and faced him. "Don't you remember me?" she asked, timidly.

Jacquelin looked at her earnestly. For a moment he was deeply puzzled; then, as a faint smile came into her eyes, a light broke on him.

"Why, Miss Bush! What are you doing here?"

"I am teaching school. I am the school-teacher at the Bend, Miss May."

"Is it possible?" He stepped forward and took her hand warmly. "I never knew it. I have heard the name, but I never connected it with you. Why did you not let me know before? I am very glad to see you, and I can say that anything in the world I can do for you I will do."

"You must not promise too fast. It is a great favor I have to prefer," she said. "And I do not know whether, when you hear it, you will be willing to help me."

"Well, I know. I have not forgotten the hospital."

She appeared once more deterred from speaking by embarrassment.

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“I want you to save Jonadab Leech,” she said.

“What! What do you know of him?” asked Jacquelin, in sincere astonishment.

“I know he is alive.”

“You do? What do you know of him? What is he to you?”

“He is—he was—my husband.”

“Miss Bush!”

“We were separated. But——” She stopped in agitation, pulled down her veil, and turned her face away. Jacquelin watched her in silent sympathy.

“I am sure it was his fault,” he said.

“Yes, I think it was,” brokenly, from under her veil. “He was not very kind to me. But I cannot forget that he was my husband, and the father of my child.”

“I will do what I can for you,” Jacquelin said, kindly. “Tell me how you think I can help him. What do you know of him?”

She composed herself, and told him what she knew. She knew where Leech was, and the conditions under which he was held. She wanted Jacquelin to interfere personally. This alone would save him, she believed. The difficulty was to get Jacquelin free. Here her powers

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failed, and she sat looking at Jacquelin in hopeless anxiety.

Jacquelin thought deeply. Suddenly he roused himself.

“All right, Miss Bush. I will see what I can do. You are just in time. The order has come this evening, I hear, for us to go to the city to-morrow. I have never asked a favor of my keepers; but I will do it for you, and, if you will wait in here, I will let you know if there is any chance.”

He went out, leaving the little school-teacher in the dim office. His first visit was to his fellow-prisoner, Mr. Stamper. It was an extraordinary request that he made of Thurston a little later: to be allowed to leave his prison for the night, and take Andy Stamper with him, and to be lent two good horses. But it was granted. He promised to be back by daylight, and Thurston knew he would be back.

“I will be here, dead or alive,” said Jacquelin; and he and Andy Stamper rode away in the dusk.

Leech was awakened from his slumbers that night by the trampling of many horses outside, and footsteps and voices in the rooms above him. He started up in terror; for though he

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could not catch anything that was said, he knew from the sound that there must be many men in the party, and he felt sure that his time had come.

He rose and groped around his chamber. By creeping up to the chimney and listening intently, he could after awhile distinguish a part of what was said. To his unspeakable terror he could hear his own name mentioned again and again. The men were a body of Ku Klux, and they were debating what should be done with him. Most of the voices were low, but now and then one rose. He heard one man distinctly give his vote that he should be hanged, and, judging from the muffled applause that followed, it appeared to meet with much favor. Then he heard the name of Steve Allen, and the discussion seemed to be heated. Suddenly, in the midst of it, there was a general exclamation. A door slammed; a heavy tread crossed the floor above him, and dead silence fell. It was broken by a single voice speaking in the deep tone which Leech recognized instantly as Steve Allen's. He gave himself up for lost. But he was astonished at the next words that caught his ear. Captain Allen's voice was clearer than the others, or he was speaking

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louder, and to the prisoner's surprise he was defending him, or, at least, was opposing the others. He was evidently angry. Leech heard him say he was surprised to find them there and to learn why they had come. There was a confused murmur at this, and Leech heard one voice calling, "Order! Order! Remember your vows."

This produced quiet, and the voice said (evidently speaking to Captain Allen):

"It is the decision of the Supreme Council. We have come to take the prisoner and deal with him according to our laws."

"And I tell you," said Captain Allen, his voice ringing out clear and perfectly audible, "that I do not recognize your laws, and that you shall not have him. He is my prisoner, and I will defend him with my life. You will not get him except over my dead body."

There was a suppressed murmur at this, but Captain Allen continued, speaking firmly and boldly. He went over the state of affairs in the County, and related his object in capturing Leech to hold him as a hostage for his friends and relatives. To do away with him would be to destroy the very object with which he had taken him prisoner, and would render himself

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liable for his murder. This he did not propose to allow. He should hold Leech for the present, and meantime would be responsible for him; and he would allow no one to touch a hair of his head.

Leech began to breathe again. It was a strange feeling to him to be grateful to Steve Allen; but at that moment he could have kissed his feet. There was more talking, but too confused for Leech to catch what was said; and whenever Allen spoke it was in the same bold tone, which showed that he remained firm; and, at length, Leech could hear the crowd going. They came down outside the house, and Leech could hear them getting their horses, and, finally, they rode away. One thing, however, terrified the prisoner. The voices of two men talking near the wall reached him from above. One of them was grumbling that Captain Allen should have come and prevented their carrying out their plan. Who was he, he asked, that he could come in and defy the decision of the Supreme Council? He had left the order, and declared that he did not recognize them any longer; and the speaker did not like to have him or anyone setting himself up and claiming to be above the order.

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“Oh, never mind about that,” said the other; “he won’t be here all the time. We’ll come back some time when he is not here, and deal with that dog as he deserves; and then Allen will find out whether he is as big as he thinks himself.”

Just then an order was given by someone, and they rode off, and left Leech with the drops of sweat standing out on his forehead. The sound of their trampling died away, and there fell a deep silence, broken for a little while by the faint sound of a distant footstep, which Leech believed to be that of his captor and guard; and after a short time even this died out, and Leech went back to his bed, trembling with fright, and, finally sank into a fitful slumber.

He had not been asleep a great while when there was again a sound of horses trampling. Leech sprang up once more, in an agony of terror. He heard a challenge from above—“Halt, there!”—from someone who seemed to be a guard, and then a colloquy, in which he could distinguish his name; and then his guard seemed to yield. After a short interval he heard the footsteps of several men coming down the stair that led to his door, and there was a short consultation outside. He heard someone

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say, "This is the place Steve said he is in; I know it."

They tried the door, and then a voice called him, "Leech, Leech—Colonel Leech!" He was afraid to answer. He was almost dead with fright. It called again; and this time he was glad he had not answered, for he heard one of the men say, "He forgot to give me the key. We'll break in the door. Wait, I'll get an axe."

He went up the stair, and Leech could hear the other waiting outside. Leech was sure now that his last hour had come. In his terror he ran to the chimney and attempted to climb up in it. It was too narrow, however; and all he could do was to get up in it a little way and draw up his feet. Here he stuck, wedged in, paralyzed with terror, while he heard the blows outside under which the door was giving way.

Presently the door was smashed in, and Leech could see the light of the torch, or whatever it was, flashed upon the floor, and could hear the voices of the men.

"He isn't in here," he heard one say, and his heart revived a little; but the next second it sank, for he heard the searchers say, "There is his bed. He has been in it; so he must be here

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somewhere." They approached the chimney, and one of them held his torch up.

"Here he is," he laughed. "Come out, Colonel."

He did not wait for Leech to move, but, reaching up, caught him by the leg and pulled him down amid a cloud of dust and soot. Leech must have presented a strange appearance, for the men, who were masked, burst out laughing. Leech began to pray for his life, but the men only laughed.

"Come on, Colonel. We'll present you to your friends as you are," said one of them, the smaller. "You ought to be pleased with your looks, for you look just like one of your friends. You wouldn't know yourself from a nigger."

Leech recognized Andy Stamper, and knew he was lost. Andy had escaped. He began to beg him, and to make him all sorts of promises, which Andy cut short.

"Oh, pshaw! Come along. Shut up. This is no time for you to be making promises. Come along, and keep your mouth shut."

They seized him, and dragged him up the steps and through a door out into the darkness. There, at a little distance, were two horses, on

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one of which Andy Stamper sprang, while the other man made Leech mount up behind him; and then, springing on the other horse himself, they set off at a sharp trot. As they mounted, Leech recognized Jacquelin Gray. He nearly fell from his horse.

As they followed wood-paths he began to have a dim hope; not much, however, for he could not think that these two men could intend him any good. Once, as they were on a road, the sound of horses' feet ahead reached them, and the two riders instantly left the road and struck into the bushes.

"If you get out of this," said Andy Stamper, "and get back safe to your friends, will you swear you'll never say a word about it to anybody? Never a single——?"

"Yes, I'll swear. I swear before——" said the prisoner, so quickly that the other had not time to finish his question.

"That you will never tell anyone a word about this place, or how you got here, or how you were taken, or anything?"

"Yes, yes. I swear before G—d I never will——never a word. I swear I won't."

"Let's see. How will you swear it?" asked the other, reflectively.

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“I’ll swear it on the Bible. I’ll swear on a stack of Bibles.”

“We ain’t got any Bibles,” said the other, dryly.

“I’ll give you my word of honor as a gentleman.”

The other only grunted. He was not much impressed.

“I’ll swear before——”

Mr. Stamper suddenly roused up to the necessities of the occasion.

“Here,” he said, quickly. “Do you swear that, if you ever breathe a word as to how you got here, who brought you, or who took you away, or anything you saw here, or anything about the place at all, you hope G—d will strike you dead, and d—n you in h—l fire?”

“Yes. I’ll swear it,” said Leech, fervently. “I hope he will d—n me forever if I do.”

“And strike you dead?” repeated Andy, not to admit any loophole.

“Yes.”

“If that don’t keep him nothin’ will,” said Andy, dryly, half-aloud; and then he added, for further security: “Well, you’d better keep it, for if you don’t, the earth won’t be big enough to hide you. You won’t have another chance.”

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As they waited, a body of horsemen, heavily muffled, rode silently along the road they had just left, and passed out of sight into the woods behind them. It was a body of Ku Klux making their way back home, or, perhaps, back to the house from which Leech had just been taken. The two rescuers rode on and at length emerged into a field, and, crossing it, dismounted behind a clump of buildings.

The eastern sky was just beginning to redden with the first glimmer of dawn; and the cheep of a bird announcing it was heard in the trees as the men tied their horses.

“Come on,” said Andy. “In a little while you can make your promises.” They led Leech between them, half-dead with fright and fatigue, and, helping him over a wall, dragged him up to a door, and, opening it, walked in.

“Who’s that?” asked a man, rising from a sofa, where he had evidently been asleep.

“Here we are; back on time,” said Jacquelin, gravely.

“Ah! you’ve got back? Wait. I’ll strike a light. Who’s this with you?”

“A prisoner,” said Andy, with mock solemnity; “but whether white or black you’ll have to tell.”

AN OLD DEBT

The man struck a light, and Leech, to his astonishment, found himself in the presence of a Federal officer—of Reely Thurston.

The two men stared at each other in blank amazement. And it is probable that, if at that moment their happiness in finding their chief wish gratified could have been marred, it would have been by the fact that they owed this to each other. Perhaps something of this kind must have appeared in their faces, for Jacqueline laughed.

“Well, you two can settle matters between you. We are off—to jail,” he said. “Now, Major Leech, you can make good your promises; and it will depend on whether you see fit to do so or not, whether we have done a good act or not. Good-night.” He and Andy went off.

The next day the prisoners were sent to the city under Captain Thurston’s personal guard, the little Captain, for his own private reasons, deciding to take them himself. Leech accompanied them.

CHAPTER XLI

DR. CARY WRITES A LETTER TO AN OLD FRIEND

THE vows of a considerable part of the human race are said to be writ in water, but it is by no means only that sex to whom the poet has attributed this quality, which possesses it. Quite another part of the race is liable to forget vows made under conditions that have changed. And Major Leech was of this number. He no sooner found himself free and guarded by a power strong enough to protect him than he forgot the oaths he had sworn so volubly to Andy Stamper that night when he stood in the darkness of the deserted plantation; and he applied himself with all his energy to repair his fortunes and revenge himself. His enemies were in his power. With them free he might have to undergo trial himself; with them under indictment for offences against the Government, even if they were not convicted, he was free to push forward his plans. It was too great a temptation for him to resist, too

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good an opportunity for him to pass by; and perhaps even Andy Stamper did not blame him, or even expect him to forego it.

The story the returned captive told of his wrongs was one strange enough to move hearts even less inclined to espouse his cause than those of the authorities into whose ears he poured it, and almost immediately after his arrival the machinery of the law was set in motion. His grudge against Captain Thurston was as great as that against the residents of the County—indeed greater; for he professed some gratitude for Jacquelin Gray and Stamper, and even had an offer made them of a sort of pardon, conditional on their making a full confession of their crimes. But investigation showed him that for the present he would weaken himself by attempting to attack Thurston. Thurston had secured his release. So for the time being he was content to leave the Captain alone, and apply all his energies to the prosecution of the enemies against whom he was assured of success.

In a little while he had his grand jury assembled, and the prisoners were all indicted. An early time was set for their trial. Dr. Cary was among those indicted.

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In this state of the case, it appeared to the Doctor that the time had come when he could no longer with propriety refrain from applying for help to his old friend, Senator Rockfield, who had asked him to call on him. It was no longer a private matter, but a public one. It was not himself alone that was concerned, but his nearest friends and neighbors; and in such a case he could no longer stand on his pride. Already the prison was in view; and the path seemed very straight, and the way of escape seemed blocked on every side. Step by step they had been dragged along; every avenue shut off; all the old rights refused; and it looked as if they were doomed.

So Dr. Cary sat down in prison and wrote a letter to his old college-mate, setting forth the situation in which he found himself and his friends, giving him a complete statement of the case and of all the circumstances relating to it, and asked that, if in his power, the Senator would help him.

He told him that unless some action were taken promptly he saw no escape, and that he seemed doomed to a felon's cell. The Doctor told his friend that, while he had been present for a little while with the masked mob that broke

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into the jail, he had been so for the purpose of trying to dissuade them from any act of lawlessness; and the part he had taken could be proved by a hundred witnesses. But all those who had been arrested were indicted with him, which would prevent their testifying for him; and if any others were to come forward to testify, they would simply subject themselves to immediate arrest.

“I can give you no idea,” he wrote, “of the condition of affairs here, and shall offer no proof except my word. Unless you and I have changed since we knew each other man to man in that old time long ago, no other proof will be necessary; yet if I should attempt to give you a true picture, I should strain your credulity.

“I think I can say, with Cicero, it is not my crimes, but my virtues that have destroyed me.

“But if you wish to know the whole state of the case, I would ask you to come down and see for yourself. Unfortunately I shall not be able personally to extend to you the hospitality of my home; but if you will go to my house, my wife and daughter will show you every attention, and do everything in their power to promote your comfort.

RED ROCK

“Lying in jail as I am, under indictment for a scandalous crime, with the penitentiary staring me in the face, I perhaps should not sign myself as I do; yet when I call to mind the long and distinguished line of men of virtue who have suffered the same fate, and reflect on my own consciousness of integrity, I believe you would not have me subscribe myself otherwise than as, “Your old friend, JOHN CARY.”

This letter reached Senator Rockfield at an auspicious time, one evening after dinner, when he was resting quietly at home, enjoying a good cigar, and when his heart was mellow. It happened that certain measures were pending just then, to secure which the Senator's influence was greatly desired. It also happened that a number of other measures of a very radical character had lately been proposed; and the Senator had gone somewhat deeply into the subject, with the result of unearthing an appalling state of affairs in the whole section from which this letter came. Moreover, Captain Middleton happened to be at the Senator's house at that very time, and added certain details to those the Senator had learned, which stirred the Senator deeply.

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The Senator's part in the release of the prisoners that shortly followed Dr. Cary's letter was not known even to Dr. Cary for some time, and was never known generally.

Senator Rockfield read Dr. Cary's letter all through twice, and then leaned back in his big chair and thought profoundly. The letter dropped from his hand to the floor, and his cigar went out. His wife, seeing that something was moving him deeply, watched him anxiously, and at length asked: "What is it?" For answer, the Senator merely picked up the letter, handed it to her across the table, and again sat back in deep thought. She read it, and looked at him more anxiously than before, her face paling somewhat. His face, which before had been soft with reminiscence, had grown stern. He was conscious that she was looking at him, and conscious of her thoughts as she was of his. Suddenly he rose to his feet.

"Where are you going?" she asked, though in reality she knew.

"To send a telegram."

"I will call John."

"No, I am going to see Secretary——."

He folded the letter and put it into his pocket. At the mention of the name, the light sprang

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into her eyes—the light of contest. She knew that it would be a crucial interview, and that her husband's future would depend on it.

“Shall I ring for the carriage?”

“No, I will walk. I want to cool myself off a little.” He stopped as he reached the door. “He was the first gentleman of our class,” he said. He went out.

A half-hour later, Senator Rockfield was admitted to the study or private office of the Secretary who had the direction of matters affecting the South and who controlled everything which related to it.

He was a man of iron constitution, a tremendous worker, and his study at his home was only a private apartment of his office in the great Government building in which he presided. His ambition was to preside in a greater building, over the whole Government. He gave his life to it. Every other consideration was subordinated. It was a proof of the Senator's influence that he was admitted to see him at that hour. And at the instant he appeared the Secretary was busy writing a momentous document. As the Senator entered, however, he shot a swift, keen glance at him, and his face lit up. He took his appearance at that hour as

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a proof that he had yielded, or, at least, was yielding.

“Ah! Senator. Glad to see you,” he said, with a smile which he could make gracious. “I was just thinking of you. I hope I may consider your visit a token of peace; that you recognize the wisdom of our position.”

He was speaking lightly, but the Senator did not respond in the same vein. His face did not relax.

“No, far from it,” he said. Without noticing the chair to which the Secretary waved him, he took Dr. Cary’s letter from his pocket and laid it on the table under the Secretary’s nose. “Read that.”

The Secretary’s face clouded. He took up the letter and glanced at it; then began to read it cursorily. As he did so his face assumed another expression.

“Well, what of this?” he asked, coldly. He looked at the Senator superciliously. His manner and the sneer on his face were like a blow. The Senator’s face flushed.

“Just this. That I say this thing has got to stop, by G—d!” He towered above the Secretary and looked him full in the eyes. He did not often show feeling. When he did he was im-

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pressive. A change passed over the other's face.

“And if it don't?”

“I shall rise in my seat to-morrow morning and denounce the whole administration. I shall turn the whole influence of my paper against you, and shall fight you to the end.”

“Oh! you won't be so foolish!” sneered the Secretary.

“I will not! Wait and see!” He leant over and took up the paper. “I bid you good-evening.” He put on his hat and turned to the door. Before he reached it, however, the other had reflected.

“Wait. Don't be so hasty.”

The Senator paused. The Secretary had risen and was following him.

“My dear Senator, let me reason with you. I think if you give me ten minutes, I can show you the folly——”

Senator Rockfield stiffened. “Good-evening, Mr. Secretary.” He turned back to the door.

“Hold on, Senator, I beg you,” said the Secretary. The Senator turned, this time impatiently. “What guarantee have I that this letter is true?” asked the other, temporizing.

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“My word. I was at college with the writer of that letter. He was my dearest friend.”

“Oh! of course, if you know yourself that those facts are correct! Why did you not say so before? Take a seat while I read the paper over again.”

The Senator seated himself without a word, while the Secretary read the letter a second time. Presently Senator Rockfield leant over and lit again the cigar he had let go out an hour before, and which he had carried all this time without being aware of it. He knew he had won his game.

When the Secretary was through, he laid the letter down and, drawing a sheet of paper toward him, began to write.

“When do you want the order issued?” he asked, presently.

“Immediately. I am going South to-night.”

“It will not be necessary. I will issue an order at once that the prisoners be admitted to bail. In fact, I had intended to do so in a few days, anyhow.”

The Senator looked politely acquiescent.

“But I am very glad to do it at once, at your request. You see, we are obliged to rely on the reports of our agents down there;

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and they report things to be in a very bad way.”

The Senator looked grimly amused.

“No doubt they are.”

“I will send you a copy of the order to-morrow. I hope you will take it as a proof that we really are not quite as bad as you appear to think us.” He began to write again.

The two men parted ceremoniously, and the Senator, after sending a telegram South, returned to his home.

As he entered, he found his wife anxiously awaiting him.

“I won,” he said, and she threw herself into his arms.

The effect of this interview was immediately felt in the old County, and after a short time Dr. Cary and the other prisoners confined with him were admitted to bail, and eventually the prosecutions were dismissed. But this was not until after the event about to be recorded.

CHAPTER XLII

CAPTAIN ALLEN SURRENDERS

THE effect of Leech's return to power was soon visible, and the gloom in the old County was never so deep as it became after that. The failure of Steve's daring and high-handed step but intensified it. It appeared as if a complete overthrow had come at last.

As is often the case when unexpected failure has come to brilliant and promising plans, popular opinion veered suddenly; and whereas, but a little before, all were full of wonder at Steve Allen's daring coup, now that it had failed many were inclined to blame him. He ought either to have let the Ku Klux, who, it was understood, had tried to get hold of Leech, deal with him, or else have let him alone. Now he had but intensified his malice, as was shown by the rancor with which he was pushing the prosecutions. He had given Leech a national reputation, and increased his power to do harm.

RED ROCK

Captain Allen was deeply offended by some of the things said about him by certain of the members of the secret society, and he met them with fierce denunciation of the whole order. It was, he said, no longer the old organization which, he asserted, had acted for the public good, and with a high purpose. That had ceased to exist. This was a cowardly body of cut-throats, who rode about the country under cover of darkness, perpetrating all sorts of outrages and villainies for purposes of private vengeance. He gave them to understand clearly that he was not afraid of them, and denounced and defied the whole gang.

But one thing Steve could not meet so well. He could not meet the charge that his wild and reckless act in carrying Leech off had, in the sequel, done harm, and had intensified the hostility shown to the old County, and increased the rigor with which the citizens were treated. Even the friends who adhered stoutly to him were forced to admit that, as it turned out, his carrying Leech off was unfortunate. The downcast looks and the gloom that appeared everywhere told him how deeply the people were suffering. Another thing stuck deeper in his heart. He was at liberty and his friends in prison. Jacquelin

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was in prison under indictment when he had taken his place, and but for him would be a free man.

Steve had thought at times of leaving the State and going West. Rupert's career there showed what might be accomplished. But this idea passed away now in the stress of the present crisis. He would not leave the State in the hour of her darkness. He could not leave his friends. It would be desertion.

Another cause of anxiety began to make itself apparent to Captain Allen about the same time. He knew, as the reader knows, that Captain Aurelius Thurston had long been an ardent, if a somewhat intermittent, suitor of Miss Welch; though his information was derived, not from the cold statement of the chronicler, but through those intuitions with which a lover appears to be endowed for his self-torture as well as for his security. Miss Ruth, it is true, had denied the charge, made from time to time, respecting Captain Thurston; but we know that these denials are frequently far short of satisfying a lover's jealousy. And it must be confessed that she had never taken the trouble to state to Captain Allen the explicit and somewhat decisive con-

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ditions under which she had consented to continue the friendship.

Captain Thurston, thus cut off from his habitual occupation in that quarter, shortly after his arrival, as has been seen, went back to his old flame, Miss Elizabeth Dockett, and was soon as deeply immersed in that affair as he had ever been with Miss Welch. As Miss Elizabeth, however, treated him with unexampled rigor, and Mrs. Dockett never for an instant permitted him to forget that he was occupying the position of a tyrant, the Captain found himself obliged to seek at times the aid of a friendly ally, and turned for consolation to Miss Welch, who cheerfully rendered him in another's behalf all the services she had declined in her own. Thus the little Captain was much more welcome at the Welches' home than he had ever been before, and rumor was kind enough to declare that his attentions were far from being unacceptable. His duties at the court-house, as Commandant of the County, were sufficient to account for all the time he spent there, including whatever hours he passed at the old Dockett place among the trees and lilacs, while his presence at the Welches' could only be attributed to one cause.

This report reached Captain Allen, lounging

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on the verandas of his friends, and it did not serve to make his life as a refugee and exile more agreeable.

Matters were in this condition when the news came that the next week had been set as the time for the trial of the Red Rock prisoners. Judge Bail had already arrived, accompanied by McRaffle. A special jury was being selected, and the witnesses were being summoned. They were a set to make the outlook as dark as possible—Bushman, and Perdue, and Dr. Moses, and a score of the worst negroes in the County. Captain Allen knew that Leech had said he would rather have him than all the other prisoners put together. And at length came a definite statement that Leech would abandon the other prosecutions if Allen would surrender himself and stand trial. It had come through McRaffle, who claimed to have secured this concession.

Next day, Steve rode down to the court-house, and, giving his horse to a negro, with directions to send him to Dr. Cary's, walked across to Captain Thurston's camp. A number of his friends saw him, and came crowding up with wonder and curiosity in their faces. Steve spoke to them cheerily, stopped and chatted lightly for a while, and then left them and walked quietly

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across the green to the camp, leaving them staring after him open-eyed and with anxious faces. He knocked at the door of the office which was the Captain's head-quarters, and, on being bid to enter, opened the door.

Perhaps there was not a man in the world whom Reely Thurston would not rather have seen at that moment than Steve Allen. He sprang to his feet as Steve entered, and stared at him in blank amazement. He had no idea why he had come, and, for an instant, perhaps, supposed it was with hostile intent. This idea, however, Steve at once dissipated by his manner.

“Good-morning, Captain Thurston.” He held out his hand, and, having shaken hands with the Captain, flung himself into a seat.

“Give me a cigar. I have come to have a talk with you,” he said, lightly. Thurston handed him a cigar and lit one himself, his face perplexed and a little troubled as he pondered on what could possibly have brought him this visitor. Steve saw his perplexity and smiled.

“I have come to see what terms I can make through you, Captain, before I give myself up.”

“Wait. I am not authorized to make any terms. I must notify you——” Thurston was

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beginning very seriously. But Steve interrupted him.

“I did not say *with* you, but *through* you. I would not place you in such an embarrassing position. I suppose you would not mind seeing what terms you could make with your friend, Colonel Leech.” Thurston flushed.

“He is no friend of mine,” he said, hotly.

“Oh, I thought you had made up,” said Steve, maliciously. “Well, he will be if you give me up to him. But I thought you might make a little better terms for me than I could for myself, as he seems to prefer the city to the country just now, and I fear a communication from me would not meet with the consideration at his hands that the closeness of our intimacy a short time since should secure for it.”

“What the d—l are you driving at, Allen?” asked Thurston. “You know what I think of Leech, and how he regards me. But that does not alter the fact that I am sent here to catch—to apprehend you—and if I do my duty I should have you arrested.”

“Of course, Captain Thurston, do your duty,” said Steve, coolly, his face hardening a little and his upper lip curling slightly.

“No, no, Allen. I did not mean it that way.

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I am only trying to get at what you want. I am a little mystified."

His evident friendliness soothed Steve's feelings, which had been ruffled by his former speech.

"I want to see whether I would not be accepted as a propitiatory offering in place of my friends—of others who have done nothing, and deserve no punishment. I am the head and front of the whole business. I am responsible for all they are charged with, and they are not. And I want to get them released, and give myself up in their place."

Thurston looked deeply troubled. He shook his head thoughtfully.

"I do not want to arrest you. I must say that you are the last person in the world that I wanted to see. But if you stay here, I must arrest you. If, however, you came here with any idea that I would—I mean, that I could—make terms with you, I do not wish to take advantage of your mistake. There is a door. You can walk out of it while I go and call the sergeant of the guard."

Steve shook his head.

"No, no. I am going to give myself up, anyhow. It is the only thing I can do to help them. Perhaps, if these scoundrels get me, they may

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let the others off. I am the one they are after. But I want you to assist me. You are a gentleman, and can appreciate my position.”

Thurston looked at him a moment, and then reached out his hand.

“Allen, I promise you I will do all I can.”

The two men shook hands across the table; and Steve, settling himself comfortably, gave Thurston an account of all that had taken place between himself and Leech the night of his capture, and between himself and the band of Ku Klux the night they had come to take Leech from the place where he had confined him. He showed Thurston that he had known of the plan to rescue him.

“But why did you carry him off?” asked Thurston. “I can understand all the rest; but I do not see how a man of your sense could have supposed that you could accomplish anything by such an act.”

“It was to gain time, Captain Thurston, and to tide over a crisis; and that it did. You do not know how desperate we are. Let me explain. But for that, Dr. John Cary and Jacquelin Gray would to-day be wearing convict suits. Leech had already appointed the time for that. I tided over that crisis.”

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He went on, and gave Thurston an account of all that had taken place in the County under Leech's régime since Thurston had left. It opened the young officer's eyes, and, when Steve was through, Thurston's face was filled with a new sympathy.

"Allen, I will do all I can for you," he said, again. And he did. He wrote to Middleton and his friends.

The news that Steve Allen had surrendered himself caused the greatest commotion not only there, but throughout the rest of the State. Even far outside the South it was regarded as a most important incident; and the newspapers declared that it was the signal of a complete collapse of the opposition to the Government. Steve was represented as every species of brigand, from the sneaking lawbreaker who entered houses under cover of night to the dashing, bold, mountain robber and desperado who held passes and fought battles with Government troops, and levied tribute on the surrounding country.

The man who profited by all this was Jonadab Leech.

He immediately took advantage of the turn in affairs to exploit himself, and to strengthen

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the foundation of his re-established plans. When he first heard that Steve Allen had surrendered himself, he could not believe it; but when the report was verified, he was wild with joy. He told, again and again, with many new embellishments, the story of his seizure and incarceration, and the horrors of the midnight meeting when he was tried and condemned to death without a hearing. (In his later relations there was an intimation of threats of torture having been used, and no mention of the mode of his escape.) He had visited the national capital, and he redoubled his energies in pushing the prosecutions of the Red Rock prisoners. He declared that nothing could be done until these men were punished, and the authority of the Government asserted. He contrived effectually to create fresh doubts as to the zeal of the Governor, and to supplant him as the representative of the Government. His star was once more in the ascendant. His fortunes were more promising than ever. His ambition had taken a higher leap, and he felt that now no power could keep him from the attainment of his wishes.

His whole attitude and relation to his former friends changed. Why should he handicap him-

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self by attempting to carry the burden of Still and his tottering fortunes? He gave Still plainly to understand that he had higher aims than merely to obtain a few thousand acres of farming land. He was now a public man, and affairs of State were occupying his attention. To be sure, he continued to act as his counsel, and bled his client for ever-renewed fees in a way that made Still groan and curse. But this was all. He was engaged now in loftier aims. His name had been mentioned in the national Senate, in connection with the plans for the "pacification" of the section for which he spoke; and someone asked, "Who is Colonel Leech?" "I will tell you who he is," said the Senator who was quoting him. "He is a man who in a short time will be your compeer on the floor of this body."

This retort was unction to Leech's soul.

Meantime the last hope of the old County was being destroyed. A black pall seemed to have covered them. The local press raved in impotent rage, and declared that open war would be better than the oppression to which they were subjected.

Just at this juncture, when Steve's surrender and Leech's triumph seemed to have put the ut-

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termost affliction on the people, the order which Senator Rockfield had secured from the authorities came, and the prisoners named in it were released on bail. The order, however, having been issued before Captain Allen surrendered himself, did not include his name or apply to him. So when Dr. Cary, General Legaie, Jacquelin Gray, Andy Stamper, and the other residents of Red Rock were released, Captain Allen was still held, and bail was refused in his case. The issuing of that order and the discharge of the other Red Rock prisoners inspired Leech to hurry up the prosecution of Captain Allen. Thurston was working for him, and Senator Rockfield was beginning to investigate matters in the State. Bolter had written an urgent letter respecting the railway investments, and had said that Middleton was interested and had come home on Major Welch's advice to see about the matter, and was talking of coming South. So Leech could not tell when new difficulties might arise.

It was soon rumored that the Government would make a test case of the prosecution of Steve Allen, as the leader and head of the resistance to it. Leech was moving heaven and earth to secure his conviction, and was staking

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everything on this issue. Leech did not even deny it. He rushed forward his prosecution. If he could get Steve Allen shut up within the walls of a Government prison for a term of years, he would be free to carry out his schemes; and of this he had no doubt. Judge Bail was to try Steve, and the witnesses were being got together by McRaffle. Leech did not want to prosecute Steve for a minor offence, such as the rescue of Rupert. He wished to put him entirely out of the way. A long term only would not satisfy him. The offences with which Steve was charged were not grave enough, the penalties not heavy enough. The attack on the jail had been thrown into the background by the more recent outrages committed by the Ku Klux. Prosecution for the seizure of Leech himself would look like personal hostility, and weaken his cause; and, besides, some awkward facts might come out in the development of the case. Thurston would be sure to tell how he had escaped, and the whole story would come out and create sympathy with the prisoner, and bring ridicule upon himself.

So Leech suddenly made a change of base. He desired to pose as a public-spirited man. He determined to drop the prosecution for the

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attack on the jail, and prosecute Steve Allen for the Ku Klux outrages, as to which the Government was more particularly interested. The difficulty was to establish Allen's active connection with the Ku Klux. Leech knew of his own knowledge, from Allen's statement to the assembly in the room above his prison that night, that Steve had left the order and opposed them at that time, if he had ever belonged to their organization. So he was somewhat at a loss to prove his connection with them as an active member. Accident, however, suddenly threw in his way the means to accomplish his wish, and to punish two enemies at once.

Leech had been in the upper end of the County looking after witnesses, when he met Miss Welch, who was on her way home from Dr. Cary's. She gave him a cold bow, and was passing on; but Leech stopped her with an inquiry after her father.

"He is very well," said the girl, coldly.

"I suppose he, like all loyal men, is rejoicing over the capture at last of the head of all the trouble that has been going on down here?" Leech's face wore a soft smile.

"I was not aware that Captain Allen was

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captured. I thought he surrendered." Ruth's color deepened in spite of herself.

"Well, we have him safe at last, anyhow," smiled Leech, "and I guess we'll keep him. No doubt your father is as much pleased as anyone. It puts an end to the outrages down here, and your father, of all men, should rejoice. He is too good a citizen not to."

"He is too good a man to rejoice in anyone's misfortunes," said Ruth, warmly; "and Captain Allen has had nothing to do with the outrages you refer to. He never had anything to do with the Ku Klux except once or twice. I have his own word for it."

Leech's eyes were resting on her face.

"Ah! You have it on good authority." His tone was most polite.

But Ruth fired up.

"I have. Captain Allen is a gentleman; and when he says that he has never had anything to do with the Ku Klux since the first or second time they acted in this County, I am sure it is so. What he has done since then he did alone." She could not resist this shot.

Leech did not appear to mind it. His mild eyes were glowing with a sudden light, almost of joy.

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“No doubt, no doubt,” he murmured. And, as Ruth was moving on,

“Please remember me kindly to your father and mother.”

As she rode away Leech actually slapped his thigh, and he smiled all the way home.

CHAPTER XLIII

MISS WELCH HEARS A PIECE OF NEWS

RUTH had heard of Captain Allen's surrender the day after it took place. Mrs. Stamper, passing through from the railway on her way home from a visit to her husband in jail, had stopped and told her all about it. Ruth almost fell to the ground during Mrs. Stamper's narration. She could scarcely stand up. When Mrs. Stamper had passed on, Ruth rushed into the house and was on her way to her own room when she met her mother.

"What on earth is it, Ruth?"

"Oh, mamma!" Ruth began, but was unable to proceed, and burst into tears. Mrs. Welch also had heard the story; and she divined the cause of her agitation, and drew her into her chamber, and there Ruth opened her heart to her mother.

"I know I ought to hate him, mamma," she wept, "but I do not. I have tried to hate him,

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and prayed—yes, prayed to hate him; but I like him better than any man I ever met or ever shall meet, and even when I cut him on the road I liked him. I hate myself; I am humiliated to think that I should care for a man who has never said he loved me.”

“But he has said so, Ruth,” declared Mrs. Welch.

“What?” Ruth’s eyes opened wide with a vague awaking something.

“He came to see your father, and asked his consent to pay you his addresses.”

Ruth sprang to her feet as if electrified.

“Mamma!” The blood rushed to her face and back again. She seized her mother, and poured out question after question. Her whole person seemed to change. She looked like a different being. A radiance appeared to have suddenly settled down upon her and enveloped her. Mrs. Welch was carried away by her enthusiasm, and could not help enjoying her joy. For once she let herself go, and gave herself up to the delight of thorough and complete sympathy with her daughter. She told her everything that had occurred, and Ruth in return told her mother all that she knew and thought of Steve. Thus Mrs. Welch became Ruth’s con-

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fidante, and, in her sympathy with Ruth's happiness, committed herself on Ruth's side beyond hope of withdrawal.

Just then Major Welch opened the door. He stopped and looked in on the scene in wonderment. Ruth rose and flung herself into his arms.

In the conference that ensued, Ruth, however, found ground for more distress. Her father had heard the whole story of Captain Allen's surrender of himself. He had just got it from Thurston. He also knew of the telegrams Thurston had received in response to his giving notice of the surrender, and he was full of anxiety. He was by no means sure that Captain Allen, however high his motive, had done a wise act in giving himself up. He did not believe his action would be effectual to obtain the release of his friends, and he had put himself in the power of those who would move heaven and earth to secure his conviction. The dispatches that had come from the city clearly indicated this.

Under the new revelation that Major Welch had received, his interest in Captain Allen naturally increased beyond measure, and he showed it. His only hope was that proof as to Captain Allen's case might not be easy. The

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new laws under which the prosecutions were being pressed aimed at recent acts, and it might not be possible to prove Captain Allen's participation in these acts.

His carrying Leech off could, of course, be proved; but while Leech would naturally push the prosecution for this, as Leech had returned, the Government might not now take that so seriously. As her father discussed Captain Allen's chances earnestly, Ruth sat and listened with bated breath, her eyes, wide with anxiety, fixed on his face, her hands tightly clasped, her color coming and going as hope and fear alternated.

It was a few days after this, that she had her brief interview with Leech.

The next day after that interview an official rode up to the door and served a summons on Ruth to appear as a witness for the prosecution in the case of the Government against Stevenson Allen. With this notice he brought also a letter to Major Welch from Leech, who wrote Major Welch that for reasons of importance to the Government he had found it necessary to request his daughter's attendance at the trial. The letter was full of expressions of regret that he should have to cause Major Welch's daughter any inconvenience. She was the only one, he

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said, who could prove certain facts material to the case for the Government.

As Major Welch read the letter his countenance fell. Ruth's knowledge of Captain Allen's confession of his part in the Ku Klux organization had filled out Leech's case, and Captain Allen was in graver danger than he had apprehended. The next day it was known in the County that Ruth had been summoned by Leech, and that the object of the summons was to have her prove Captain Allen's confession to her of his part in the acts of the Ku Klux. It was stated that Leech had written Major Welch to obtain the information from him, and that Major Welch had replied that his daughter would be on hand, dead or alive. The excitement in the community was intense; and the feeling against the Welches flamed forth stronger than it had ever been—stronger even than before the trial of Jacquelin's case. Intimations of this came to the Welches, and they could not ride out without encountering the hostile looks of their neighbors. It was asserted by some that Major Welch and his daughter had trapped Steve, and were taking their revenge for his part in Jacquelin's suit. Major Welch received one or two anonymous letters accusing him of this, and

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warning him to leave the country without attempting to push his malice farther.

As the Major treated these letters with the contempt they deserved, and destroyed them without letting either Mrs. Welch or Ruth know anything about them, they would have given him no further concern except for the fact that he had made up his mind to go North just then on business. The letters came near preventing his going; but as the matter was urgent, he went, and the rumor got abroad that he had left on account of the letters.

Ruth was in a state of great distress. She hoped she would die before the day of the trial; and, indeed, to have seen her, one might have thought it not unlikely. Dr. Cary was sent for. He prescribed change of air and scene. Mrs. Welch shook her head sadly. That was impossible just now. "You look as though you needed change yourself, Doctor," she said. And well she might say so. The Doctor had aged years in the last weeks. His face had never lost the prison pallor.

"No madam—I think not," he said, calmly, his hand resting against his breast. Mrs. Welch did not know that he meant that he was past that now.

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“Then you must take a rest,” urged Mrs. Welch.

“Yes, I think I shall take a rest before long,” said he.

Ruth was out riding one afternoon just after this when she met old Waverley. She stopped to inquire after Miss Thomasia who she had heard was ill. The old man was actually short to her. “I don’ think she’ll last long now,” he said, so significantly that it pierced the girl’s breast like a knife. Ruth had always felt that Miss Thomasia and she had one thing in common, and Miss Thomasia had always been sweet and gracious to her. Now the picture of the old lady at home, lonely and ill from anxiety and distress, pursued her. She could not get away from it. At length she turned her horse, and rode slowly back to the little cottage amid the vines. An air of stillness that was oppressive surrounded the place. For a few moments Ruth thought of drawing back and going home. Then her courage returned. She sprang from her horse, and, tying him, walked up to the door and knocked. The knock was answered by old Peggy. The old woman’s eyes darted fire at Ruth, as she answered her. She did not know whether Ruth could see Miss Thomasia or not—

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she thought not. Miss Thomasia was asleep. Ruth, however, persisted; she would wait until Miss Thomasia waked up. She took her seat quietly on the little veranda. The old woman looked puzzled and disappeared. Presently she returned, and said Miss Thomasia would see Ruth. Ruth went in. Miss Thomasia was sitting up in a little rocking-chair. Ruth was astounded to see the difference in her since she saw her last. She looked years older. She received Ruth civilly, but distantly, and let her do the talking. Ruth kept well away from the one subject that was uppermost in both their minds. Presently, however, in face of her impenetrable coldness, Ruth could stand it no longer. She rose to go, and bade the old lady good-by.

“Good-by, my dear,” said Miss Thomasia. They were the words with which she always said her adieus. Her voice was feeble, and she spoke very low. There was something in her tone, something of resignation and forgiveness, that went to Ruth’s heart, and as she turned away—a deep sigh caught her ear. She turned back. Miss Thomasia’s thin hands were tightly clasped, her eyes were shut, and her lips were trembling. The next moment Ruth was down

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on her knees beside her, her head buried in her lap, pouring out her story.

“I must tell you,” she sobbed. “I came to tell you, and I cannot go away and not tell you. I know you love him, and I know you hate me. You have a right to hate me; they all hate me, and think I am hard and cruel. But I am not, and neither is my father.”

She went on, and, as she told her story, the other lady’s hands came and rested on her head and lifted her up, and the two women wept together.

A little later Blair came in, and stopped, surprised, on the threshold. The next moment she and Ruth were in each other’s arms, weeping together; while Miss Thomasia, with her face brighter than it had been since the news reached her of Steve’s surrender, smiled on them. Presently old Peggy opened the door, thinking perhaps Ruth had been there long enough. She gazed on the scene in wonder for a moment, and then closed the door. “Well, dee beats me,” she muttered. When Ruth left, Miss Thomasia looked better than she had done in days, and Ruth’s own heart was lighter. That night Blair asked old Mr. Bagby if there was no way in

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which a woman could avoid giving evidence
against a man, if she were summoned and did
not wish to testify.

“One,” said the old lawyer “—two: she can
die.”

CHAPTER XLIV

MIDDLETON REVISITS RED ROCK, AND AN OLD SOLDIER LAYS DOWN HIS ARMS

THE account of affairs in the South that Middleton had got from Senator Rockfield had decided him to go down there. It awakened old recollections, and recalled a time in his life which, though there were many things in it that he would have had otherwise, was on the whole very pleasant to him. He had tried to do his duty under very adverse circumstances, and, though he had not been sustained, events had justified him. He happened to be present in the gallery during the debate in which one Senator asked, "Who is this man Leech?" and another replied, "He is a man who will soon be your compeer on this floor." This statement had astounded Middleton. Could it be possible that Dr. Cary, Jacquelin Gray, and General Legaie were in jail, and that Leech was about to become a Senator of the United States. It seemed in-

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credible to the young man. He had in a way kept himself informed as to the old County, and he knew that there had been trouble there; but he had had no idea that things had reached this pass. That night he had the conversation with Senator Rockfield about Dr. Cary, and soon afterward he got a letter from Thurston which finally decided him to go South and see for himself.

His arrival at Brutusville was regarded very differently by different people. The Welches were delighted to see him, and so was Reely Thurston. Leech met him with a show of much cordiality—extended his hand, and greeted him with warmth which somehow cooled Middleton. Middleton could not for his life help having that old feeling of repulsion. He was conscious of a change in Leech. Instead of his former half-apologetic manner that was almost obsequious, Leech now was lively and assertive. His air was that of an equal—indeed, almost of a superior.

The strangest greeting, however, Middleton met with was from “Dr. Moses.” Moses had returned to the County after the arrival of the troops, and had been much in evidence about the court-house, where he appeared to be in Leech’s

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employ. The day after Middleton arrived, Moses came out of a yard just ahead of him, and advanced to meet him, hat in hand, grinning and showing his repulsive teeth and gums. It was almost a shock to Middleton to see him.

“How’s Mass’ Middleton? My young master? Glad to see you back, suh. Does you ’member Moses—ole Moses?”

“Yes, I remember you,” said Middleton, almost grimly. The negro burst out into a loud guffaw.

“Yas, suh. I knows you ’members Moses. Yaw-yaw-yaw-ee. Done lay de whup on Mose’ back too good not to ’member him, yaw-yaw-yaw-ee. Dat wuz right. Now you gwine gi’ me a quarter for dat.” He held out his hand, his eyes oscillating, in their peculiar way.

Middleton pitched a dollar into his hand and walked on hastily, followed by the thanks and protestations of gratitude of the negro. He did not see the look that Moses shot after him as he followed him at a distance till Middleton went into Mrs. Dockett’s.

As the trick-doctor turned back, he muttered, “Yas, done lay de whup ’pon Moses’ back. Dollar don’ pay for dat. Ain’ *Cap’n* Middleton now, jes Marse Middleton. Ump!” He disap-

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peared with his uneven gait around the rear of Leech's law-office.

When Middleton mentioned to Mrs. Welch his meeting with Moses, to his surprise she spoke of him with unmitigated detestation, and, equally to his surprise, she spoke of Captain Allen with much less reprobation than from his knowledge of her views he had anticipated.

Most of the other friends of Middleton received him with even greater cordiality than he had expected. Mrs. Dockett invited him to come and occupy his old quarters, and made him understand distinctly that it was to be as her guest. She did not board any Yankees now—except Captain Thurston, of course. The Captain was an old friend, and she had to take him in for old times' sake; she could not let him be starved or poisoned at that miserable hole of a hotel.

Middleton laughed as he thanked her. He knew which way the wind was setting with Thurston. He was staying with his cousins, he said. But he hoped Mrs. Dockett would be good enough to let him come to dinner some time and eat some of her fried chicken, which was the very best in all the world, as he knew by experience. Mrs. Dockett declared that he was flattering her;

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but this Middleton stoutly repudiated. He had said so in every country he had visited, and there was no reason why he should not say so now. In fact, he so flattered Mrs. Dockett that the good lady declared at the table that evening—gazing hard at Captain Thurston—that Captain Middleton was quite a model now that he no longer wore that horrid blue coat, but dressed like a *gentleman*. “By jove! Larry,” said Thurston, “you’ve been acting on the lessons I gave you. You’ve captured the brigadier first charge. Keep on, and you may capture the whole army, my boy.”

“You blackguard!” said Middleton. “You yourself flatter and humbug every woman you meet, so that you think everyone else must be playing the same game.”

“Have you told the Senator’s daughter about the chickens in this country?” drawled Thurston.

For reply, Middleton shied a pillow across at his friend. “Of course I have, and how about you?”

“Oh! I like Mrs. Dockett’s chicken too.”

To Middleton’s surprise Thurston actually flushed a little.

“Reely!”

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Thurston's eyes twinkled, and he grew red.

"Well! And she?"

Thurston met his gaze this time.

"Larry, how could any sensible woman resist my charms?" he laughed.

"Are you engaged?"

"Only in a military sense—as yet."

"But she likes you?"

"Larry, she's the most unaccountable creature."

"Of course."

"You don't know how clever she is."

"To discover your good qualities?"

"And sweet and kind-hearted."

"To like you?"

"Yes, such a vagabond as I am. And how charming she can be! She's about six girls in one—one minute one thing, the next another."

"That just suits you. You need just about that many to be in love with."

"She's the only girl in the world I ever was in love with," asserted Thurston, boldly.

Middleton whistled.

"Here, you are not talking to her now, but to me. Have you told Ruth Welch that?"

"She's my confidante."

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“She is? That accounts for it,” said Middleton.

“She likes Allen,” said Thurston, explanatorily.

“Oh!”

“And Miss Cary likes Gray.” This with a keen look at Middleton.

“Ah?” After a pause: “Who told you so?”

“I have it from the best authority.”

“Miss Cary, or Gray?”

“No, Miss Elizabeth.”

“Oh!” laughed Middleton. “Reely, what a humbug you are.”

“No, only a diplomatist, my dear boy. It’s necessary, to accomplish anything with the dear creatures.”

The morning after Middleton’s arrival he was driving to the county seat, when at a turn in the road he met Dr. Cary walking. It had rained the night before, and the road was muddy and heavy; but the Doctor was trudging along with his old black saddle-pockets over his shoulder. Middleton pulled up, and sprang out and greeted him.

The Doctor returned his greeting cordially, and invited him to come and see them.

“What are you doing walking?” asked Middleton. “Has your horse got away?”

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The Doctor smiled half-grimly. "Yes, some time ago." The smile died slowly out. "I have no horse now," he said, gravely. "I lost my horse some time ago, and have not been able to procure one since." Middleton looked so shocked that the Doctor added, "Usually my patients, who are able, send a horse for me; but sometimes I have those who are no better off than myself." Once more the smile flitted across his worn face.

"Steve sent me his horse when he gave himself up, but Leech has taken him. He has a brand on him, and Leech claims, I believe, that he belongs to the Government, and Leech now is the Government."

"I will see if he is," said Middleton, with a sudden flush of anger. "I'll put a brand on him."

Middleton asked to be allowed to take the Doctor to his destination. The old fellow at first demurred; but on Middleton's insisting, yielded. It was a little warm walking, he admitted.

"Why don't you borrow the money to buy a horse?" asked Middleton, presently. "I wish you would let——" He was going to ask the Doctor to let him lend him the money; but the Doctor interrupted him.

"Ah! sir, I have borrowed too much money

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already. I thought then I could pay, I know now I could never pay.”

When they reached the place to which the Doctor was going, it was a negro cabin.

“I have to look after them, sir,” explained the old fellow. “I don’t know what they will do when I am gone.”

The deep sincerity in his face took away any suggestion of egotism.

Middleton drove on in deep meditation, trying to unravel the tangle of his thoughts. As he drove into the village, he was passed by a carriage and pair. In the carriage sat Leech and a negro. They were both dressed in long black broad-cloth coats, and the negro wore a shiny new beaver.

That very afternoon Middleton began to negotiate for a horse that he thought would suit an old man. His intention was to buy the horse, and when he went away ask Dr. Cary to keep it for him and use it.

As he was looking at a horse, Leech came by. He stopped and looked on, a smile on his sallow face.

“If you want a good horse, don’t buy that one. I’ve got a lot on my place, and I’ll lend you one,” he said.

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“Thank you, I prefer to buy,” said Middleton, coldly, examining the horse.

“All right, I’ll sell you one—cheap. I’ve got the finest lot you ever saw. Some of the old Cary stock,” he added.

“I’ve no doubt you have,” said Middleton, dryly, a frown gathering on his brow.

“You used to be a better judge of a horse than that,” laughed Leech.

Middleton straightened up and turned on him so angrily that Leech stepped back involuntarily. The next instant, however, he recovered himself.

“Find a good many changes since you went away, I guess?” His voice was full of insolence, and his face wore a provoking smile. Middleton was trying to control himself. Leech misinterpreted his silence.

“Some of your friends sort of gone down the hill?” He nodded his head in the direction of the jail beyond the court-green. His insolence was intolerable.

“Are you trying to be insolent to me?” demanded Middleton. He stepped up close in front of Leech. “If you are, you are making a mistake.” His manner and his face, as he looked Leech in the eyes, abashed even him, and

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he changed his tone. He did not mean to offend him, he said; he was only "jesting when he called them his friends."

"I don't wish to be jested with," said Middleton, coldly, turning away.

As Leech went on he smiled to himself. "Ah, my young man, times are changed," he muttered to himself, softly; "and if you stay here long you'll find it out!"

Middleton concluded his purchase, and the following evening rode his new horse up to Dr. Cary's.

That day Leech called Moses into his office. "I see your friend Captain Middleton is back?" he said. Moses uttered a sound that was half a laugh, half a snarl.

"Yas—all dat comes don' go, and all dat goes don' come"; he snickered.

"You better not fool with him," said Leech. "He knows how to manage you." He made a gesture, as if he were cutting, with a whip, and laughed tauntingly.

Moses's eyes moved swiftly. "Nor I ain' forgit; I'se done learnt some'n' sense den. He better look out."

"You think the Ku Klux would trouble him?" asked Leech.

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Moses stole a swift look at him. "He better look out," he repeated.

"Have some whiskey," said Leech.

There was one man in the County besides Leech who was not overjoyed to see Middleton. When Jacquelin Gray heard of his arrival, his countenance fell. Perfect love may cast out fear, but it does not cast out jealousy; and Jacquelin was conscious of a pain in his heart. He did not know whether Blair Cary liked Middleton now very much or not, but he feared she did; and Middleton had been the cause of his rupture with her. When, therefore, he met Middleton he could not pretend that he was glad to see him. So he greeted him distantly, though with marked civility. Middleton was unusually cordial to him; but this only grated on Jacquelin. There was a smile in his eyes which Jacquelin, torturing himself as every fool under like circumstances does, interpreted as a glance of triumph, if not of positive compassion. This was the more biting to Jacquelin because it was at Dr. Cary's that they met, and Blair was unusually gay that evening. Her cheeks, which were sometimes pale, were now flushed, Jacquelin felt, with pleasure at Middleton's presence. She talked mainly to Middleton, to Jacquelin scarcely at

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all. At length Jacquelin rose and said he must go.

“Why, aren’t you going to stay to tea? I thought you were?” Blair asked, in genuine surprise. Her color had suddenly vanished, and she looked at him with a vague trouble in her eyes.

“Thank you, no,” said Jacquelin, shortly. “Good-evening, Captain Middleton.” He bowed ceremoniously.

“I had hoped to have the pleasure of riding back with you,” said Middleton.

“I am walking,” said Jacquelin, grimly. He went out. Blair excused herself hurriedly to Middleton. “Oh! Jacquelin,” she called, “will you take this letter for me, and mail it to-morrow morning?”

“Can’t I take it?” asked Middleton. “I am going by the office.”

“Oh! Jack will take it, thank you.”

As she gave Jacquelin the letter she glanced up in his face inquiringly. But Jacquelin’s eyes avoided hers. He took the letter and stalked out. How he hated Middleton! And how he hated himself for doing it!

He strode down the road full of bitterness, weaving himself a nettle-web that stung him at

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every step. The moon was just rising above the tree-tops, and its silvery beams were struggling with the last light from the slowly fading west; but Jacquelin was all in darkness. All his plans had come to naught, overthrown by this smiling outsider. He groaned in his helpless anguish. Had he not waited; tried to keep his ideals ever before him; served faithfully; never for a moment faltered or turned aside for anyone else! And what had it availed him! Here was a lifetime of devotion flung away for the facile addresses of this interloper.

At a point in the road, he caught, for a second, just on top of a hill some distance before him, the outline of a man's figure clear against the sky in the cleft between the trees. It moved with a curious dip or limp that reminded him for a moment of Moses the trick-doctor. The next second the figure disappeared. When Jacquelin reached the spot, he stopped and listened; but there was only silence and a momentary crackle of a piece of bark as some night-animal moved up a tree deep within the shadows. Jacquelin walked on once more, in the dusk of the road and the deeper gloom of his own thoughts. He could not go home, because he had told his aunt he would stay at Dr. Cary's to

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tea, and she would wish to know why he had not done so, and when she heard of Middleton would want to hear all about him, and he could not talk of Middleton then. So he wandered on.

When he reached home Miss Thomasia had retired, and he went silently to his room, cursing his fate and Middleton.

Early next morning, Jacquelin was awakened by voices in the yard. Someone was talking to Miss Thomasia. All Jacquelin heard was that Captain Middleton had been shot the night before at the fork of the road that led to Dr. Cary's. Jacquelin lay still for a second—quite still—and listened. Could it be a dream! The body had been found right at the fork by Dr. Cary as he was going home from seeing Sherrod's wife, and he had sent for Mr. Jacquelin.

Jacquelin's heart stopped beating. He sprang from bed and threw open a window. Old Gideon was the speaker.

“What's that?” asked Jacquelin.

Gideon repeated the story, with further details.

“Is he dead?”

“Nor, suh, he ain't dead yet; but de Doctor say he ain' got much show. Ef he hadn't hap-

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pened to git dyah pretty soon after he was shot, he'd been dead pretty soon."

"Thank God!"

Jacquelin had felt like a murderer. The thought of Blair, stricken in the moment of her joy, came to him like a stab in his heart. His heart gave a bound that he was able to rejoice that Middleton was not dead.

Old Gideon was giving particulars.

"Some thinks 'twas dem Ku Kluxes—some dat dee wuz after somebody else, whoever 'twuz. I don' know who 'twuz," he asserted, with manifest veracity. "But I sholy don' 'prove of folkes' shootin' 'roun' at folks dataway, dat I don't! Dee don sen' for Mr. Welch and de Capt'n at the cote-house."

When Jacquelin reached Dr. Cary's he was met by Blair, white-faced and tearful.

He walked straight up to her and held out his hand.

"Blair." His voice had all the old tenderness. The lover had disappeared. It was only the old, old friend—the brother.

"Oh! Jacquelin!" And she burst into tears.

Dr. Cary's providential appearance on the spot where Middleton lay had undoubtedly saved Middleton's life; and although at first the

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wound appeared very desperate, his splendid constitution stood him in good stead, and in a very short time he began to rally. "It is in such instances as this," said Dr. Cary, "that a man's habits tell. Nature conducts her campaign with less than half her forces in action; it is when an accident comes that the reserves tell."

One of the first things done, after it was known whether Middleton would survive the immediate shock, was to telegraph to Miss Rockfield.

The sudden shock appeared to have driven away all the cloud of misunderstanding that had so long settled between Jacquelin and Blair; and although Jacquelin felt that all was over between them, his self-abnegation brought him a content to which he had long been a stranger. Every moment that he could spare he was at Blair's service; but she was most of the time at Middleton's bedside, with Ruth, and all Jacquelin could do was to show by his silent sympathy how deeply he felt for her.

One afternoon she came and asked him to go to the station for Miss Rockfield.

"Who is Miss Rockfield?" asked Jacquelin. "I know she is related to Middleton; but who is she?"

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“She is Captain Middleton’s *fiancée*,” said Blair, quietly.

“What!” Jacquelin turned hot and cold by turns. “Blair!”

Blair’s eyes were dancing, and her mouth was trembling with an effort to suppress the sign of her triumph.

Jacquelin positively staggered. He hitched up Middleton’s horse and went for Miss Rockfield; but how he reached the station and what happened that evening he always vowed he could never remember. When Miss Rockfield arrived, Middleton was already out of danger. The strain, however, had told heavily on Dr. Cary. Still he refused to rest.

A night or two later, the Doctor had just come home from a round of visits. He had come by the court-house, and had paid Steve a visit. Every effort had failed to put off Steve’s trial. Leech had brought the judge, and they were together at Still’s. The Doctor was much depressed. He would write to Senator Rockfield, and see if he could not make one more attempt. He looked so fagged and worn that Mrs. Cary and Blair urged him to put off the letter. But he said it must be done at once. The day for the trial was approaching, and every hour was

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precious now. So he wrote the letter. Then he lay down on a lounge.

The next moment there was the clatter of horses' feet outside, and a man riding one horse and leading another dashed up in the yard at a gallop and gave a shout:

“Aw—Dr. Cary.”

Mrs. Cary's countenance fell. The Doctor's face, which had just before been expressive of extreme fatigue, suddenly took on a new expression.

“You cannot go; it is impossible,” declared Mrs. Cary. The Doctor did not answer. He was listening to the conversation going on outside between the messenger and Mammy Krenda.

“Leech!” exclaimed Mrs. Cary, and sprang to the door. “He says that Leech is dying.” A light almost of joy had come into her face. The Doctor rose and passed out of the door by her.

“What's that? What is the matter?” he asked. His face was as calm as a statue's!

Mrs. Cary reported what she had heard: “Leech was ill—had been taken with violent cramp, and was having fit after fit. He was supposed to be dying. He was at Birdwood.”

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“You cannot go; you are worn out,” urged Mrs. Cary, imploringly as the Doctor straightened himself.

“I must go,” said the Doctor. He turned back to get his saddle-bags.

“It is the visitation of God,” murmured Mrs. Cary to herself.

“Not until all medical means have failed,” said Dr. Cary, gravely. The man on the horse, thinking that the delay meant that the Doctor was not coming, said:

“They told me to tell you he’d pay you anything in the world you asked.”

The Doctor turned and faced him.

“He has not money enough—the Government has not money enough—to induce me to go, if he were not ill,” said he, slowly. “I am going because he is sick and I am a physician.”

He leant down and kissed his wife, and walked down the path toward the horses. Mrs. Cary went out with him, and saw him mount the horse the messenger had brought and ride away in the darkness. Then she went into the house with a white face. She did not retire that night. Blair and she sat up waiting for him.

The sun was almost rising when they saw him come riding up through the orchard. As they

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went out to meet him, he sat up very straight. The sky was all pearl, and he seemed to be riding in the sunrise.

As he dismounted he almost fell, but recovered himself and tied the horse. A messenger would come for him, he said.

“How is he?” asked Mrs. Cary.

“Out of danger,” he said. “I am glad I went. He would have died if he had not been relieved.”

Mrs. Cary said nothing. Her eyes were searching his face, which seemed to have grown thinner in one night. She threw her arm around him to support him. They walked up to the door, and he sat down on the step and passed his hand over his brow. “I am very tired. I have fought—” he began; but did not finish the sentence. The next second he sank forward on the steps.

With a cry to Blair, Mrs. Cary caught him. She raised him up; his eyes opened once and rested on Mrs. Cary’s face, and a faint smile came into them. His lips murmured his wife’s name, and then Blair’s; and then his eyes slowly closed, and, with a sigh, his head sank on Mrs. Cary’s arm, and the long fight was done. John Cary, of Birdwood, had laid down his arms.

Jacquelin was absent from the County when

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the news of Dr. Cary's death reached him. At first he could hardly grasp it. It seemed as if it could not be true. He had never thought of Dr. Cary's dying, or of the County existing without him. All of Jacquelin's own family except Rupert and Miss Thomasia had passed away, and he was accustomed to death. Many friends had gone. Dr. Cary had sat at their bedsides and closed their eyes; but, somehow, it had never occurred to Jacquelin to think of Death striking him. He seemed to be a part of the old life—in all the County, its best and most enduring type; and, now that he had gone, Jacquelin felt as though the foundation were falling out—as though the old life had passed away with him.

The next thought was of Blair. The two had been so absolutely associated ever since he could remember. He could hardly think of her as surviving. He hurried home. As he neared the neighborhood, every man he met was talking of the Doctor. They all felt like Jacquelin. They wondered what would happen, now that the Doctor had gone. At one place, where Jacquelin had to wait a little while, a group were discussing him. They were talking of him as they remembered him in the war. They were

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all poor men; but they had all been soldiers, and they spoke of him as of a comrade. He was always at the front, they said; he could hardly have been there more if he had been the Colonel. If a man was shot, before they knew it there was Dr. Cary. He said he could save at any time those not badly wounded; those who were badly shot he could only save on the firing-line. And he was as quick to look after a wounded Yankee as after a Confederate, they asserted. "A wounded man wasn't an enemy," he had said; "he was a patient." They all had stories of his courage, his endurance, his kindness. One told how he had sent a fresh cow over to the speaker's wife on a time when the children were sick; another mentioned how he had come around once to collect some money, but, finding that they did not have a cent, had lent them some he had just collected from Andy Stamper. A third related how he had kissed and prayed with a wounded Yankee boy, who was dying and wanted to see his mother. "He leant down by him," said the man, "and put his arm around him, and said 'Now I lay me,' just for all the world like a woman. And, next minute, after the boy got quiet, he was leaning over getting a ball out of a man right by him."

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There was a long pause after this simple recital, which had been delivered in a quiet, monotonous tone.

“They say Leech was as good as dead when he got to him.”

“I’d ’a’ let him die a thousand times,” swore one, with deep sincerity.

“Yes. Well, so would I. But, somehow, the Doctor, he always was different. Seemed like, big as he was, he couldn’t bear any ill feelin’s.”

There was a silence after this.

It was broken presently by one of the auditors. “And that was the man they put in jail,” he said, bitterly.

“Yes, and murdered,” responded the others.

Jacquelin rode on. He, too, felt that Dr. Cary had been murdered.

When he reached Dr. Cary’s, the first person he met was Mammy Krenda. The old woman was the picture of grief. She did not utter a word, nor did the young man. She simply opened the door and stood aside while he softly entered the little room where rested the silent form of her old master. The quiet figure, the calm, upturned face, had suddenly ennobled the little apartment. The hours that had passed had smoothed out the traces of care and pain,

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and the Doctor lay in perfect rest. There was, perhaps, a trace of scorn of the ills he had so long faced, but Jacquelin did not note it. What he saw was only perfect peace, and a face of undisturbed nobility. Gazing down on it, his heart softened; his bitter thoughts passed away, and he sank on his knees, and thanked God for such a life.

He became conscious presently that someone was standing by him, and he rose and faced Blair. Neither spoke a word; but he took her hand and held it, and the next second she sank on her knees, and after a moment he knelt beside her.

CHAPTER XLV

CAPTAIN ALLEN HAS AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

DR. CARY had hardly been laid away, when the County had to face another sorrow.

The trial of Captain Allen was set for the next day, and the county seat was in a fever of expectation and apprehension. It was the final struggle between the old residents and the new invaders, and it seemed that the latter must triumph. There was no hope. It was the beginning of the complete subjugation of the people. All thoughts were centred on the little village where the battle was to be joined and fought. A dark cloud seemed to have settled like a pall over the place which even the soft afterglow of a summer evening could not lighten. The breath of flowers was on the breeze that came from the shrubbery-filled yards and rustled the trees. Yet the sounds were subdued, and the faces of the people were gloomy and grim. The Judge had arrived, and had taken his room in the old

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Hotel. Leech, solemn and once more self-assertive, with a face still pale from his recent attack, but a gleam of joy in his pale blue eyes, was quartered with Judge Bail in the hotel. Some said he was afraid to go to his house; some that he wanted to be near the Judge, and keep his mind filled with his insinuations. It was hinted that he was afraid Bail would offer to sell out. McRaffle had quarrelled with Leech and had made such an offer. He had also said that the Judge could be reached, if the sum tendered were large enough. At least, such was the rumor about the village. The jury was assembled and kept together. The witnesses had been brought to town and were also keeping together. The lawyers, with grave faces, were consulting behind locked doors and closely shut windows—those who represented the Government in a room adjoining Leech's, and not far from the Judge's chamber; and those who were for the prisoner, among them some of the ablest lawyers in the State, in Steve's old office. Mr. Bagby and General Legaie were the leading counsel, and Jerry lounged about the door like a Bashi-Bazouk. The crowd in the village was larger than it had been in a good while. Men were assembled in groups in the suburbs or on

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the verandas, sullen and almost awe-struck, discussing the points in the case with the intelligence of those trained by sharp experience to know the gravity of such an occasion and to weigh the chances. It was known that the principal evidence against Captain Allen was his own confession. This was his chief danger. Leech (it was noticeable that, when Leech was there, it was not the Government, whose soldiers were still quartered in the village, but Leech that was spoken of as representing the prosecution)—Leech could not prove any act of his without that. The lawyers could break down all the witnesses except one—the one to whom Captain Allen had been fool enough to talk; her testimony they could not get around. Mr. Bagby and General Legaie had said so. Mr. Bagby said that a man's own confession was the hardest thing in the world to overcome; that one was a fool ever to confess anything. Such were the observations of a group assembled on one of the street corners, out of hearing of the sentries.

This idea gave the discussion another turn. "Was Captain Allen really in love with Miss Welch?" someone questioned. He had been in love with her beyond a doubt, but he had stopped visiting her. Some thought she had led him on,

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to get all out of him she could; others that he had stopped, and that she was taking her revenge. One element considered that it served him right. Why should he have to go off after a Yankee girl, whose people were all against them, when there were plenty of their own girls just as pretty and more attractive? Others took Steve's part. If a man fell in love he fell in love, that was all; and if he was in love, he had a right to do as he chose—there was no Mason and Dixon line in love. Even these, however, thought that Miss Welch was taking her revenge.

Andy Stamper, who had come up and was grimly listening with unwonted silence, broke forth with a strong denunciation of such nonsense. He did not believe a word of it. Miss Welch had been to see Miss Blair Cary and Miss Thomasia, old Mr. Langstaff and Mr. Bagby, and had done all she could to keep from testifying. She was "cut up as the mischief about it," declared Andy. She had wanted to go away, but Leech was too sharp for her; he had had her recognized to appear. He knew he could not convict the Captain without her. Her father, too, was awfully troubled about it, and had been to Washington to see what he could do. He could not bear Leech. Was he not getting ready

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to sue him about that railroad steal? He had just come back from the North. They had not come to the court-house. Perhaps he had been able to do something?

The crowd did not accept Andy's views. Some of them thought the attitude of Major Welch was all a sham; that his anger with Leech was just a pretence, and that he was really in collusion with him. Had he not objected to Captain Allen's visiting at his house, and hadn't he done all he could to trace up Leech when the Captain had him hidden. He had made a big show of giving up when Captain Steve and Mr. Gray proved Hiram Still's rascality; but he had bided his time, and he was getting a pretty sweet revenge. He had been North; but the speakers believed it was to push the case against the Captain, not to stop it. He could have stopped it easy enough, if he had chosen. He was "in with the biggest of 'em."

Little Andy chewed in glum silence. Suddenly he burst out:

"Well, I say that man don't pretend to nothin'. Whether he likes the Captain or whether he don't, or whether you like him or whether you don't, is one thing. But what he is, he is; and he don't pretend to nothin'. If all Yankees

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was like him, I wouldn't care how many they was—unless I had to fight 'em."

This sententious speech had its effect on the crowd, and the sergeant was proceeding to expound further his opinion. But just then the sound of wheels was heard; and the next moment a close carriage, with a good pair of horses, drove quickly by them in a cloud of dust. It was recognized as Major Welch's carriage, and, though the curtains were half-drawn, the group recognized the occupants as Major and Mrs. Welch and their daughter, and one other person, who was leaning back. One man thought it looked like old Mr. Langstaff; but, of course, it was not he. A number of groans followed the carriage as it passed on down the street toward the hotel. Andy's countenance and stock both fell.

To a man like Steve Allen the sentence which appeared to wait for him on the morrow was worse than death. He had faced death scores of times, and would readily have done so again, on any occasion. But he had never apprehended that a shameful sentence, however undeserved, would be passed on him. Better, a thousand times, that he had died in battle and lain with his comrades, who had left honorable names. He

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summoned to his aid all his fortitude, and tried to soothe himself with the knowledge that he had never committed a dishonorable act; that the cause of his present situation was the desire to act a noble part and save others. But do what he might, he could not keep from his mind the feeling that, deserved or not, a conviction and sentence to the penitentiary placed a stigma on him never to be erased. All his high hopes would be blighted, his future ruined; he would have brought disgrace on his family; he could never more face men as he had done heretofore; he would not be fit to speak to a lady.

He was aware at intervals that this was a weakness, for he had moments when he recognized that an undeserved sentence could not degrade; but do what he might, the horror of it would come back to him. With it was another wound. The blow had been struck by her whom he loved. The girl whom he had given his whole heart to and whom he had thought the truest, bravest, highest woman in all the world, to whom he had spoken as he would not have spoken to any other man or woman, and who, he had hoped, cared for him, had turned and betrayed him. But for her he would be free tomorrow. He knew it himself, and his lawyers,

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in their last interview with him, just over, had told him so. They would do what they could; but the fact remained that he had confessed his part in the act for which the prosecution was brought, and they did not see how they could get around it. Some of them had suggested that they had a single chance. The witness was in a condition of high excitement; and they might, by severe cross-examination, confuse her, and destroy the force of her evidence. This Steve promptly vetoed. He would not have it done. The lawyers gazed at him in dismay.

“My dear sir, it is your only chance.”

“I do not care, I will not have it,” said Steve, firmly. “I said it, and I will have no cross-examination on that point.”

“That is Quixotic.”

“Then I’ll be Quixotic. I’ve been so before. Don Quixote was a gentleman.” General Legaie’s eyes sparkled suddenly as they rested on him.

They had left him, saying good-by with that solemnity which showed how forlorn their hope was. As they reached the outer door and passed across the court-green, old Mr. Bagby said, “That is really a most extraordinary young

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man, and to think that such a man should be in prison under indictment.”

The little General breathed a deep and fervent oath.

“What a pity that he could not have married that nice young lady, Miss Welch—such a nice young lady!” proceeded Mr. Bagby, half in soliloquy.

“Marry her! Marry that woman! The viper!” exploded the General. “I’d rather die!”

“Oh, a very nice young lady,” pursued Mr. Bagby to himself, as he walked on, feeling his way in the darkness. He did not tell the General that he had lately had an interview which had raised Miss Ruth Welch in his esteem and changed her, in his mind, from the viper which the General conceived her to be, to the nice young lady of whom he muttered in the dusk of the summer night.

This interview with his lawyers had been over an hour ago. Steve was still in the room in which the interview had been held; but the high stand which he had taken with his counsel had now lost some of its loftiness as the hardness of his position stood nakedly before him. After all, had not this girl betrayed him? Why should

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he sacrifice himself for her? This thought flitted before Steve, only for an instant. He put it away from him with a gesture of bitterness. At least he would be a gentleman, whatever befell. He took from his pocket a pistol which he wore when he surrendered, and which had not been taken from him, and examined it attentively, with a curious expression on his face. He was thinking deeply. Suddenly his expression changed. "Never! Cowardice!" He flung the pistol over on the cot by the window. The reflection had come to him that it would be taken as a proof of fear as well as of guilt. And, moreover, the thought had come that he might still be of use.

The triumph of Leech recurred to him. He very often thought of Leech—of Leech, who had hounded him down, and not only him, but others a thousand times better: Dr. Cary, the high-minded, noble gentleman, the faithful Christian. Leech, the vampire, sucking the life-blood of the people; the harpy, battenning on the writhing body of the prostrate State, had broken Dr. Cary's heart. Jacquelin had told Steve how the Doctor looked as he lay in his coffin, murdered; his face full of scars, but calm with the stamp of immortal courage—like an old

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knight, paladin of a lost cause, stricken through the heart in a final charge, before the light of victory could fade from his brow. Steve, thinking of this, was leaning against the bars of his open window, looking away into space through the dusk. The window was in the rear of the jail, and looked down on a vacant, weed-grown lot, back of the court-green. Steve became conscious of the presence of two men in the open space beneath. They had just moved, so as to be in the shadow of the building, and were right below his window, conversing earnestly. Suddenly their voices rose, and Steve was almost startled to recognize Leech and McRaffle. He could not help hearing what they were saying. McRaffle was insisting on something, and Leech was refusing. McRaffle broke out in a passion. He was evidently under the influence of liquor.

“You owe it to me. You said you would pay me \$1,000 for him, alive or dead,” he asserted. “I kept my part of the bargain; now, blank you! stand up to yours.”

“If you had brought him dead, I might have paid; but you did not capture him,” said Leech, with a harsh laugh. “He gave himself up.”

“Well, it was in consequence of the report I

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circulated," insisted McRaffle. "Do you suppose he'd have given himself up, if he had not heard that if he did so the others would be released?"

Leech laughed incredulously. "More fool he!"

"And whose idea was that?"

"My friend, there's no use to try that game on me. What good would that have done, if I had not induced Miss Welch to tell what your friend was fool enough to confide to her? Where would we have been but for her testimony? If anyone is entitled to claim the reward I offered, I am the man. I must protect the Government." He spoke unctuously.

"You think you are entitled to everything. I know how you'll protect the Government!" sneered McRaffle. "Suppose your important witness won't testify?" he asked.

"She'll sleep in jail. I'll make Bail give her the apartment next her friend," said Leech, scornfully. "They'll enjoy that."

Leech never knew how close Death brushed by him that instant. Steve's pistol was lying on the bed, within a foot of him. He seized it. He would rid the country of that cursed presence, and pay his own debt at the same time.

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He had cocked the pistol involuntarily, when he came to himself. Oh! if he only had him face to face, in an open field, both armed, he could settle the final score! He uncocked the pistol and flung it away from him.

“Miss Welch won’t refuse,” Leech went on, “I am smart enough to know how to deal with women as well as men.” He laughed arrogantly.

“You think so? You are sometimes too blanked smart for your own good,” said McRaffle.

Leech, stung by the speech, turned on him.

“I’ll put you on the stand,” he threatened.

“Not much, you won’t. I won’t testify.”

“You’re getting pretty squeamish all of a sudden,” sneered Leech.

McRaffle wheeled on him in a rage.

“Don’t you dare sneer at me that way,” he said. “If you do, I’ll——”

He seized Leech by the shoulder.

“I’ll tell how you deal with women—for instance, with Miss Bush, the school-teacher, *alias* Mrs. Jonadab Leech!” he hissed.

Leech seemed suddenly to shrink up.

“What do you know about—about her?”

“Put me on the stand, and I’ll tell you all you

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want to know," said McRaffle, tauntingly. "Perhaps, you don't want me as a witness now? Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. Pay me the thousand dollars, or—I tell you—endorse my note for a thousand, and I'll keep quiet. Otherwise, I'll have to get Dr. Still to endorse it, or maybe even the Governor," he said, meaningly.

"Well, if I do, will you swear that you will never open your mouth again about this to a single soul on earth?"

"Make it twelve hundred," said McRaffle. "The Governor'd give twice that to know of Mrs. Leech. I reckon it would be some time before you'd dine with Miss Krafton again."

Leech seized him to stop him.

The rest of the conversation was in a lower key, and they soon moved off together, leaving Steve still in darkness, literally and figuratively. But he had conquered a great temptation. This reflection, after a time, brought a feeling almost of peacefulness. He threw himself on the bed, and began to go over his life. Presently he began in humility to look to a Higher Power.

At that moment his door was opened, and a voice said:

"A visitor to see you, Capt'n. Will you come to the parlor?" The messenger was the old

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Sergeant, O'Meara, whom Thurston had placed in charge of the prison.

Steve, after a moment, left his cell and walked slowly through the corridor to the apartment adjoining the jailer's quarters, which was dignified by the name of parlor. It was lighted by a small lamp, the rays of which hardly reached the walls. The room was empty. But Steve could hear from the voices that there were two persons in the next room. He walked to the open window and waited, with his head resting on his arm against the bars. The same reverie from which he had been aroused returned.

The door behind him opened and closed softly.

"Captain Allen!" said a faint voice. Steve turned.

"Miss Welch!" He stood dumfounded. Before him, with her veil only half thrown back, was Ruth Welch. She stood just inside the door, motionless as though planted on the spot; and, as Steve did not move, the whole space of the room was between them. Her eyes, which she lifted for a second, to Steve's face, fell.

"Captain Allen," she began, and then faltered. After a second, however, with an effort she began again.

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“I have come to see you; to see—to see if there is nothing I can do to—to help you?”

At the words, Steve’s heart hardened.

“No, thank you, there is nothing,” he said. His voice was hard and unnatural. She made a movement, almost as if she shrank back. But she began again, speaking very slowly and painfully:

“I do not know what to say. But I want—I want to see if there is nothing——?” She broke off, but began again: “You don’t know how deeply — how terribly—I——” Her voice failed her. She stopped and wrung her hands. “Is there nothing—nothing I can do?”

Steve stood like stone. “No, nothing.”

She broke the silence that fell.

“I thought there was—there might be. I hoped—there might be. You do not know how terribly I feel. I hoped there might be some way for me to help you, to atone for my wicked folly. I did not know——”

Her voice failed again, and she put her handkerchief quickly to her eyes.

Steve, up to this time, had not volunteered a word or stirred from where he stood. His heart began to relent, and he felt that he must say something.

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“You need not reproach yourself,” he said. “I have not done so. It was my folly, not yours.”

“Oh, no, no! I will not let you say that,” she broke out, vehemently. “You trusted me. You have been only brave and noble. But I did not know! I thought, when I told it, it would help you. You will believe that, will you not?”

She came a step or two nearer in her intensity, and gazed at him earnestly.

“Yes, if you say so,” said Steve.

“I do,” she declared, earnestly. “I thought, when they were prosecuting you, that it would set you in the right light; and it seems that dreadful man knew how to distort it and knew— Oh! it all seems like a dreadful nightmare! I have done everything I could. And my father has, too. Is there no way? Do you not know of one way in which my testimony could not be taken?” Her voice faltered, so that Steve could scarcely catch the words.

“No, none whatsoever.”

“Yes. There is one way. I have heard—I have been told there is one,” she persisted, faintly.

“And what is that?” asked Steve, coldly. Suddenly she broke down.

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“How can you be so hard on me—so cruel?” she sobbed.

Steve watched her, at first almost grimly; but her weeping softened him.

“Miss Welch, do not distress yourself,” he said, quietly. “There is no way to help me; but it is not your fault. I believe what you have told me.”

“There is one way,” she said.

“And that is?”

“To marry me.”

“What!” Steve almost tottered.

“To marry me. If you marry me, I could not be made to testify against you. I have been told so.” She had recovered her composure and was speaking quite calmly.

“I could not let you do that,” said Steve, firmly.

“I have come to ask you to do it,” she went on, speaking quite as if she were but finishing her first sentence. “And afterward, you could—get—a—a—divorce. I would go away and hide myself, and never, never trouble you again.” Her composure deserted her, and she buried her face in her hands. If she could have seen Steve’s face at that moment—the sudden flame which lit it up—and the gesture which he

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made, as though he would have caught her in his arms, and that with which he restrained himself and reasserted his self-control, she might not have wept. But she did not see it, and Steve was able to master himself, though when he spoke his voice had wholly changed.

“I could not do that,” he said, gently, and with a new tone. “I could not allow you to sacrifice yourself.”

“It would not be— Yes, you can,” she pleaded.

“No,” said Steve, almost sternly. “Do not, I beg you.” He lifted his hand as though to put her from him; but suddenly clutched at his heart.

She stopped sobbing. He turned half-away.

“Go,” he said. “Leave me, please.”

His voice could scarcely be heard, and he put his hand to his forehead. She turned without a word, and moved slowly toward the door. As she put out her hand to open it, she suddenly sank in a heap on the floor. In a second Steve was at her side. He stooped and lifted her, as though she were a child.

“Ruth,” he said; and, as she opened her eyes, “forgive me.” He caught the hem of her dress and crushed it against his lips. “I could not

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let you do that. I could not let you sacrifice yourself.”

“It is no sacrifice. Do you not see? Oh! Can you not see that—I—love——?” She could not complete the sentence. Her head drooped.

“What! Ruth!” Steve stood her up on her feet and held her at arm’s length. “Ruth Welch, for God’s sake do not tell me that unless it is true.” His eyes were burning, and were fastened on her face with a gaze that seemed almost to scorch her.

“It is true,” she said, in a low voice, and tried to turn her face away. Steve did not stir.

“Wait,” he said, hoarsely. “Does your mother know of this?”

“Yes.” She was looking in his eyes now quite calmly.

“Where is she?”

“In the next room.”

Steve suddenly caught her in his arms.

A little later Mrs. Welch and Steve had an interview. Steve told her that while he had loved her daughter better than his life, ever since the day he had met her, and while the knowledge that she cared for him had changed the world for him, that very fact would not permit him to let

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her take the step she proposed. He would not allow her to sacrifice herself by marrying him when under a criminal charge, and with a sentence staring him in the face. Mrs. Welch adroitly met this objection with the plausible argument that it was as much on her daughter's account as on his that she desired it. She spoke for her husband as well as for herself. It would prevent the horror of her daughter's having to appear, and give testimony against him, in open court. She did not believe Ruth could stand the ordeal. She knew she would not testify, even though she should be sent to jail and kept there. This Ruth stoutly confirmed. She would die before she would answer a question.

Mrs. Welch, having come over to Steve's side, was a powerful ally; and as Ruth resolutely maintained her position that she would die in prison before she would utter one word, there was nothing else for Steve to do but yield to their proposal. He raised the point that it was too late, as it was now midnight, and no license could be secured or clergyman be found. But Mrs. Welch was prepared to meet this objection. Captain Thurston had authority under the law to issue the license, and a preacher could be

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secured. Indeed, Mr. Langstaff had come down to the county seat with them.

So in a short time these preliminaries were settled. A few friends were brought in quietly: General Legaie, who knelt on one knee and lifting Ruth's hand kissed it reverently; Mr. Bagby, whose eyes twinkled with deep satisfaction over a double victory; Reely Thurston and Jacquelin Gray, and Andy Stamper who had got wind of the matter and asked permission to come. And there in the little dingy room, in the presence of these and of Major and Mrs. Welch, Steve Allen and Ruth Welch were married at midnight by old Mr. Langstaff.

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And there, in the little parlor, Steve and Ruth were married.

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CHAPTER XLVI

THE OLD LAWYER DECLINES TO SURPRISE THE
COURT, AND SURPRISES LEECH

THE next morning the case was called, and the whole village was astir. In the little conclave held after the marriage it had been discussed whether anything should be said about it until after the jury was impanelled, when it could be sprung on Leech, and, in the surprise thus occasioned, the jury be forced to give a verdict of acquittal.

Some were for taking this course, and this was Steve's wish; but old Mr. Bagby said, No. He had lost one case, he said, by allowing his client to act on a sentiment, and he would not risk another. Sentiment was sentiment, but law was law. He looked through his spectacles significantly at Major Welch. He believed in making every defence as you came to it. So, as Major Welch was sure he would receive the telegrams he was expecting from the North,

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and agreed with Mr. Bagby, this plan was adopted. It was decided to announce the marriage before the beginning of the trial, and take the postponement that would almost inevitably occur.

The secret was well kept, and, up to the last moment before the trial, there was no idea on Leech's part of what had taken place. He had put on a new and longer black coat than usual, and a carefully tied white cravat; and, with his books and papers clasped to his breast, and his pale eyes downcast except when he lifted them covertly and cast a swift glance of conscious triumph around him, he moved about the court-green busy and noiseless. He was still haggard from his late illness, but there was an air of triumph even in the flapping of his loose coat and the line of his thin back.

But, notwithstanding Leech's ignorance, an idea had got abroad that something unusual would happen. The lawyers for Captain Allen were still grave; but they wore a more confident air than they had exhibited yesterday. Andy Stamper was chirpy and facetious, and had a look of deeper mystery than he was wont to wear except when events were about to happen. It was known that Major Welch, who had just

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returned from the North, had been to the railway station after midnight, and had remained there until daybreak; and it was known, further, that Mrs. Welch and Miss Welch had left the tavern, and were staying at Mrs. Dockett's. So there was something in the air. It was rumored that McRaffle had been sent away by Leech.

When Captain Allen walked across the green from the jail to the court-house, he wore a look of triumph which cheered the hearts of his friends. They crowded round him, to speak to him and shake his hand; and he laughed and chatted with them like a victor, not like a prisoner. One man called to him: "We came near taking you out of yonder last night, Captain; and if you just crook your finger, we'll clean up the whole gang now. There's several of the old Company around here yet." Steve looked over at him and smiled.

"It's all right, Michael. Don't trouble yourself." And the crowd pressed after him into the court-house, which was already jammed.

The case was called, and the Court asked the usual question whether counsel were ready. Leech replied meekly that the Government was ready, and glanced across at the array of counsel

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for the prisoner. After a moment's hesitation, old Mr. Bagby slowly rose:

“If the Court please!” he said, “we are ready for the defence; but before entering on the case, there is a statement which I feel—which we feel—it is proper we should make, as we do not wish to surprise the Court, or to take any advantage of a state of facts which may cause a surprise to the other side.”

He turned to Leech, on whose face a look of wonder was beginning to dawn.

“I believe I see among the list of witnesses summoned for the prosecution the name of a witness—” (the old lawyer took up the book containing the list of witnesses, and scanned it as if he had not seen it before)—“of a young lady—ah—Miss Welch—who, I believe, has been summoned ah—who I understand has been summoned to prove—ah—to testify to certain statements alleged to have been made by our client, which are deemed material.” He looked across at Leech, who was staring at him in vague wonder. “Am I correct in this, Colonel Leech?” His voice was never so unctuous and his manner so civil as when he was preparing a deadly thrust.

“Umph, I don't know. I believe there is a

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witness of that name, to prove some of the prisoner's confessions. There are a number of others. We are not dependent on her at all," said Leech, with insolent indifference.

"Ah!" drawled the old lawyer. "I was misinformed." With a bow, he took his seat. As he did so, he added, slowly, "I understood she was a material witness—a *very* material witness. If she is not, of course——?" He looked benignantly at the jury and shut his lips. He was apparently relieved. Leech cleared his throat nervously. He saw he had lost whatever advantage the statement would have given him.

"I did not mean that. I did not mean to say she is not a material witness."

The old lawyer turned his eyes on him slowly. "A *very* material witness?"

"Oh, well, yes; I suppose you might say so."

Mr. Bagby rose again.

"Then I will resume my statement. I am informed that this young lady to whom I have referred is summoned to prove certain statements of our client, respecting his supposed connection with the secret and unlawful order for the suppression of which the law, under which this prosecution is ostensibly made, was

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framed. I am informed, further, that she is a very material witness—so material, indeed, that but for her testimony it is possible this prosecution, in this particular form, might not have taken place.”

Leech cleared his throat ominously, and Mr. Bagby looked at him benignly.

“I am inclined to credit this report not only from facts within our own knowledge, but also because I understand that these conjectured statements, whatever they were, were made in the course of conversation of a kind peculiarly confidential, under seal of a friendship unusually close and intimate; and I cannot believe that the learned and amiable counsel for the Government would have wished to violate wantonly such a confidence. I can only think he considered that his duty required it. And I am glad to say I have his own statement that such was his view of the case” (he took from his hat a paper and held it in his hand), “in a letter which he personally wrote to the young lady’s father.

“It is under these circumstances that I feel it is due to the Court, and may lead to a different disposition of the case, to say to the Court that the young lady in question is not an eligible

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witness in this prosecution.” (He here took from his hat another paper.) “She has been united in the bonds of matrimony to my client, and is at present the wife of the accused, Captain Stevenson Allen, and thus is not an eligible witness for or against him.”

He resumed his seat slowly and sedately, amid the dead silence which had fallen on the courtroom. The next moment the crowd took in the situation, and the old court-room rang with cheer after cheer. Even the jury were moved to grin, and exchanged pleased glances and words of wonder and satisfaction.

During the tumult that went on, Leech's face was a study. Surprise, dismay, baffled revenge, rage, fear, craftiness, dissimulation—all had their place. He looked about him at the shouting assembly, and gauged all the elements. He took in Captain Thurston's jolly face, Major Welch's look of satisfaction, and the shrewd content of old Mr. Bagby, as Major Welch handed him a batch of telegrams. He saw the other lawyers' faces light up as the telegrams were handed on to them and were eagerly scanned. He knew the wires had been well worked. He calculated all the chances. And when the judge, with sharp reprimands and

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angry threats, had quelled the noise and restored order, Leech rose.

It was true, he said, that the testimony of the witness mentioned was material in the aspect of the case as it stood at present, and it was true that he had summoned Miss Welch as a witness, only under the strictest sense of duty and at the greatest cost of pain to himself, as he had already stated to her father. And he was glad that they at last recognized it. He had not known that the friendship between the—ah—witness and the prisoner, had been carried so far—indeed, it seemed that this last degree of intimacy must have been of quite recent date. Had he known it, the Court would have been spared some trouble and the Government considerable expense. As it was, while he was not prepared to say that the Government could not compel the witness to testify when the disability had arisen under such circumstances (here he glanced at the judge, and read on his countenance that this view was untenable; so he added), or could not convict without the witness, his idea of his duty to the Government was so high that he was unwilling to risk going to trial under the circumstances, until he had summoned one or two other witnesses who could prove the

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same facts; and he should therefore consent to an adjournment till next day.

Mr. Bagby rose. "You will ask for it," he said, looking at Leech. "We are ready to proceed." He addressed the Court in a few words, and urged that the case proceed or that the prosecution be dismissed. This Leech "could not consent to," and the Court refused it. Then the old lawyer more firmly insisted that his client be admitted to bail.

Leech was about to rise to resist this also. At that moment, however, a dispatch was handed him. It was from his friends at the national capital, and stated that Major Welch had secured an order to admit Captain Allen to bail. Leech turned the dispatch over carelessly, face downward, leant back, and spoke aloud to the man who had handed it to him. "I'll send an answer. Wait a little." He rose.

This motion, he said, he should be glad to assent to, and, indeed, was about to propose himself, as such novel circumstances had arisen; and he should be glad to do anything that would please his friends, especially Major Welch, and he hoped he might add his congratulations to the young couple and his friend Major Welch, if it was not too late. This was received with

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bows more or less perfunctory; only old Mr. Bagby bowed low with mock gratitude, and General Legaie, twirling his mustache, said something aloud about a "shameless dog." The bail was quickly arranged, and Captain Allen walked out amid the cheers of the crowd. The delight of the multitude about the court-green, among whom the story had rapidly spread, knew no bounds. There are some things that strike chords in all hearts, and the happiness of a newly married couple is one of them. The negroes had responded to it as quickly as the whites; and when Captain Allen, who, immediately on the announcement, had been joined by his wife, walked from the court-room, with her at his side blushing and pale by turns, but with her face full of joy, the enthusiasm of the crowd knew no bounds. Whites and blacks crowded up to congratulate him, and to shake his hand and say pleasant things to his wife.

Through this throng Leech had to push as he made his way from the court-house, his bundle of papers hugged to his chest. His sallow cheeks were deadly white, and his face was drawn and white; but the look of baffled rage in his eyes was not seen, as he kept them turned to the

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ground. He saw many whom he had deemed
his closest followers pressing up to be seen
among those who congratulated Captain Allen,
and he knew by these weather-cocks that the
wind had turned and the game was lost.

CHAPTER XLVII

SOME OF THE THREADS ARE TIED

IN the old stories, the climax used to be considered attained when the young couple became engaged. Like the hero and heroine of the fairy tales of our youth, in that golden land of "Once-upon-a-time," all that was to be told after they became engaged was that "they married and lived happily ever after." In the modern stories, however, this seems to be but the beginning of new adventures. Marriage, which used to be the entrance to bliss unending, appears to be now but the "gate of the hundred sorrows;" and the hero and heroine wed only to find that they loved someone else better, and pine to be disunited. They spend the rest of their lives trying to get unmarried. Nothing is so unconventional as to love one's own husband or wife, and nothing so tame as to live pure and true to one's vows in spirit as well as in fact.

It must be said, at once, that this is not a

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story of that kind. The people described in it knew nothing of that sort of existence. Any reader who chooses to go farther in this history must do so with the full knowledge that such is the case, and that the married life of the young couples will be found as archaic and pure as that of our first parents, before modern wisdom discovered that the serpent was more than the devil, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil more than a tree of knowledge. Still, when we have come so far together, it is necessary to go a little farther.

Thus, it must be briefly explained, for the benefit of those who may be interested to know, what became of those whose story they have been following; and such as do not care to read farther, may leave off here and content themselves with knowing that they met, if not the fates they deserved, at least, the fates which life brought, and met them with undaunted hearts.

The temporary adjournment of the prosecution against Captain Allen was but preliminary to a continuance, and, finally, the case was altogether dismissed. The prosecution of Major Welch's son-in-law was a very different thing from that of a mere citizen of that unhappy section. But the investigation that followed proved

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triumphantly that Captain Allen's part in the movements that had taken place had been precisely what he asserted they were, and that he had done much to break up later the organization of night-riders.

Not that this was the end of the troubles in the Red Rock country, and in the section of which it formed a part, or of the struggle that went on between the people of that section and Leech and the other vultures who were preying on them. The talons of those vultures were too firmly imbedded to be easily dislodged. But in time, the last of the harpies was put to flight.

As for Leech, there is record of one of the name who, after holding the leadership of one party in his State, on the overthrow of that party by the outraged white people of the State, soon became a partisan on the victorious side. There is also record of a Leech who, having been during the "carpet-bagger" régime a man of large means and political prominence, was known at last mainly on account of an unsavory story of the manner in which he had tried to get rid of his wife, and marry another woman. Having been frustrated in that design through the efforts of a former political associate, a certain Colonel McRaffle, who attained a temporary

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celebrity on account of his disclosures before the Commission that investigated the frauds in the State, this Leech, it appears, fell into great want, and was nursed through his last illness by the faithful wife whom he had so ill-treated. Readers may decide for themselves whether either of these was the once supreme "carpet-bagger" dictator of Red Rock—if, indeed, they both were not the same person.

But to narrate all this would lead this history into wholly other lines.

The day after her marriage, Ruth received a deed which had just been recorded, conveying to her the part of Red Rock which Major Welch had bought of Still and restored to Jacquelin, and with the deed a letter from Jacquelin, asking her, as Steve's wife, to accept it from him and Rupert as a wedding present. The letter said things about Steve over which Ruth shed tears, though her radiant face showed how happy she was.

"Dr. Moses" had a somewhat curious career. Jacquelin's statement of what he saw the night of the attempted assassination of Middleton cast suspicion on Moses; and he was arrested, and arraigned before a negro magistrate. It was shown that he had made prophecies or threats

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against Middleton. But Leech appeared as his counsel, and at least twenty witnesses testified to the man's having been at the Bend all night. So he was at once discharged; and the shooting of Middleton was, in the public press, generally charged to the bands of midnight assassins, to whom it was the custom at that time to attribute all outrages that were committed—at least, where the objects were Northern men. One journal, indeed, alleged that Jacquelin himself was concerned in it, and charged that his crowning infamy was the attempt to place the shooting on “a reputable colored physician in the County—one of the few men whose education had enabled them to enter one of the learned professions.” The prophecies of Moses, however, greatly increased his reputation; his prestige and power became tremendous, and he was, perhaps, the person most feared in the whole County by his own race. Finally, indeed, he became such a dread to them that they rose, and he was run away from the Bend by his own people. Nothing more was heard of him in the County. But some years later, in one of the adjoining States, a negro was hanged by a mob, and an account of it was published in the papers. The press of one side stated that he confessed

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not only the terrible crime for which he was hanged, but, in addition, several others sufficiently heinous to entitle him to be classed as one of the greatest scoundrels in the world. The other side asserted that he was a physician of standing, who had at one time enjoyed a large practice in another State, from which he had been run out by the bands of masked desperadoes who had terrorized that section. In proof, it declared that "he died calling on all present to meet him in heaven." As both sides, however, concurred in giving his name as Moses —, and his former domicile as Red Rock, we have some ground for supposing that "Dr. Moses," as Andy Stamper said, at last came to the end of his rope.

Did our limits permit, the marriage of several other couples besides Steve and Ruth might be chronicled. But the novelist cannot tell at one time all he knows. Be this known, however, that as some citadels are captured by assault, so others capitulate only after long siege; and this both Jacquelin and Captain Thurston discovered.

When the engagement of Captain Thurston and Miss Elizabeth Dockett was announced to Mrs. Dockett, it was by Miss Dockett herself.

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It must be left to the members of Mrs. Dockett's own sex to say whether Mrs. Dockett was surprised or not. But if Miss Elizabeth had struck her flag, Mrs. Dockett had not by any means struck hers. Her first pronunciamento was that she had not a word to say against Captain Thurston, who was, she admitted, a perfect gentleman; but that she wanted him to understand that everyone who came into that house had to dance to the tune of Dixie. This the Captain professed he was prepared to do, and would only ask that he might sometimes be allowed to warble in his own room the Star-Spangled Banner.

Not long after this, the Red Rock case was to come up again. But a little time before the term of court at which it was to be tried, an offer of compromise was made to Jacquelin. It was said that Hiram Still had one night seen the "Indian Killer" standing by the red-rock, and that this influenced him to make his proposition. Later on, some said the apparition was Rupert, who had just come back from the West a stalwart youngster as tall as Jacquelin.

Under the terms of Still's offer the mansion and a part of the plantation were to become Jacquelin's and Rupert's, while the overseer's

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house, with something like half the estate, was to remain Mr. Still's.

Jacquelin was, at first, unwilling to make any terms with Still. He was satisfied that, with the evidence he now had, he should win his case, and that Still could be sent to the penitentiary. But Bail was to sit in the case again, and the upper court was composed of Leech's creatures; so that no one could be sure of winning his cause, whatever its merits; while Still himself was reported to be so feeble that his death was expected at any time.

There were, perhaps, other reasons that moved Jacquelin. Miss Thomasia, when she heard of Still's offer promptly urged its rejection. She would never allow him to be lawful owner of an acre of their old place, though she added with a sigh, she herself would, perhaps, not live to set foot there again.

"Yes, you shall," said Jacquelin; and he wrote that night and accepted the terms proposed. His first act was the fulfilment of his pledge to his mother on her death-bed; and she was laid beside her husband in the Red Rock burying-ground, in sight of the old garden in which she had walked as a bride.

When Miss Thomasia entered the Red Rock

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door on the day of her return, she stopped and clasped her hands tightly. The eyes bent on her, from the walls seemed to beam on her a welcome.

“Well, thank God for all His mercies!” she said, fervently; and, taking her seat in an arm-chair, she spent most of the afternoon knitting silently and looking round her with softened eyes and lips that moved constantly, though they uttered no sound. Later she went out into the garden, and looked at the remnants of the flowers that were left; and there Steve and his wife found her when they came to take tea with her that first evening, and there, still later, Jacquelin brought Blair to tell of his new happiness.

THE END

