THE RED ASCENT

BY ESTHER W. NEILL

CHAPTER IX-CONTINUED

At last he fell into a sort of stupor, and when he woke the room was bright with moonlight. A lifewas bright with moonlight. A life-giving breeze came in at the open window, and Richard finding his wet pillows uncomfortable, stag-gered to his feet, and walking drunkenly to an old arm-chair, spent the rest of the night sleeping in its moth-eaten deaths.

in its moth-eaten depths.

For three days he rested. His head felt so strangely light that he dared not go out in the sun, but he did not enjoy this enforced idleness. So many neglected tasks seemed piling up on him that he grew rest-less and impatient at the restraint. He knew that he had taxed his body mercilessly, and, now that it cried out for some cessation of labor, he felt that it was only prudent to heed the warning. He could not afford to break down when his work

was barely begun. was barely begun.

During this period of convalescence, he turned again to his grandfather's letters. Perhaps after all they might hold a clue that would relieve all this anxiety about the future, Now that the drudgery of sorting them was finished, they sorting them was finished, promised entertaining reading, for they had been written at a time when letter-writing was considered one of the fine arts. Richard turned yellow pages to find where he had left off. He glanced at some of the love letters that he had already read. Somehow they did not seem so extreme to him now. He paused for a moment over one little verse that had appealed to his sense of

"You chain my thought by day and night, And once I struggled to be free,

Now, even if you scorn my love, I cannot hope for liberty." Unconsciously he began to com-

pose couplets himself.

"You came as a flame in the moonlight, Fanned by an eerie breeze."

He could think of nothing to rhyme with breeze except sneeze. The homeliness of the word brought him back abruptly to his task. He turned away from the love letters. They were wild, passionate extravaganzas with which he had nothing

Here were letters written many years before the war, marking the first parting of the young hus-band and wife. Letters full of tender peace, happiness, and love stronger than passion. And, at last, here was one from Texas.

One paragraph read:
"You remember that the year before we were married, some years after my campaign in Mexico, my dear mother fancied I had lung trouble, and sent me to this State the idea was a good one. What would you think of our making our or two. home here permanently?

But evidently the young wife had objected to leaving her old home and kinsfolk, and so her husband had returned to her side, for there was a long interlude between the letters. The next was a short jubifollowed many more from Washingfollowed many more from washing-ton, vivid pictures of the great men of the day: long interviews that he light. of the day; long interviews that he had had with Clay and Webster; detailed explanations of the burn- as cold and dark as a tomb ever ing political questions that were hastening on the war, but though these letters were full of enthusiasm and buoyant with the hope of siasm and buoyant with the hope of like most women, Betty with all her a young man just beginning to carelessness possessed that inex-realize his own power, there was in -plicable knack for home-makingthem a deep love and sympathy, a rare understanding for the suffering little wife at home, who was soon again to become a mother.

"I would not ask you to endure the hardship of the journey, but I pray that these few months will quickly pass. The separation is intolerable, and no material intolerable, and no material advancement counts when weighed

in the balance with your happiness.
"Washington is not a pleasant place to live; the boarding houses are so inferior that many of the members reside in Baltimore, traveling forty miles by train every morning. The streets are muddy; I think the river flats make the place unhealthful—the city is only four feet above tide water. The northwest part of the town is much more desirable, but it is difficult of access; a small creek divides the city from the best residential section, known as Georgetown.

The next letter was dated some

'I am so glad that you are enjoyram so grad that you are enjoy-ing your visit home. You are cor-rect in your surmising that my re-election is not assured, but do not worry about our future. I feel sure that a fortune awaits us on our ranch in Texas. It is a great cattle country, a great cotton-growing State. Its possibilities are endless. If, in the after years, I should die before you, don't be persuaded to part with those lands. We will hold them for our children."

It was this letter that decided Richard. He sat down that night and wrote to Jefferson Wilcox:

"Come down. Believe I have a case for you, if you will take it on a contingent fee. All up in the air myself, but you may see daylight. No danger of starvation now, if you are willing to stick to farm products. Every known and unknown indefinite visit, she fairly danced with delight, and even old Aunt Dinah's proverbial patience was taxed by the conflicting orders that her young mistress fired at her red-kerchiefed head.

"We'll have fried chicken—no, we won't—we'll have it creamed—put in a little sherry, or would it be nicer curried? I don't know—biscuits or waffles for lunch? Dear

bug and beetle have tried to devour the vegetables, but there are a few onions left in the patch."

Jefferson replied by telegram: "Delighted. Will start at once."

CHAPTER X

THE OLD CLAIM Jefferson Wilcox arrived two days later without benefit to the railroad; he came in his big touring car. Goggled, mud-bespattered, enveloped in a grease-streaked linen duster, he was not prepossessing as he drove up to the Matterson door to greet the punctilious Colonel who awaited him on the porch.

The Colonel limped forward doubtfully. He was uncertain of his son's selection of friends, and he certainly was not accustomed to these modern, disreputable outer garments that concealed every clue to a gentleman's identity. But Jefferson, like one long practiced in legerdemain, jerked off his coat, cap, goggles, gloves in a twinkling, and stood before the Colonel immaculately clad, and holding out his hand with his most ingratiating

smile, said:
"I'm Jefferson Wilcox; so delighted to get an invitation to Matterson Hall that, I could not wait until train time."
The Colonel shook his hand warmly.

And I am delighted to meet you. He was effusive in his hospitality, partly because of his inherited instincts, and partly because his mind was relieved by Jefferson's appearance. When Richard had first announced his intention of consulting a lawyer friend and invit-ing him to the house, the Colonel had made no outward objection, but he had expected a dull visitor whose presence would give him no pleasure. Jefferson, over-bubbling with vitality and spirits, had a genius for adapting himself to older men. Before he had been there half an hour the Colonel had admitted him to intimacy, and when Betty appeared to show the guest to the room she had prepared for him, the Colonel had established a relationship dating back to the original Wilcox, who had married a Matterson in some dim English cathedral three hundred years before.

Jefferson's room looked very restful to him after his mad drive through the summer heat; a great bowl of roses stood upon the mantel, and the carved four-poster was

Betty's efforts at housekeeping were erratic. Most of the time a soft, lint-like dust lay on the waxed floors and the polished furniture; the rooms were almost always in disorder. Then would come a consciencestricken upheaval, and everything was washed and scrubbed, and looselying objects stowed away and their whereabouts forgotten, until the Colonel's swearing sent Betty scurrying to find them again; then, for a week or more, saddles and to spend the winter? To amuse boots, hats and newspapers lay on myself in my idleness I bought a large tract of land, intending to raise cattle. I begin to believe that the idea was a record. order again prevailed for a day

The announcement of an expected visitor had sent Betty and Aunt Dinah into a vortex of mops, brooms, and dusting rags, and, though the house was an uncomfortable place to live in during the process, Richard was grateful for lant note announcing his election to the transformation. So many of the United States Senate. Then the rooms which had been shut up all winter as too bleak and big to hand in all his labors, seeing with

long parlor, which had been that fine intangible art that conjures an atmosphere out of unfeeling furniture. She moved through the room, pulling a chair here, pushing a table there; she opened the yellow-keyed piano, taking the trouble to put the music of an old song she could not sing upon the rack; she piled pine-boughs on the shining brass andirons; she the vases with flowers; she left a book of poetry she had never read upon the window-sill; a photograph of some one she did not know lean-

ing against the shaded lamp.
Richard was amazed at the possibilities of his own home. "Why," Betty, I believe you are a witch,

he said.
"I hate house-cleaning," an nounced Betty, viewing her small hands shrivelled now with soap suds, " but if we are going to have company to stay we must look our

. Is he young?" About twenty-eight."

"Is he good-looking? "Fairly so. " Is he tall?"

"About my height."
"Does he know how to dance?"
"Seems to do a lot of it."
"Does he like it?"

I suppose he does."

"How long will he stay?"
"I don't know." When Betty heard that the gentle-man in question had arrived in a big touring car to pay them an indefinite visit, she fairly danced

me! the flour bin is nearly empty. Haven't we any honey left from last year? Parsley around the chicken, Aunt Dinah. Asparagus? No, it isn't fit to pick. Wax beams and a very suppose we can get enough. do you suppose we can get enough wax beans? Oh, I suppose he is used to everything. That's his automobile. Oh, I hope he will stay a month or more. stay a month or more.'

Aunt Dinah's mind moved slowly, keeping time to her billowy body that lumbered heavily about her

ork.
"Fo' de Lord's sake run long, chile, you git me so flustered. git up dis mess of victuals—you go long inter de house."

So Betty had wisely abandoned her position of commanding officer, but she was very restless. Jeffer-son was still in his room; Richard had not returned from the village store; the Colonel was dozing in his chair; she had only the dogs for company. She was working off some of her surplus energy play-ing with the puppies, when Richard came wearily up the gravelled road. He quickened his pace when he saw

the gray touring car.
"Has Jefferson come?" he asked Jefferson heard through the open window and came hurrying down the stairs. "Dicky, Dicky, Dick! I'm tickled to death to be here." Richard held out both hands to

And I'm glad to have you. believe I feel quite rejuvenated."

There were few reserves about
Jefferson Wilcox. He was pleased with his welcome, pleased with his first glimpse of this old home, pleased that his friend's lot had not been cast in the poverty and squalor that he had feared, and he expressed

his delight quite openly.

The luncheon was delicious in every detail. As Jefferson helped himself to a sixth waffle and spread it with honey, he declared that he would like to remain as a permanent guest. It was not until he had been there two days that he fully realized the struggle Richard was making. The first day he spent joyfully touring the country with the Colonel and Betty. The Colonel was a real celebrity, for his remote ancestor had possessed a royal grant of land that included several counties in colonial days. This was ties in colonial days.

sufficient distinction in a community that believed that it takes "three generations to make a gentleman," but the Colonel also had a war record, and, like many another valiant soldier, he had repeated his experiences so often that they seemed present-day occurrences instead of shredded reminis cences. Then the Colonel was an orator of the old-fashioned, grandiloquent type, and he had been a conspicuous figure at every political and patriotic celebration for the last forty years. Jefferson appre-ciated, before he had been out fifteen minutes, that he was traveling with a distinguished personage. The seams of the Colonel's coat might shine in the sunlight, the Colonel's farm might be the attenuated remnants of a vast estate, and the Colonel's daughter might be ashamed of her own shabbiness, but the journey in the big automo-bile proved the Colonel's importance and popularity in his particu-

lar corner of his State.

The next day, much to Betty' disappointment, their guest stowed away his automobile in the old carriage house and spent the day with Richard, lending him a willing his cultivated business sense h ceived, even more than Richard himself, the many difficulties that would vanish with the intelligent investment of a little ready money the fact that he had been admitted to the house on trustful terms of intimacy seemed to make the sug-gestion of material assistance impossible. He felt that the Colonel would consider it an insult; Richard had already positively refused his help. Winning the ancient law case ed the only hope of releasing his friend from this wearing routine

of drudgery.
That night he listened eagerly to Colenel's visionary account of the Fielding forgery, secretly enjoying the old gentleman's forceful language and his absurd aristocratic views, and after the Colonel had hobbled off to bed, he and Richard spent the rest of the night —all night—pouring over the old box of letters, trying to find out something more definite than the mere announcement. "We will hold them for our children."

There was a faint streak of pink in the eastern sky when Jefferson stretched himself and said with a

yawn:
"This is no way for a second-class lawyer to preserve his brains; I'm going to bed." 'Do you think there is any chance for us?" asked Richard; his face looked pinched and wan in the glare

of the sputtering lamp.
"Immense!" said Jefferson optimistically. "Immense! I believe you've got a mercenary streak in you after all." Richard deliberated for a moment:

believe—I'm afraid I have.'
'Why afraid ?''

"Chasing money was the last of my intentions, and it is certainly not an idealistic pursuit. Fighting Dick."

Bight "Bound of the last of million of my intentions, and it is certainly not an idealistic pursuit. Fighting Dick." your neighbors is no altruism. "Do you know these Fieldings?"
"Well, no—yes—that is, I have met one of them—Miss Fielding."

Jefferson pricked up his ears sus-What kind is she?"

'Well, you know I'm no authority on girls, but I believe she's rather different from most of them. Or at least she seemed so.
"H'm!" grunted Seemed so?" grunted Jefferson.

Richard was a trifle confused. "I met her at a masquerade. Never went to one before. Felt as if I were living in a fairy tale. She was dressed as Fire — most amazing costume. And the first time I saw her she suggested that the coal mines of her father's might belong to me. I had been telling her that she was responsible for the living conditions at the mines:

unsanitary houses, long hours, poor Over Jefferson's mobile face there passed an expression of relief. He

grinned broadly. "Strange tete-a-tete for a party," he observed. "Couldn't you think of anything else to talk about?" "She's a strange girl," said Richard reflectively. Again Jefferson viewed his friend

"Believe me, all girls are strange," he said.
"Why?"
"Don't ask me. Can't under-

stand them; every one is different. Now, men seem to belong to types; like newspapers with patent insides

They don't belong to her." Who owns them

She has a father.

"I'm going to Texas. more sensible than trying to fight it out in the courts here. But, Jeff, I can't pay you for

Pay!" shouted Jeff. "Why, it's the biggest case I ever had. It's the biggest case I ever had. It's coal mines, railroads, oil wells. It's millions, Dick! I begin to feel like a bloated corporation lawyer already. And I'll charge you—I'll charge you a fee that will make you believe that my time is worth money. Richard looked relieved.

"Then if you have made up your mind to go, I think you ought to take some of these letters with you;" he sorted them out with nervous fingers. "This one, for nervous fingers. "This one, for instance. If the deed is dated prior to this, it ought to prove something. My grandfather certainly would not have announced his intention of keeping the land for the children if he had sold it, and if we are going to try and prove that the title was forged, you will want some signa-

"It's the most important case I ever had," said Jefferson jubilantly. letters. I tell you, Dick they are hot stuff. Bet your life your grandfather wouldn't have wasted readlight talking wages and labor conditions to a fiery phantom of a

Richard smiled.
"I guess not," he agreed, "but then he belonged to snother generation.

Generation has nothing to do Men have been making with it. fools of themselves ever since the beginning-moonlight, mists, music, masquerade, and you're in love before you know it."
"Don't you usually know it?"

day; that's where I slip up. Doubting is fatal. Show a girl

"But when it comes to the real thing, Jeff: love like my grandthing, Jeff: love like my grand-father's; love that in the after years brings out all the best in a so meek and still of demeanor, man; that holds him to his ideals; suddenly developed a strong and makes him willing to suffer, to determined will, and informed her sacrifice, to live for some one else. there is something sacramental in a

"Never felt it," said Jefferson with conviction. "Did you?"
"No," said Richard, "but I believe I have felt it for the world at large. There is something so appealing, so pitiful, so ignorant in God's poor that I wanted to spend my life on them, plan for them, fight for them. I fancied I could do a great deal if I had had a chance to follow out some of my theories. Perhaps, after all, there has been something wrong in my makeup. It wasn't so much the in-dividual that appealed to me as the overpowering sense of obligation I have felt for the masses of men. wanted to bring about the millennium, and—I've fallen down flat.

I tell you I've fallen flat. "How do you mean?"
"Grovelling for bodily necessities takes all the vigor out of a man. He's too tired to think, to pray, to realize that he's got a soul worth saving.

"But when you get your millions?" said Jeff hopefully. answered "I don't know," answered Richard wearily. "I'm not so sure of myself. Just now leisure seems the most desirable thing in life to me, and the priesthood a million miles away."

But if you had the leisure, Richard gave a mirthless little

laugh.
"I'd go to bed for six months,"
he said, "and take massage instead of exercise."

TO BE CONTINUED

THE WEDGWOOD CLOCK

It had a portentous sound, that clock; whenever it struck, its tones tolling seemed always to foretell a calamity, though during the thirty odd years of its existence it had much more frequently chron-icled merely the little happenings of life. It had struck the hour for breakfast, dinner and supper dur-ing the lives of at least a generation: it had greeted schoolboys and girls returning from the classroom and paterfamilias hastening back from the office. It had sounded through long nights, with particular emphasis, as it seemed, on the midnight. Its voice had been heard through the long vigils beside the sick or the dying, and had continued to mark the passage of time when time for some, lately the dwellers in that house, had been no more. Its solemn, long-drawn notes had echoed through the vacant house when the family was absent, and were heard in the adjoining tenements, causing in those who listened an uncanny feeling of dread. The clock stood upon a broad, low

mantelshelf, overhanging a hearth, upon which from time to time on huge brass —not very interesting—read it all dogs. It looked upon a large, some-before. But girls!—don't know them—can't guess them. If this Miss Fielding thinks the mines are gruities. Its face was broad and yours, why doesn't she give them to open, conveying, as do some human countenances, an impression of frankness. Though there was a suggestion of slyness, too, in the way that it sometimes took people "Oh, yes. I had quite forgotten the father. Where is he?"

"In Texas, the last I heard of him."

"In Texas, the last I heard of him." china parts—and could have told a tale, if it had any other voice than its regular tick or its deep toll, of a far-off English factory and the pottery works over which the far-famed Josiah Wedgwood had so long presided.
Or, if clocks have long memories

of the numbers of people who had passed before its perch on the mantelpiece and of the scenes that had been enacted before its face. One of the most striking of these may be here related. It concerns a young couple who were foolish and romantic, and who did not perhaps take the best way to attain their ends, which were quite justifiable in themselves. There was, in the first place, a girl, young and slender, with a quantity of what is called ash-blonde hair, blue eyes with dark lashes and a creaminess of complexion which most people admired immensely. She was the niece and ward of Mr. Robert Sinclair, the with special directions as to its care. He was a stern man, that childless widower, his one human

time that she would not marry at all, but had lately modified that idea of his in favor of a friend of his own, who would be financially a brilliant match, and would, as he believed, keep the girl in closer touch with himself. The man was very wealthy and would thus increase the portion which he destined for her. There were many relative and connections of the family who came and went but amongst them all there was but one whom Anita especially favored. Francis Martin, a distant connechad developed into a warm affection. the uncle's admiration. Some officious friend, having read boubting is lated. Show a gar-you're doubtful of your own heart-throbs, and she's down the pike before you know it."

Some officious friend, having feat after the close currents of the futural the symptoms aright, gave warning the mind. "I repeat, sir," exclaimed the that Francis Martin was forbidden old man at last, in a voice fairly the house and Anita forbidden to uncle that she intended to marry Francis Martin, with his consent, if possible, but to marry him in any case. She felt the more justified in this decision by the fact that the suitor whom Mr. Sinclair had chosen for her was many years her senion and a Protestant so bigoted that, together with her uncle's strong support, she feared that the practice of her religion, to which she had so tenaciously clung, would be endangered should she consent to

become his wife.

Meanwhile, Francis Martin, who was young and ardent, pressed his suit with all the vigor and determination of his years and of a particularly strong character. He was submitted to you without delay. larly strong character. He was only waiting, he said, to be certain of a position which he had been promised, and which would enable him to support his wife, before openly claiming her hand and marrying her despite her uncle's opposition. So, during all this time the Wedgwood clock had been in some sort, the confidante of the lovers. The interchange of notes between them was carried on by a friendly housemaid, who always placed these missives within the clock. Often Anita, standing in front of the ancient timepiece and warming her hands at the fire on the hearth, apostrophized it in her low, melodious voice, caressing, she spoke, the blue and white Wedgwood ware. "Old clock," she murmured.

you are as the face of a dear and

had had no mother to direct her. Only she had never been persuaded to give up that faith which her mother had taught her; and looked back upon her First Communion as the most beautiful day of her life not Mr. Sinclair suddenly informed his niece that she must marry the man of his choice without delay, and that he himself would fix an diate date. Hence it was that the Wedgwood clock, having been the repository of her secrets and in some sense the intermediary be-tween her and her lover, saw her go out one day with a very and frightened face, for she

taken just then a very important step on the path of courtship. It was but a short time afterwards that the Wedgwood clock became in a way the cause of her undoing, like some indiscreet friend, who had become aweary of secrecy

Francis Martin came to the do one morning early and left with the friendly housemaid a note which that personage concealed as usual in the clock. In this note he arranged a meeting for that night, after the uncle had retired to rest, having as he said, to discuss a matter of importance. And this meeting was to take place in that self-same room where the clock, like a faithful guardian, kept watch.

Now, it chanced that the timeiece developed that day a rheunatic groaning in its works as though it were anxious to give warning and betray the long-guarded secret. The uncle, who set great store upon the clock and regarded it as almost a member of the household, with great concern on his face opened the door and in examining the works found the condemnatory note, twisted care lessly into a cocked hat. He removed the paper, believing at first that it was the cause of the trouble, and wondering at its presented. ence there, opened and read. His face flushed to a deep purple, then paled. His worst fears, which had been set at rest by the supposed hood of the too attractive suitor, were realized and in a manner almost beyond his belief.

While almost beside himself with rage, a sudden thought came into his mind, and replacing the note where it had been placed, it was Anita. With extraordinary self control, the old man gave no during the day of the storm that was raging in his breast. He retired at the usual hour and waited. Francis Martin arrived at immensely. She was the niece and ward of Mr. Robert Sinclair, the owner of the dwelling, and to whom the Wedgwood clock had been left, with a region directions as to its their secret. But it ticked on, with its usual innocent air of frank friendliness. After the first ex-

change of greetings, as they before the fire of logs which Francis had kindled into a blaze, Anita expressed the only regret that came between her and perfect happiness was the thought that she was deceiving her uncle, to whom she owed so much.

"But, my dearest girl," cried Francis, "he has only himself to blame, since he has driven us to all this abominable secrecy.

destined for her. There were many relatives and connections of the family who came and went, but voice close behind them, and springing to their feet they the stern figure of the uncle. Anita turned pale as death, but Francis faced the old man resolutely, with "Happens to me like a boome-rang," answered Jeff cheerfully.
"I never doubt myself until next made a bond between them which that even in all his rage it awoke are the cross-currents of the human

choked with anger, "that you have acted abominably in trespassing upon these premises, against my express prohibition, in tampering with my servants, and in compro-mising the hitherto unspotted name

The rising tide of his fury so checked his speech that Francis, who still confronted him, eye to eye, with the same fearless mien vas able to advance the only possible plea in his own defence

Of the last charge, Mr. Sinclair," he said quietly, "I am at least guiltless, since Anita has been e had for more than a month past, my

Your wife," gasped the old nan. "Are you mad?" Francis shook his head.

We were married in the rectory of St. Stephen's Church, in presence And since I have just received the lucrative position for which I was waiting, it will now be my proud privilege to remove my deare to the home I can now provide."
"With, no doubt, the unfounded

hope in the background that my niece will also one day be my heiress," sneered the old man, using in his despair the only weapon of which he could think.

Had that motive weighed with me," responded Francis, whose face had flushed deeply at the im putation, "I should scarcely, in my love for Anita, have controverted your wishes in the manner that I have done. Personally, I should prefer that my wife never touched a dollar of the inheritance which it is yours to give or withhold as you will."

familiar friend."

And she fancied that the ticking of the clock replied. She was in some respects very childish, for she



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