THE RED ASCENT

BY ESTHER W. NEILL CHAPTER VI

IN THE ATTIC When Richard reached home it was four o'clock. He had wasted two hours of a precious day. It had been so long since he allowed himself any leisure that he felt conscience-stricken when Betty met him at the door and asked:

Where have you been all this I've been talking to Miss

Fielding. "Where did you meet her?"
"Down by the swimming-pool.
Her horse threw her into a mud puddle, but fortunately she was not

How did she look ?" "She looked rather muddy."
"Oh, Dick, Dick, you know what
I mean? Is she as beautiful as
people say she is?"

He seemed perplexed. "I don't know." 'Didn't you look at her?"

'Why, yes."
'And you don't know whether she is pretty or not "Why, I suppose she is; I never thought about it."

"Well, you are funny," said Betty with a hopeless shake of her head. "Most men think of that the first thing. I've been crazy to see her. They say she has traveled everywhere, and that she was presented at court in a white action everywhere, and that she was presented at court in a white satin dress with a train four yards

long."
"Must have been dreadfully in the way," he said. I suppose it was. But think of

being rich enough to trail four yards of satin over a dusty floor, and not care whether it gets dirty or not."
"Let us hope the floor wasn't

dusty."
"You are never serious," said
"You are never serious," said cut into a bathing suit, and there's nothing. Jess Fielding seems to have everything. You know they have come to live in the old Hedricks' house. People say they've turned it into a palace; broad-covered walls: all kinds of hand-carved furniture they bought in Europe; electric lights; five landscape gardeners fixing the grounds, and we—we have nothing."
"I don't know," he said cheer-

"I think we have a great 'We have a roof above our heads

and a bed to sleep on; what else? We have no money, and I don't see how we are going to get on any longer without it. Bonny has a calf, that means no milk or butter for us; the cow shed is leaking; there's some kind of a bug eating the beans you planted in the garden; the chickens need feed; the corn-meal bin is empty. The Colonel has ordered a new bridle for Spangles—I don't know how he expects to pay for it—and—and Jess Fielding has invited us to a masquerade party, and—and I haven't a thing to wear!'

It was a climax. Betty buried her face in her hands and sobbed. Richard sat down beside her. He felt weak with a sense of failure. From his normal point of view, Betty's lack of a ball-gown would have seemed a small tragedy, but he was not normal. Exhausted by overwork in the fields, beset continually by the innumerable demands of the household, fearing to go in debt himself, yet having to to go in debt filmself, yet maying to struggle to keep down the Colonel's luxurious expenditures, Betty's tears made him feel powerless, mercenary, desperate. But his mercenary, desperate. But his long-practiced efforts at self-control now made his voice fall calm and

"If it's a masquerade, any kind of fancy fixing will do. I'm sure we can find something in the

Her tears were like a sudden rainfall. She wiped them hurriedly away, reassured by his suggestion. "What will you wear?" she

"You're invited too. Where can you get a costume?"
"That's easy," he answered.
"I'll be delighted to stay at

home."
"But you can't," she said with great finality. "You will have to great finality. "You will have to take me. I can't drive five miles through the woods at midnight,

and have one of those fearful miners murder me on the way."

"Do you want to go so very much?"

ing and she looked so woebegone that he put his arm affectionately around her.

wear, I suppose that you will agree that we will have to stay at home."
"But we'll find something," she said, her natural optimism fully restored. "Geometric me and life."

"Come with me and lift down the trunks. They are piled high on top of one another. I never thought of it before, but there must be all kinds of dead world all the strice."

people's clothes in the attic."
Richard followed her with heavy steps. His sensibilities were finer than Betty's. Her words: "dead peoples clothes" had made him regret his suggestion. To go rummaging among the belongings of the departed for a masquerade costume seemed to belittle their memories. But the fancy was a foolish one, he told himself, and the situation worthy of another interpretation. After all, if Betty's mother and grandmother had been alive, they would have offered their wearing apparel, willingly to aid the child. And if he was obliged to escort Betty, he determined not to destroy her pleasure by going grandingly. alive, they would have offered their

grudgingly.

The attic was a creepy place, dimly lighted, full of odd-shaped bundles that required little imagination to transform them into ghostly shapes. One of the Colonel's old the colonel the colone suits hung from the rafters, looking, like the body of a successful suicide; a rag bag lying prone in one corner resembled a fat old woman, who had fallen in a hopeless heap waiting for some one to help her to her legs again. Richard opened one of the creaking shutters. The summer sunshine dispelled the illusions, and forced

these castaway possessions back into a world of reality again.

It had been years since Richard had been in the attic. He had romped here when he was a boy, but now to his maturer mind the Betty. "Don't you know that all women adore clothes? I'm getting dreadfully tired of being shabby." dreadfully tired of being shabby."
She sat down on the top step, and, leaning her curly head against one of the porch pillars looked ruefully down at her soiled linen skirt. "I don't suppose I'll ever have anything," she sighed. "I came hom to see if I could find something to cut into a bathing suit, and there's feel to dust in his hands. He guessed that his mother had put them there, intentionally bringing them from the toward in all their beauty, and there's feel to dust in his hands. He guessed that his mother had put them there, intentionally bringing them from the toward in all their beauty, and placing them where the pink baby "You?"

"You?"

"Of course. I may live out here wild woods, but we occasionally have visitors in the county. No girl could live this far South without garden in all their beauty, and placing them where the pink baby "You?"

"I take your word for it," he was turning over faces had rested, marking a grief to motherhood that comes when cradles are outgrown and children emerge from that state of absolute

helplessness so precious with the privilege of service. In one trunk Richard's toys were treasured, and in a box were the curls that the Colonel had insisted upon cropping off when his son was six. Richard remembered that when the scissors had begun their work of destruction, his mother cried, and the Colonel had sneered at her for being a sentimentalist.
And Richard's joy at getting rid of
his hated hair had been tempered
by a vague feeling of indignation
toward his father.

His mother had died when he was
nine; if she had lived she would
here given him the sympathy that

have given him the sympathy that the Colonel had denied him. If she had lived his boyhood would have been brightened, his struggle to gain an education would have been been brightened, his struggle to gain an education would have been lessoned, and, in some wise woman's way, she might have made even this last sacrifice unnecessary. She would have fostered his idealism, and he could have gone on somehow in the life he had elected to lead.

He hapished these thoughts from the struggle to phase of it especially appears to the specially appears to the special spe

his mind and turned to Betty. "Do you want that big trunk lifted down?" In these last few months began to have regrets, to seize upon the first practical work that pre-

sented itself.
"Let's explore this camphor chest first." she said, falling on her knees to fumble with the rusty lock.
"Oh, Dick! Dick! Look here. The very thing. It's grandfather's uniform—Mexican war uniform—
not a hole—gold-plated buttons.
If they had been brass they would
have barnished long ago. Look at
the breadth of the shoulders. Look at the epaulettes. Try it on, Dick.

at the epaulettes. Try it on, Dick. Oh, try it on."

Richard obligingly threw off his coat, and thrust his arms in the uniform that Betty held out to him. "Oh, it fits as if it were made for you," she cried, clapping her hands. "You couldn't get in the Colonel's clothes, but grandfather was a big man like you. Oh, it's the best kind of a masquerad costume, Dick, Dick, you look like an angel!"

He ran his fingers over the smooth cloth with some satisfaction. "A brass-buttoned angel!"
he exclaimed.

"It's just splendid," said Betty.
"Whit's the use of talking," said
"Whit's the use of talking," said

he exclaimed.

"It's just splendid," said Betty.

"Such a lot of buttons, and the fit!
Oh, Dick, you really ought to join
the army. You're—you're just
superb. Now if I can only find
something as good."

"He kept down beside her to aid."

now that you have something so

He threw the coat obediently "I'll do anything you say, Betty, into the cradle, and exerting his dear, but if we haven't anything to great strength he lifted a heavilypacked trunk from the pile that reached to the ceiling. As he did so a thin box clattered to his feet, and a heap of old letters were scattered on the floor. As he stooped to pick them up, mechanistooped to pick them up, mec

cally, the yellow papers suggested a thought to him.

"Betty," he said, "did you ever hear any one besides the Colonel talk about our claim to tha! Texas land?"

"No," said Betty, busy with the refractory lid of the trunk. "Did you?"
Miss Fielding mentioned it

today," he answered.
"Jess Fielding?" "She said they might belong to

"Then why doesn't she give them "Why should she? We can't

papers are my grandfather's. This

ms to be a love letter. "Oh, let me see," said Betty jumping up. She leaned against her brother's shoulder, and for a time they stood in silence, both said Betty both Richard, that seems to prove it : intent upon this romance of long

ago.
"I don't call that a love letter,"
she said at last. "It's too stilted."
"I don't know," said Richard. "I don't believe I'm an authority on the subject.

Didn't you ever get one? Didn't you know any girls when you were

They didn't write me letters." "Dear me! I don't see why.
But they will after they see you in that gorgeous uniform."

He smiled a little wearily.
"Don't frighten me, Betty," he

"Pooh!" said Betty. "Everybody gets love letters; I've got a band-box full myself."

"Of course. I may live out here

"I'll take your word for it," he agreed. He was turning over papers with more interest. "Betty," he said, "if there is any truth in what the Colonel believes that the title was forged, well, here we have grandfather's signature dozens of times on these letters. I'm going to take this box to my room. I'm going to sit up nights. I'm I'm going to sit up nights. I'm going to see if there's any truth or law or justice in that Fielding claim. How would you like to have a million dollars, Betty, dear ?" "A million! I would die of joy.

she said.
"Then we had better not try to get it if the effect is to be so deplor-

"It would be delightful," said Betty, pausing for a moment in her foraging. "Then we would have everything that Jess Fielding has

now." Well, I don't know that that phase of it especially appeals to me.

ad.

He banished these thoughts from do that. Spangles is no fit horse for a woman to ride. She will kill

I don't care if she does," said he had schooled himself, when he Betty, with a wilful toss of her

Richard forced her to look straight into his face. "Betty," he began, "I hate to hear you talk like that. Promise me that you won't ride Spangles any more. Promise

Well, I won't if we get the Fielding's money. Then we can have the finest stables in the state. Oh! I love blooded horses, Dick."

"So do I," he admitted.

"And we could travel, Dick,

travel

"What's the use of talking," said
Betty, "we'll never have anything.
Oh, yes, we will! Look here!"
From the bottom of the trunk she

"Have you your uniform?" she

But he had forgotten it: In one arm he carried a dozen of his grand-father's shirts, in the other hand he held the tin box of papers. It beat against the banisters as he de scended the narrow stairs.

CHAPTER VII

THE COLONEL S SWORD Richard had expected that the Colonel would take some interest in the papers that he had found in the attic. He brought them downstairs next evening, and spread them on the mahogany table that stood under the library lamp.

The Colonel picked up one or two of the letters, carelessly adjusted his eyeglasses, and after glancing at the faded pages, he put them down and thumped upon the table to show his emphatic disapproval.

"What rot! I didn't know my father could be such a fool. "My grandmother must have been very beautiful," said Richard

Beautiful sputtered the Colonel. "Of course she was beautiful. In those days men weren't looking for some sour-faced, intellectual, spec tacled woman to put at his head of their table. By heaven, sir, it's woman's business to be beautiful See, here are some verses,

"Such beauty I have ne'er beheld, Your violet eyes, your raven hair, If I could die to prove my love

I'd welcome death, my lady fair. They do sound-rather feverish wonder if men really feel that

Feel ?" repeated the Colonel, staring at his son in astonishment. "Do you mean to say that you have never been in love?" "I can't say that I have."

"Then for the Lord's sake go and

try it. Why, you must have the make-up of a fish, sir. When I was your age I had courted half the girls in the county."

The old look of weariness came

into Richard's eyes.

"I suppose it was the fashion, then," he said. He put the letters into the box and carried them back to his room. The Colonel was willing to keep on swearing that the Fielding title was a forged one, but he considered Richard's efforts to prove it practically useless. He frankly said that he was not willing to strain his eyes going through all that "mooning slush" to convince himself of a fact he knew already.
"But we might convince the

court," Richard had said. The courts are corrupt," reiterated the Colonel with a conviction that precluded argument. "What justice can you expect from a Yankee judge that had his eye shot

out at Manassas?"

"I believe that justice is supposed to be blind," Richard suggested dryly. "But not squint eyed," said the

Colonel who always enjoyed the last word in an argument.
Richard went to bed that night with the feeling that the Fielding case was hopeless. There was no escape for him from the grime of the fields, the uncongenial labor that began with every dawn. Of what use was his college course, his university training? He was a farm hand, ignorant of his work, deprived even of meager wages. Where could he get money for the simple every-day necessities? He thought of writing, teaching, translating, but the ceaseless duties of the day seemed to preclude all the day seemed to preclude all further effort—his mind was hindered, his body heavy with sleep. He must trust to the fruition of the fall. If he had had any confidence in his achievements as a farmer, he would have gone to Jefferson Wilcox for help, but he was too proud to

borrow when payment seemed so remote. It was worry over his increasing indebtedness at the village store that drove him again to the inspection of his grandfather's love letters, and having once begun to wade through the "slush," his original intention was almost forestten in the interest he began to "And we could travel, Dick, travel everywhere—Europe—Asia—and we could go to India and shoot digers, Dick."

"And we could travel, Dick, gotten in the interest he began to take in these human documents. He had not had time or inclination for love affairs of his own, but the

psychology of this ancient romance fascinated him. fascinated him.

He had never known his grandfather, but he had heard him spoken of with vast respect as a brave soldier, a scholar, a statesman. He had been sent to the United States Senate, and had with distinction; he had served with distinction; he had even been considered as a presi-dential possibility. These old dential possibility. These old letters showed another side of his ife, as real as and more vital than his public career.

With a systematizing spirit that comes from long training, Richard sorted out the letters according to date. From the first formal note much?"

"Dick! I'd be broken-hearted if I had to stay at home! I'd go if I had to stay at home! I'd go if I had to walk all the distance. You will take me—you surely wouldn't be cruel enough to deprive me of a pleasure like this."

"But, Betty, dear, I don't know what to do at parties."

"You dance?"

"I don't know how."

"Then you'll have to sit around and talk to the girls."

"I don't know how to do that either."

"I don't know how to do that eithers according to date. From the bottom of the trunk she bought a white satindress festooned in lace and orange blossoms. "Oh. Dick—Dick!" she cried in an ecstasy. "It's my grandmother's wedding-gown. Big as a balloon, and here—here is the hoop-skirt to go with it."

"But, Betty, child, you can't wardrobe; they may be a hundred years behind the times, but they are clean! I'll look fine! You and I will be the greatest things at the party." She cried in an ecstasy. "It's my grandmother's wedding-gown. Big as a balloon, and here—here is the hoop-skirt to go with it."

"But, Betty, child, you can't wardrobe; they may be a hundred years behind the trunk she bouton of the trunk she bounders satindress festooned in lace and orange blossoms. "Oh. Dick—Dick!" she cried in an ecstasy. "It's my grandmother's wedding-gown. Big as a balloon, and here—here is the hoop-skirt to accept "Born" to ward the first proposal of marriage, a strange mixture of humility and in lace and orange blossoms. "Oh. Dick—To here here is the hoop-skirt to accept "Born" the first proposal of marriage, a st "You dance?"
"I don't know how."
"Then you'll have to sit around and talk to the girls."
"I don't know how to do that either."
"Dick! Didn't you ever go to parties when you were at college?"
"Not if I could help it."
"But you wouldn't disappoint me, Dick?" Her voice was very appeal."

"You dance?"
"It's a hoop-skirt, Dick! And won't I look lift down this other trunk for you. Surely we can find something for you among so many boxes."
"Take off that coat," commanded Betty. "I wouldn't have you tear if for the world. It's too beautiful. You can't miss the masquerade look in the ward of the times, but they are clean! I'll's a hoop-skirt, Dick! And won't I look lift down this other trunk for you. She gathered up the cld-fashioned dress and the white wedding veil. "I'm going to my room to try them on."
Richard shut the window and followed her.

To be continued

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