

OUR SATURDAY SHORT STORY

"Ma'am?" BY GOUVERNEUR MORRIS

Illustrated By Dom L. Lavin

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In most affairs, except those which related to his matrimonial ventures, Marcus Antonius Saterlee was a patient man. On three occasions "an ardent temperance and the heart of a dove" as he himself had expressed it, had married a wife within his house. The first had been the love of his childhood; the wooing of the second had lasted but six weeks; that of the third but three. He rejoiced in the fact that he had been a good husband to three good women. He lamented that all were dead. Now and then he squirmed his bull head around on his bul body, and glanced across the aisle at the showy woman who was daintily picking a chicken wing. Each time he looked he muttered:

"Eighty. Too slight. Stuck on herself. Pinhead." etc.
With his food Saterlee was not patient. He dispensed with most of the delicacies of other people's matrimonial ventures. And, in particular, that contemplated and threatened by his son and heir was moving across three hundred miles of inundated country as fast as a train could carry him. His son had written: "Dearest Dad: I've found Dorothy again. She's at Carcasonne. They thought her lungs were bad, but hey aren't. We're going to be married a week from today—next Friday—at nine a. m. This marriage is going to take place, Daddy, dear. You can't prevent it. I write this so to be on the square. I'm inviting you to the wedding. I'll be hurt if you don't show up. What if Dorothy's mother is an actress and has been divorced twice? You've been a marrying man yourself. Dad, Dorothy is all, darling from head to foot. But I love you, too, Daddy, and if you can see it my way, why, God bless and keep you just the same. JIM."

I can't deny that Marcus Antonius Saterlee was touched by his son's epistle. But he was not moved out of reason.

"The girl's mother," he said to himself, "is a painted, divorced jade." And he thought with pleasure of the faith, patience, and rectitude of the three gentle companions whom he had successively married and buried. There was never any divorce in the Saterlee blood, he had prided himself. "Man or woman, we stick by our choice till he or she turns up his or her toes. Not till then do we think of anybody else. But then we're married. It's not good to live alone especially in a small community in Southern California."

He glanced once more at the showy lady across the aisle. She had finished her chicken wing, and was dipping her fingers in a finger bowl, thus displaying to sparkling advantage a number of handsome rings.

"My boy's girl's mother, a painted actress," he muttered as he looked. "Not if I know it." And then he muttered: "You'd look like an actress if you was painted."

Though the words cannot have been distinguished, the sounds were audible. "Sir?" said the lady, stiffly but courteously.

"Nothing, Ma'am," muttered Mark Anthony, much abashed. "I'm surprised to see so much water in this arid corner of the world, where I have often suffered for want of it. I must have been talking to myself to that effect."

The lady looked out of the window—no, her's, but Saterlee's.

"It does look," she said, "as if the waters had divorced themselves from the bed of the ocean. I suppose," she continued, "they attribute those constant and tedious delays to which we have been subjected all day to the premature melting of snow in the fastnesses of the Sierras?"

This phrase did not shock Saterlee. He was amazed at the power of memory which it proved. For three hours earlier he had read a close paraphrase of it in a copy of the Tomb City Picayune which he had bought at that city.

"The train ran slower and slower. 'Do you think we shall ever get anywhere?' queried the lady. 'Not when we expect to, Ma'am,' said Saterlee."

The train gave a jolt. And then, very quietly, the dining-car rolled over on its side down the embankment. There was a subdued smashing of china and glass. A clergyman at one of the rear tables quickly remarked: "Washout," and Saterlee, who had not forgotten the days when he had learned to fall from a bucking bronco, relaxed his great muscles and swore roundly and at great length. The car came to rest at the bottom of the embankment, less on its side than on its top. For a moment—or so it seemed—all was perfectly quiet. Then Saterlee saw the showy lady across the aisle descending upon him through the air.

"Thank you," she murmured, as her impact drove most of the breath out of Saterlee's body. "How strong you are."

"When you are rested, Ma'am," said he with extreme punctiliousness, "I think we may leave the car by climbing over the sides of the seats on this side."

He preceded her over and over the sides of the seats, opened the car door, and helped her to the ground. And then, his heart of a parent having awakened to the situation, he forgot her. He pulled a timetable from his pocket, and consulted a mile-post. It was forty miles to Carcasonne—and only two miles to Grub City—a lovely city of the plains.

"Grub City—hire a buggy—drive to Carcasonne," he muttered, and he moved forward with great strides. "Where do you want to go?" asked the proprietor of the Great City Cafe. "Carcasonne," said Saterlee. "Not the junction—the resort."

"Well," said the proprietor, "there's just one hotel and one trap in Grub City, and they ain't for hire. We've no use for them," said the great man. So there're for sale. Now what do you think they'd be worth to you?" "Fifty dollars," he said as one accustomed to business.

It was then that a panting, female voice was raised behind him. "Sixty dollars!" His showy acquaintance of the dining car had followed him along the floor as fast as she could and was just coming up!

"I thought you two was a trust," commenced the proprietor's wife, who

stood near. "But it seems you ain't even a community of interests."
"Seventy dollars," said Saterlee, quietly.
The lady advanced to his side, counting the change in her purse.
"Seventy-six dollars and eighty-five cents," she said.
"Eighty dollars," said Saterlee.
"Oh!" cried the lady, "seventy-six and eighty-five is every cent I've got with me—and you're no gentleman to bid high!"
"Eighty," repeated Saterlee.

"Dearest Dad: I've found Dorothy again. She's at Carcasonne. They thought her lungs were bad, but hey aren't. We're going to be married a week from today—next Friday—at nine a. m. This marriage is going to take place, Daddy, dear. You can't prevent it. I write this so to be on the square. I'm inviting you to the wedding. I'll be hurt if you don't show up. What if Dorothy's mother is an actress and has been divorced twice? You've been a marrying man yourself. Dad, Dorothy is all, darling from head to foot. But I love you, too, Daddy, and if you can see it my way, why, God bless and keep you just the same. JIM."

And he swam to shallow water, not without great labor, towing Mrs. Kimbal by the hair. But here he picked her up in his arms, this time with no word spoken, and carried her ashore.

"Eighty dollars," said the son-in-law, "for a horse and buggy that a man's never seen is too good to be true."

"I guess your dress ain't really hurt," commented Saterlee. "I remember my old woman—Anna—had a brown silk that got a mud bath, and came through in your cellar or in mine?" he asked. "I ain't set eyes on her since February."

Saterlee turned quietly to the angry and tearful vision whom he had so callously outbid.

"Ma'am," he said, "if we come to my stop first or thereabouts, the buggy is yours to go on with. If we reach yours first, it's mine. Now, if you're going further than Carcasonne Junction, I'll get off there. And either I'll walk to the hotel or hire another trap."

"Why?" exclaimed the lady, "are you bound for Carcasonne House? So am I."

"In that case," said Saterlee elegantly, "we'll go the whole hog together. 'Quite so,' said the lady primly. 'You'd ought to make Carcasonne House by midnight,' said the proprietor. 'Heaven!' exclaimed the lady. 'And if we don't make it by midnight?'"

"We will by 1 or 2 o'clock." The lady became very grave. "You couldn't see that, it can't be helped. But it would be ever so much nicer if we could get in before midnight."

"I take your point, Ma'am," said Saterlee. "I can promise nothing. It's all up to the horse."

"Of course," said the lady, "it doesn't really matter. But," and she spoke a little bitterly, "several times in my life my actions and my motives have been open to misinterpretation. I have suffered, sir, much."

"Well, Ma'am," said Saterlee, "my reputation as a married man and a father of many children is mixed up in this, too. If we are in late—or out late—rather—and there's any talk—I guess I can quiet some of it. I rather guess I can."

The proprietor entered the conversation with an insinuating wedge of a voice.

"I don't like to mind other folks' business," he said, "but if the lady is fretting about being out all night with a total stranger, I feel it my duty to remark that in Grub City there is a justice of the peace. He bowed and made a gesture which either indicated his whole person, or that smug and bulging portion of it to which the gesture was more directly applied. Saterlee and the lady did not look at each other and laugh. They were painfully embarrassed."

Saterlee brought down the whip sharply upon the bony flank of the old horse. But not for a whole minute did the sensation caused by the whip appear to travel to the ancient mare's brain. Not till reaching a deep puddle did she seem suddenly aware of the fact that she had been whipped. Then, however, she rushed through the puddle, covering Saterlee and the lady with mud, and, having reached the other side, fell once more into a halting walk.

Once more the road ran under a shadow of water. And once more the old mare remembered that she had been whipped, and made a rush for it. Fresh mud was added to that which had already dried upon them by the dry miracle of the air.

"She'd ought to have been a motorboat," said Saterlee, the mud which had entered his mouth gitting unpleasantly between his teeth. The mare rushed through another puddle.

The lady laughed. "Please don't



bother to hold her," she said; "I don't mind—now."
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Once more the road ran under a shadow of water. And once more the old mare remembered that she had been whipped, and made a rush for it. Fresh mud was added to that which had already dried upon them by the dry miracle of the air.

"She'd ought to have been a motorboat," said Saterlee, the mud which had entered his mouth gitting unpleasantly between his teeth. The mare rushed through another puddle.

The lady laughed. "Please don't

"It all depends," said Saterlee, "how deep the water runs over the road, and whether we can keep to the road. Can you swim, Ma'am?"

Mrs. Kimbal admitted that, in clothes made to the purpose, and in very shallow water, she was not without proficiency.

"Would you rather we turned back?" he asked.

"I feel sure you'll get me over," said she.

For some moments Saterlee considered the river, knitting his brows to see better for the light was falling by leaps and bounds. Then, in an embarrassed voice:

"I've GOT to do it. It's only right. 'I feel sure,' he said, 'that under the circumstances you'll make every allowance.'"

Without further hesitation—in fact, with almost desperate haste, as if wishing to dispose of a disagreeable duty—he ripped open the buttons of his waistcoat, and removed it at the same time with his coat, as if the two had been but one garment.

"PLEASE," she said, "don't mind anything—on my account."

He reached desperately for his boots, unlaced them and took them off.

"Why," exclaimed Mrs. Kimbal, "BOTH your heels need darning!"

Saterlee had tied his boots together, and his fastening them around his neck by the remainder of the laces.

"I haven't anybody to do my darning now," he said. "My girls are all at school, except two that's married. So he as dead, even if she loved him, as if he had really died? He is dead to her—buried—men don't come back. Well, maybe the more she loved that man the quicker she is to get the service read over him—that's divorcee and find another whom she can trust and love. Suppose that happens to her twice. The cases would seem identical, sir, I think. Except that I could never, never fancy myself marrying again—I'm a husband and died still loving me, still faithful to me."

"I take your point," said Saterlee. "I have never thought of it along those lines. But I may as well tell you, Ma'am, that I myself have buried more than one wife."

"If we are to be on an honest footing," said the lady, "I must tell you that I have divorced more than one husband, and yet when I size myself up, I do not seem to myself a lost woman. It's true that I act for my living."

"I know," he interrupted, "you are Mrs. Kimbal. But I thought I knew more about you than I seem to. I'm Saterlee. And my business at Carcasonne House is the same as yours."

"Yes," he said, "there we are. And that's lucky in a way. We both seem to want the same thing—that is, to keep our children from marrying each other. We can talk the matter over and decide how to do it."

"We can talk it over anyway," as you say," said Saterlee. But—and he fished in his pocket and brought out his son's letter and gave it to her. She read it in the waning light.

"But," he repeated gently, "that does not read like a letter that a brute of a son would write to a brute of a father; now, does it?"

She did not answer. But she opened her purse, and took out a carefully and minutely folded sheet of notepaper.

"That's my Dolly's letter to me," she said, "and it doesn't sound like—" her voice broke. He took the letter from her and read.

"No," he said, "it doesn't. And he said it roughly, because nothing brought rough speech out of the man so surely as tears—when they were in his own eyes."

"Well," said Mrs. Kimbal with a sigh, "let's talk."

"No," said Saterlee, "let's think."

They could hear from far ahead a sound as of roaring waterfalls.

"That," said Saterlee, "will be Gila River. Mebbe we'll have to think about getting across that first. It's a river now, by the sound of it, if it never was before."

"Fortunately it's not dark yet," said Mrs. Kimbal.

"The last time I had trouble with a river," said Saterlee, "was when my first wife died. That was the American River in flood. I had to cross it to get a doctor. We'd gone prospecting—just the old woman and me—more for a lark than profit."

He broke off short. "And there's Gila River," he said.

"I hoped you were going to tell me what your poor wife said in her letter," said Mrs. Kimbal.

"Oh, Ma'am," he said, hesitated, cleared his throat, and became confused.

"You'd rather not—" said Mrs. Kimbal.

"It isn't that," he said, "it would seem like bragging."

"Surely not," she said.

Saterlee, with his eyes on the broad, brown flood which they were approaching, repeated like a lesson:

"Mark—I'm dying. I want it to do good, not harm. Jenny always thought the world of you. You'll be lonely when I'm gone. I don't want you to be lonely. You give me peace on earth. And you can't be happy unless you've got a woman to pet and pamper. That's your nature—"

He paused.

"That was all," he said, and wiped his forehead with the palm of his hand. "It just stopped there."

"I'm glad you told me," said Mrs. Kimbal gently.

When they came to where the road appeared under the swift, unbroken brown of Gila River, the old horse paused.

eluded him.
"It will be easier, won't it," she said, "if you have my hair to hold by? I think I can manage to keep on my back."

"May I, Ma'am?" said Saterlee. She laughed at his embarrassment, and half-thrust the two great braids into the keeping of his strong left hand.

A moment later Saterlee could no longer keep his footing.

"Now, Ma'am," he said, "just let yourself go."

And he swam to shallow water, not without great labor, towing Mrs. Kimbal by the hair. But here he picked her up in his arms, this time with no word spoken, and carried her ashore.

Some moments passed.

"Well," she said, laughing, "aren't you going to put me down?"

"Oh," he said, "I was just casting an eye around for that horse. She's gone."

"Never mind, we'll walk."

"It'll be heavy going, wet as you are," said he.

"I'll soon be dry in this air," she said.

Saterlee managed to pull his boots on over his wet socks, and Mrs. Kimbal, having given him his wet coat from her neck, stooped and wrung as much water as she could from her clothes.

It was now nearly dark, but they found the road and went on.

"What time is it?" she asked.

"My watch was in my vest," said Saterlee.

"How far to Carcasonne House?"

"About thirty miles."

She did not speak again for some time.

"Well," she said, a little hardness in her voice, "you'll hardly be in time to steer your boy away from my girl."

"No," said he, "I won't. And you'll hardly be in time to steer your girl away from my boy."

"Oh," she said, "you misconceive me entirely, Mr. Saterlee. As far as I'm concerned my only regret NOW is that I shall not be in time to dance at the wedding."

One rotten shaft had broken clean off, both rotten traces and the reins, which hitherto there had been no warning pull, were jerked from Saterlee's loose fingers. The old mare reached the further shore presently, swimming and scrambling upon a decaying diagonal, stalked sedately up the bank, and then stood still, only turning her head to look at the buggy stranded in mid-stream.

Saterlee was climbing out of the buggy.

"Now," said he, "if you'll just tie my coat around your neck by the sleeves, and then you'd have to let me carry you."

Mrs. Kimbal did as she was told. But the buggy, relieved at last of all weight, slid off sideways with the current, turned turtle, and was carried swiftly down-stream. Saterlee, staggered, for the footing was uncertain, and holding Mrs. Kimbal high in his arms, started for shore. The water rose to his waist and kept rising. He halted, bracing himself against the current.

"Ma'am," he said in a discouraged voice, "it's no use. I've just got to let you get wet. We've got to swim to make it."

"All right," she said cheerfully.

She gave a little shivery gasp.

"It's not really cold," she said. "How strong the current pulls. Will you have to swim and tow me?"

"Yes," he said.

"Then wait," she said, "don't let me be carried away."

He steadied her while she drew the hatpin from her hat and dropped it carefully on the water as if that had been her dressing-table. Then she took down her hair. It was in two great, brown, shining braids. The ends disappeared in the water, listing down-stream.

Shorn of her hat and her elaborate hair-dressing, the lady was no longer showy, and Saterlee, out of the tail of an admiring eye, began to see real features about her that had hitherto

"Ma'am," he said, and there was something husky in his voice.

"About midnight they saw a light, and forsaking what they believed in hopeful moments to be the road, they made for it across country."

The light proved to be a lantern upon the porch of a ramshackle shanty. An old man with immense horn-rimmed spectacles was reading by it out of a tattered magazine. When the couple came close the old man looked up from his reading and blessed his soul several times.

"It do beat the Dutch!" he exclaimed in whining nasal tones. "If here ain't two more!"

"Two more what?" said Saterlee. "It's the floods, I reckon," whined the old man. "There's three on the kitchen floor and there's two ladies in my bed. That's what's a' happenin'. There wa'n't no bed for a man in his own house."

"But," said Saterlee, "you must find some place for this lady to rest. She is worn out with walking and hunger."

"Stop," whined the old man, sniffling his thigh. "If there ain't that there mattress in the loft! And I clean forgot, and told the boys that I hadn't nothin' better than a rug or two on the kitchen floor."

A mattress! exclaimed Saterlee. "Splendid! I guess you can sleep on anything near as good as a mattress. Can't you, Ma'am?"

"Indeed I could," she said. "But you have been thorough as much as I have—more, I won't take it."

The old man's whine interrupted. "Ain't you two married?" he said.

"No," said Saterlee shortly.

"Now, ain't that ridiculous?" he meditated the old man. "I thought you was all along." His eyes brightened behind the spectacles. "It ain't for me to interfere, IN course," he said, "but heresabouts I'm a justice of the peace."

Neither spoke.

"I could rouse up the boys in the kitchen for witnesses," he insisted.

Saterlee turned surlily to Mrs. Kimbal, but his voice was very husky.

"Ma'am?" he suggested.

THE END.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE CZAR OF RUSSIA

[From the Independent.]

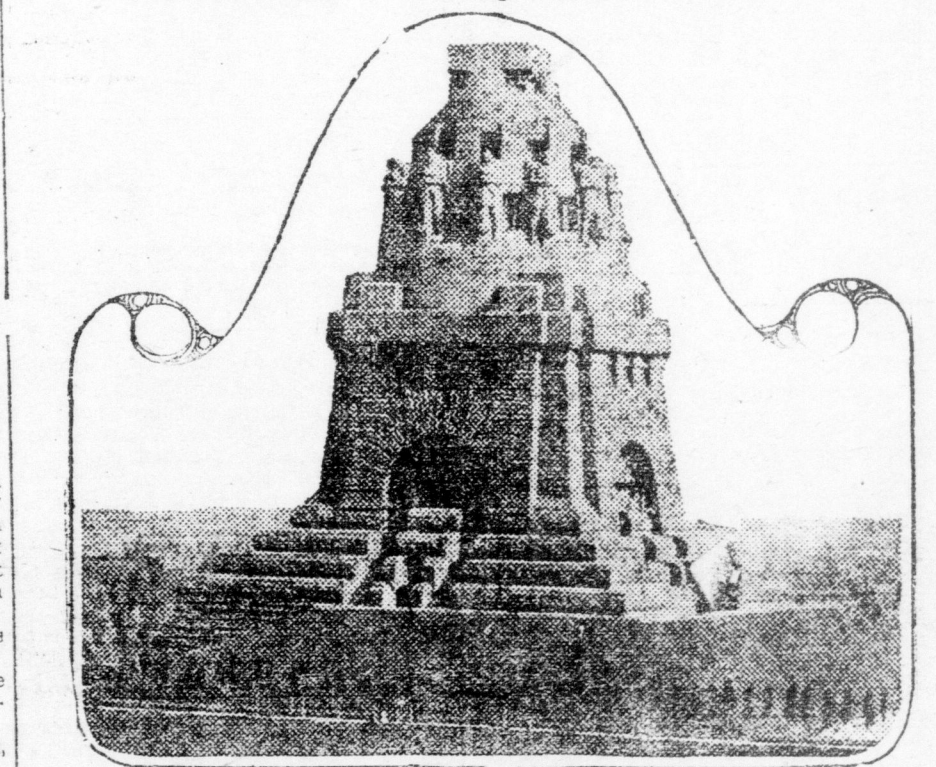
"Sire.—When you ascended the throne of the Russian Empire the expectations of your people ran high. They looked forward to a more humane reign than that which had just ended. They were yearning for reforms, for a sympathetic bond between the palace and the huts of the hungry and the homes of the oppressed. You were regarded as a young man of liberal tendencies, of advanced views. After your father's reactionary reign the Russian people longed for relief. But, alas, what an awakening was theirs!

The Vision Faded.
"Little by little the vision of a better day faded. Your people began to despair. Your supposed idealism failed to manifest itself in any of your acts. The evil genius of Polyedonostoff, of the holy synod, reigned supreme while he lived, and still rules Russia from his grave. A long list of charlatans and mad monks and illiterate fortune-tellers have been in the ascendancy and have exerted a baneful influence at your court. Those who have counselled reform and have advocated liberal tendencies have become discredited and have been driven away."

An Oppressor of Nations.
"The condition of the long-suffering nationalities of your empire instead of ameliorating has become ever more tragic. Though you have special cause to be lenient with your Polish subjects, Poland has been bent upon added burdens. Finland has become an autonomous government without autonomy, and it is gradually becoming converted into a Russian province. The Baptists and the Roman Catholics have suffered oppression. The Jews have experienced during your reign persecutions far more cruel than those which prevailed during the Middle Ages."

When you were driven into a war with Japan by Admiral Alexeyev and others of your advisers—men who sought the personal gain of power and wealth, and who led Russia headlong to ruin, the army and the people have experienced during your reign persecutions far more cruel than those which prevailed during the Middle Ages."

Europe Unveils Monument in Honor of Battle of Nations—A Napoleonic Defeat.



Battle of the Nations Monument at Leipzig.

One hundred years ago the power of Napoleon Bonaparte was shattered. Oct. 18 at Leipzig, Germany, the descendants of a dozen or more kings and princes and grand dukes, whom Napoleon had kicked and scuffed all over Europe, will meet and dedicate a huge monument of stone in honor of the Battle of Leipzig, sometimes called the Battle of Nations, where the great Frenchman met his most disastrous defeat.

Of course Waterloo, which was fought something more than a year and a half later, capped the climax of the Napoleonic career; but it was the battle of Leipzig, where the Austrians, Russians, Prussians and Swedes beat him most badly, that signified his downfall.

The Battle of Nations came after the disastrous Russian campaign—the campaign in which Napoleon took 600,000 men and the Austrians and the Prussians were conspired to rid the world of the biggest figure that had ever appeared in Europe up to that time. They raised an army between them and met Napoleon on several fields where they were beaten or he beat them—but not to a decisive finish in either