

THE RAILROAD SCHEME.

(Continued.)

Jarvis St. Gerald flushed red. He had never imagined such a rebuff as this. Hollis Overton was a self-made man. His wife and daughter were "new" people; whereas the St. Gerald's were of the "Four Hundred." He had expected Marguerita to meet his advances coyly, as became a bud, but gratefully at heart. What was the girl thinking of?

"Upon my soul there's your father coming home. My mother warned me not to be out late. By! by! Marguerita. Why didn't you send me away half an hour ago?"

But St. Gerald hastily suppressed his anger and mortification which rose in his heart. Marguerita was a prize. He must not let it slip through his fingers. In the crisis he was relieved to hear Mr. Overton entering the house.

Marguerita stood up, with her serious eyes. St. Gerald hastened towards the door, shaking his hand as he would to a child, smiling and at ease, glad to escape from a rather embarrassing situation, to plan a new line of attack.

Several weeks succeeded the evening when Mrs. Overton gave the party to introduce her daughter. The season was at its height. Every morning a salver full of invitations had to be canvassed, accepted or declined. It took nice management to guide the process of selection. It was like walking a rope. Mrs. Overton had experience, and the wisdom which comes of it. She was very solicitous about Marguerita, that she should dance with the right partners and bow to the right acquaintances, and show little civilities to stolid dowagers, who would remember her in consequence when they were making up their lists. Marguerita seemed very light-hearted. She said she was delighted to be in society; that it was nicer than she had thought.

"How well Marguerita keeps her color, for all her disipation," Mrs. St. Gerald remarked to Mrs. Overton one day.

"She takes a great deal of exercise. She rides every morning in the park," replied her mother. "She goes quite early. She says it rests her more than lying in bed."

"I dare say," was the thoughtful reply. "I will tell Geraldine—though, to be sure, she hasn't a horse and groom at command like Marguerita."

It was true that Marguerita rode every morning in the park. She breakfasted in her habit, with her papa, and at nine o'clock cantered off on Mustapha, her long-legged chestnut, followed at a distance by the brown-coated groom. She had begun to take these rides the very morning after her "coming out," and on that morning, as she rode slowly along the bridle-path, a figure that stood in the shubbery moved suddenly and startled her horse.

Marguerita was a good horsewoman, and, taken unaware as she was, she sat firmly while Mustapha rose with his fore feet in the air, tightening her grasp on the rein, and touching the horse's flank with her gold-mounted whip. Recalled to his senses, Mustapha somewhat excitedly regained his feet, but only to stumble unexpectedly and rear again. Marguerita did not touch Mustapha the second time with the whip. She braced herself and caught her breath, expecting him to run; just at that critical instant, with her eyes closed for a second, and the consciousness that the groom was too far behind to help her, she felt a hand upon the bridle, felt Mustapha trembling beneath her, opened her eyes, and saw Mr. Effingwell standing quietly at the horse's head.

"Miss Overton!" he exclaimed. "How nearly I caused you an accident. Will you dismount and let me tighten your saddle? I think the girth slipped a little."

She let him lift her down. She was rather giddy, though she felt quite heroic. When the groom came clattering up she let him lead Mustapha away.

"I am going to walk about for a few minutes, John. You may keep near. No one at home must know. It was all my fault."

In her agitation she did not reflect that she was excepting Effingwell's escort unasked.

It was an easy beginning of an acquaintance, and it ripened as easily as it began. The young ranchman liked, it seemed, the freedom and solitude of the park at this early morning hour, and Marguerita and he saw each other for a few moments—for more than a few moments sometimes—every day. The weather was fine, sunny and windless under the trees, and John was not slow to find that his duty consisted in keeping a good distance from his young mistress, when she decided to walk, giving him Mustapha to lead.

Effingwell was somewhat taciturn by habit, but when he talked he was frank and direct. Perhaps he did not realize, as keenly as some men might, how unconventional, not to say compromising, was this regular morning interview which he and Miss Overton enjoyed. He told her about his life. He had started out as a telegraph operator, had fought Indians, and killed buffaloes.

"Fancy the Pampas zheen!
Miles and miles of gold and green,
Where the sunflowers blow
In a solid glow—"

There was something imaginative and original in his talk. Mar-

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guerita, who so easily got tired of smiling at receptions, listened fascinated. She "loved him for the dangers he had passed, and he loved her that she did pity them."

"I did not know that you meant to stay in town so long," said Marguerita, one morning. "Why do you not come and see us?"

"I see your father nearly every day, Miss Overton. I am bidding his decision. That delays my return."

"Why doesn't papa decide?"

"My proposal involve a good deal—of money. He is a cautious man, who does not trust statements until he can verify them."

"Oh—doesn't he trust—"

"You mean doesn't he trust me? Only so far as he can see me. That is the fashion of men."

"But it must be unpleasant to be mistrusted."

"Oh, not at all—when one knows themselves."

Marguerita pondered upon that.

"You want papa to build a railroad, don't you?"

"That is about the size of my suggestion," laughed Effingwell. "In truth, I am speaking one good word for a railroad and two for my own interest. I am an ambitious man, Miss Overton. I started in life without much of a chance, but I am bound to be rich and respected before I get through. I have spent years in working up this railroad scheme. I have made lots of investments hinging upon it. Now I have to persuade a capitalist that there is money in the investment for him."

"And you have persuaded papa?"

"Partially. He is trying to form a stock company. We are managing the matter very quietly. Those who go into it are sure of a great thing. Your father is as sanguine, I believe, as I, though, of course, he doesn't confess it. But he is working with a will, and I hope now that in a day or two I will start back to New Mexico successful."

"You will be glad to go?"

"I shall be glad to see the beginning of the end. When I come back, if I come back—I shall feel less like an adventurer."

"I never thought of you in that light," said Marguerita.

"You have been very kind, Miss Overton. I shall never forget you. I have been a lonely man; you—pardon me!—you seem like a star in my dark sky—such a star as might lead a man to Heaven."

They walked on slowly, Marguerita holding her habit up to the tops of her boots, keeping well in the shelter of the trees.

"To New Mexico," she said, to steady the conversation.

"Yes, that is where I hail from—as we say."

"I think I should like to see such places as you have lived in."

"Your father will bring you with him, perhaps, if you ask him. He is coming my way in a few months."

Effingwell took a folding map from his breast pocket while he spoke. He opened it before Marguerita, and, in his concentrated way, began to explain his scheme, following the outline with his expressive forefinger.

The two stood still, side by side, heads bent over the map. Their joint interest was quite remarkable. Neither would for a moment have admitted that the explanation was a mere excuse for delay—for lingering a few more blessed minutes in each other's presence.

"I shall certainly ask papa to take me with him," said Marguerita, in a low, grave voice, when at the end of several minutes Effingwell ceased speaking.

"Will you truly, Miss Overton? May I hope to see you again—to have you see me where I am known—where I, too, am—pardon the egotism—of some little consequence? If I should hope to see you again, I should have something better to live for, to succeed for, than I ever dreamed of before I knew you."

He spoke with agitation, in a rapid way. Marguerita felt what was not expressed in his words, felt a passion and longing which he dare not utter; felt that the time would come when he might utter it, and she be glad to hear him. She was silent.

"You don't know what a privilege it has been to meet you. I feel myself very rough sort of a fellow—not a carpet-knight at all; while you are—you seem to me a divinity among women, Miss Overton. I shall never forget you as you entered your father's private room that evening when I first saw you. I shall never forget you," he hurried on—"as you stand before me now." Marguerita did not stir. Her eyes were dropped, her color going and coming. "It may be a long time before I see you again," continued Effingwell, gaining courage from rising passion, as he gazed into the girl's agitated face; "but let me tell you—it is only your due that I should tell you—that you have inspired me with a profound love—"

Marguerita started a step backward. She suddenly realized her indiscretion.

"Pardon me for daring this," continued Effingwell. "Do not answer me, I beseech you. Think of me only as one who has flung his pearl of price at your feet, and asks nothing but that you let it lie there. I had not right to speak. I admit it all. But that you have listened in silence gives me hope, ambition—what shall I say?—gives me an inspiration—"

A loud cough near interrupted Effingwell's vehement words. The groom standing with the horses, just at the turn of the bridle-path, took this method of attracting the attention of the absorbed couple.

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