

The Scarlet Dawn

Where they were standing, the road was bordered on either side by a wide stretch of level sward. On the left was a spinney of larches showing as yet no crimson plumes of Spring, round which numbers of rabbits gambolled in air that sparkled like golden wine. It seemed indeed more like July than April, and only the bare trees told the true tale of the season's youthfulness. Up here on the top of the world the three men drank in the beauty of the universe and, having as it were performed their orisons, turned to arrange the details of a bloody encounter.

"I promised I would meet you where you would in a month's time," repeated Vernon obstinately.

"But I prefer to meet you now," replied Charles.

"I have no one to act for me."

"Mr. Clare will act for both of us."

"That is an irregular proceeding."

"I don't care."

"And Miss Courteen?" Vernon was resolved to bring Charles to the real point at issue. "What is to become of Miss Courteen?"

"In either event, Mr. Clare will be able to escort her back to Curtain Wells."

"D——n you," said Vernon, roused by his enemy's assumption of guardianship. "And what if she wishes to stay with me?"

"Mr. Lovely has her mother's authority to conduct her home," interposed Clare.

"What you two prim busybodies don't appear to understand is that Miss Courteen prefers to remain with me."

"Miss Courteen is not her own mistress. She is not of age," said Clare.

"And pray how do you propose to make her accompany you?"

"Why, in this way," interrupted Charles, shaking off his friend's arm, "in this way, Mr. Vernon. If you decline to meet me with pistols, by G—— I'll thrash you senseless with my crop."

Vernon's hands twitched for a moment, but he had learned