CHAPTER XXI.

"You Cannot Leave Me Now."

FOR two days and two nights the girl fought on alone against the outcry of her heart until she recognized the futility of it, and then she ordered Ragtime to be saddled. And Miriam Burrell, sighting Barbara's face as the latter wheeled toward the hills, flew from her window to scratch off a note to Garry—her third note that day, for she seemed always omitting most important things which needed saying.

"It's come," she scrawled in delighted haste. * * * When are we going to be married?"

Once before Barbara had ridden that road with him alone in her thoughts. Now she realized that she had loved him then as she must have loved him always and marveled at such blindness. Once, on that other day, she had told herself that all ignoble and unworthy comparisons of herself and him were done and gone. Now she did not need such reassurance, when her lips were tremulous.

She grew pensive at times. At times in an abandon of gayety she chattered back at a quarrelsome squirrel in the thicket. She could rest later, and if she could not go to him immediately at least every step the horse took was bringing them for a little while closer together. And her tomorrow was only one twilight and one dawn away. Her tomorrow would be his as utterly as was she herself.

Dusk came, and regretfully she told herself that she must be turning back home. Two rifle shots, sharp and startlingly close, whipped through the quiet of that lazy afternoon, but they meant nothing to her. She had reached the height of land, where he had found her the day her roan mare strayed off while she sat mooning on a log. She was holding out both arms toward the spot where the valley of Thirty Mile must lie when a team of heavy horses broke around a turn in the road, slowed to a trot at the sight of her and came to an abrupt standstill. When the girl rode nearer to them, merely surprised and curious at first, they snorted and showed the whites of their eyes and shied back nervously.

Something chill clutched at Barbara's heart while she spoke peremptorily to Ragtime who was dancing in sympathetic panic. There was nothing to fear here, yet she knew that these were Big Louie's horses. And Big Louie was a dreamy incompetent. He had left them for a moment, that was all, and they had become frightened and bolted. But Big Louie never neglected his team—they were not wet—they had not been running far. And their fright became less when she dismounted and approached them, soothing them with her voice until they let her touch their sleek sides without rearing away.

Dusk had come and gone, for it was growing dark. Uncertain, more and more unnerved as she stood and gazed at the forbidding, black-shadowed ridges beyond her, the girl had to fight suddenly against an impulse to turn and race back to the lower country and Morrison and home. Even then the rifle shots meant nothing to her—and price would not let her run. She remounted and rode on a rod or two and stopped to look back at the team which was watching her. She pressed on and rounded the curve. Ragtime reared and snorted there, and she barely stifled the cry which his strange behavior brought to her lips. Because of her senseless panic she punished him the more severely and sent him on. And then she saw what the horse had already seen.

A blue shirted figure lay half in the road, half in the undergrowth that fringed it, one arm crooked under him and his face prone in the dust. A bulkier mass was stretched wholly within the trail—and she recognized him too. Big Louie's face was upturned, and the explanation of the two riderless reports and the driverless team was here, for Big Louie's hand still clutched the handle of a canvas pail. They had stopped to water the horses, they had been shot down from behind. And first of all, unable to move, while horror parched her lips, the girl remembered words which the limp one half in the road and half in the underbrush, had spoken to her in a moment of sternness.

"He has fired upon me from cover," the man who loved her had said. "He has been taking money from a man who was bent on beating me at any price."

"Blood sickens me," she whimpered aloud. "Blood sickens me." But she managed to turn him over upon his back. With brown head against his heart she listened—listened and would not believe that her tomorrow might come too late. And then she caught the slack pound of his pulse.

From there on she was less panic stricken. She gained control of faculties shocked for a time into uselessness. Method marked her acts—deliberation mechanical, but sure. She was horribly afraid of Big Louie, but she finally disentangled the handle of the pail from those loose fingers and ran to the brook which bubbled near at hand. Returning, she drenched Steve's face with icy water. She lifted his head and propped it as comfortably as she might upon one thigh and opened his flannel shirt. The ball had passed through, for back and front the shirt was immediately wetter with fresh blood. Blood sickened her, but she peeled off the coat of her boyish riding habit and wrenched the sleeves from her linen blouse. They were desperately scant, yet they provided pads with which to check that dreadful oozing. And when they were in place she turned again to bathing his forehead.

A folded sheet of paper came to view when she tried once to ease his heavy body from the position which was numbing her leg, and she seized upon it fiercely. It was only a brief line, bidding him come to her, but it bore her name. With instant, bodiless clarity which had marked all her mental processes so far, its purport was hers. She had not written—the hand that had traced her signature had been unstrung for once. She understood though such knowledge seemed of little moment now.

She kept the pads cold and wet. She went for fresh water and stumbled and fell more than once because of the treacherous footing in the deepening shadows. But she was no longer afraid of the dark. She had grown to fear Big Louie less, even though there was no help for Big Louie any more. It was the first time that Barbara had looked upon the face of a man who had died in violence. Big Louie's face was growing indistinct now, but she knew that he was smiling—knew that his eyes were dreamy and mild. Death, like life, had been a quite incomprehensible puzzle to that slow witted one who had no name. But he had smiled seldom in life. In death his smile was almost childish, almost sweet and questioning beyond all else.

Alone with him who still lived, the pallid girl sat and waited and wondered how long—or how soon—it would be. When she bade him wait until she could bring the team he nodded his comprehension. He was watching for her return. And he came to his feet with a readiness that made her heart leap with hope. But he fell twice before she lifted him, half with her hands, half with her voice, to the seat.

She crawled in beside him, and the next moment she had to struggle madly to prevent his returning to Big Louie.

"He will wait quiet until we come for him," she protested. "There isn't room for Big Louie—and he won't mind."

Her logic made an impression upon him, for he stilled. There was no sequence in his acquiescence, however.

"Big Louie never could find his way alone," he mused, "and that is strange, too, for he was born in these hills. He was always getting lost"— And with that he must not desert Louie. She had even more trouble with him this time. "He will lose his head," he expostulated mildly—his old, unfailing attitude of gentleness toward her. "He will lose his head and waste his strength in running from things which do not exist."

"Big Louie will find his way this time." She was whimpering again in her helplessness. "He is—already home."

There she learned that her voice could control him when her arms availed not at all against even his dead weight. And so she talked as steadily as she was able while she drove. Once he lurched against her. When he pulled himself together he was so sane, so apologetic of a sudden that she searched his face with hungry eyes. But he was talking now to himself.

"I must not touch her," he stated firmly. And then, dreamily, "I am sick. I have never been so sick—before."

With that he subsided, but his silence was far more dreadful than his wanderings had been, and as fast as she dared she pushed the heavy team on, with Ragtime following behind like a dog. He slipped back against her almost immediately, and this time he had not the strength with which to apologize nor lift himself erect. With his head heavy in the hollow of her arm, they came at length to the open pasture hills. They topped the rise and faced the loops on loops of highway that ran down to Morrison at the river edge. And so she brought him home. At the sight of his "city" she sobbed aloud, but he, sunken and slack

Alone With Him Who Still Lived, the Pallid Girl Sat and Waited.

was conscious neither of distance covered nor change of country. He climbed down from the seat, however, in response to her urgings when the team halted before Caleb Hunter's white columned house. He turned and started stubbornly back the way they had come.

She ran after him and clung to his arm.

"You promised that you would come back to me," she cried up at him. "Oh, you cannot leave me now!"

That halted him momentarily.

"I must go back to my bridge," he explained, plainly nonplused. "But then I'll surely come back to you."

She pleaded with him—raged at him.

"I must go back to my bridge," he reiterated, gruffly now.

Her arms went around him in desperation, and then, with one swing, he had swept her yards away, reeling before his blazing wrath.

"Take your fingers from my eyes, Harrigan," he gasped in sudden agony. "I am going to kill you now, and she is looking on!"

The girl was afraid of him. She dared not try to hold him. She screamed wildly for help and screamed again. And he had gone on and wavered and crashed over upon his face when Caleb Hunter and her father came running heavily across the lawn in answer to her shrieks.

Between them they lifted him and carried him into the house.

CHAPTER XXII.

And Tomorrow, and Tomorrow.

THEY carried him into the house and bore him upstairs and laid him, quiet now and almost pulseless, upon the bed. They stood there dumfounded at the bedside until Miss Sarah, reentering the room, coolly ordered them from underfoot and sent them back downstairs. And at that their unprotesting obedience was of greater assistance than their hands could have been. But when, after one glance at the girl's stricken face, she tried the next instant to dismiss Barbara for once Miss Sarah's will alone proved insufficient. The girl refused, point blank, to go.

"He half undressed me and put me to bed," Barbara flung back in reply to the spinster's final objection, "and if that did not shock you, surely my staying now need not!"

The refusal itself brought a glint to the older woman's eyes and the phrasing thereof a flush to her cheeks, but she wasted no more words in what she knew to be useless argument. And though the girl grew sick and sicker still while Miss Sarah cut away the sodden shirt and started, with competent skill, to cleanse the wound, the latter let her remain and hold a basin of antiseptic and replenish it when necessary.

Miss Sarah knew what to do, and she worked with unhurried thoroughness. They had sent for the doctor, and after ages had passed for the girl maddeningly cool and unruffled, he arrived. But his first words, too, were an order that she leave the room, and unable to combat his professional bleakness, meekly she had to obey. Little and wholly hopeless she stole downstairs.

Caleb and her father were confronting each other before the fireplace when she reached the lower floor, but the queer note of restraint in their voices meant nothing to her, until she heard her father cry out in sudden anguish.

"Cal," he cried. "Cal, you don't think I was a party to this attempt at murder?"

Then, at Caleb's reply, which went hurtling back at him, the girl was crouching, white and still, and clutching at the stair rail.

"Party! Attempt! Because you did not pull the trigger are you any the less guilty?"

"Do you believe that I would murder the man my girl loves?" Dexter Allison moaned now.

Barbara gasped at the deadly anger which crossed Caleb Hunter's face. Caleb had lifted a hand in righteous accusation.

"You have dealt in crookedness," he thundered. "You have thrived on cunning. And, being a law unto yourself in this country, you have gone unpunished until now. You aided and abetted a vicious and unscrupulous scoundrel in his villainy, and now you have looked upon the result of your works. Law has never touched you, sir—reprisal has passed you by. But, by God, sir, I warn you that if that boy dies—if he dies—I shall see that you meet me at thirty paces the next morning. And I shall not miss—I shall be your law!"

They had been friends for close to forty years, yet they were worse than strangers now. Dexter Allison could not answer. He could not speak aloud. Caleb's finger had swung toward the door in a gesture unmistakable. Allison turned, and, ghastly of face, met the eyes of his daughter.

"Barbara," he appealed to her frantically. "Baby"—

But she shrank, a huddled heap of misery, away from him.

"You—too?" she whispered. "You!" And then, dully: "And you're my father!"

The shoulders beneath the garish plaid rose and fell pitifully. This, then, was the moment which he feared. He gulped aloud and hung his head and turned his feet toward home. Barbara rose after he had gone and crept into a chair.

One after another they tried to persuade the girl to rest. Miriam came and talked to her, and Caleb, and even Miss Sarah passing through the room stopped to urge her again to go to bed. But she met them all with the same wordless refusal. She was waiting for him when the doctor, descending in the morning, tried to combine, diplomatically, praise for what she had done with disapproval of her obstinacy.

"My dear child, this insubordination will help no one," he said, "and it may end in your collapse at just the moment when you are needed most."

"Will he live?" was all she would say. "Will he live?"

And before such hopelessness the doctor could not lie.

"He is hard hit and very, very weak," he had to admit. "The shock is great and the tissue damage—unpromising. It is far worse than I expected, but he is still alive, and most men would have been already dead. And his vitality is a marvel, even to me."

He might have comforted her, but with no other statement could he have told the truth. He failed also in his effort to persuade her to go to bed; he had breakfast with Caleb, and she refused to eat. And she was still there in her chair, asking only to be let alone, when Garry Devereau and Fat Joe arrived. She rose and ran to meet the latter, but the doctor, who knew how many such situations the podgy river-man had weathered, summoned him immediately, and Barbara had to wait an hour before Joe came back downstairs. By the lapels of his coat she clung to him then.

"He's mighty sick," reluctantly Joe, too, told the truth.

"The doctor said that it was worse than he expected," she droned. "They sent me away, but if he isn't going to live I won't let them keep me from him!"

Joe's sympathy was unspoiled by professionalism.

"Sick is one thing"—his confidence was almost convincing—"and dyin' is another. And— Shucks! I ain't going to let no book taught medico worry me yet! Men get well because they are bound to get well, or they die because it's their time to die—and he's got too much to live for now!"

Her hopeless face made deception impossible, but Joe comforted her, just the same. He persuaded her to eat with him, and when he found that his conversation made the waiting easier for her, he waxed quite garrulous.

"Why, he's been hurt almost as bad as this, once before," he rambled on, "but he's still alive, ain't he?"

The girl's eyes livened at that.

"Once, down on the island, he mixed in an affair in which most men would not have meddled. And he got it from behind that time, too, only it was with a knife."

"He never told me," murmured the girl.

"It ain't likely he would," the other stated with finality. "It was over a woman, and not a particularly pretty story, any way you look at it."

Her dark eyes widened. She bit her lip. It came to her how little of his life she had shared.

"Oh!" she barely breathed. And again, falteringly, "Oh!"

From that halting monosyllable Joe judged that something was amiss. Observation had never been a slow or painful process of concentration with him.

"He didn't even know who she was. He'd never seen her before," quickly he put her right. "She was just a public dancer, that was all. But a man—mistreated her, and Steve, he just interfered."

Indeed, Joe had found the way to comfort her and still tell the truth, even though he found it foolishly difficult to swallow food and watch at the same time the warmth which his words kindled. So for an hour he lingered at table and told her many things concerning the man she loved which she would never have learned from his own lips. And it was Joe's jocularity which in the end subdued her rebel spirit. She yielded at last and promised to go home and rest, but only after he had promised first, in a fashion which could leave no doubt in her heart, that he would come for her if things grew worse.

Before she left him that morning she told Joe of Big Louie, whom she had had to leave in the road, but he interrupted her before she could finish. They had already found Big Louie. Then she gave him the note which she had discovered crushed under Steve's body. This Joe scanned ferociously; he flashed a strange glance at her from bleached blue eyes.

"Some one traced your name," he put into words the first thought that had been hers. "Some one who had your signature to copy."

She nodded, whitely, in horror. Joe folded the paper and tucked it into a pocket.

"We can touch nobody," he averred regretfully, "unless we catch Harrigan."

Caleb himself took Barbara home, and on the way across the lawn she giggled suddenly at the funny way in which the distance seemed to increase and the lessen between her eyes and her feet. The ground persisted in rising to meet her, she said, until she had to cling to Caleb's arm. And the outer steps proved difficult to negotiate. But at the sight of her father sunk in silence upon his desk in the ground floor "office" she drew her hand from the crook of Caleb's arm and went swiftly across to him.

"Barbara," he besought her brokenly the moment her cheek touched his, "you mustn't believe that I"—

She hushed him with gentle fingers laid upon his lips.

"I have been a very foolish and hysterical child," she said. "I'll try to be have more like a woman now. And you and Uncle Cal have been only—absurd!"

She had to laugh again at the behavior of her feet as she climbed upstairs but her head seemed steady enough. It was only after she had reached her own room that she complained querulously of the failing lights. Miriam had to help Cecile undress and put her to bed.

On the floor below her father had turned again to his desk, his head bowed under his arms. And total breakdown was imminent for Dexter Allison when a hand touched awkwardly his shoulder. He looked up heavily to meet this time the eyes of Caleb Hunter. Caleb stuttered furiously at first, for sentimentality shamed him. Then a happy thought showed the way.

"Dexter, I secured a few sprigs of very superior mint yesterday." He made of it a ceremonial. "Do you think you would—care to join me, sir?"

They had been friends for close to forty years not because of common tastes, but in spite of innate dissimilarity. Dexter came to his feet. He reached out and crushed the other man's hand within his soft, white fingers. Nor was his reply quite according to formula.

"I don't mind if I do, Cal," he accepted fervidly. "Thank God, I don't mind if I do!"

Arm in arm they recrossed to the white columned house. And they kept close, each to the other, throughout the hours of suspense that followed, finding a potent though unconfessed reassurance in such companionship.

Delirium came again upon the sick man who lay in the room which Miss Sarah had always kept waiting for him. Fever strode upon him, while the girl who had brought him home slept in complete exhaustion. At times Steve lay quiescent, only muttering fitfully; the next moment he called crisply for Fat Joe—he feared for his bridge—and Joe had to exert every iron muscle to hold him down. And always he spoke Barbara's name, with a poignant gentleness that left Miss Sarah on the verge of collapse. But he continued to live, through that day and the next night, even when the doctor shook his head and Fat Joe rose to go for the girl, as he had promised he would, in the last extremity. He continued to live, and with the coming of the second dawn suddenly he was no longer delirious. Stephen O'Mara opened his eyes and gazed feebly but very understandingly into the eyes of Fat Joe who was watching at that moment.

Joe tried to hush him, but he would talk a little.

"I know," he pronounced each word with calculated effort. "I have been very sick, and I must not waste my strength. But I have to be clear, first, on one point. Have I dreamed it, Joe, or—or did she bring me home?"

With his voice alone, when all else seemed failing, Joe had kept his friend alive. The doctor believed it; Miss Sarah knew it to be so. And first of all Joe had to voice his thankfulness, for it was an explosive thing.

"Didn't I tell her so?" he demanded in his whining tenor. "Didn't I say so, all along? And I let that doctor worry me, just because he's got a diploma in a frame, hanging on his wall!"

Then he answered Steve's question.

"She found you," he said. "She brought you home."

A long time the sick man lay and pondered. And finally he found it possible to smile.

"I have not cared whether I lived or died," he said in little more than a whisper. "All along I have seemed to know how near I was—to going across, and I have been near to quitting—at times. For I was happier than I'd ever dared let myself be, before—and then, with the first shot that dropped Big Louie, I knew"— He shook his head, still smiling vaguely. "I have not wanted to live, but I am looking at things—more like a man now. You need not worry any longer, Joe. I'll sleep a little while, I think, and then I'll put my mind hard on getting well, when I awake."

That marked the end of delirium, and with sleep which came almost while he was talking the fever began to abate. He "put his mind on getting well," when he awoke twelve hours later. Strength was flowing in a steady tide back into his body long before Barbara's knees would again bear her weight. For she had squandered her endurance without counting the cost, and she paid the full penalty. She lay three days and three nights railing at her weakness before she could get up at all, and even then Cecile, her little maid, clucked disapprovingly at the dark circles beneath her eyes.

Joe was several days absent on that errand which had all but emptied the seething town of men. He returned the same day Barbara was about again, forced to admit that Harrigan and Fallon and Shayne had won clear. And there was nothing left to the disgruntled groups which straggled in behind him, save tall and heated conjecture. Some said that they must have managed to cross the border, others maintained that they had found sanctuary in the lumber camps of the lake country to the west. But no matter which guess was right the net result stood unchanged. For it is upon the one who runs away that the blame is always laid, and Archibald Wickersham knew fully as well as did Caleb and Allison and Fat Joe that, without Harrigan, they could not hope to touch him. Harrigan had disappeared from the ken of men, and Wickersham delayed only until his departure could no longer be construed as flight. Then one evening modestly he boarded a train.

"Say that I am still—half boy—to you!"

After she had rested Barbara proved almost humbly amenable to reason, until it was best for her to go to him she would wait as patiently as she was able.

Miss Sarah ordered a week of unbroken quiet and rest for her patient, and Steve, and not Barbara, proved the difficult one to manage during that period. For with returning strength there came to him recollection of many things which required his attention. He fretted over his work, he swore humorously at Fat Joe, who, coming to make daily reports as soon as Miss Sarah realized that the good in such visits far exceeded the benefits of sleep and solitude, assured his chief that they had accomplished much, unhampered as they were by carping authority.

But he lay and brooded, no humor in his eye, when he was left alone. Fat Joe had assured him that she had brought him home. Fat Joe, who was ever averse to anti-climax, had told him no more than that. His efforts at entertainment were only the more spontaneous those days because of the soleness of his friend's face. And then the same day that Joe raised him against the pillows so that he might watch a string of flat cars, high piled with logs, roll into the yards, they let her go to him.

Steve was listening to the shrill salute of the whistle which he knew was McLean's pean of victory; he was smiling a little wistfully over the memory which, with McLean, always recurred to him, when he turned and saw her standing on the threshold. She had come on diffident, mouselike feet. She was watching him. And before he believed it really was she, Barbara faltered his name.

"Steve!"

It was only a wisp of a sound—an aching, throbbing bit of tenderness lighter even than the breath that bore it.

"Steve!" she breathed again.

But thereupon, with a headlong little rush that scattered spools of bandages and rolls of lint and set the bottles upon his table jingling dangerously, she flew to him and came, somehow, into his arms.

They had not told him—at first he could not speak. Dumbly he sat, his face bowed upon that brown head pillowed in his arms. She had told herself that she was a woman now—yet her first words were all girl.

"Tell me just once that I'm pretty," she quavered. "Say that I am still—half boy—to you!"

His tongue unsteadied with joy, he told her again, as he had told her on that other day, and, watching the old, old wonder of her grow in his eyes, she listened as though she were taking the words, one by one, from his lips. But there was nothing boyish in the crooked little arch of her mouth—nothing boyish in the depths of her dark and brimming eyes. She remembered his wincing shoulder then. Her arms crept higher about his neck. And now her face was uplifted, and there was no more need for words.

Afterward when they spoke of Big Louie she loved him more for the sorrow which he did not try to hide. From Fat Joe he had already learned of Big Louie's last dereliction. Out of a deeper silence Steve spoke gravely—an epitaph for the man to whom he had been unfailingly kind.

"Most any kind of a failure can live," he said, "but it takes a man—to smile and die."

CHAPTER XXIII.

In Real Life Too.

THERE was no longer any objection raised by Miss Sarah, and Barbara spent every hour of her days with him. It grew warmer with aging spring, and almost immediately he was able to sit with her and watch the stream of logs coming in over the line from Thirty Mile and beyond.

Miriam and Garry were married in that week which followed directly Steve's first days of convalescence.

Steve and Barbara were at the window together. Steve outwardly still a little pale and haggard, but for the rest his old serene self again. He managed not to smile at her small and serious face.

"It certainly has not strengthened my vanity a little bit, either," said he, "to learn how smoothly things can move along without me."

Day by day the girl was finding her way deeper into that innermost heart of him which he had never shared with other woman or man. Hour by hour she was learning to know him better, and yet his whimsical gravity still could deceive her—she was sometimes thoughts behind his thoughts. Hard upon his reply her eyes flashed with indignation.

"Pooh!" she scoffed. "Pooh! Most any old clock will run after somebody's wound it up!"

It was a trick of speech that she had learned from him, but his employment of parallel, lazily amiable for the most part, had never been so lotly partisan as was hers at that moment. And suddenly self conscious, suddenly confused and warmly disconcerted at the quality of his gaze, she had to hide her head. But she hid it upon a shoulder most conveniently at hand.

Spring gave way to early summer, and now Steve was able to be on his feet again, so absurdly uncertain of balance at first, however, that she ridiculed him mercilessly one moment, only to rush to him in a panic of solicitude the next. There came long walks and longer trips in the saddle—came hours of silence that were the more wonderful for want of words—hours in which, in a hushed voice, she gave him sketches of her plans. But always, too, the interruptions grew more and more frequent and insistent. Fat Joe and McLean and even Hardwick Elliott made more and more pressing demands upon his time, until finally he insisted that he could no longer play shamelessly the invalid. He must look in upon the works up river if only for the moral effect which it would have upon the men. She assented grudgingly. It would be but a day or two, and then—then he would come back to her.

The next morning, at the moment when Barbara and Steve were mounting their horses, for she wanted to ride with him a little way, Dexter Allison chose to disclose something which had been but lately in the process of preparation. He joined them at the edge of the lawn before the white columned house on the hill.

"Easing back into harness, I understand," he began, not quite comfortably, however, for he was aware of a gleam of disapproval in his daughter's eyes at this interruption. "Well, there's no great rush, but it's wise no doubt to see that things don't lag." He hesitated and shifted heavily to the other foot. "We'll want to start through to the border by fall, I suppose."

"We'll be ready." Steve had to laugh at his lack of ease.

"No doubt—no doubt." Again Dexter hesitated momentarily. And then there came to the surface that promptness to accept men for what they were in a man's world which had long before convinced Caleb Hunter of Allison's inherent bigness.

"Elliott resigned the presidency of the East Coast company last night." The statement was brief to actual crispness. "I merely tell you this so that you can begin to lay tentative plans accordingly, because in view of the immediate need of filling that vacancy I feel sure that there will be too many demands upon your time here at the Morrison office for you to plan on much field work for yourself in the future."

To Barbara at the beginning the speech seemed merely another of her father's rather involved, entirely labored attempts at the facetious. But when she saw the blood steal up and stain Stephen O'Mara's face she realized that it was the very sort of suggestion from which on her lips he had turned roughly away. Coming from the lips of her father, Steve accepted gravely, with a matching briefness that could not hide a surge of triumph.

"I am so happy," she whispered.

She rode with him that day until he told her that it was time for her to turn back. With Ragtime standing quiet, she laid her face against his and complained that he had promised her she should never be allowed to go more than arm's length away from him once she was his.

"This is the last time," he told her in a voice vibrant and low. "This is the last time—for you and me."

He held her closer for a moment.

"You will be ready when I come back?"

She bobbed her head.

"Ready—and waiting," she said.

* * * * * * *

The next night, in the cabin up river, after Miriam had left them alone to what she termed their complacent silence, Garry Devereau and Steve sat a long while before the former raised a face alight with his rare mirth.

"Well, here we are," chuckled Garry—"I, poor, but honest, already in the toils of matrimony, and you, a plutocrat in sudden danger of a government investigation, I'm told, and hovering on the brink"—

"Here we are!" echoed Steve.

And that was as close as either of them came to outspoken emotion. With a lightness somewhat self conscious, Garry had alluded to the property which Caleb Hunter had turned over to Steve. There was a trace of like humor in the latter's reply.

"I certainly am oppressed with the cares of sudden wealth," said he.

* * * * * * *

Only her father and Miss Sarah and Caleb were present when they were married. And then, and not alone because she knew he wished it, but because it was the dearest wish of her own heart, they turned their faces toward the cabin on the balsam knoll. He dismounted and lifted her to the ground, for suddenly she wanted to go the rest of the way on foot.

She let her weight lie against him, the top of her head scarce higher than his chin, and sighed a little.

"Tired?" he asked with that gentleness he saved for her alone.

The bright head shook.

"Happy?" he asked again as gently.

She swung around and clung to him then.

"I'm so happy!" she whispered. "Do you suppose that any one will ever be as happy again?"

There was ineffable content in her question. Whimsically her own phrase rose to his lips.

"Maybe," he said, "maybe some time—in books."

She lifted her face then. He had the dusky glory of her eyes.

"Maybe," she echoed, her voice tremulous—"some time—but this time in real life too."

THE END.

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226 S. Charles St., Cor. Camden St.
Baltimore, Maryland
Grain Salesmen: R. Nelson Stevens, J. W. E. Emory. Fruit and Produce Salesmen: A. B. Carey, John L. Corson, C. H. Norris, C. D. Biggs, Robert F. Smoot. All under the personal supervision of R. Nelson Stevens.
We have the best possible facilities for handling shipments of Grain, Fruit, Asparagus and Produce of all kinds.
References: Merchants and Mechanics National Bank and all Commercial Agencies.

DUDLEY & CARPENTER
GENERAL
COMMISSION
MERCHANTS
215 Light St. BALTIMORE, MD.

DR. J. EARLE GILFILLAN
Veterinary Physician and Surgeon
Sudlersville - Maryland
Phone connections.
Office Opposite Railroad Station.

Piles Cured in 6 to 14 Days.
Your druggist will refund money if PAZO OINTMENT fails to cure any case of Itching, Blind, Bleeding or Protruding Piles in 6 to 14 days. The first application gives Ease and Rest. 50c.