

ONLY A ROSE. A BURLAR'S STORY, BY WALTER LEARNED. "As some of the actors in the following scene are still living, neither the true locations nor the names are given...

At the time I speak of I was working with one of the whitest men that was ever in my profession. Him and me was partners for about six years, and I'm proud to say that never was a word between us. A sudden change from an active to a sedentary was too much for his sensitive system and he died some years ago.

So we fetched round that way about the time they were a-clearing off the table, and we sees 'em above the silver in a closet and lock the door. Nothing but a light pine door, you know.

That's tempting Providence," says Jim. I didn't say nothing, not knowing in what light Providence looked at silver spoons, but I know it was tempting us.

The house wasn't far back from the street, but back of the house was a lawn, and a verandah ran round the corner of the house. The dining-room was a back room, opening out of the sitting room. Now you wouldn't want a better thing than that, would you?

It don't make any difference how careful you be, or how well all your plans are laid. Sometimes they'll go wrong. But I tell you it's mighty discouraging when everything's fixed as far as you can fix it to bring up against something you couldn't help. It takes the pluck right out of a man. We had arranged that I was to get in and Jim was to keep watch. Jim usually took the outside work. It requires a different sort of talent. A man may be utterly at inside business and yet fail utterly as an outsider, and vice versa. If I had time I should like to point out the lines of difference.

Of course there wasn't any difficulty about getting in. Gentlemen in my profession all know that it's perfectly simple to get into any house as far as that goes. I stepped up on the back verandah. Lovely night it was; just a small slice of moon, rather too much to suit me, but it looked nice as I stood on the verandah for a minute. Then I put a long thin blade up between the windows and opened 'em and stepped into the dining-room. Pretty little room it was—hardwood floor, side-board and corner cupboard, pictures on the walls, and on one side the closest I was a-looking for. I stepped to the side-board a minute to take a nip, seeing a bottle of three-star brandy there, and then I stepped over and opened the closet with my skeleton key. Pretty lot of stuff it was when I turned my dark lantern on it. Nothing tremendous, but a nice respectable lot of silver that was a credit to the family.

I had a green baize bag to pack it in, and I had it all in, up to the spoons, when I struck in the spoon-holder a small, very thin, old-fashioned silver spoon, and the bowl was all marked with little teeth. I looked at it for a minute. "Here," says I, "is a spoon what has come down in the family, and from grandfather down all the kids has chewed it." It seemed a pity to take it, and as it wasn't heavy, being pretty well worn down, it was that tender hearted that I put it back on the shelf again. This little bit of thoughtfulness on my part gave me a tender glow, and I laid down the bag and went over to the side-board to sample the three-star brandy again, when I heard a step outside. I shut off my gim and stopped just where I was. I thought maybe Jim had piped something, and come up to give me the tip. Then I heard somebody cough kindly light, and I heard two or three notes on a guitar. Blowed if I wasn't mad. I crept to the window and peeped out. There he was—cursed fool—a-standing there in the grass with his guitar over his shoulder and a-strummin' away like mad. Pretty soon he began to sing—some rotten nonsense about his being a gondolier, about if we only took for Heaven's sake as much pains as we did for women's we'd all be angels, and a-ending with "Hush—hush—hush," very soft and delicate. I'd a hushed him if I could get a rap at him. Liable to wake up the whole house. I heard somebody stirring up stairs when he commenced the second song—worse than the other—something about her being made of Athens, and giving him back his heart, and a lot of nonsense at the end. I'd like to have had a crack at him. There I was. I wasn't to go out the front way, and I couldn't go out of the back way, while he was standing there, and I didn't know how soon the family might come down and ask him in to take some refreshments. Nice place for me, wasn't it? I with all the silver in my green baize bag. It seemed as if there was more than four hundred verses to his song, and I was that excited and nervous about it that I should have had to have thrown the soup ladle at his head in another minute, when I heard another step on the grass. I was a-wondering whether I could stand a duet or not, when, by George, I see it was Jim. Oh, he was a fly boy, Jim was. He'd got onto the

serenade, and he knew what a blamed nuisance it would be to me. I got close to the window where I could hear and see everything. The young fellow was just beginning another verse when Jim tapped him on the shoulder. "What are you doing here?" says Jim very gruff.

"A serenading," says the young fellow. "What a!" says Jim. "A serenading," says he. "What's that?" says Jim. "Why it's—it's—oh, it's singing, you know," says the young fellow. "Who got you to do it?" says Jim. "Who what?" says the young fellow.

"Who got you to do it?" says Jim. "Nobody," says the young fellow. "Are you a-singing here without permission? Aint you got no license?" says Jim.

"Why," says the young fellow, "I tell you I'm a serenading." "I don't know nothing about no serenading," says Jim. "I know that I'm hired as night-watchman on this ere street, and if you're a-singing without any orders I'm-a-going to run you in."

So saying Jim walks the young fellow off. Neat, wasn't it? I was a-feeling pretty good at the way he'd got me out of it. But I'd heard steps a-stirring up stairs and I thought I'd better cut as soon as I could. I poured out a snifter of the three-star, and was just a-going to down it, when I heard a step in the hall and the door close by me was opened just a crack.

"Harry!" I heard her say. I mumbled something. "It was lovely, dear, so sweet. But you must go and hurry. Papa is coming down the stairs." She reached her hand through the door. There was something in her fingers. I took it. At that minute the light streamed in from the front-room, I saw my green baize bag, too far off to get it, and a man coming towards the dining-room, and then I jumped through the window, out onto the lawn and ran. When I got well out into the street I stopped and looked at what she'd give me. It was a white rose, and by the way, that was all I got for my night's work.

A MODERN OPEPUS. A TALE OF KENTUCKY PIONEER LIFE. When a settlement was first made in South Kentucky, one of the great dangers of the colony was the universal presence of the wolf. Around the "Green River" lay heavy forests, into which no one ventured to go unless ready to meet the savage animal at every turn. Barnyards were robbed of calves and pigs, belated wayfarers were attacked, and sometimes even a child was carried away.

Henderson—one of the most prosperous towns near the mouth of the Green River—took its name from a family of wealthy planters located there. Now, they had an old black slave called Dick, who was a skillful fiddler, but good for little else. He was the most important "fiddler" of color in all the country, in constant request for forty miles around, for cornshuckings, weddings, and break-downs. His master was wealthy and good-natured, and allowed him to have very much his own way.

It happened once that a grand marriage festival took place among the colored people at a plantation about six miles from Henderson. Old Dick was summoned, of course, to act as musician and master of ceremonies. He put on his blue coat, with long tails and flaming gilt buttons, and rolled a brilliant cravat round an immensely high shirt collar. He allowed the younger niggers to leave before him, because, though he liked punctuality, he would never demean himself by unbecoming haste; and when he was finally ready, he sallied forth alone.

His way lay, for the most part, through a forest, where there was no wagon-road for miles. It was a solitude so dismal that the very silence seemed full of echoes. As Dick went on, visions passed before his eyes of a warm and cheerful room, crowded with happy people, of homage yielded to himself by old and young, as to the Viceroys of King Etiquette. Still, in spite of dignity, he could not but hasten his steps. Perhaps he was anxious to get out of the woods as quickly as possible; and well he might be. There was a rout of wolves in the distance on every side. They were yelling behind him, and the dismal sound was echoed from the front; on right and left they were rushing with uncouth howls through the forest in search of prey. Gradually the sounds came nearer. They seemed to be closing around him. He began to run, and heard them tearing along all the faster. The wood seemed alive with devils, and a pack of hungry wolves appeared charging upon him from every side.

But he soon stopped running. He knew that the wolf is very cautious of attacking a human being, and that if you walk steadily without seeming afraid, it still more hesitating. The old fiddler now kept on at a regular pace, but the danger continued to increase. Every moment Dick shuddered as a black form rushed by, and he heard its jaws snap with a ring like that of a steel-trap. The pack was evidently gathering; but he knew that a little way there was an old clearing with a deserted hut in the middle, and this he hoped to reach before the wolves began their attack.

They were growing bolder every instant. He could see their green eyes sparkling through the thickets around. Then some of them swept by close to his legs, snapping at them as they passed. He struck at them with his fiddle; the strings jarred loudly, and, oh! what relief came to his shivering soul when he saw that the sound made the brutes stand off. He immediately struck his hands across the chords. A wolf that was within two yards of him leaped aside in terror. He walked rapidly forward, snatching his violin again and again to terrify the creatures that beset him.

Soon he reached the clearing. It was a broad field covered with snow, and in the centre of it stood the hut of which Dick was in search. He bounded hastily over the white surface, scraping the string with his hand

until they shrieked harshly, and the wolves roared again with horror. They paused at the edge of the clearing, with tails between their legs, looking after the singular being whom they desired, but feared to attack. Their savage instinct was instantly renewed, however, and again, yelling, they gave chase, their black shadows hurrying like phantoms over the snow. Dick still continued to strike his fiddle, but even this would not have saved him, had he not reached the hut just as the whole pack was at his heels. In he rushed, slammed the rickety door behind him, clambered up through a hole in the roof, and perched on the gable, with the frail timent literally shaking beneath his weight. The door of the cabin did not for a moment withstand the attack of the wolves, which immediately thronged the interior. They were now wild with rage. They leaped up, they gnashed their teeth, they closed their jaws with that sharp snap, so horrible to the ears of the fiddler, as he almost fell from his roost in despair; but he remembered the effect of his violin. He had not yet drawn the bow from its case, but now did so, and struck it shrieking across the strings, forced all the while to keep his legs kicking high in the air to avoid the trap-like fangs that were only a few inches below. In an instant the yells ceased, and the negro went on, drawing forth the most wild, hysterical and grating sounds from his friendly violin.

This barbarous noise, however, had no other effect upon the creatures than to astound them. Even wolves cannot be charmed by bad music. When the first surprise was over they renewed their attack. Presently a great gaunt head lit by two eyes like globes of green fire, was thrust up through the roof!

"Who's dar!" shrieked the negro, mad with horror. An instinct drove him. Just as there seemed no thread of fate to hold him from being dragged down and made the prey of these ravenous brutes, he once more smote his bow upon the fiddle and began with desperate energy to play "Yankee Doodle." The loud inspiring notes caught instant silence among the hungry rout below. Orpheus piping to the brutes was no unmeaning fable. Dick won a kindred triumph. He was astonished at the effect of his music. Around him was the most attentive audience that ever listened to his fiddling. But whenever there was the slightest pause the wolves sprang forward and commenced their howl again. Thus the black was forced to labour away, flinging his feet into the air, redoubling his vigour, and filling the clearing with this extraordinary harmony. A feeling of professional pride gradually stole over him in spite of his alarm. Now and then a thought of the wedding, and of the warm lights, of the sweetened whiskey, of the whirling dance, of the homage and admiration of the colored people came regretful into his mind; but he knew that he was safe so long as he continued to play; so he went, from Yankee Doodle to Hail Columbia, searching his memory for every lively strain to charm away the ferocity of the strange audience that cooched around.

The pleasure and peril, as well as patience, came to an end. It was a cold night. Dick had walked far and fasted long; his arms were weary of their exercise; he began to feel benumbed, hungry, exhausted. Nothing, however, could be done but play on, for at every pause these fearful growls began again. There was no satisfying that sluggish troop of connoisseurs, fidgeting as they sat, with lolling tongues and perched ears, through several hours of the wildest night that Dick had ever known. The moon sank low in the west. A deeper shadow crept from under the arches of the forest. The stars seemed paler, the trees barer and gaunter, and the troop of wolves to multiply instead of diminishing.

At the wedding feast the people became alarmed. Dick was the soul of punctuality. What could have happened? Their anxiety for his safety and desire for his fiddling impelled them to see him. So with lanterns and clubs they went out through the plantations to look for him, and when they found him he was still perched on the roof of the old hut, sawing upon his fiddle, running over all his tunes again, but ready to drop with weariness and cold. The wolves were driven off, and they reluctantly quitted the spot. Their forms might be seen lingering on the skirts of the woods, and as the rescuers passed on with their old friend, a howl, rising at intervals, and an occasional rustling among the bushes, showed that the pack was still in wary, and determined but useless pursuit.

It was long past midnight when Dick arrived with his fiddle. All that could be done was to go on all next day instead of breaking up in the morning. The fires blazed high, and their light blazed in ruddy streams across the floor. The corn cakes were hot and the sweet whiskey was abundant, so Dick was cheerful after his adventures, and for many, many hours he went on playing to a happy crowd of revellers those airs of merriness, which, to save his life he had been playing all night to a pack of wolves.

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