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Moxley's Chum.



THOUGH his name was always pronounced Beauvillier by

Moxley; but whether the French name was too long for tongues which delighted in brevity and revelled in abbreviations, or whether they regarded it as a bit of romantic christening on Moxley's part, the settlers on the Rio Madre Dolorosa called him invariably "Moxley's Chum." Moxley was a man of note among the rugged Texans—cattle herders and Indians. The whole exterior of the man—his hawk eye and hooked nose, his grizzled beard and iron-gray hair, his form, athletic, sinewy, spare—attracted attention wherever he appeared, and something underlying these claimed respect.

Taciturn and reserved though he generally was, Moxley had from the first seemed strangely drawn toward the fair-browed adventurer who came among them from "the States," he said, briefly, vouchsafing no further explanations and, oddly enough, Beauvillier reciprocated his partiality. Oddly, because whatever his antecedents were, Beauvillier had the bearing and intuitions of a gentleman, while Moxley—but he filled his place and filled it well.

Perhaps one man in fifty would equal Beauvillier in strength; not more than one in a hundred possessed his strength and symmetry combined. His physique was superb; and the dangerous precision of his long-range rifle and the dexterity with which he handled a bowie indicated ability to hold his own among those who liked him least.

Not of that number, it began to be whispered, was Judith Carew, only daughter of "Old K'rew," as she was in his absence called by the borderers, but when present a vague feeling of respect toward the man himself, or his superabundant flocks and herds, induced the prefix of "Colonel" to his name.

That Judith was beautiful few who had seen her could deny. It would hardly be correct to style her a belle, since belle naturally suggests its masculine opposite—beau—and Judith Carew had none. A queen in her own right, she ruled royally; but not one of her subjects dared hope, from any look or word of hers, ever to share in her kingdom. When Beauvillier appeared among them, however, the aspect of things changed somewhat—Miss Carew bent her proud head in gracious acknowledgment when he was presented to her, and listened with winning deference to his courteous speeches, for courtesy was a part of Beauvillier's nature.

She had resented with incredulous scorn certain

insinuations to the effect that "nobody knew where he came from or what he was." "What does anyone here know of anyone else but what he chooses to tell?" she answered haughtily, "and if a man is not an egotist does it follow of necessity that he is a rogue?"

Beauvillier himself must have seen how the lustrous black eyes grew liquid in his presence, how the slow, sweet smile kindled at his approach; indeed, he seemed drawn to her by a magnetism he could not resist. He would absent himself from her presence for days, weeks even, at a time, but when accident again brought them together he was always found near her—near enough at least to watch with moody eyes the Mexican, José Valcarde, who seemed to stand so high in her father's favor, and who, with handsome person and insinuating address, lost no opportunity to ingratiate himself with the daughter.

Beauvillier was undergoing a longer period of self-imposed exile from her presence than hitherto, while at the same time Moxley, watching him closely, saw how one glimpse of Judith Carew, as she rode past on her milk-white mare, would throw him into a fit of the deepest abstraction, melancholy even, for the remainder of the day. But the grim mentor said nothing till it chanced one day, while baiting their horses in the shade of some cottonwood trees, Miss Carew came riding toward them. Her face grew radiant in the swift surprise of the meeting, and as Beauvillier bowed low in recognition she offered him her hand, and dismounted.

As she left them the pleasant smile faded from her lips and a look of pain and perplexity deepened in her eyes. She had honestly thought that this man loved her—she had gone as far to meet him as a woman could go without being unwomanly—and had met with no response.

But if the wound hurt she could hide it well. If Beauvillier ever had another chance to plead his cause with her it would be one of his own seeking.

As she passed out of sight, Moxley came nearer to him. "Why don't you marry her?" he asked, abruptly, but the speaker seldom indulged in pre-

face. "Why don't I?" and the tone was very bitter, "Why don't I? Because—" He turned and spoke a few sentences in a low, rapid undertone. Moxley looked at him incredulously. "You don't mean that?" he said slowly.

"I mean just that," answered Beauvillier, drearily, and the look on his high-bred face was sorrowful to see.

They slept beneath the cottonwood trees, and when Moxley opened his eyes in the gray of early dawn Beauvillier stood booted and spurred beside him.

"I'm on the back trail, Moxley," he said. "If I fail in my errand I will overtake you before sundown."

Moxley prepared and ate his solitary breakfast, but seemed in no haste to mount. When he began saddling his horse he muttered: "You may call Tom Moxley a fool or not, but I'll ride to Kerrew's ranch, for three strange things have happened this morning. I dreamed of a gallows tree; an eagle flew and screamed three times above my head, and Tom Moxley has changed his mind before noon!"

When he reached the Carew ranch his quick eye noted at once a certain appearance of disorder which prevailed everywhere. Gates were flung open and drawbars were let down, but no one was in sight. Dismounting, he walked straight to the front door and rapped vigorously. It was opened by Miss Carew herself.

"Have any of the men told you?" was her hasty question.

He shook his head. Judith Carew then explained that the night previous a number of the horses and mules belonging to the ranch had been stolen and the loss not discovered till the household rose at their usual hour. Her father was gone eastward for a few days and in his absence she had made such arrangements as seemed best to her for the pursuit and possible recapture of the stock.

Moxley's questions were brief and to the point.

"Who had gone first in pursuit?"

"Mr. Valcarde. He had called early in the morning and on learning their loss had offered at once to lead the pursuit."

