

## BAPTIZED BY FIRE.

'That reminds me of an incident,' said Uncle Zarah. 'That riding master may think he knows it all so far as 'grace' is concerned, though his ideas of grace differ with mine materially; but I'd like to tell him about one woman I have known who 'had been accustomed to the management of horses in rural parts or on the plains,' who had been at home on a horse's back all her life and seldom essayed any gait but a 'gallop,' yet who could lay it over any rider in this city for grace.'

Uncle paused to polish his glasses, then remarked, interrogatively: 'You remember Mrs. —? Her name was Captola. Did I ever tell you how Cappie won her husband?'

'It was an early September morning in the late sixties. The Summer rains had made vegetation rank, and the buffalo grass was then thickly matted, brown and dry as powder. The night had been gray and still and given place to a skylight copper in the morning and a strange stillness brooded in the air.'

'I had been giving orders for branding a bunch of steers to send to the lower range, and as I came up on the porch I discovered Cap in her dingy riding habit, sitting on the edge swinging her feet and snapping a squirt, her pony browsing just in front of her, and beside her was Henry—the owner of the big 'Home' ranch and affianced lover. His bridle rein was thrown over his arm and he was earnestly begging the girl to comply with some request.'

'Please, Cappie, yield to me this time.'

'But I want the gloves and whip.'

'I'll buy you a gross of silver-mounted whips and a dozen pairs of Jouvin's best; import them especially for the purpose, if you would give up riding at the fair.'

'That would be a circumstance, wouldn't it?' flashed Captola. 'I could shake them under Miss Oates' nose and say, "There! Just see what I got for letting you win the prize." No, Hal, it isn't the gloves or the whip, but a mean little ambition I want to gratify. That woman called me a hoyden, an uncultivated little heathen, and said I couldn't ride a little bit. I don't mind the hoyden and heathen. I suppose I am both; but I can ride, and mean to do it.'

'Little girl, you hurt me when you talk so thoughtlessly.'

'And you hurt me cruelly,' she cried, passionately, as she turned her flashing eyes on him. 'I'm ashamed to acknowledge how much I thought you loved me, but you don't. When you see me beside your mother and your incomparable sisters—and that horrid prim Puritan, Miss Oates, you get ashamed of me over by the square and level of your own social world, but you can't do it. I tried to cultivate the little prairie anemones, but they always died. I'll die, too, under the cultivating process. So you—I think—you can have your ring back, and with a little sob Captola began to tug at her gauntlets, but Henry caught her hands.'

'My dear little wild bird, I love you. I am twenty years older than you are, but never said that to a woman until I met you. I am graver and quieter than you are, but I like your sunny ways—your bright nature. My mother and sisters do not know you as well as I do, and they want me to marry Miss Oates. They are looking for flaws in my gem and I don't want them to think they have found one. It is such a little thing I have asked you. Your father is away; there is no one to attend to you and you utterly refuse my escort unless I desert my mother and other ladies, which I cannot do. You—well, you know, little girl, that you are very unconventional in both manners and dress, and I do wish you would try to win them over, child.' Henry paused, feeling that he was making the matter worse.

'Never!' Cap replied angrily, as she jerked her hands away. 'They may take me as I am or not at all. If mamma had lived maybe I would have been different—as prunes and prisms as Miss Oates, possibly—but I've only had dad, and he likes me best as I am. I never would have thought of riding at the fair, only when we were all out horseback-riding one night after Miss Oates first came she said, purposely for me to hear, that "sticking on" was not good riding by any means and made fun of my "old-fashioned" riding habit.' And Cap's tears splashed down on the dingy black calico.

'You are much prettier in it than Miss Oates is in hers,' returned Henry, warmly. 'Oh, yes!' said Cap, mockingly, 'much prettier; but you don't want to see me match my skill against her grace; but I will; and I will win the whip and gloves, so now!'

'Then we will discuss the matter no further.'

'Adios, then, senor, until this afternoon, and remember, she called, as she vaulted on Bert's back and turned to go, "after to-day I mean to show that dad has as much money as anybody. I don't care for dress, but if you do you shall be pleased," and with a

saucy kiss from her finger-tips she rode away.

'I felt sorry for both, but I knew it would come out all right. In his Summers on his stock ranch, only two miles away, Henry had seen Captola grow into a wilful but lovable girl and had yielded up all the strength of his great heart to her; but as she was too young to marry he was waiting for her. His mother and sisters had come from the Quaker City to 'inspect' the possible addition to the family, and were horrified at her unconventionalities, particularly her going about by herself. The special grievance was over the county fair.'

'Miss Oates and some of the city girls were going to ride for the prize, properly chaperoned, of course. Captola suddenly decided that she too would ride. The rules for entry required saddles, a piece of furniture Cap scorned, and besides her riding alone, Henry feared that she would be defeated by Miss Oates, who was extremely graceful in the saddle, and he knew that would break the child's heart. He was not aware that Cap had a thoroughbred Kentucky mare of her father's in training under the saddle, or that she had added to her wardrobe an almost conventional habit. Captola was so nearly perfect that I verily believe she could have ridden on that saddle standing on her head,' and Uncle Zarah stopped to chuckle quietly at the remembrance.

'When afternoon came the fair grounds were crowded. Half a dozen young ladies in prim black and blue habits, chimney pot hats, long gauntlets and veils, which they wore then, were gathered near the judge's stand, and their escorts were chatting with them, waiting the order to clear the ring.'

'Where is your Lady Gay Spanker, Henry?' asked his sister as he drove up with his mother. Henry frowned slightly, but before he could answer a little buzz of comment called the attention of all as Captola rode up unattended. She wouldn't even let me ride my old cob beside her, so I was there before her in the buggy.'

'Lord, but she was a beauty! Her slender black mare was as mettlesome as could be and tossed her long mane and tail impatiently as she obeyed that little hand, with its touch of velvet and grip of steel. Cap was as slim and willowy as a cottonwood sapling in her close-fitting black velvet habit. She had put up all her curls under a little black velvet hat, around which was a long black ostrich plume. Miss Oates looked like a thundercloud. She had expected to see the child on her mustang and in the old black calico skirt she usually wore. Henry smiled and went to her instantly with a loving word, and I knew the clouds had disappeared for a time.'

'The tournament began; up and down, around this way and back that, under the coppery sky the ladies rode, then paused. The judges were undecided, so they went through the paces again. No decision. The ladies would please change horses.'

'Cap was off Rondo in an instant, but many of the ladies demurred. Miss Oates positively refused to mount anything but her own thoroughly trained animal. The contest narrowed to Cap and two other plains-bred girls, but even they dared not mount Rondo. Cap rode each of the six horses in turn. As she changed the seventh and last time to Rondo she rode to me.'

'Uncle, don't you smell the prairie fire?' she asked uneasily.

'Yes,' I replied; 'but it's across the creek; it can't reach us.'

'I was thinking of the school house,' she replied hurriedly as the judges called. 'School began in Henry's district yesterday, and his sister let her little daughter go with Rose Williams to-day,' and then she rode into the ring.'

'I looked at my watch—3.30—then over to the north. The smoke was rolling up black and thick. I could see an eating line of red. The sun was beginning to look like a yellow haze and the air was dense and heavy with the odor of burned grass. If the winds should rise! Just then a puff lifted my hat. Yes, the school house was in great danger if the wind veered a point or two. I heard a shout of pleasure and turned to see the judge hand a silver-mounted whip to Cap. She turned her head to look at me and over beyond me saw the clouds of smoke. She brought the whip down on the flanks of the mare and, quivering with fright, Rondo reached me in two leaps.'

'The Gill school house,' gasped Cap, as she pointed with her whip.

'To that moment the prairie fire, so common a thing, had not been noticed. In a moment all was confusion. Miss Oates screamed, Miss Merriam, Henry's sister, fainted and his mother turned white. In an instant Henry was out of the buggy, with his hand on Rondo's neck.'

'May I take her, Cappie? Nellie is over there.'

Cap slid down. The saddle was flung off and, outting the mare with the silver-mounted handle of the whip Cap thrust in his hand, Henry was off, followed by half a dozen mounted men.

Just then Cap heard a whinny and a cold nose was thrust against her face.

With a scream of joy she threw her arms about Bret's neck. The faithful little mustang had broken its lariat rope and followed its mistress. Catching the trailing rope, Cap tied it bridle fashion in the halter; then, slipping out of her velvet riding-skirt and tearing of her gauntlets, she said to me as she jumped on Bret: 'I know a short-cut just below the ford; maybe I can help,' and was off.

I followed in the buggy.

Cap reached the school house. The fire-guards were forty feet wide and the teacher and his pupils had burned the grass about the building and felt safe in the school house. The teacher said he would not let the children go till danger was passed.

Cap asked for Nellie Merriam.

She cried to go home, so I permitted her to do so about three o'clock.

The teacher told me afterward that he thought he had been struck by lightning when Cap got her breath.

'Idiot!' she blazed, 'to let a little city-bred six-year old child go half a mile across the prairie by herself. Why, she isn't tall enough to see over the blue stem in the buffaloes' yellow,' and she dashed away.

At the ranch, only the frightened house-keeper appeared. Nellie had not come! Cap rushed in the house and grabbed a handful of matches and a blanket from a pile that was airing on the porch. This she dipped in the watering trough as she flew by. Then she jumped on Bret again, with the blanket before her.

'The little mischief has gone down in that ravine, where we found the rabbit's nest, and if the wind changes one atom from the north-west, we are doomed,' was her one thought, as she dug her heels in Bret's steaming sides.

Sure enough, as she neared the bank of the ravine she saw a head of damp, dark curls, and a little girl came clambering and crying up the steep banks. Cap slid to the ground and gathered the frightened waif in her arms. It was too late to ride from the fire. With all the strength left her she struck Bret a stinging blow. 'Go home, if you can,' she cried, and the snorting mustang fled before the flames, now hot upon them.

Cap struck matches and threw them into the ravine. The fire leaped up and ran over the bank toward the creek. Down over the hot embers, hands and feet blistering and the child in her arms screaming in pain, Cap crept, dragging the wet blanket with her. The oncoming flames swept to the edge of the ravine and hungrily licked up the bits of dry grass left. They singed Cap's hair and nearly cooked her face. She could barely keep the frantic child under the blanket and could not save herself.

The roar and orackle died away toward the creek, the air cooled a little and then came unconsciousness.

Just at dusk we found them. The men had all taken the bridge road, two miles around, but Bret and Cap had gone right down over the rocky hill and across the stream, dangerous to ford at the proper place, doubly dangerous there; but they had dared and won.

Henry and his men rode right into the jaws of hell in the blue stem along the creek, and had to retreat till the flames had exhausted themselves in the water's edge.

We found Bret first. He had stumbled in a dog hole, broken his leg and died in the fire. After a search of four awful hours we found Cap. Through the gathering gloom the crying of the child guided us to her. The wet blanket had saved Nellie, but poor Cap was nearly dead. She had lost all her yellow curls. Her face was blistered and her eyes swollen shut. The waist to her new habit was irretrievably ruined and her skirts nearly burned off.

She was wandering a little in her mind and when Harry gathered her up in his arms she put her blistered little hands about his neck and said sorrowfully, 'If I'd had a mother maybe I'd been different.'

'Thank God, you are your dear, loving little self,' Henry replied, with grave tenderness, as he drew her disfigured face close to his loving heart.

It was a baptism of fire, but it burned lots of dress out of several natures and blazed a safe and sure way for two of the best people I ever knew to tread.

'Yes,' concluded Uncle Zarah, 'I shall always insist that "knowing how to gallop" was in this instance a very desirable accomplishment, even if not according to the "English" method.'—Washington Star.

### Getting the Gas Ready for the Night

Mistress (to new housemaid)—Now, see, Mary, this is the way to light the gas. You turn on this little tap, so, and then apply the match, so. You understand?

New Housemaid—Yes, ma'am; quite ma'am.

Mistress (next morning)—Why, what a horrible smell of gas! Where can it come from? We shall all be suffocated!

New Housemaid (with much pride)—Please, ma'am, what shall I do next? I've made all the beds, and dusted the room, and turned on all the gases ready for the night, and—

## Her Greatest Success.

There could be no doubt that Miss Kittie Buller (of the principal music-halls, herself Her Own Parallel, Agents Wawkin and Wynne, York road) was a clever and diverting young person.

As she sat in her rooms in Doughty street, Bloomsbury (economically lodged was Kittie, for she saved money), sipping her cup of chocolate, she seemed a shade less lively than usual. Under her curly fringe of brown hair there was a temporary but sufficiently distinct furrow of thought.

It looked very much out of place, this temporary furrow of thought; for its present patroness had much to induce her to assume an aspect of joy.

In a month's time she would shout her 'Swan Song' at the music halls. A quiet wedding, and then as Mrs. Herbert Easelton she would embark on a life of dignity and peace.

Herbert Easelton was a very decent sort of fellow, as fellows go. Certainly he painted misty landscapes, for which nobody craved in the least; but, as compensation, he himself thought a good deal of them.

For the twentieth time Kittie Buller, leaning back in the chair, with her forehead still wrinkled, kicked her loose slipper in the air and for the eighteenth time, on her silken-stokinged toe caught it. A double knock on the street door made her jump up. She called over the stairs:

'Is that a telegram for me, Mrs. Munro?'

'No, miss; it's only an advertisement from the draper's.'

Kittie muttered something harsh about the draper and his ways and then ran into the bedroom. In a few minutes she reappeared, dressed to go out.

The disturbing fact that Herbert had not as usual called, and that no explanatory telegram had not arrived did not permit her to forget that she had to rehearse a new song. She kissed the portrait of her sweetheart and went down stairs.

'Is there—'

'No, miss; not yet,' sang out the landlady.

As soon as she reached the hall Kittie hurried to the office. There, also, was no telegram. With just a suspicion of a tear in her eye, she went to rehearse a new and merry song.

She sang it three times, danced three times, the band showing at each turn obvious and palpable signs of improvement; and then she tried through her funny imitations of a cafe-singing girl, and made the band laugh like anything.

'Are you sure there isn't one there?' said Kittie, trying to crane her neck round the half-opened door; 'have you looked among the B's?'

'Write a bit, miss; write a bit. Don't be in a hurry. Wot's this?'

A small telegraph boy was sauntering through the corridor.

'Nime of Buttler?'

Kittie clutched at the telegram impatiently and tore it open.

Cannot see you to-day. Have excellent news. Will try to write you to-morrow.

HERBERT.

Kittie gave a little sob, crushed the little flimsy pink sheet into her muff and stood for a moment undecided. Thence she took from her purse a dozen pieces of silver and looked at them. They were nearly all heads, and she went out and hailed a hansom. 'Burlington Studios, Langham place.'

'My dear Kittie,' said the good looking young fellow (hair brushed over his forehead a shade too much and a trace of weakness about the chin) who opened the door, 'why, I wired you and—and—'

'I know, dear Bert, but I couldn't understand.'

Then Miss Kittie Buller did a very silly thing. She fell into Herbert Easelton's arms and fainted.

When she recovered she was in the large, worn armchair near the well-littered table and Herbert was standing near.

'How absurd of you, Kittie,' he said testily and a little awkwardly. 'It always gives a chap the hump to see a girl fainting about, don't you know. Such capital news, too, I've got. Perhaps I'd better not tell you if you feel at all off color.'

'Tell me,' said Kittie.

'You'll never guess. I reckon I've just about hit the bullseye this time. It's in all the art columns. Look here,' Herbert took up an evening paper of the previous day's date and read:

It is sometimes complained that our young artists are not sufficiently encouraged by those to whom the world has given gold. There are, it seems, exceptions. A young artist, whose merits have not hitherto found appreciation (a disciple of Corot), has through the firm of Tablou & Co., of Old Bond street, just sold two pictures for £1,500. The titles of the works are 'A Cloudy Evening' and 'Mist in Hyde Park.' The artist's name is Mr. Herbert Easelton. 'There!' said Herbert, with a kind of

nervous joy—'what do you think of that, my little twenty-pounds-a-weeker—eh?'

Herbert went to the cabinet, brought the liquor stand and poured out some brandy. Added to it from a siphon.

'Success to Mr. Herbert Easelton,' he cried.

'Success to Mrs. Herbert Easelton,' cried Kittie.

Herbert stopped. There was a silence, broken at last by a nervous little laugh from Kittie.

'Kittie, I think I ought—I ought to be quite frank with you. I hope you—I hope you won't mind what I'm going to say. You see, when we arranged to get married, I had never thought of such a solid success as this. They were saying last night at the Hogarth that there was really no reason why I shouldn't get on splendidly, if I took sufficient pains.'

'So I've been thinking that I ought to get you to release me. I must be cleverer even than I thought, don't you know, or I shouldn't be selling pictures for £1,500, and it might do me a lot of harm if it got wind that I was going to marry—'

'Miss Kittie Buller, of the principal music halls,' said the voice behind the muff.

'That's just it, my dear—that's the point. I'm so glad you look at the matter so sensibly. You see this fifteen hundred pound business is only the beginning. I'm bound to get on now. And if you don't mind—'

'Do I understand,' said Kittie firmly, 'that you'd rather not marry me?'

'Well, dear—well—yes—that's about it.'

Miss Kittie Buller rose from the armchair. Miss Kittie Buller swept her long-handled parasol across the table and the tumblers, palettes and liquor stand went down with a crash on the floor. A little twitch and wriggle of the body and she wrested from her pocket a letter. Herbert took it up.

(Private.) OLD BOND STREET, W.

DEAR MADAME—We beg to acknowledge receipt of your check for £1,500 (fifteen hundred pounds) for the two paintings by Mr. Herbert Easelton, entitled 'A Cloudy Evening' and 'Mist in Hyde Park.' We await the favor of your further orders and beg to assure you that in all transactions your name shall, as you desire, be kept secret. Your obedient servants,

TABLOU & CO.

Miss Katherine Buller.

Mr. Herbert Easelton turned very white and said:

'Damn!'

A moneyed person from Australia read the paragraph in the papers. Moneyed person wanted to buy pictures to take home. Did not mind what sort of pictures, providing they cost a good deal.

Went to Tablou & Co., did moneyed person; met there Miss Buller, bought the pictures, married Miss Buller, took her back home to be the popular Mayoress of a populous town in New South Wales. Easelton is writing libels on successful artists in a new paper.

### Passive Resistance.

One of the most novel methods ever attempted of conducting a strike was that inaugurated by the telegraphers in Spain. All the details of the affair were excellently arranged long beforehand, so that there should be no hitch. The government were taken completely by surprise. Suddenly they found all communication by wire stopped, though the telegraphic system was apparently in good working order. The operators did not leave their posts, but when asked to send messages they signalled as usual and informed the officials that there was no response to their calls for the distant offices. This sort of passive resistance puzzled the officials.

The home secretary in Madrid and the governors of the various provinces entered the offices escorted by the gendarmes, and ordered the operators to establish communication in their presence. The operators replied respectfully, after calling the offices as commanded, that they received no answer and therefore could not send the messages offered.

It seems that it was part of the plan of the men, arranged beforehand, that no operator should answer when his office was called for on the wires.

The first dispatches which the government was able to send to the provincial governors were put through by the courtesy of the railway officials over the wires generally devoted to train orders. The railway operators were in sympathy with the strikers and would not handle the government's messages, but some of the railway officials who are practical telegraphers themselves managed the wires and transmitted the messages.

The operators struck because their appeals for the redress of a number of long standing grievances were disregarded. The immediate cause was the appointment of a postal officer of only three years' service to the office of director of the central office in Madrid over the heads of officers of thirty years' service.