



Painted for OUTING by F. W. Read.

"A SHADE OF DISPLEASURE CROSSED HER FACE." (p. 457.)

TWO KENTUCKY THOROUGHBREDS.

BY FRANCIS J. HAGAN.



A WOMAN is always a dramatic figure in a scene where she is not expected. As the only figure in the scene, as well as on account of the incongruity, Miss Geraldine Woodford, commonly called Jerry by her intimates, might well excite attention as she strayed through a woodland as

wild, as dense, and as primeval as it was when Daniel Boone first looked upon it from the crest of the Cumberlands. She was simply and quaintly clad in a suit of light Kentucky tow-linen, which fitted her perfectly. There was a shadow beneath the long lashes of her dark and restless eyes, which looked like discontent.

In this sylvan sanctuary, apparently unprofaned of man, it was hard to realize that all about was the carefully kept and cultivated blue-grass country, and hardly half a mile away the beautiful home of her uncle, Colonel Woodford, which was just then infected with that contagion indigenous to the blue-grass region, a house party—an irruption of friends or relatives from adjoining counties who always come unheralded and stay until the fit wears off—a thoughtless throng of pleasure-seekers to whom peace and quiet was an unknown and undesired thing.

Miss Woodford was spending the vacation with her uncle, and perforce had all day been assisting her aunt and her cousin Florentine—a girl of about her own age—in the trying duties of hostess.

It was the unfashionable hour of five o'clock, and she had been possessed by the desire to stray away to an unfashionable distance to be alone.

Suddenly upon her reverie there was a startling interruption, the sound of

rapid" footsteps upon the soft turf behind her, a sudden stop, and the next moment a heavy thud as of some object striking the ground, and then the wrathful, constrained voice of a man pouring forth furious objurgations, There was a sound as of scuffling almost within an arm's length of her, and then the footsteps again, evidently withdrawing from the spot. Then the voice of a man, "Now will you do it? take that," followed by a swish as some keen weapon cleaved the air. She stretched out her hand and parted the tangled screen of shrubbery before her.

A strange and totally unexpected spectacle met her gaze, so ludicrous that in her overwrought condition she burst into quite uncontrollable laughter. There, in a little glade before her, upon one side of a large log, stood a horse with head down and forelegs braced before it, an attitude of ridiculous, unyielding, stubborn defiance. Upon the other side lay a young man rubbing a shoulder.

Looking hastily up at the first sound, his eyes met hers; and scrambling to his feet he stood, surprise, shame and consternation struggling for mastery in his frank, open face. Her own instantly assumed a very sober expression upon being discovered.

"I—I—I didn't know there was any, body: about," he blundered. "I—I beg your pardon, Miss Woodford. I—I didn't, really."

"I do not doubt it," she replied, relenting, and with difficulty restraining herself from laughter at the comical figure he had cut. "I can well believe you were not aware of having an audience—only an audience of one," she added, smiling at his renewed consternation as he glanced hastily about.

"I'm deuced glad of that," he said, with evident relief. "I—I hope you won't give me away to—to Miss Flora or anyone?" he added in such an appealing tone and look from his expressive gray eyes that she could but promise.

"I had no idea," she continued with feigned surprise, "that you placed so much weight upon Flora's good opinion——"

"Oh, I don't," he hastened to say with



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“YES! MY DOGS ARE GOING TO RUN TOO, YOU KNOW.” (p. 458.)

open-hearted, if ill-judged candor—"that is, of course, I'd rather you wouldn't say anything about it to her or anyone else. You see, they've all given me the laugh about this mare—particularly 'Gene—you know 'Gene? 'Gene Walker? Of course not—I forgot—he's worse than I am—doesn't know anybody here—"

"What an ignoramus he must be," interrupted the girl, laughing. "I thought you were the 'only' anchorite; the girls all call you the Hermit."

"Well, you see," explained the youth, sensible of this rebuke, "I've been so busy ever since I got out of college, trying to get the farm and everything in shape, that I haven't had time to get about much."

"You seem to get about a good deal, if all the fences knocked down and gates left open are any criterion."

"Don't you believe a word of it," broke in the young man hotly. "Every farmer in this county that finds a rail off his fence charges it up to us fox-hunters, when we haven't been within miles of his place, and I wouldn't ride a horse that I had to hunt gates for. Oh, that!" as she laughingly glanced at the equine statue of stubbornness across the log. "I don't ride her hunting, not yet, but I'll break her or die trying. She's Bonda, by imported Vagabond, and she can jump a ten-rail fence if she wants to, but she's a stubborn brute. But say," he added, with a comical grimace, "wasn't that a neat 'cropper' I came over the log?"

"Lovely," she assented. "Try it again."

"Excuse me," he said; "I might forget about the audience." Then they both laughed,

"In that case," she said, "the audience will not delay the game. It's time I was returning, anyhow," and with a pleasant adieu she started off.

"Hold on!" called the young man. "I'll show you the way home."

"Oh, I couldn't think of stopping your diversion—so sorry I interfered—and taking you so far out of your way."

"As to taking me out of the way, we've got to go right by my house. And as to finding your way, that isn't as easy as you think once" you get turned around."

Walking side by side, chatting pleasantly and as much at his ease with this young lady as if she had been a man,

about the things in which he was interested, horses and hounds and hunting, they followed an obscure bridle-path out of the woods and taking a short cut through the sweet-scented clover fields, came unexpectedly out of an old apple-orchard, with its low drooping boughs, upon a typical Kentucky homestead, a charming pastoral picture with its broad cool verandas, its weather-stained gables, its quaint old-fashioned casements, its broad halls and high ceilings, its host of flowering shrubs, which rioted in profusion over the lawn.

"This is my home," said Clay proudly. "Don't be frightened at the dogs," he added, as they bounded towards them; "they won't bite." But the caution was needless. Jerry betrayed not the least trepidation, but received them with frank fearlessness, which disarmed their suspicions at once; and the next moment, hound-like, they were fawning upon her, while she was patting their big heads with her dainty hands and her eyes were beaming with the light that could only come into those of a true lover of animals. Clay was lost in admiration. "Gad!" he thought, "there's a girl with nerve."

Then he came to her rescue, as with laughing gayety she repelled their boisterous caresses as they bounded upon her, threatening with their big paws to tear her dress to shreds in excess of delight. Laying about him with his riding whip he sent them howling away.

"How could you!" she exclaimed indignantly. "Why you are as cruel as can be. Here, old fellow, poor doggy," to that arch hypocrite, old Ranter, who at a respectful distance was howling vigorously, for the whip had touched him, and unused to such sympathy he was industriously making the most of it. "I don't wonder you can't manage your horse; that's no way to treat an animal."

"Oh! isn't it," said Clay much disconcerted at this indictment, and demurring stoutly to it. "I guess I don't; know anything about hounds or horses. I guess you and 'Gene are the *cestui-que-trust* of all that kind of knowledge in the universe;" this with fine sarcasm drawn from his legal studies. "Just wait until you have handled them as long as I have," he concluded, assuming a superior air that he felt to be unanswerable.

"I don't care," she retorted with a

woman's perverseness. "You know you can't manage Bonda, and I know that's the reason. Anybody can see what a proud-spirited animal she is," she argued. "You've just ruined her temper; that's what's the matter with her."

"Well," said Clay, smiling as the novelty of it struck him, "she has pretty nearly ruined mine, I'm thinking; and if you know so much about it, suppose you try your hand. If you break her you can have her."

"I wouldn't think of taking her from you," replied the girl, quite seriously, "but if you will let me I will try it, and if she suits me I will buy her from you. Papa has promised me a saddle-horse—I think she is just what I want. She is gentle enough, if humored, but you terrify and anger her. I know how to manage her."

And as she stroked the satin neck of the sleek thoroughbred, Clay could not help the conviction that the animal that would not appreciate the divine felicity of yielding to such a charmer and such soft blandishments was lost indeed to all human control. And when she leaned her head fondly against Bonda's soft coat they made such a pretty picture, the soft-eyed, clean-cut, blood-like head of the filly, so close to that of the beautiful, bronze-eyed, bronze-haired girl, that the young man could not conceal his admiration. Two Kentucky thoroughbreds he called them.

The undisguised admiration that burnt in the steel-gray eyes seemed suddenly to bewilder and confuse the young lady, as she glanced from the mare to the tall, handsome young man who stood before her, and with some embarrassment she inquired the direction of her home.

It was but a short distance, as the plantations joined, but before the journey was completed Clay, who did not altogether share Jerry's expressed confidence in her ability to manage Bonda, frankly expressed his misgivings, born of an intimate and somewhat trying knowledge of that capricious animal's moods, and endeavored to retract the promise he had made, declaring he could not contemplate the possibility of Jerry's getting hurt in such a quixotic attempt. But Jerry indignantly resented the implied doubt of her equestrian ability, and good-humoredly twitted him upon his fear of defeat, attributing his reluc-

tance to his dislike of having her accomplish what he had failed in doing.

He had promised to come over the next evening and bring Eugene Walker with him. He might have answered for himself; but whatever possessed him to embrace in that compact his old school-fellow, whose aversion to female society had always been even more marked than his own!

Next night as the twilight of the long summer evening gave way to the silvery glamor which the rising moon cast over the vast half-sphere of earth and sky, Miss Woodford and her cousin Florentine sat out upon the lawn before the Woodford home, silently enjoying the beauty and serenity of the summer night. Occasionally low tones came from the porch where the old folks sat, and at intervals a vagrant breath of air brought a whiff from Colonel Woodford's pipe, which mingled with the spicy odors of the night-blooming flowers like rare incense. A whippoorwill began his monotonous plaint from his nightly perch upon the woodpile, and an awakened mocking-bird in the pasture poured forth that low, liquid melody that is heard only from this king of feathered songsters on a summer night. Then the big gate that opened on the pike was faintly heard as it clanged shut after admitting someone on horseback.

Jerry, whom her cousin had found silent, distract, suddenly brightened up with expectancy. But only for a moment. An air of disappointment succeeded, as far down the stream a single horseman seemed vaguely outlined, appearing and disappearing, Jerry could not conceal her disappointment as she sank back on the rustic settee, exclaiming, "It's only that bumpkin, Mr. Simpson."

"Why, who in the world did you think it was?" laughed her cousin Flora.

"Why so disappointed? You surely did not expect Mr. Deatherage and his friend to-night," said the Colonel.

"Why not to-night? They promised to come."

"Yes, but that was before the rain—you surely don't think he would lose an opportunity to be with his dogs—he can while away an hour with us when it's too dry to fox-hunt.

They heard Flora greet the newcomer with an exclamation of surprise followed by light-hearted laughter.

"I don't believe that is Joe Simpson," said the Colonel; "doesn't sound like his voice. It can't be Clay Deatherage's friend, Eugene Walker, for they are inseparable, and, besides, I wouldn't think they would lose the chance to hunt after the fine rain we had this morning. Wonder who it is?"

But the problem did not seem likely of solution, as, the greeting over, the couple talked low and in monosyllables, and it was impossible to distinguish features in the shadowing obscurity of the shrubbery.

In one of the pauses when the mocking bird having shamed the whippoorwill into silence hushed, the silence was broken by a sound—a sound with a trailing refrain of echoes, so far, so faint, so fine, so elfin, that the fugue-like feignings seemed as if they might have come back from the horn of Diana, wound among the mountains.

"That's Clay Deatherage's horn," said Col. Woodford. "There never was another like it for tone and timbre. His grandfather brought it back from the Mexican war—it was a yard long, as straight as a stick and as black as ebony—the horn of a Spanish bull imported for the Mexican bull-fights. He cut it down until its tone suited him, but it takes a Deatherage to blow it."

Jerry was silent; she had not been used to young gentlemen placing any pleasure before that of being in her society, and she was thinking, promised to come over to-night."

But that was before the rain. She was mentally condoning his dereliction under such strong provocation, when Flora approached and mischievously informed her that she had endeavored to excuse her absence, but that Mr. Simpson's disappointment was so evident, she had volunteered to procure him the pleasure of her company.

"Run along like a good girl," Flora laughed, "and don't get too stuck up, because I have to admit that he came to see you."

"Oh, horrors! It's the other fellow's ox now! The shoe is on the other foot, is it! Well, I'll just pay you back in your own coin," Jerry laughed, as she ran in the house.

"Why, Eugene Walker!" the Colonel heard Jerry exclaim delightedly upon finding that entertaining young gentleman instead of the *bête noire* she ex-

pected. "Why didn't you let me know you were here, sooner?"

"Did you forget our engagement for this evening?" he asked Miss Woodford in surprise, "I asked for you as soon as I came," he said with meaning and a warm pressure of the hand she had extended to him in greeting. Quickly withdrawing it, a shade of displeasure crossed her face at the tone and the look which accompanied it. But the next moment she upbraided herself for attaching any importance to it—surely nothing warmer than a passing friendship could possibly be imputed to this utterly careless young man.

"No," replied the girl, "I had not for gotten, but I thought you had, or that at least the rain which made it possible to hunt would afford an excuse for deferring it, We heard Mr. Deatherage's horn, and supposed—"

"You surely did not suppose that anything could induce me to defer such a pleasure," he said quickly and gallantly.

"I thought you said you were so fond of hunting," she said banteringly.

"I am," he asserted, "but I must again admit that there are other things I am even more fond of. For instance," he added, noting her gesture of deprecation, "the preservation of my own fine features, to say nothing of my neck, for which no man can have a high regard who follows Clay Deatherage after the hounds at night. I did so once," and in "He his whimsical way he related the experience, how he had found himself alone with Clay in an unknown country one dark night, when the hounds struck the trail.

Although she could not help being amused at the recital, she said ungraciously, "I should think it would be lots of fun; how I would love to take a hunt. I think I will have to get Uncle George Woodford to bring his pack over some night and take us girls hunting, before I go back. So sorry you can't go, Mr. Walker; I imagine it will be such fun."

"In that event," said 'Gene, temporarily, "I think I could go without breaking the vow—with you girls along it wouldn't be fox-hunting in the proper acceptance of the term—any fox-hunter will vouch for that."

"Oh, I'm going," he added decisively, "if only to help carry home the pieces. When shall it be, and who will we have

in the party?" and, Miss Flora joining them, they eagerly discussed the new diversion, which was calculated to be a novel departure from the threadbare round of summer festivities, of the usual lawn fêtes, basket picnics, fishing excursions, and straw rides.

The eventful evening at last arrived. It was an ideal one for such an outing, the air cooling quickly after sunset and giving promise of a heavy dew, which would favor scented conditions.

As the dusk began to thicken into night, and the whippoorwills began their monotonous plaint in the park before the house, the hunting horn hastened final preparations and summoned the merry dinner party to the saddle. Then the lawn was a scene of indescribable tumult and confusion for a few minutes, but soon, with the aid of their gallants, assisted by the negro grooms, each young lady attached herself to her own mount, and the cavalcade was in motion, with merry laughter and chatter. As they drew rein upon the hunting-ground the rising moon bathed with splendor the crest of the wooded knoll which stood isolated, sentinel-like, overlooking the level country about it.

The cavalcade was halted at the intersection of two lanes which, converging from opposite sides of the knoll, commanded it whichever way the chase tended, and was told to await here until the fox was found and forced to break cover. Opening a gate, Uncle George led the way along an obscure path through the pasture to the woods at the base of the knob, accompanied, to the disgust of several gallants who were left behind, by Jerry, who was his favorite niece, and whom he wished to induct into the ancient craft.

Of course Clay, having his dogs to hunt, went, too. "Are you really going to ride with us, Mr. Deatherage," Jerry said, with a pretty little accent of surprise, upon finding him beside her; "this is quite an unexpected pleasure."

"Yes," he replied, simply, "my dogs are going to run, too, you know."

"Oh! I might have known it was unavoidable on your part; you have shunned my company so persistently of late. Why? may I presume to ask. Was it because of remorse at having broken, your engagement the other evening?"

He looked up quickly, appealingly.

For an instant his eyes met hers, and then looked hastily away as he said, or rather muttered, that he had no excuse to offer, and no idea that he had committed any offense, or that she expected any apology, but that he had rather conferred a favor by absenting himself; a very ridiculous answer indeed. Diffident, constrained, troubled, his manner was very bad in the eyes of the young lady, all the more by contrast with his, natural frank and open candor.

She felt a little piqued at the neglect and wished herself back among the merry party left behind; so was not sorry, upon hearing a footstep behind her, to turn and discover Eugene Walker quietly leading his mount.

"It's only I," he said. "They kept up such a chatter out on the road there that I slipped away, and came here where I might hear the dogs. Have they found yet?" Throwing his bridle rein over a stump he reclined on his elbow beside her mare, where he could converse with her.

"Hark!" exclaimed Uncle George. "Wasn't that old Rocket to the right yonder?" It had been but a faint whimper far distant on the knoll.

"Hark to him!" yelled the Colonel, excitedly, in stentorian tones; and they could hear the pattering upon the leaves as some of the dogs passed through the woods before them, Harking to the cry, and commanding the negroes to follow, he and Clay galloped away through the woods.

It was decidedly dull and not at all what Miss Woodford had imagined it; even her mare seemed to feel the infection, and from restlessness had subsided into apathetic indifference.

"This fox-hunting is a very exciting sport," said Eugene in his whimsical way, looking up at her with half-closed eyes. He seemed to divine her thoughts; for all his seeming levity. "Glad I haven't heart disease, or I know I couldn't stand it. One must indeed be blasé who cannot enjoy the thrilling scamper across country, the swift rush of the chase, the low moan of the disabled hen as the horsemen run her down, the shriek of the frightened shoat as he flees to the straw rick, the muffled plunk of the pumpkin, and the dull scrunch of the cucumber, the mad dash through the farmer's fields, and the equally mad dash, dash, dash it of the

farmer who owns them. I always get poetical when I think of it, of the deep-mouthed baying of the hoarse hounds hotly hugging the trail, calling upon the hills to give back their merry music, and incidentally calling up the farmer, who calls upon you to make change with him for that panel of fence you knocked down."

"How can you be so ridiculous," she laughed.

"Not at all, I assure you. There's nothing to me like the pleasures of the chase; my chief object in life is to imitate the people in the novels that we steal from English authors."

His tone and manner were inimitable, and she enjoyed his quaint, dry humor too much to suggest a return to the crowd as she felt she ought to. She lingered—had not her uncle left her here—she momentarily expected his return, and Clay's. She had never known Eugene to be so entertaining, she had never enjoyed his sallies more; she returned his fire, bandying wits with him and beamed upon him kindly. She could not help liking him—who could? Jerry felt more, a sympathetic attraction for this bright, kindly youth of generous and noble impulses, who wasted his opportunities and was his own worst enemy. Suddenly his humor changed, and he became serious. He was a strange fellow, a compound of anomalies. For a few moments he appeared abstracted, distraught. In the continued absence of her uncle and Clay—or was it a premonition—Jerry suggested seeking the others.

His form had a sharply defined shadow behind it, for the moon was well up now, and glistening through the needles of the pines. She turned to look over her shoulder at it as it rested with its rim upon the ridge of the knob. The hounds had for a moment hushed, and following the late tumult the stillness could almost be felt.

In this silence she heard her name softly spoken; and turning quickly with a great fear at her heart, saw what she dreaded in one glance at the pale face upturned to hers in the pallid moonlight, in which the bright eyes, with their passionate appeal, burned more brightly by the contrast,

"Oh, don't! don't!" she cried pitifully, wringing her hands in unfeigned and uncontrollable distress, seeking to

stay the torrent of passionate words that poured from his heart. "I—I never thought. Forgive me—indeed, indeed, Eugene, I would not have caused you this pain for all the world."

Her kindness, her sorrow, her distress, worked upon him visibly. He had started back at her first frenzied gesture rejecting his love, the half-spoken words of passionate appeal frozen upon his lips, his hands clenched by his side, his face set and hard. He half turned and leaned against a tree; but quick as thought straightened up, and turning again to her he spoke, when, with a little catch in her throat, she broke down in the middle of the sentence—spoke with a strange calmness.

"I know it, and I beg your forgiveness. I had no right to speak to you so. Never by look or word have you given me such right. I can only pray for your forgiveness. I do not know what possesses me—but—but I am a creature of impulse and sometimes it gets the better of me. Can you forgive me?"

His words seemed to afflict her with even greater distress; her face was buried in her hands, and she sobbed despairingly. "I am so—so sorry for you. I can not tell you how much I like you, but not that way. I—I must tell you I—I love—I never can be what you wish. I wish I could tell you why—I do like you so much, and I do want you to be my friend—if—if you think you can."

Before he could reply, sounds of some one rapidly approaching startled them, and the next moment Uncle George checked his horse beside them and exclaimed, "Come on, Jerry. Get on your horse quickly, Mr. Walker. Old Rocket and the other dogs we whipped off the old trail struck it hot on the other side of the knob, and Ranter and the rest have harked to them and put him to running. Listen! Which way are they going, Clay?"

Clay had halted at a little distance and could be seen with his hat off, his handsome face upturned in the moonlight, an attitude of rapt absorption.

The next moment they were all cantering briskly across the pasture.

The motion was exhilarating to Jerry and revived her. Her blood, stagnated by the weary wait in the woods, once more coursed through her veins as her thoroughbred moved strong and free

beneath her, fighting for her head, and only restrained from a racing gait by a strong pull on the bit.

"Hold hard!" came the command from the front, and they pulled their horses to their haunches while Uncle George rode a little distance beyond to get away from the champing of the restless mounts, and, with his hat in his hand, stood listening intently, to locate the progress of the chase, which was faintly audible in the distance.

"They are coming up Deer-Lick Hollow," he said, "and are going to cross the pike at the big poplar stump. You all are better mounted than I am, and if you ride hard can beat them there. I am going to try to cut in through the flat woods if they go that way."

"Shall we try it?" asked Clay.

"Yes, if you are not afraid of Bonda beating you too badly," was Jerry's reply, as she shook her reins loose; and Bonda, who was as quick on her feet as a cat, sprang forward in full flight, while Osiris; who, like all large, long-striding thoroughbreds, was not as quick to get into his stride, fell back a full length behind even Eugene and Roland, who could not hope to hold the pace long with either the mare or the big bay.

Looking back over her shoulder Jerry banteringly called upon both her escorts to come on and show her the way. But she saw in a moment that Osiris was going easily under a double wrap, with the long space-devouring stride of the Kentucky thoroughbred; and knowing the race was for a good mile or more, she settled into her seat and caught Bonda short by the head, determined not to ride her out at the very start, and let Clay win the race in the end by superior generalship.

Half the distance was rapidly reeled off and Clay had overhauled and passed Eugene, and was challenging Jerry for the lead, when, with a little cry, she dashed away from him, while her spirited mare's head flew up, freed from check or curb.

Clay saw in a flash that Bonda had taken the bit and bolted. Calling upon Osiris for all that was in him now, he quickly drew away from Eugene, but gained only slowly on Miss Woodford's mare, who, stimulated by the pursuit, with free head raced madly on.

Never before had Clay raced for such a guerdon—the prize, a human life for

which he felt gladly willing to lay down his own. Slowly the long reach and steady stride of his powerful racer drew him alongside. But as Clay reached out toward her head the mare swerved slightly aside, without checking her mad race, and again and again, with blind instinct, eluded the grasp of his long arm. They were going at a fearful pace, racing side by side now, along the level stretch of turf to the left of the pike, the mare crowding blindly closer and closer to the fence.

Suddenly before them loomed large and dim in the moonlight a wagon drawn up by the roadside, where it had been left by some teamster the evening before. Instinctively Clay's hand swung the animate machine which moved beneath him, aside, to avoid collision with the obstacle; but in a flash he saw that the mare in the blind terror of the runaway would dash into it, saw too a narrow space between the wagon and the fence, and driving his spurs into Osiris' sides, swung the gallant animal with the gathered momentum full against the mare in the very moment of collision with the wagon, the shock of impact from the side throwing her off her feet, but propelling her into the narrow passageway, through which she stumbled and fell, unseating her fair rider, whose fall, however, being checked, was not a hard one. With no injury save a dull pain in the shoulder, upon which she had fallen, Terry sprang up, as Eugene Walker came up and, dismounting, caught the terror-stricken mare by the headstall as she tried to make off again.

Clay did not fare so well. The momentum had not been sufficient to carry him clear, and, striking full against the wagon-wheel, horse and man had gone down like a shot. For some moments he lay stunned and bruised where he had fallen, and then struggling to his feet stood with one hand holding to the fence, his other hanging limply by his side, his head in a whirl, which, gradually subsiding, permitted first to appear clearly to his vision, out of the chaos, the figure of the young lady, standing a pace or two from him, with all her old scorn of mien expressed in her attitude.

"I am glad you escaped unhurt," he said, simply.

Turning upon him with fierce contempt, she answered, "Small thanks to

you, *coward!*" and advanced to meet Eugene, who had quieted the mare.

With his hand to his head, unable to believe he saw or heard aright, and unable to understand the peculiar bitterness she displayed, Clay stood in mute amaze while she sprang into the saddle, and gathering up the reins with a firm hand, while Eugene, with difficulty, restrained her fractious mount, said calmly, "There, you can give her her head. I can control her now. If you will be so kind I will trouble you to see me home," and without waiting for an answer, started on, humoring Bonda into a walk.

Eugene glanced at Clay as if for an explanation, but there was no response, and he hastened off after Miss Woodford.

Clay turned and looked to his gallant mount, who stood with right foreleg up-lifted, badly lamed. With his right hand upon the animal's shoulder he strove to stretch out his left to lift its leg, but at the movement, a keen, shivering pain shot through him from his dislocated shoulder, like a knife, through his brain and his whole being, swiftly and suddenly, and everything grew dark and gave way beneath him; his arms were broken, or he was paralyzed, and with his head swung back he could see nothing but the heaving sky, across which flames shot jaggedly, and with a sickening sense that all was lost he sank.

For a short space Jerry and Eugene rode on in silence, the girl fearing to break it, but when Eugene did speak, instead of the gloomy restraint she feared, it was with one of his own odd conceits. And going on at her side so gaily, regardless of all that had happened, so superior in his sallies and self-possession to all the unhappiness she had inflicted upon him, so faithful to her, as it seemed, when her faith had received such a blow, and the one she had put before him had proved so unworthy, what an immense advantage, what an overpowering influence were his in that hour.

For a short space she listened in silence instead of replying to some sally intended to amuse her; and then turning, suddenly overwhelmed him with her sincerity, as she simply but with strange depth of feeling told him how grateful she was, how she could not bear to have him think her unappreciative, or

blind to the sacrifice he was making—that she had been through much herself that night that he could not know—but here, womanlike, her fortitude failed her, and, the ordeal passed through, she broke down with a little sob in her throat.

"Look here," he said, excitedly, "I would have avoided this if I could. I would have spared you any reference to anything that has happened to-night, or that could cause you pain, but tell me what is the matter, what has happened? there is something wrong here, some mistake, I'm sure. You asked me to be your friend. God knows I want to be, and want to prove it. Do you doubt it; will you not confide in me?"

Confide to him what she had not even admitted to herself! Her blindness! her weakness! her folly! She shrank within herself, and coldly protested she had nothing to confide.

"What in the world happened before I came up?" he insisted. "I heard you call Clay a coward. Will you not tell me at least what happened?"

It was nothing, she protested lightly, and she regretted, in the excitement of the moment, having said it, but he must not attach any importance to it; she could not have expected Clay to act otherwise; doubtless it was the only thing for him to do; and calmly, indifferently, she related the occurrence as if it were of no particular moment to her, how Bonda had taken the bit and bolted, and how Clay had frightened the mare still more by endeavoring to take her by the headstall, and prevented her being got under control again, how they had suddenly come upon the wagon by the roadside, and how, instead of trying to turn out upon his own side, *he had driven his horse deliberately against her own* in the endeavor to force his way through the space between the wagon and the fence.

When she had concluded, Eugene said simply, but with intensity that carried conviction: "You have made a great mistake. You have wronged Clay grievously. I don't see how you could be so blind. Can't you see that he simply risked his own life to save yours? When Bonda once fairly runs away, like all bolters, she is absolutely blind to any obstacle, and would try to run through a stone wall, If he had pulled Osiris aside to avoid the wagon, Bonda would

have crashed into it; and I shudder to think of the fate you escaped."

She heard, and turned upon him a white, startled face. There was no question of this being the true explanation of Clay's action, How base she had been to judge him so meanly. There was a clatter of hoofs behind them that they now noticed for the first time, as they had both stopped; and, looking backward, they discerned in the moonlight, Osisis riderless, stumbling along after them, badly lamed in his right foreleg. The empty saddle aroused unutterable apprehensions. Where was Clay?

"What in the world does this mean?" exclaimed Eugene, wheeling his horse around and satisfying himself of what he dreaded. "It is his horse. He surely cannot have been hurt, I left him standing there against the fence, and he didn't look it; and yet that is his way—he would have died before saying anything after"—but here he checked himself.

"Oh, don't—don't say it," pleaded the girl, with tears in her voice, "but I know, I know I have killed him." In a moment they were galloping swiftly back toward the scene of the late catastrophe.

Lying there so still and cold and white in the pale moonlight, the stars still blinked coldly at Clay across billions of leagues of space, but there were other eyes upon him now—ah, if he could only have looked into those soft bronze eyes now, as she tenderly laid his head in her lap, so disfigured by the pain that his mother might have covered it.

"He has only fainted," said Eugene, as he raised the senseless form to a more restful position, and opened Clay's coat and collar to the cool night air. "Be easy with his shoulder there—it is dislocated, I fear. There; now that is better. We will bring him around directly. I'll be back in a moment," and he was off for water from the spring branch that bubbled in the hollow near by.

Whether it was the revivifying influence of the cool night air, or the light touch of her lips upon his forehead, certain it is that Clay drew a deep breath and opened his eyes, and for a moment gazed into hers, then closed them again with a sluggish and confused idea that such things were, mingling with a host of others that were not, what he saw seeming vague and disordered as a fever fugue. But in a moment with a rushing revival of soul he was conscious of all; conscious of her arms about him as he lay pillowed upon her breast, held as sacredly as if he had been sanctified to her by death; conscious of the light sweep of her long hair that fell about his face as her lips were pressed to his, and she kissed him as she might have kissed the dead.

As he opened his eyes again and gazed into hers. there seemed to be a kind of film upon her face which he took to be of the moonlight, but as he looked he saw that her long lashes were wet with tears and she was weeping. Tears of joy and gratitude they were, of fervent gratitude to that merciful divinity through whose wonderful workings this calamity had been turned to good at last.

Softly-spoken words, softly monosyllabic, arrested Eugene as he hastened back with the water; and glancing at the two he had so lately left, he saw and knew all that had happened, and he felt to advance was to intrude, and reverently he retraced his steps.

"I am not needed—not now," he said, as he stood in the shadow of a tree by the roadside, silently gazing upon the quiet beauty of the night. There was in the manner in which he said the words no trace of disappointment, of regret or repining; but upon the face upturned to the moonlight perfect peace found perfect expression, and the attitude was that of a man who had wandered and got lost, and struggled through many devious ways, but who at last had found the right road and saw its end.

