



YOU and I are making that mysterious, solemn thing we call character, moment by moment.—Alexander McLaren.

The Heart of the Desert

(Continued from last week.)

KUT-LE'S eyes deepened. He turned and picked up his rifle. "Bring your friend back to dinner, Alchise," he said. "Our little holiday must end right here."

They reached the camp at noon and while the squaws made ready for breaking camp, Rhoda sat deep in thought. Before her were the burning sky and desert, with hawk and buzzard circling in the clear blue. And under the old hatred of Kut-le gone? Whence came this new trust and understanding, this thrill at his touch? Kut-le, who had been watching her adoringly, rose and came to her side. The rampart hid the two from the others. Kut-le took one of Rhoda's hands in his firm fingers and laid his lips against her palm. Rhoda flushed and drew her hand away. But Kut-le again put his hand beneath her cleft chin and lifted her face to his.

Just as the brown face all but touched hers a voice sounded from behind the rampart:

"Hello, you! Where's Kut-le?"

CHAPTER XV.

An Escape.

Rhoda sprang away from Kut-le and they both ran to the other side of the rampart. Billy Porter, worn and tattered but still looking very well able to hold his own, stood staring into the cave where the squaws eyed him open-mouthed and Alchise, his hand on his rifle, scowled at him aggressively. Porter's eye fell on Injun Tom.

"Uh-huh! You pison Plute, you! I just nacherally snagged your little game, didn't I?"

"Billy!" cried Rhoda. "O Billy Porter!"

Porter jumped as if at a blow. Rhoda stood against the rock in her boyish clothes, her beautiful braid sweeping her shoulder, her face vivid.

"My God! Miss Rhoda!" cried Billy hoarsely, as he ran toward her with outstretched hands. "Why, you are well! What's happened to you!"

Here Kut-le stepped between the two.

"Hello, Mr. Porter," he said. Billy stepped back and a look of loathing and anger took the place of the joy that had been in his eyes before.

"You Apache devil!" he growled. "You snatched as smart as you thought you were!"

Rhoda ran forward and would have taken Porter's hand but Kut-le restrained her with his hand on her shoulder.

"Where did you come from, Billy?" cried Rhoda. "Where are the others?" Billy's face cleared a little at the sound of the girl's voice.

"They are right handy, Miss Rhoda."

"I'll give you a few details, Rhoda," said Kut-le coolly. "You see he is without water and his mouth is black with thirst. He started to trail Injun Tom but got lost and stumbled on us."

Rhoda gave a little cry of pity and

running into the cave she brought Billy a brimming cup of water.

"Is that true, Billy?" she asked.

"Are the others near here?"

Billy nodded then drained the cup and held it out for more.

"They are just around the corner!" with a glance at Kut-le, who smiled skeptically.

"Oh!" exclaimed Rhoda. "What terrible trouble I have made you all!"

"You made!" said Porter. "Well that's good! Still that Apache devil doesn't seem to have harmed you. Just the same, he'll get his! If I shot him now, the other Injuns would get me and God knows what would happen to you!"

"Whom do you call an Apache devil?" asked Kut-le. Rhoda never had seen him show such evident anger.

"You, by Judas!" replied Porter, looking into the young Indian's face. For a strained moment the two eyed each other, hatred glaring at hatred, until Rhoda put a hand on Kut-le's arm. His face cleared at once.

"So that's my reputation now, is it?" he said lightly.

"That's your reputation!" sneered Billy. "Do you think that's all? Why, don't you realize that you can't live in your own country again? Don't you know that the whites will hunt you out like you was a rat? Don't you realize that the folks that believed in you and was fond of you has had to give up their faith in you? Don't you understand that you've lost all your white friends? But I sup-

pose that don't mean anything to an Injun!"

A look of sadness passed over Kut-le's face.

"Porter," he said very gently, "I counted on all of that before I did this thing. I thought that the sacrifice was worth while, and I still think so. I'm sorry, for your sake, that you stumbled on us here. We are going



An Attractive Entrance to a Farm Home.

The illustration herewith was snapped by one of our editors along a country road, near Peterboro. As will be seen, the fence across the lawn is neatly painted and attractive. Bushes on either side of the gate, also add to the homely appearance. It pays to make our home grounds as pleasing as possible.

to start on the trail shortly and I must send you out to be lost again. I'll let Alchise help you in the job. As you say, I have sacrificed everything else in life; I can't afford to let anything spoil this now. You can rest for an hour. Eat and drink and fill your canteen. Take a good pack of meat and tortillas. You are welcome to it all."

The Indian spoke with such dignity, with such tragic sincerity, that Porter gave him a look of surprise and Rhoda felt hot tears in her eyes. Kut-le turned to the girl.

"You can see that I can't let you talk alone with Porter, but go ahead and say anything you want to in my hearing. Molly, you bring the white man some dinner and fix him some trail grub. Hurry up, now!"

He seated himself on the rampart and lighted a cigarette. Porter sat down meditatively, with his back against the mountain wall. He was discomfited. Kut-le had guessed correctly as to the circumstances of his finding the camp. He had no idea where his friend's might have gone in the twenty-four hours since he had left them. When he stumbled on to Kut-le he had a sudden hope that the Indian might take him captive. The Indian's quiet reception of him now plussed him and roused his unwilling admiration.

Rhoda sat down beside Porter.

"How is John?" she asked.

"He is pretty good. He has lasted better than I thought he would."

"And Katherine and Jack?" Rhoda's voice trembled as she uttered the names. It was only with the utmost difficulty that she spoke coherently.

All her nerves were on the alert for some unexpected action on the part of either Billy or the Indians.

"Jack's all right," said Billy. "We ain't seen Mrs. Jack since the day after you was took, but she's all to the good, of course, except she's been about crazy about you, like the rest of us."

"Oh, you poor, poor people!" moaned Rhoda.

Porter essayed a smile with his cracked lips.

"But, say, you do look elegant, Miss Rhoda. You ain't the same girl!"

Rhoda blushed through her tan.

"I forgot these," she said; "I've worn them so long."

"It ain't the clothes," said Billy, "and it ain't altogether your good health. It's more—I don't know what it is! It's like the desert!"

"That's what I tell her," said Kut-le.

"Say," said Billy, scowling, "you've got a nerve, cutting in as if this was a parlor conversation you had cut in on casual. Just keep out of this, will you!"

Rhoda flushed.

"Well, as long as he can hear everything, it's a good deal of a nerve to let him talk," she said.

"Parce!" exclaimed Billy. "Say, Miss Rhoda, you ain't sticking up for this ornery Plute, are you?"

Rhoda looked at the calm eyes of the Indian, at the clean-cut intelligence of his face, and she resented Porter's words. She answered him softly but clearly.

"Kut-le did a awful and unforgivable thing in stealing me. No one knows that better than I do. But he has treated me with respect and he has given me back my health. I thank him for that—and I do respect him!"

Kut-le's eyes flashed with a deep light but he said nothing. Porter stared at the girl with jaw dropped.

"Good Lord!" he cried. "Respect him? Would that come and get you! Do you mean that you want to stay with that Injun?"

A slow flush covered Rhoda's tanned cheeks. Her cleft chin lifted a little.

"At the very first chance," she replied, "I shall escape."

Porter sighed in great relief.

"That's all right, Miss Rhoda," he said leniently. "Respect him all you

want to. I don't see how you can, but women is queer, if you don't mind my saying so. I don't blame you for feeling thankful about your health. You've stood this business better than any of us. Say, the squaw seems to be puttin' all her time on making up my pack. Can't I negotiate for something to eat right now? Tell her not to put pison into it."

Kut-le grinned.

"Maybe Miss Tuttle will fix up something for you, so you can eat without worrying."

"Well, she won't, you know!" growled Porter. "Her wait on me! She ain't no squaw!"

"Oh, but," said Rhoda, "you don't know how proud I am of my skill! I can run the camp just as well as the squaws." Then, as Porter scowled at

her, she said: "I don't see how you can, but women is queer, if you don't mind my saying so. I don't blame you for feeling thankful about your health. You've stood this business better than any of us. Say, the squaw seems to be puttin' all her time on making up my pack. Can't I negotiate for something to eat right now? Tell her not to put pison into it."

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