

THE STORY OF A MINE.

issues of party and policy were severely taken up and dismissed in the old foreboding rhetoric that had early made him famous. Interruptions from other senators, now forgetful of unfinished business, and wild with reanimated party zeal; interruptions from certain senators mindful of unfinished business and unable to pass the Roscommon bill, only spurred him to fresh exertion. The tocsin sounded in the senate was heard in the lower house. Highly excited members congregated at the doors of the senate and left unfinished business to take care of itself.

Left to itself for seven hours, unfinished business gnashed its false teeth and tore its wig in impotent fury in corridor and hall. For seven hours the gifted Gashwiler had continued the manufacture of oil and honey, whose sweetness, however, was slowly palling upon the congressional lip; for seven hours Roscommon and friends beat with impatient feet the lobby and shook fists, more or less discolored, at the distinguished senator. For seven hours the one or two editors were obliged to sit and calmly compliment the great speech which that night flashed over the wires of a continent with the old electric thrill. And, worse than all, they were obliged to record with it the closing of the congress, with more than the usual amount of unfinished business.

A little group of friends surrounded the great senator with hymns of praise and congratulations. Old adversaries saluted him courteously as they passed by with the respect of strong men. A little woman with a shawl drawn over her shoulders, and held with one small brown hand, approached him timidly:

"I speak not the English well," she said gently, "but I have read much. I have read in the plays of your Shakespeare. I would like to say to you the words of Rosalind to Orlando when he did fight: 'Sir, you have wrestled well, and have overthrown more than your enemies.'" And with these words she was gone.

Yet not so quickly but that pretty Mrs. Hopkinson, coming—as Victrola always comes to Victor, to thank the great senator, albeit the faces of her escorts were shrouded in gloom—saw the shawled figure disappear.

"There," she said, pinching Wiles mischievously, "there! that's the woman you were afraid of. Look at her! Look at that dress. Ah, heavens! look at that shawl! Didn't I tell you she had no style?"

"Who is she?" said Wiles sullenly.

"Carmen de Haro, of course," said the lady vivaciously. "What are you hurrying away so for? You're absolutely pulling me along."

Mr. Wiles had just caught sight of the travestied face of Royal Thatcher among the crowd that thronged the staircase. Thatcher appeared pale and distraught; Mr. Harlowe, his counsel, at his side, rallied him.

"No one would think you had just got a new lease of your property, and escaped a great swindle. What's the matter with you? Miss de Haro passed us just now. It was she who spoke to the senator. Why did you not recognize her?"

"I was thinking," said Thatcher gloomily.

"Well, you take things coolly! And certainly you are not very demonstrative to wards the woman who saved you to-day. For, as sure as you live, it was she who drew that speech out of the senator."

Thatcher did not reply, but moved away. He had noticed Carmen de Haro, and was about to greet her with mingled pleasure and embarrassment. But he had heard her compliment to the senator, and this strong, pre-occupied, automatic man, who only ten days before had no thought beyond his property, was now thinking more of that compliment to another than of his success; and was beginning to hate the senator who had saved him, the lawyer who stood beside him, and even the little figure that had tripped down the steps up.

CHAPTER XVII.

AND WHO FORGOT IT.

It was somewhat inconsistent with Royal Thatcher's embarrassment and sensitiveness that he should, on leaving the Capitol, order a carriage and drive directly to the lodgings of Miss de Haro.

That on finding she was not at home, he should become again sulky and suspicious, and even be ashamed of the honest impulse that led him there, was, however, quite natural. He felt that he had done all that courtesy required; he had promptly answered her dispatch with his presence. It she chose to be absent at such a moment, he had at least done his duty. In short, there was scarcely any absurdity of the indignation which this once practical man did not permit himself to indulge in, yet always with a certain consciousness that he was allowing his feelings to run away with him—a fact that did not tend to make him better humored, and rather inclined him to place the responsibility of the eloquent on somebody else. If Miss de Haro had been home, etc., etc., and not going into ostentatious over speeches, etc., etc., and had attended to her business, i. e., being exactly what he had supposed her to be—all this would not have happened.

I am aware that this will not heighten the reader's respect for my hero. But I fancy that the imperceptible progress of a sincere passion in the natural strong man is apt to be marked with even more than the usual haste and absurdity of callous youth. The fever that runs riot in the veins of the robust is apt to pass your aching weakness by. Possibly there may be some immunity in inoculation. It is Lathario who is always self-possessed and does and says the right thing, while poor honest C. feels becomes ridiculous with genuine emotion.

He rejoined his lawyer in no very gracious mood. The chambers occupied by Mr. Harlowe were in the basement of a private dwelling once occupied and made historic by an Honorable Somebody, who, however, was remembered only by the landlord and the last tenant. There were various shelves in the walls divided into compartments, sarcastically known as "pigeon holes," in which the dove of peace had never rested, but which still perpetuated in their legends the feuds and animosities of suitors now but common dust together. There was a portrait, apparently of a cherub, which on nearer inspection turned out to be a famous English lord chancellor in his flowing wig. There were books with dreary, unenviable titles—egotistic always, as recording Smith's opinions on this and Jones' commentaries on that. There was a handbill tacked on the wall, which at first offered hilarious suggestions of a circus or a steamboat excursion, but which turned out only to be a sheriff's sale. There were several oddly shaped packages in newspaper wrappings, mysterious and awful in their corners, that might have contained forgotten law papers or the previous week's vashing of the eminent counsel. There were one or two newspapers, which at first offered unattaining prospects to the waiting client, but always proved to be a law record or a supreme court decision. There was the bust of a late distinguished jurist, which apparently had never been dusted since he himself became dust, and had already grown a perceptibly dusty mustache on his severely judicial upper lip. It was a cheerless place in the sunshine of day; at night, when it ought by very suggestion of its dusty past to have been left to the vengeful ghosts, the greater part of whose hopes and passions were recorded and gathered there; when in the dark he dead hands of forgotten men were stretched from their dusty graves to fumble over more for their old title deeds; at night, when it was lit up by flaring gaslight, the hollow mockery of this dissipation was so apparent that people in the streets, looking through the illuminated windows, felt as if the privacy of a family vault had been intruded upon by body-snatchers.

Royal Thatcher glanced around the room, took in all its dreary suggestions in a half weary, half indifferent sort of way, and dropped into the lawyer's own revolving chair as that gentleman entered from the adjacent room.

"Well, you got back soon, I see," said Harlowe briskly.

"Yes," said his client, without looking up, and with this notable distinction between himself and all other previous clients, that he seemed absolutely less interested than the lawyer. "Yes, I'm here; and, upon my soul, don't exactly know why."

"You told me of certain papers you had recovered," said the lawyer suggestively.

"Oh, yes," returned Thatcher with a slight awn. "I've got here some papers somewhere"—he began to feel in his coat pocket anxiously—"but, by the way, this is a rather heavy and God-forsaken sort of place! Let's go up to Welcker's, and you can look at them; a bottle of champagne."

"After I've looked at them, I've something to show you, myself," said Harlowe; "and as for the champagne, we'll have that in the other room, by and by. At present I want to have my head clear, and yours too—it'll oblige me by becoming sufficiently interested in your own affairs to talk to me about them."

Thatcher was gazing abstractedly at the fire. He started. "I dare say," he began, "I'm not very interesting; yet it's possible that my affairs have taken up a little too much of my time. However—" he stooped, took from his pocket an envelope, and threw it on the desk—"there are some papers. I don't know what value they may be; that is for you to determine. I don't know that I've any legal right to their possession—that is for you to say, too. They came to me in a queer way. On the overland journey here I lost my bag, containing my few traps and some letters and papers of no value, as the advertisements say, to any but the owner. Well, the bag was lost, but the stage driver declares that it was stolen by a fellow passenger—a man by the name of Giles, or Stiles, or Biles—"

"Wiles," said Harlowe earnestly.

"Yes," continued Thatcher, suppressing a yawn; "I guess you're right—Wiles. Well, the stage driver, finally believing this, goes to work and quietly and unostentatiously steals—I say, have you got a cigar?"

"I'll get you one."

Harlowe disappeared in the adjoining room. Thatcher dragged Harlowe's heavy, revolving desk chair, which never before had been removed from its sacred position, to the fire, and began to pore the envelope abstractedly.

Harlowe reappeared with cigars and matches. Thatcher lit one mechanically, and said, between the puffs:

"Do you—ever—talk—to yourself?"

"Not—why?"

"I thought I heard your voice just now in the other room. Anyway, this is an awful spooky place. If I stayed here alone half an hour, I'd fancy that the best chancellor up there would step down in his robes, one of his frames, to keep me company."

"Nonsense! When I'm busy I often sit here and write until after midnight. It's so quiet!"

"D—nably so!"

"Well, to go back to the papers. Somebody stole your bag, or you lost it. You stole—"

"The driver stole," suggested Thatcher, so languidly that it could hardly be called an interruption.

"Well, we'll say the driver stole, and passed over to you as his accomplice, confederate or receiver, certain papers belonging—"

"See here, Harlowe, I don't feel like joking in a ghostly law office after midnight. Here are your facts. Yuba Bill, the driver, stole a bag from this passenger, Wiles, or Smiths, and handed it to me to insure the return of my own. I found in it some papers concerning my case. There they are. Do with them what you like."

Thatcher turned his eyes again abstractedly to the fire.

Harlowe took out the first paper.

"Aw, this seems to be a telegram. Yes, oh? 'Come to Washington at once. Carmen de Haro.'"

Thatcher started, blushed like a girl, and hurriedly reached for the paper.

"Nonsense. That's a mistake. A dispatch I mislaid in the envelope."

"I see," said the lawyer dryly.

"I thought I had torn it up," continued Thatcher after an awkward pause. I regret to say that here that usually truthful man elaborated a fiction. He had consulted it a dozen times a day on the journey, and it was quite worn in its foldings. Harlowe's quick eye had noticed this, but he speedily became interested and absorbed in the other papers. Thatcher lapsed into contemplation of the fire.

"Well," said Harlowe, finally turning to his client, "there's enough to unsettle Gashwiler, or close his mouth. As to the rest, it's good reading—but I needn't tell you—no legal evidence. But it's proof enough to stop them from ever trying it again—when the existence of this record is made known. Bribery is a hard thing to fix on a man; the only witness is naturally particeps criminis—but it would not be easy for them to explain away this record. One or two things I don't understand: What's this opposite the Hon. X's name. 'Took the medicine nicely, and feels better' and here, just in the margin, after X's, 'Must be labored with.'"

"I suppose our California slang borrows largely from the medical and spiritual profession," returned Thatcher. "But isn't it odd that a man should keep a conscientious record of his own villainy?"

Harlowe, a little abashed at his want of knowledge of American metaphor, now felt himself at home. "Well, no. It's not unusual. In one of those books yonder there is the record of a case where a man, who had committed a series of nameless atrocities, extending over a period of years, absolutely kept a memorandum of them in his pocket diary. It was produced in court. Why, my dear fellow, one half of our business arises from the fact that men and women are in the habit of keeping letters and documents that they might—I don't say, you know, that they ought, that's a question of sentiment or ethics—but that they might destroy."

Thatcher half mechanically took the telegram from poor Carmen and threw it in the fire. Harlowe noticed the act and smiled.

"I'll venture to say, however, that there's nothing in the bag that you lost that need give you a moment's uneasiness. It's only your rascal or fool who carries with him that which makes him his own detective."

"I had a friend," continued Harlowe, "a lever fellow enough, but who was so foolish as to seriously complicate himself with a woman. He was himself the soul of honor, and at the beginning of their correspondence he proposed that they should each return the other's letters with their answer. They did so for years, but it cost him ten thousand dollars and no end of trouble after all."

"Why?" asked Thatcher simply.

"Because he was such an egotistical ass as to keep the letter proposing it, which she had duly returned, among his papers as a sentimental record. Of course somebody eventually found it."

"Good night," said Thatcher, rising abruptly. "If I stayed here much longer I should begin to disbelieve my own mother."

"I have known of such hereditary traits," returned Harlowe with a laugh. "But come, you must not go without the champagne." He led the way to the adjacent room, which proved to be only the ante-chamber of another, on the threshold of which Thatcher stopped with genuine surprise. It was an elegantly furnished library.

"Sybarite! Why was I never here before?"

"Because you came as a client; to-night you are my guest. All who enter here leave their business, with their hats, in the hall. Look; there isn't a law book on those shelves; that table never was defaced by a title deed or parchment. You look puzzled! Well, it was a whim of mine to put my residence and my workshop under the same roof, yet so distinct that they would never interfere with each other. You know the house above is let out to lodgers. I occupy the first floor with my mother and sister, and this is my parlor. I do my work in that severe room that fronts the street; here is where I play. A man must have something else in life than mere business. I find it less harmful and expensive to have my pleasure here."

Thatcher had sunk moodily in the embracing arms of an easy chair. He was thinking deeply; he was fond of books, too, and like all men who have fared hard and led wandering lives, he knew the value of cultivated repose. Like all men who have been obliged to sleep under blankets and in the open air, he appreciated the luxuries of linen sheets and a frescoed roof.

As, by the way, only your sick city clerk or your dyspeptic clergyman, who fancy that they have found in the bed board, dried stables and trowny flames of mountain peering the true art of living. And it is a somewhat notable fact that your trip mountaineer or your gentleman who has been obliged to honestly "rough it," does not, as a general thing, write books about its advantages, or implore their fellow mortals to come and share their solitude and their discomforts.

Thoroughly appreciating the taste and comfort of Harlowe's library, yet half envious of its owner, and half suspicious that his own earnest life for the past few years might have been different, Thatcher suddenly started from his seat and walked towards a parterre, whereon stood a picture. It was Carmen de Haro's first sketch of the furnace and the mine.

"I see you are taken with that picture," said Harlowe, pausing with the champagne bottle in his hand. "You show your good taste. It's been much admired. Observe how splendidly that freight plays over the sleeping face of that figure, yet brings out by very contrast its almost deathlike repose. These rocks are powerful! Isn't that what a

suggestion of mystery in those shadows; you know the painter?"

Thatcher murmured, "Miss de Haro," with a new and rather odd self-consciousness in speaking her name.

"Yes. And you know the story of the picture, of course?"

Thatcher thought he didn't. Well, no; in fact he did not remember.

"Why, this recumbent figure was an old Spanish lover of hers, whom she believed to have been murdered there. It's a gusty fancy, isn't it?"

Two things annoyed Thatcher: first, the epithet "lover," as applied to Concho by another man; second, that the picture belonged to him; and what the—! did she mean by—

"Yes," he broke out finally; "but how did you get it?"

"Oh, I bought it of her. I've been a sort of patron of her ever since I found out how she stood towards us. As she was quite alone here in Washington, my mother and sister have taken her up, and have been doing the social thing."

"How long since?" asked Thatcher.

"Oh, not long. The day she telegraphed you she came here to know what she could do for us, and when I said nothing could be done except to keep congress off, why she went and did it. For she, and she alone, got that speech out of the senator. But," he added, a little mischievously, "you seem to know very little about her?"

"No—I—that is—I've been very busy lately," returned Thatcher, staring at the picture.

"Does she come here often?"

"Yes, lately, quite often; she was here this evening with mother; was here, I think, when you came."

Thatcher looked intently at Harlowe. But that gentleman's face betrayed no confusion. Thatcher reddened his glass a little awkwardly, tossed off the liquor at a draught, and rose to his feet.

"Come, old fellow, you're not going now, I shan't permit it," said Harlowe, laying his hand kindly on his client's shoulder. "You're out of sorts. Stay here with me to-night. Our accommodations are not large, but are elastic. I can bestow you comfortably until morning. Wait here a moment, while I give the necessary orders."

Thatcher was not sorry to be left alone. In the last half hour he had become convinced that his love for Carmen de Haro had been in some way most dreadfully abused. While he was hard at work in California, she was being introduced in Washington society by parties with eligible brothers, who bought her paintings. It is a relief to the truly jealous mind to indulge in phantasies. Thatcher liked to think that she was already beset by hundreds of brothers.

He still kept staring at the picture. By and by it faded away in part, and a very vivid recollection of the misty, midnight, moonlit walk he had once taken with her came back, and reddened the canvas with its magic. He saw the ruined furnace; the dark, overhanging masses of rock; the trembling intricacies of foliage, and, above all, the flash of dark eyes under a mantilla at his shoulder. What a cool he had been! Had he not really been as senseless and stupid as this very Concho, lying here like a log? And she had loved that man! What a fool she must have thought him that evening! What a snob she must think him now!

He was startled by a slight rustling in the passage, that almost ceased as he turned. Thatcher looked toward the door of the outer office, as if half expecting that the lord chancellor, like the commander in "Don Juan," might have accepted his thoughtless invitation. He listened again; everything was still. He was conscious of feeling ill at ease and a trifle nervous. What a long time Harlowe took to make his preparations. He would look out in the hall. To do this it was necessary to turn up the gas. He did so, and in his confusion turned it out!

Where were the matches? He remembered that there was a bronze something on the table that, in the irony of modern decorative taste, might hold ashes or matches, or anything of an unpicturesque character. He knocked something over, evidently the ink—something else—this time a champagne glass. Becoming reckless, and now groping at random in the ruins he overturned the bronze Mercury on the center table, and sat down hopelessly in his chair. And then a pair of velvet fingers slid into his, with the matches, and this audible, musical statement:

"It is a match you are seeking? Here is of them."

Thatcher flushed, embarrassed, nervous—feeling the ridiculousness of saying "Thank you" to a dark somebody—struck the match, held by its brief, uncertain gleam Carmen de Haro beside him, burned his fingers, coughed, dropped the match, and was cast again into utter darkness.

"Let me try!"

Carmen struck a match, jumped briskly on the chair, lit the gas, jumped lightly down again, and said: "You do like to sit in the dark—do you?—some times—ah—"

"Miss de Haro," said Thatcher with sudden, honest earnestness, advancing with outstretched hands, "please give me, I am sincerely delighted, overjoyed, again to meet—"

She had, however, quickly retreated as he approached, and was sitting behind the high back of a large antique chair, on the cushion of which she sat. I regret to add also that she slipped her outstretched fingers a little clumsily with her inevitable black fan as she still advanced.

"We are not in California. It is Washington. It is after midnight. I am a poor girl, and I have to lose—what you call—a character. You shall sit over there"—she pointed to the sofa—"and I shall sit here"—she rested her boyish head on the top of the chair—"and we shall talk, for I have to speak to you, Don Royal."

Thatcher took the seat indicated, contritely, humbly, submissively. Carmen's little heart was touched; but she still went on over the back of the chair.

"Don Royal," she said, emphasizing each word at him with her fan, "before I saw you—ever know of you—I was a child. Yes, I was but a child! I was a bold, bad child—and I was what you call—a 'forgable'!"

"You shall sit over there?"

"A what?" asked Thatcher, hesitating between a smile and a sigh.

"A forgable!" continued Carmen, demurely. "I did myself write the names of oyster people" when Carmen was excited she lost the control of the English tongue; "I did write just to please myself—it was my ninkie that did make of it money—you understand, eh? Shall you not speak? Must I again hit you?"

"Go on," said Thatcher, laughing.

"I did find out, when I came to you at the mine, that I had forged against you the name of Micheltorona. I to the lawyer went, and found that it was so—of a verity—so all the time. Look at me now, Don Royal—it is a 'forgable' you stare at."

"Carmen!"

"Hush! Shall I have to hit you again? I did overlook all the papers. I found the application; it was written by me. There."

She tossed over the back of her chair an envelope to Thatcher. He opened it.

"I see," he said gently, "you possessed yourself of it?"

"What is that—'re-re-possess'?"

"Why?"—Thatcher hesitated—"you got possession of this paper—this innocent forgery—again."

"Oh! You think me a thief as well as a forger. Go away! Get up. Get out."

"My dear girl—"

"Look at the paper! Will you? Oh, you silly!"

Thatcher looked at the paper. In paper, handwriting, age and stamp it was identical with the formal, clerical application of Garcia for the grant. The indorsement of Micheltorona was unquestionably genuine. But the application was made for Royal Thatcher. And his own signature was imitated to the very life.

"I had but one letter of yours with your name," said Carmen, apologetically; "and it was the best poor me could do."

"Why, you blessed little goose and angel, said Thatcher, with the bold, mixed metaphor of amatory genius, "don't you see—"

"Ah, you don't like it—it is not good?"

"My darling!"

"Hush! There is also an 'old cat' upstairs. And now I have here a character. Will you sit down! Is it of a necessity that up and down you should walk and awaken the whole house? There!—she had given him a vicious dab with her fan as he passed. He sat down.

"And you have not seen me nor written to me for a year?"

"Carmen!"

"Don't you, you bold, bad boy. Don't you see it is of business that you and I talk down here; and it is of business that oyster people up stairs are thinking. Eh?"

"D—n business! See here, Carmen, my darling, tell me—I regret to say he had by this time got hold of the back of Carmen's chair—tell me, my own little girl, about—about that senator. You remember what you said to him?"

"Oh, the old man? Oh, that was business! And you say of business, d—n—"

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