MC2397

POOR DOCUMENT

CORNER LOTS.

[BY ROBERT HOWE FLETCHER.]

[Continued.]

"But what is it?" said Benton, picking up one of the lavender sticks and looking at it suspiciously. "Dynamite! Phiz'z'z'! For the old woman?" with an expressive reference to the region occupied by the landlady.

"No, you old Anarchist," replied Brown. Then in a fine lady's voice he said: 'Tis sweet lavender. Placed in your bureau drawer, it will give a pleasing odor to your linen. That's right," he continued in his own voice, "laugh! I was going to give you one. I shan't now."

"Did they throw a bureau in?" said Benton; "otherwise, it is not much use to us."

"Use!" said Brown, scornfully; "think of a man who has to go without his breakfast buying $3 worth of lavender!"

"Don't make me laugh any more," said Benton; "it is weakening, and we can't afford it. Tell me, how did you come to buy those things?"

Whereupon Mr. Brown narrated the story of his purchase.

"Young," said Benton, at its conclusion, "and pretty"——

"I did not say so," interposed Brown.

"It was not necessary," replied his friend; "we must get acquainted with her."

"Why?" said Brown, in not altogether pleased surprise.

"Because she may have friends among the natives here, who have land that we can handle for them. Land, my dear boy, land, that is what we want. You don't seem to fancy the idea," continued Benton, as Brown remained silent; "but we cannot afford to be romantic just now. It is absolutely necessary to use every chance. You have made a three-dollar investment, and I don't propose to throw it away. I am superstitious in money matters, you know, and I have a fancy that this generous act of yours may bring us luck. Three dollars' worth of bread on the waters, as it were. I shall make a point of getting acquainted with your friend, and I should like to have you stand in with me. If you would rather not, why, of course"——

But Mr. Brown said he would "stand in," only, be it understood, for the sole purpose of keeping Mr. Benton's business proclivities within decent bounds.

* * * * * *

Tulita sat upon the door step of the white adobe house looking out upon the shining waters of the bay. The sun was sinking into the Pacific behind Point Loma and the soft air was full of a golden haze. The Coronados islands and the distant hills of Mexico were outlined in a purple silhouette against the evening sky and everything was still and peaceful—everything except Tulita's poor little heart. Her mother had not been very well for the last two or three days, and the death of her father was recent enough to cause the slightest illness to fill Tulita with alarmed foreboding. Then they were so lonely, she and her mother, with no one to care for them, and they were so poor; it was all very forlorn, and they had just been crying over it together, they two, in the twilight. And now, with that vague interest which the mind after great emotion feels in trifling matters, Tulita sat on the door step and idly watched the sea gulls fluttering and squabbling over some scraps thrown from a passing steamer, and then her eyes followed a jack rabbit which loped across the road and disappeared in the sage brush; then she saw two men come along and stop at the house next to hers. This latter incident rather aroused her curiosity, because, while sea gulls and jack rabbits were plentiful enough in that neighborhood, gentlemen were not, and these appeared to be gentlemen. Evidently, from their gestures, they were inquiring for some one; but what was her surprise when these gentlemen left the other house and coming directly to her garden gate opened it and approached her.

"Is this where Mrs. Lunavarita lives?" said the elder of the two gentlemen, as they both politely removed their hats.

Restraining an impulse to take refuge in the house, Tulita replied that it was.

"If it will not disturb her," continued the gentleman, "may we see her for a moment?"

At this juncture the senora herself, hearing the voices, came to the door and answered by bidding them enter.

"I hope that we are not intruding," continued the stranger who did the talking; "my name is Benton and this is my friend Mr. Brown."

The senora bowed in a stately way.

"My friend here," continued Mr. Benton, "bought some lavender sticks at the Blank hotel this morning which we understand were made by you."

"Lavender sticks," repeated the senora, slowly, shaking her head; "I do not know what that is that you call lavender sticks. Tulita," she continued, turning to her daughter, "de que esta hablando el caballero? Que son palitos de lavandrila, hija mia, sabes tu?"

Yes, Tulita knew. At the sound of the familiar words her face flushed hotly, and then grew very pale. What was the matter? Had she offended some law in regard to the sale of lavender sticks, and were these sheriffs come to arrest her? Or—more dreadful thought—were here so badly made that the people who had bought them came to make complaint to her mother? Then she heard the gentlemen say something about souvenirs of California, aunts in the east, all of the lavender sticks at the hotel being sold, and taking the liberty of coming to Mrs. Lunavarita herself to see if she would make him a dozen more. All of her lavender sticks sold! Could it be possible? Tulita's heart gave a happy bound, and in the excitement of the moment she turned to her bewildered mother and poured forth her confession, in what Mr. Brown afterward declared was the most musical Spanish he had ever heard in his life. This was followed by quick, sharp questions from the mother, and pleading, faltering answers from the girl, and then what seemed a torrent of repreach and protest fell from the lips of the senora.

"It seems," said Mr. Benton, in a low tone to his friend, "that the old lady was not posted."

"No, confound you," indignantly whispered Mr. Brown, "you have let the little girl in for a nice scolding."

Then the Senora Lunavarita, with flushed face and glistening eyes, turned to the two gentlemen and said, with dignity and pathos:

"Senores, I have to make the apology to you. It is my daughter that makes these—these"——

"Lavender sticks," suggested Benton, pleasantly.

"These lavender sticks, and I did not know. She is a young lady, and I would not have her do work. Sainted Mother! it is bad enough for me, who am old. And I did not know, you understand? Not that my daughter ever does anything without telling me," she added, hastily; "no, senor, never! She has no secrets from her mother. But her father is dead and we are poor." Here the senora's voice faltered a little, and one of the tears that had been gathering in her eyes rolled slowly down her face. "We are poor, and I have to work, and my daughter, she loves me, and she says it makes her sad to see me sew, sew, all the time sew, and she do nothing, and so she makes these things to help her poor mother. That is the way of it, senor. She is a good daughter, and—and—" here the senora's feeling overcame her, and, turning to Tulita, who had stolen to her side, with a little gesture of surrender she allowed her tears to flow unrestrained.

Quickly putting her arms around her mother's neck, Tulita drew her head down upon her shoulder, and spoke to her soothingly in Spanish. Then, turning gravely, almost defiantly to the young men, she said: "My mother has not been very well for the last few days, senores, and to-night she is not herself. You will excuse her."

At this, both of the gentlemen arose, and Mr. Brown, speaking for the first time, said: "We are very sorry, indeed we are. We had no idea that—that your mother was not well. In fact, I hope that you will pardon us for taking the liberty of calling on you about so trifling a matter."

Now, although Mr. Brown's apology was not very eloquent, there was a sincerity and sympathetic feeling in the young man's voice that made its way to the hearts of both of the women. The senora raised her head, and, drying her eyes, said, with smiling simplicity:

"Ah, senor, do not feel distressed because I cry a little. I often cry; I am not very strong since my husband died. But it is nothing."

Tulita meanwhile, having arisen, had gone to the door, in the evident expectation of the immediate departure of her unexpected guests. In fact, Mr. Brown himself stood hat in hand ready to go, but Mr. Benton was lingering to make some reply to the senora's words. Then Mr. Brown, on the impulse of the moment, said to the girl, who stood near him, "You are not annoyed or angry with me—with us, I mean, for coming?"

"Why should I be?" replied Tulita, with dignity. "It is of no consequence."

"May I hope, then, that you will make the lavender sticks for me? I will call for them, of course," said Mr. Brown.

"I will make some more for sale at the news stand," replied Tulita; "no doubt you can get them there."

Having administered which little cut Tulita turned her big dark eyes severely upon the still tarrying Mr. Benton. Brown, convinced now that their visit had displeased the young lady, also turned and glared at the cause of his discomfiture. What was their surprise to find that Mr. Benton had reseated himself and that he and the senora had apparently launched into an extended conversation.

"Are you coming, Benton?" said Brown, impatiently.

"In a minute, my dear fellow," replied his friend; "I have just discovered that Mrs. Lunavarita and I have a whole lot of mutual friends up in San Francisco."

And the senora herself, turning to her daughter, confirmed this in quite an animated way, repeating several names, evidently those of the friends referred to.

Then Mr. Brown's eyes sought Tulita's with such solemn protest that she in her turn could not help smiling. Common politeness forced her to say, "Will you not sit down?" But no, Mr. Brown would not sit down; he preferred to do penance standing. Then he looked so unhappy, casting gloomy glances at his friend, which that gentleman ignored, that Tulita finally began to feel a little pity for the young man. Perhaps she had been too severe. After all he was very evidently a gentleman, and was not bad looking, and he had the good taste to appreciate her lavender sticks. And so, after a little hesitation, she ventured to ask him if he was a stranger in San Diego. She almost laughed again to see how grateful he looked for this bit of condescension. In fact this young man was so modest and courteous—so different from his companion, for instance—it was really a pleasure to encourage him a little. Then gradually Mr. Brown ceased to cast remonstrative glances at his friend, and presently, when he saw that he was keeping Miss Lunavarita standing, he consented to sit down.

It was growing dark when Mr. Brown again arose to his feet and exclaimed, peremptorily, "Come, Benton, we must go! I don't know what Mrs. Lunavarita and her daughter will think of us."

Now, even if Mrs. Lunavarita's daughter had cared to give expression to her thoughts just then, she was the next moment rendered speechless by her mother's behavior. Giving Mr. Benton her hand as he bade her good night, the senora said, in a pleased and most vivacious manner, "Good night, senor, I shall look for you to-morrow at 10 o'clock, and then we will take our little ride."

After leaving the house Mr. Benton and Mr. Brown plodded along through the dusk and dust in silence for some minutes. Then Mr. Benton said, "Women are strange creatures." To which trite remark his companion made no reply. But, having arrived at the end of his reflections, and broken the silence, Mr. Benton continued: "Do you remember my telling you, Frank, that I had a sort of superstition that your $3 investment was going to bring us luck?" And as Brown assented, with a nod of his head, "Well, I think it has, though I had no idea when I inquired the name of your friends, of the people next door, that the luck was all ready, laid away in lavender, as it were, waiting for us to come and get it. Mrs. Lunavarita has 200 or 300 acres of land over on the sea shore. What do you think of that? It is the same old story. They once owned leagues and this is all they have left, and they have got that, as Mrs. Lunavarita says, because it is not worth anything, although she is wrong there. At any rate she is holding it for her daughter, hoping that it may be worth something some day. It is all they have got. Two thousand dollars is the highest figure she has thought of. If it is anything like she describes it, and if she will let me handle it, I propose to make it worth $100,000 in the next year."

"Look here, Tom," said Brown, impulsively, "if you do get hold of this thing, you will do the best you can by Mrs. Lunavarita, won't you?"

"My dear fellow," said Mr. Benton in a rather cold tone, "is it necessary to ask me that? I am not a devourer of widows and orphans."

"Oh, hang it, don't be touchy," said Brown. "You know I did not mean anything like that. Only these two women are so lonely, and innocent, and plucky, they really have made quite an impression on me."

"I noticed that one of them seemed to," replied Mr. Benton, dryly, "but I did not observe the other had. As for the proposition, if everything turns out as I expect, it was a lucky day for Mrs. Lunavarita when I knocked at her door. And now let us quit work for the day, and go and have a respectable dinner as a send off for the new firm of Benton & Brown, real estate dealers."

* * * * * *

A year and a half have elapsed. It is Christmas Eve. Once more Tulita is watching the sun set, but this time from another home, where Point Loma does not intervene its huge bulk, where she can see the golden disc slipping down between the blue of the Pacific and the blue of the evening sky, until the last burnished tip disappears. Then the soft warm air is filled with rich color as the afterglow stains sky and water with its hues. Turning away, Tulita proceeds with her occupation of gathering roses which this celestial pageant had interrupted, while the air grows heavy with their perfume. Behind Tulita is a large so called "Queen Anne" cottage, and on the veranda sits her mother, lazily rocking and fanning herself. Next to the senora sits an elderly gentleman, and on the back of the elderly gentleman's chair leans Mr. Brown, of Philadelphia. As Tulita passes the side of the porch, she dexterously tosses a rose to the elderly gentleman, and laughs, as he successfully catches it, and presses it to his lips with a gallant bow.

"Well, well, well," he says, breaking the silence, "imagine being out of door without a wrap, gathering roses on Christmas Eve. And you really mean to tell me, Frank, that this place has been set out only a year?"

"Yes, sir," replied the young man, "just about. You see, father, in this country water is everything. If you can only get plenty of water, things grow like magic. I remember that is what worried us most when we put Lunavarita town lots on the market, water was the great question, and we were afraid we would have to pipe it from town. But as soon as we struck that artesian well we were fixed. The property doubled in value in twenty-four hours, and we sold enough lots the first week to pay for laying out the town, putting down water and sewer pipes, and subsidizing a street car line to run a motor out here. After that the people used to come and stand in line all day long at our office waiting to buy lots. We raised the price religiously on the first of each month, and now you can't buy a lot in Lunavarita for less than $300. Water is king in California. There is a company formed to flume it down from the mountains about sixty miles from here; it is a good scheme, too."

"It must cost a great deal," said the elder Mr. Brown, doubtfully.

"Oh, no," said his son, "a million ought to do it."

"A mere trifle," said the old gentleman, mimicking Frank's airy tone. "Upon my soul," he continued, with sudden energy, "if I stay here much longer I shall be as stark, staring mad as all of the rest of you are. Why, they tell me that that peninsula over there, with that absurdly big hotel, which they will never fill in the world"——"All of the rooms are engaged already," murmured Frank, but his father, with a snort of incredulity, proceeded without heeding him—"with its parks, and its drives, and its zoological gardens, and God knows what, begging your pardon, madame, they tell me that that was a sage brush desert last year. I don't believe it—I won't believe it!"

"My dear father," said his son, "two or three years ago San Diego itself was little more than that—you could have bought pretty near the whole place for a short bit. But a railroad came in here and that brought people, and when the world at large began to find out what a magnificent harbor"——

"There, there!" exclaimed his father, hastily, "don't get started now. I have heard all about the harbor."

"And the glorious climate?"

"Yes," said Mr. Brown, emphatically, "and the climate, too."

"I am afraid you don't appreciate it, though," said his son, reproachfully. "Just think of the Boston east wind to-night and compare it with this air, where you can feel your lungs grow. Why, I believe I have sprouted an extra one myself since I have been here."

"I believe that you have, my dear boy," said the old gentleman, chuckling, "from the amount of talking that you do, I believe that you have. Eh, senora, I rather think I got him there? Did you hear that, Tulita, my dear? Ha! ha! ha!"

At this moment a carriage was seen coming up the hill toward the house.

"Ah!" cried Tulita, "here comes Aladdin."

The carriage stopped, and Benton descended. Tulita, waving the bunch of roses before his face, bade him good evening.

"Well, sir," said the elder Mr. Brown, "and how many towns have you built today?"

"Not many," said Benton, laughing. Then drawing from his coat pocket a package of papers, he handed it to Mr. Brown, saying: "Here are your deeds and abstracts; they are all right!"

"What!" shouted Frank. "Father, have you"——but here he bursts out laughing. "Father," he continued, regaining his gravity, "father, look me in the eye. Is it possible that you, you, a conservative merchant of Philadelphia, have, at the present ruinous prices, been indulging in wild, insane speculation, that you"——

"There, there, Master Frank," said his father, joining in the laughter; "we all know that you have sprouted an extra lung."

"Don't mind him, Mr. Brown," said Benton. "You have got a bargain. As soon as you get your vines well under way one year's crop of raisin grapes will pay for it."

"Oh, of course, of course," said the old gentleman, "it is a bargain. They all are. Though to my mind," he continued, putting his arm around Tulita and drawing her to his side, "this is the best bargain ever got in southern California."

"Yes," said his son, looking at his wife proudly, "and to think that I only had to put up $3 for the option."

"Men are so conceited," said Tulita, confidingly to her father-in-law; "that was not the way of it at all. It was I who gave a dozen lavender sticks for a husband and the town of Lunavarita."

WILL O' THE MILL.

BY ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

The mill where Will lived with his adopted parents stood in a falling valley between pine woods and great mountains. Above, hill after hill soared upwards until they soared out of the depth of the hardiest timber, and stood naked against the sky. Some way up, a long gray village lay like a seam or a rag of vapor on a wooded hillside, and when the wind was favorable, the sound of the church bells would drop down, thin and silvery, to Will. Below, the valley grew ever steeper and steeper, and at the same time widened out on either hand, and from an eminence beside the mill it was possible to see its whole length and away beyond it over a wide plain, where the river turned and shone, and moved on from city to city on its voyage toward the sea. It chanced that over this valley there lay a pass into a neighboring kingdom, so that, quiet and rural as it was, the road that ran along beside the river was a high thoroughfare between two splendid and powerful societies. All through the summer, traveling carriages came crawling up, or went plunging briskly downward past the mill; and as it happened that the other side was very much easier of ascent, the path was not much frequented except by people going in one direction; and of all the carriages that Will saw go by, five-sixths were plunging briskly downward and only one-sixth crawling up. Much more was this the case with foot passengers. All the lightfooted tourists, all the peddlers laden with strange wares, were tending downward like the river that accompanied their path. Nor was this all; for when Will was yet a child a disastrous war arose over a great part of the world. The newspapers were full of defeats and victories, the earth rang with cavalry hoofs, and often for days together and for miles around the coil of battle terrified good people from their labors in the field. Of all this, nothing was heard for a long time in the valley; but at last one of the commanders pushed an army over the pass by forced marches, and for three days horse and foot, cannon and tumbril, drum and standard, kept pouring downward past the mill. All day the child stood and watched them on their passage—the rhythmical stride, the pale, unshaven faces tanned about the eyes, the discolored regimentals and the tattered flags, filled him with a sense of weariness, pity and wonder; and all night long, after he was in bed, he could hear the cannon pounding and the feet trampling, and the great armament sweeping onward and downward past the mill. No one in the valley ever heard the fate of the expedition, for they lay out of the way of gossip in those troublous times; but Will saw one thing plainly, that not a man returned. Whither had they all gone? Whither went all the tourists and peddlers with strange wares? whither all the brisk barouches with servants in the dicky? whither the water of the stream, ever coursing downward and ever renewed from above? Even the wind blew oftener down the valley, and carried the dead leaves along with it in the fall. It seemed like a great conspiracy of things animate and inanimate; they all went downward, fleetly and gayly downward, and only he, it seemed, remained behind, like a stock upon the wayside. It sometimes made him glad when he noticed how the fishes kept their heads up stream. They, at least, stood faithfully by him, while all else were posting downward to the unknown world.

One evening he asked the miller where the river went.

"It goes down the valley," answered he, "and turns a power of mills—six score mills, they say, from here to Unterdeck—and it none the wearier after all. And then it goes out into the lowlands, and waters the great corn country, and runs through a sight of fine cities (so they say) where kings live all alone in great palaces, with a sentry walking up and down before the door. And it goes under bridges with stone men upon them, looking down and smiling so curious at the water, and living folks leaning their elbows on the wall and looking over too. And then it goes on and on, and down through marshes and sands, until at last it falls into the sea, where the ships are that bring parrots and tobacco from the Indies. Ay, it has a long trot before it as it goes singing over our weir, bless its heart!"

"And what is the sea?" asked Will.

"The sea!" cried the miller. "Lord help us all, it is the greatest thing God made! That is where all the water in the world runs down into a great salt lake. There it lies, as flat as my hand and as innocent like as a child; but they do say when the wind blows it gets up into water mountains bigger than any of ours and swallows down great ships bigger than our mill, and makes such a roaring that you can hear it miles away upon the land. There are great fish in it five times bigger than a bull, and one old serpent as long as our river and as old as all the world, with whiskers like a man and a crown of silver on her head."

Will thought he had never heard anything like this, and he kept on asking question after question about the world that lay away down the river, with all its perils and marvels, until the old miller became quite interested himself, and at last took him by the hand and led him to the hilltop that overlooks the valley and the plain. The sun was near setting and hung low down in a cloudless sky. Everything was defined and glorified in golden light. Will had never seen so great an expanse of country in his life; he stood and gazed with all his eyes. He could see the cities, and the woods and fields, and the bright curves of the river, and far away to where the rim of the plain trenched along the shining heavens. An overmastering emotion seized upon the boy, soul and body; his heart beat so thickly that he could not breathe; the scene swam before his eyes; the sun seemed to wheel round and round, and throw off, as it turned, strange shapes which disappeared with the rapidity of thought, and were succeeded by others. Will covered his face with his hands and burst into a violent fit of tears; and the poor miller, sadly disappointed and perplexed, saw nothing better for it than to take him up in his arms and carry him home in silence.

From that day forward Will was full of new hopes and longings. Something kept tugging at his heart strings; the running water carried his desires along with it as he dreamed over its fleeting surface; the wind, as it ran over innumerable tree tops, hailed him with encouraging words; branches beckoned downward; the open road, as it shouldered round the angles and went turning and vanishing fast and faster down the valley, tortured him with its solicitations. He spent long whiles on the eminence, looking down the rivershed and abroad on the flat lowlands, and watched the clouds that traveled forth upon the sluggish wind and trailed their purple shadows on the plain; or he would linger by the wayside, and follow the carriages with his eyes as they rattled downward by the river. It did not matter what it was; everything that went that way, were it cloud or carriage, bird or brown water in the stream, he felt his heart flow out after it in an ecstasy of longing.

We are told by men of science that all the ventures of mariners on the sea, all that countermarching of tribes and races that confounds old history with its dust and rumor, sprang from nothing more abstruse than the laws of supply and demand, and a certain natural instinct for cheap rations. To any one thinking deeply, this will seem a dull and pitiful explanation. The tribes that came swarming out of the north and east, if they were indeed pressed onward from behind by others, were drawn at the same time by the magnetic influence of the south and west. The fame of other lands had reached them; the name of the eternal city rang in their ears; they were not colonists, but pilgrims; they traveled towards wine and gold and sunshine, but their hearts were set on something higher. That divine unrest, that old stinging trouble of humanity that makes all high achievements and all miserable failure, the same that spread wings with Icarus, the same that sent Columbus into the desolate Atlantic, inspired and supported these barbarians on their perilous march. There is one legend which profoundly represents their spirit, of how a flying party of these wanderers encountered a very old man shod with iron. The old man asked them whither they were going; and they answered with one voice: "To the Eternal City!" He looked upon them gravely. "I have sought it," he said, "over the most part of the world. Three such pairs as I now carry on my feet have I worn out upon this pilgrimage, and now the fourth is growing slender underneath my steps. And all this while I have not found the city." And he turned and went his own way alone, leaving them astonished.

(To be Continued.)

When your canary droops and seems ill, particularly if he shows signs of asthma or a cold by a wheezing sound, feed him for a week on boiled bread and milk. Mix bird-seed and flax seed and give it; also strew red pepper plentifully on a piece of salt pork and tie it up in the cage within reach. Give it also a little saffron in its water now and then.

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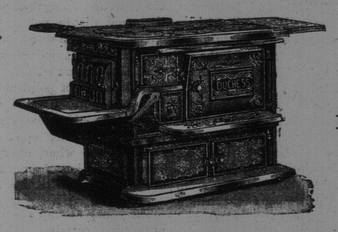

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