

[CONTINUED FROM TENTH PAGE.]

How dearly he loves me! The very fervour of his love makes the task I have set myself seem harder of accomplishment, and yet renders me the more determined to perform it.

He evidently sees by my face that there is something amiss.

'Well, little woman,' he says, 'what is troubling that busy brain of yours now?' The reply he receives must occasion him in a very abandon of grief.

'Why, Kloria, child?' he exclaims, 'what ever is the matter?'

'Oh, Nigel!' I sob, 'don't—don't do it.' He takes my tear-wet face between his hands, and gazes into my eyes in a puzzled manner.

Then he presses his lips to mine.

'Don't do what?' he asks.

For answer, I burst into tears afresh, and he takes me tenderly into his arms, and pillows my head upon his shoulder.

He does not say anything more until I myself speak, and that I do as soon as my outburst has so far subsided as to allow of my uttering half-a-dozen consecutive words coherently.

But a covert glance at his face enables me to see, by its expression, that he mere than half suspects the cause of my grief.

'Nigel,' I say at last, with woefully tremulous lips, and a sob here and there, 'I have been thinking about your oath of vengeance, and—and it has made me so—so unhappy.'

He positively frowns now, and I can see at a glance that I have angered him.

But he loyally suppresses his feelings, and imprints another tender kiss upon my lips.

'And why should you be unhappy, pet?' he asks.

'Because it is so very terrible—your having sworn to avenge poor Olga by exacting a life for hers.'

'It is terrible,' he agrees, 'but it must, and shall, be done.'

'But, Nigel,' I venture to expostulate, 'it would be so very wrong for you to take the matter into your hands.'

'It would be just e,' he sternly answers.

'Nay,' I return, growing bolder now that I have really embarked upon my undertaking, 'the execution of justice does not pertain to private individuals.'

He makes an impatient movement, but forces a laugh.

'Why, Kloria,' he says, 'you speak quite learnedly. Have you been poring over some musty old tome on ethics, or jurisprudence, or something of that sort?'

'Don't laugh at me, Nigel,' I say, reprovingly. 'No; I have been poring over no old tome, musty or otherwise. I say what my conscience dictates. You must leave the punishment of that wicked woman in the hands of Him to whom we are all accountable.'

'I must carry out my oath of vengeance,' he says, more sternly than before.

'But, Nigel,' I again expostulate, 'you—'

He interrupts me almost fiercely.

'Would you have me falsify my oath?' he demands.

I feel almost afraid to continue my opposition.

But the thought that the cause I am advocating is a righteous one, nerves me to do so.

'I would have you be true to yourself, and to right,' I answer.

'And that is what I intend,' he declares. I begin to feel desperate.

By what means am I to carry my point? It seems almost hopeless.

Nevertheless, I do not abandon hope entirely.

I still have one or two arguments to try.

'Now, Nigel, listen to me,' I say, coaxingly. 'You know, as well as I do, that it would not be right for you to take that woman's life.'

He bites his lip almost viciously, and the frown on his brow deepens.

'How so?' he demands.

'Because it would be—'

I hesitate.

How can I utter that awful word which the completion of the sentence requires?

'Well?' he queries.

And I burst out desperately with—

'It would be murder!'

He winces.

But, alas! there is in his face no sign of relenting.

'What folly is this!' he exclaims, harshly. 'It is not folly, Nigel,' I wildly insist. 'It is true, true, true!'

And again my pent up feelings find relief in a passionate outburst of tears.

His frown gives place to a look of distress.

'For Heaven's sake,' Kloria, my darling,'

he exclaims, 'don't! I shall begin to wish I had never taken that oath.'

The words buoy up my flagging spirits. They seem to suggest that there is still a hope of his coming round to my view of the matter.

And, perhaps, for that reason, I weep even more distressingly than before.

'I wish with all my heart you never had taken it,' I sob. 'But, even as it is, it need not be fulfilled.'

He is silent for a moment.

Then he asks—

'Why so?'

'Because such an oath is unlawful,' I answer, 'and, therefore, does not bind.'

He shakes his head gloomily.

'I cannot see the matter in that light,' he says. 'Even if my just desire to avenge the death of Olga Stanisloff did not impel me to seek the life of her murderer, the fact that I have sworn to exact vengeance to the full, would necessitate my doing so. An oath is ever binding, and must be fulfilled, let the consequences be what they may. Cease your pleading, Kloria. You cannot turn me from my purpose. Olga's murderer shall die!'

He puts me from him abruptly, as that last dread word escapes his lips, and strides away.

I feel heart-broken at the failure of my efforts to save him from that terrible crime upon which his mind is so desperately set, and in the extremity of my grief I throw myself upon the ground and bury my face in my hands.

I feel that there is only one resource left to me.

I can do nothing of myself.

I can only pray that God will avert the threatened evil.

And pray I do, with a fervour that never has characterised my prayers before.

And as I pour forth my supplications, my grief subsides; and at last I rise to my feet, with a feeling that I have been heard, and that Nigel will be saved from the awful consequences of his oath.

CHAPTER V.

'At last!'

'Yes, Mr. Josslyn,' with a smile, 'at last we do meet again.'

'I have been longing to get back,' he goes on, quickly; 'but I could not manage to leave town, not even for a day until yesterday. I arrived in Coldmere late last night, and, knowing what a favorite walk of yours this cliff road is, I started in this direction directly I had had my breakfast, hoping that I might meet you.'

'Which you have done,' laughing amusedly at the fervour of his tone. 'It is a wonder, though, that you have met me, for I had planned to drive into Highminster with my—er—with my cousin; only, at the last moment almost he postponed the drive until this afternoon.'

'I thank the gods that he did; but, if you had promised to drive anywhere with me, nothing would have induced me to postpone the pleasure.'

'But you are not, Nigel,' in a demure tone.

'I am not,' Mr. Josslyn agrees. 'I—'

The rest of the sentence, however, he does not complete, and we walk on in silence, until, suddenly, as we reach the Prior's Cross, he comes to an abrupt halt, of course compelling me to halt, too.

'Do you remember what—er—happened the last time we stood here?' he asks, in a low voice.

'Did anything in particular happen?' I inquire, in a doubtful tone. 'I really do not remember that anything did.'

'You are saying this to torment me,' he declares, hotly. 'You surely must be, for you cannot have so completely forgotten our parting as you would make me believe you have. It was here we said, not our "Good-bye," but our "Au revoir," and you gave me a "hope" which—'

'Oh! I interrupt, quickly, 'that is what you are alluding to, is it? Of course I remember that, and I am quite ready to fulfil that "hope," if you wish me to do so.'

'It is the dearest wish of my heart,' he returns, in a tone which I mentally stigmatise as "most ridiculous." 'All the weary time I have been away it has scarcely been out of my thoughts.'

'How absurd you are!' I laugh, gaily.

'You think so?' he smiles back. 'Well, never mind if I am; we won't quarrel over that. And now—the smile in his eyes deepens—'I am going to seal our compact.'

'What in the world do you mean?' I ask. 'Seal our compact! How?'

'I will show you,' and, striding quickly forward, he seizes me in his arms and lays his lips upon mine in a long, lingering, passionate kiss.

His action takes me so much by surprise, that I cannot even make an attempt to evade him; but, when I do at last manage to gather my scattered wits together, I wrench myself out of his arm, and turn upon him like a veritable little fury.

'How dare you?' I pant. 'How dare you put such an insult upon me? But you shall be punished for it. I will tell Sir Nigel of your impertinence, and you may be very sure that the punishment he will mete out to you will not be a light one,' and, without another word or glance, I would turn away, only he bars my path.

'It is my turn now to ask you what you mean?' he says, in a resolute tone. 'You declared that I have insulted you, but I really fail to see in what way I have done so. It can scarcely be called an insult for a man to kiss the girl who has just promised to marry him.'

'Who has just promised to marry him?' I repeat, stupidly. 'I have not promised to marry you.'

Very, very pale he grows. Then—

'For Heaven's sake do not tell me that you have been playing with me,' he grasps. 'Of course I have not,' I retort, in an impatient tone. 'I have not the faintest idea of your meaning. I say again, that I have never promised to marry you—'

'Not in so many words, perhaps,' he interposes, quickly; 'but you have done so indirectly.'

'I have not,' I interpose in my turn, and then, a sudden terrible suspicion assailing me, I go on with some vehemence: 'Why don't you explain yourself? for it is evident that we are at cross purposes.'

'Ah!—with a long breath—I have never thought of that. Perhaps we are, and yet you clearly gave me to understand that you knew what my "hope" was.'

'Let me explain now,' I cry, my terrible suspicion increasing. 'I—I thought that you wanted me to—promise that I would go with you on—an exploring expedition—'

'You really thought that,' he interrupts, gazing at me as though he would read the very inmost recesses of my soul.

'I really and truly did. I have been thinking that ever since I last saw you. Do not tell me that I was—that I am mistaken.'

'But I must tell you so, for you are mistaken. What a delusion we both have been laboring under! I thought that you understood that I love you, while you thought—but, Kloria, it is not too late for me to tell you of my love, and ask you now for yours; say that it is not, my darling. I have loved you even from that day when we travelled down together from Giffman Junction to Coldmere, and I shall love you as long as I live.'

'Do not say that,' I entreat. 'Do not let me think that I have ruined your life, for—for what you wish can never be.'

'Kloria, my darling, my love, have pity,' he bursts out, passionately. 'If you do not love me now, you must, you will love me in the end. Such a love as mine must win itself a return. Promise to be my wife—'

'I cannot,' I interrupt, thinking that it will be best for him to learn the truth at once.

'Mr. Josslyn, I—I am not free. I am—engaged to my cousin.'

'So this is the end of my love-dream,' Leonard Josslyn says slowly. And I could cry aloud with pity; the pain in his voice is so terribly intense. 'Well, Fate has been against me, so I can but bow my head and submit to her decree. I will say good-bye to you now; but, if in the future you should ever need a friend, one who would give his life itself to render you a service, always remember that you have such a one in me.'

'Thank you,' I whisper; then, yielding to sudden uncontrollable impulse, I continue; 'There is something you can do for me now, Mr. Josslyn, if you will only do it.'

'And that is?'

'Persuade Nigel to give up his revenge. I know the whole story, and he declares he can never be at peace until, she his enemy, is dead. You belong to the same society as he does. Do help me to persuade him that mercy is better than vengeance. he knows that the wretched woman will, some day be placed in his power—'

'She will be placed in his power a week this very night, though he is not yet aware of the date,' Leonard Josslyn interposes, in strangely quiet tones. 'We have discovered her place of abode, so I'll advise—'

'Oh save him, save him from himself; as you love me help me now,' I cry distractedly, scarcely knowing what I do say. 'Do not let him learn the truth; if you do, he will assuredly kill her and then—'

With a wail of anguish I bury my face in my hands, and during a long space no sound save the hoarse murmuring of the sea disturbs the chill silence around us; then the voice of the man beside me once more falls upon my pain-dulled ears.

'For your sake, Nigel I'll advise shall be saved,' he says, in low, but steady, tones. 'Ask me not how, or when, or where this deed shall be accomplished, it shall be. And now, my love—my very life itself—farewell.'

And in another instant I am alone.

'A letter for you, Miss Kloria.'

Indifferently enough I take it, but quickly my nervous curiosity as to the writing on the envelope. The letter is from Leonard Josslyn. It bears the London postmark, and runs thus—

'Be at rest. Your enemy, his enemy, is dead. Be happy with the man you love. That you may indeed be so

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"LEONARD JOSSELYN."

'Dead! she is dead!' I muttered aloud, after a long pause, with an involuntary shiver.

'Yes; she is dead!' a voice echoes near me; and, looking round, with a start, I see that Nigel is standing by my side. 'I, too, have had a letter from Leonard Josslyn,' he continues, gravely, 'in which he explains his reason for taking my vengeance on his own shoulders. And, child—with sudden passion—"you have saved me, but you have baulked me of my revenge."

'Do not say that you regret it,' I plead. 'You must not, you shall not. Heavens knows that—that I never dreamt of this'—touching the latter lying in my lap; 'but since the wretched woman is dead, put all thought of her out of your heart, and remember only our love.'

Fierce is the struggle which rages within him. It is clearly evident in the deep frown which wrinkles his forehead, in the heaving of his broad chest, in the lurid glow which has flashed into his sombre eyes. But at last—

'It shall be as you will, he says, slowly. 'I will sever, to-morrow, my connection with the society, and from this hour I cast all thought of the woman Rukoff out of my mind. He, who, for your dear sake, has risked his soul to save me from my oath of vengeance, bids me to make you happy. I will make you happy. Henceforth, my sweet—my wife—there shall be no vestige of a cloud between us. I loved Olga Stanisloff with a boy's mad passion, but you I love with a man's love—steadfast, abiding.'

He does, he loves me, even as I love him. But, looking down upon Leonard Josslyn's letter, and remembering what he has done for my sake, I cannot keep the hot tears from blinding my eyes; for, truly, he, too, has loved me well.

TEXAS RANGERS.

They Caught the Enemy at a Wedding and They Surrendered.

During the thirties and forties there was a rough, picturesque fight between Mexicans, Comanches and Texans to determine who should inherit the land of Texas. They chased one another over the plains, killing and being killed. The prominent figures in this wild debate were the famous Texas Rangers, commanded by Capt. Jack Hayes.

If a man wished to join the Rangers, he had to pass an examination in which four questions were asked: 'Can you ride a bronco? Can you hit a man with a six-shooter at one hundred yards? Are you willing to take odds against yourself? Will you obey orders? If the applicant said 'Yes' to these questions, he was enrolled among the Rangers.

Civilization uses rough, ready men for its pioneers. When they have built bridges and constructed roads, the pioneers are disbanded. Texas disbanded its Rangers. Then, ten years after, the state reorganized them in order, to use the picturesque phrase of Remington's 'Crooked Trails,' 'to carry the law into the chaparral.'

The cowmen of Texas had begun trailing their stock to Abilene, Kansas, where a railroad carried the cattle East. But bands of outlaws rounded up battle on the trail, and the six-shooter determined the property right. The ranchmen went to the Legislature of Texas and persuaded it to appropriate two hundred thousand dollars to reorganize the Ranchers for two years service. Their duty was to carry the law into the chaparral, regardless of judges and sheriffs, who were in league with the cattle-stealers.

It was a terrifying sight. With its enormous ears spread out like sails, and emitting shrill notes of rage, the monster came thundering over the ground like a runaway locomotive. The hunter fired another shot, missed; his nerve was shaken, and throwing down his rifle, he sought safety in flight.

Near at hand was a steep hill, and to this he directed his steps, for being but slightly acquainted with the climbing powers of the elephant, he thought his pursuer might be baffled by the steepness of the ascent. It was a terrible disappointment to find that the elephant could climb a hill as quickly as he could, good runner as he was.

Their reorganization was very elastic. It made them United States marshals and deputy sheriffs. In fact, it was so elastic that, when circumstances demanded, the Rangers were judge, jury and executioner. The spirit of adventure filled the ranks with young men who were fine riders and dead shots. How thoroughly the Rangers did their work is illustrated by this narrative:

One night sixteen masked men took Doctor Brazel and two of his boys from their beds, and deaf to the cries of wife and daughter, hung the doctor and one son to a tree. The other son escaped by running into a field of high corn. The lynchers were men of property, and no one dared to suggest that they should be punished.

Captain Hall, of the Rangers, being determined that the law should get a hold in that county, sent out detectives, who reported that the lynchers would be at a wedding on a certain night. He surrounded the house, and demanded the surrender of the men. The lynchers returned word that they would kill Hall and his rangers.

'All right,' said Hall. 'Get your women and children out of the house.'

When they had departed, Hall sprang on to the gallery and shouted, 'Now, gentlemen, go on and kill the Rangers! But if you don't surrender, the Rangers will kill you.' They surrendered.

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With Alarming Effect.

An old journal (dated January 16, 1797) gives the following interesting account of the effect that was produced by the sight of the first silk hat worn in London:—

John Hetherington, a haberdasher, of the Strand, was arraigned before the Lord Mayor yesterday on a charge of breach of the peace and inciting to riot, and was required to give bonds in the sum of \$500. It was in evidence that Mr. Hetherington, who is well connected, appeared on the public highway wearing upon his head what he called a silk hat (which was offered in evidence), a tall structure having a shiny lustre, and calculated to frighten timid people.

As a matter of fact, the officers of the Crown stated that several women fainted at the unusual sight, while children screamed dogs yelped, and a younger son of Cordwainer Thomas, who was returning from a chandler's shop, was thrown down by the crowd which had collected, and had his right arm broken. For these reasons the defendant was seized by the guards and taken before the Lord Mayor.

In extension of his crime, the defendant claimed that he had not violated any law of the kingdom, but was merely exercising a right to appear in a head-dress of his own design, a right not denied to any Englishman.

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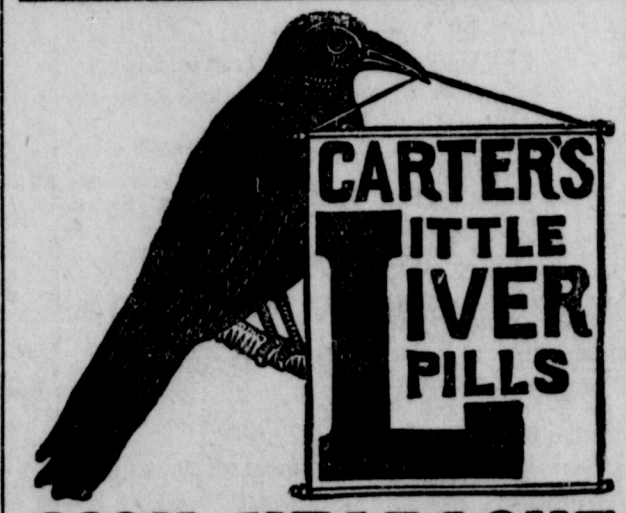
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