

AN HEIRESS OF RED DOG.

BY HRET HARTZ.

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The first intimation given of the eccentricity of the testator was, I think, in the spring of 1884. He was at that time in possession of a considerable property, heavily mortgaged to one friend, and a wife of some attraction, on whose affections another friend held an incumbering lien. One day it was found that she had secretly dug, or caused to be dug, a deep trap before the front door of his dwelling, into which a few friends, in the course of the evening, casually and familiarly dropped. This circumstance, slight in itself, seemed to point to the existence of a certain humor in the man, which might eventually get into literature, although his wife's lover—a man of quick discernment, whose leg was broken by the fall—took other views. It was some weeks later that, while dining with certain other friends of his wife, he excused himself from the table to quietly reappear at the front window with a three-quarter inch hydraulic pipe, and a stream of water projected at the assembled company. An attempt was made to take public cognizance of this; but a majority of the citizens of Red Dog, who were not at dinner, decided that a man had a right to choose his own methods of diverting his company. Nevertheless, there were some hints of his insanity; his wife recalled other acts clearly attributable to dementia; the crippled lover argued from his own experience that the integrity of her limbs could only be secured by leaving her husband's house; and the mortgage, fearing a further damage to his property, foreclosed. But here the cause of all this anxiety took matters into his own hands and disappeared.

When we next heard from him he had, in some mysterious way, been relieved alike of his wife and property, and was living alone at Rockville, fifty miles away, and editing a newspaper. But that originality he had displayed when dealing with the problems of his own private life, when applied to politics in the columns of the Rockville Vanguard was singularly unsuccessful. An amusing exaggeration, purporting to be an exact account of the manner in which the opposing candidate had murdered his Chinese laundryman, was, I regret to say, answered only by assault and battery. A gratuitous and purely imaginative description of a great religious revival in Calaveras, in which the sheriff of the county—a notoriously profane skeptic—was alleged to have been the chief exhorter, resulted only in the withdrawal of the county advertising from the paper. In the midst of this practical confusion he suddenly died. It was then discovered, as a crowning proof of his absurdity, that he had left a will bequeathing his entire effects to a freckle faced maid servant at the Rockville hotel. But that absurdity became serious when it was also discovered that among these effects were a thousand shares in the Rising Sun Mining company, which a day or two after his demise, and while people were still laughing at his grotesque bequest, suddenly sprang into opulence and celebrity. Three millions of dollars was roughly estimated as the value of the estate thus wantonly sacrificed. For it is only fair to state, as a just tribute to the enterprise and energy of that young and thriving settlement, that there was not probably a single citizen who did not feel himself better able to control the deceased humorist's property. Some had expressed a doubt of their ability to support a family; others had felt perhaps too keenly the deep responsibility resting upon them when chosen from the panel as jurors, and had evaded their public duties, a few had declined office and low salary; but no one shrunk from the possibility of having been called upon to assume the functions of Peggy Moffat, the heiress.



PEGGY MOFFAT.

The will was contested—first by the widow, whom it now appeared had never been legally divorced from the deceased; next by four of his cousins, who awoke, only too late, to a consciousness of his moral and pecuniary worth. But the humble legatee—a singularly plain, unpretending, uneducated western girl—exhibited a dogged pertinacity in claiming her rights. She rejected all compromises. A rough sense of justice in the community, while doubting her ability to take care of the whole fortune, suggested that she ought to be content with \$300,000. "She's bound to throw even that away on some damned skunk of a man, naturally; but three millions is too much to give a cheap for makin' her unhappy. It's offerin' a temptation to come in."

The only approving voice to this counsel came from the cardiac lips of Mr. Jack Hamlin. "Suppose," suggested that gentleman, turning abruptly on the speaker—"suppose, when you won \$20,000 of me last Friday night—suppose that instead of handing you over the money as I did—suppose I'd got up on my hind legs, and said, 'Look yer, Bill Wetherabee, you're a d-d fool. If I give ye that twenty thousand, you'll throw it away in the first skin game in Frisco, and hand it over to the first short card sharp you'll meet. There's a thousand—enough for you to sling away,—take it and get!' Suppose what I'd said to you was the frozen truth, and you know'd it, would that have been the square thing to play on you?" But here Wetherabee quickly pointed out the inefficiency of the comparison by stating that he had been the money fairly with a certain...

how do you know," demanded Hamlin savagely, bending his black eyes on the astonished casual—"how do you know that the gal hasn't put down a stake?" The man stammered an unintelligible reply. The gambler laid his white hand on Wetherabee's shoulder. "Look here, old man," he said, "every gal stakes her whole pile—you can bet your life on that—whatever's her little game. If she took to cards instead of her feelings, if she'd put up chips instead of body and soul, she'd bust every bank 'twixt this and Frisco! You hear me?"

Somewhat of this idea was conveyed, I fear not quite as sentimentally, to Peggy Moffat herself. The best legal wisdom of San Francisco, retained by the widow and relatives, took occasion, in a private interview with Peggy, to point out that she stood in the quasi-criminal attitude of having unlawfully practiced upon the affections of an insane elderly gentleman, with a view of getting possession of his property, and suggested to her that no vestige of her moral character would remain after the trial, if she persisted in forcing her claims to that issue. It is said that Peggy, on hearing this, stopped washing the plate she had in her hands, and, twisting the towel around her fingers, fixed her small pale blue eyes at the lawyer.

"And ez that the kind o' chirpin these criers keep up?"

"I regret to say, my dear young lady," responded the lawyer, "that the world is censorious. I must add," he continued, with engaging frankness, "that my professional lawyers are apt to study the opinion of the world, and that such will be the theory of our side."

"Then," said Peggy stoutly, "ez I allow I've got to go into court to defend my character, I might as well pack in them three millions too."

There is hearsay evidence that Peg added to this speech a wish and desire to "bust the crust" of her traducers, and, remarking that "that was the kind of hairpin" she was, closed the conversation with an unfortunate accident to the plate that left a severe contusion on the legal brow of her companion. But this story, popular in the barrooms and gulches, lacked confirmation in higher circles. Better authenticated was the legend related of an interview with her own lawyer. That gentleman had pointed out to her the advantage of being able to show some reasonable cause for the singular generosity of the testator.

"Although," he continued, "the law does not go back of the will for reason or cause for its provisions, it would be a strong point with the judge and jury—particularly if the theory of insanity were set up—for us to show that the act was logical and natural. Of course you have—I speak confidently, Miss Moffat—certain ideas of your own why the late Mr. Byways was so singularly generous to you."

"No, I haven't," said Peg decidedly.

"Think again. Had he not expressed to you—you understand that this is confidential between us, although I protest, my dear young lady, that I see no reason why it should not be made public—had he not given utterance to sentiments of a nature consistent with some future matrimonial relations?" But here Miss Peg's large mouth, which had been slowly relaxing over her irregular teeth, stopped him.

"If you mean he wanted to marry me—No?"

"I see. But were there any conditions—of course you know the law takes no cognizance of any not expressed in the will; but still, for the sake of mere corroboration of the bequest—do you know of any conditions on which he gave you the property?"

"You mean did he want anything in return?"

"Exactly, my dear young lady."

Peg's face on one side turned a deep magenta color, on the other a lighter cherry, while her nose was purple and her forehead an Indian red. To add to the effect of this awkward and discomposing dramatic exhibition of embarrassment, she began to wipe her hands on her dress, and sat silent.

"I understand," said the lawyer hastily. "No matter—the conditions were fulfilled."

"No!" said Peg amazedly. "How could they be until he was dead?"

It was the lawyer's turn to color and grow embarrassed.

"He did say something, and make some conditions," continued Peg, with a certain firmness through her awkwardness; "but that's nobody's business but mine and his'n. And it's no call o' yours or theirs."

"But, my dear Miss Moffat, if these very conditions were proofs of his right mind, you surely would not object to make them known, if only to enable you to put yourself in a condition to carry them out."

"But," said Peg cunningly, "suppose you and the court didn't think 'em satisfactory? Suppose you thought 'em queer? Eh?"

With this helpless limitation on the part of the defense, the case came to trial. Everybody remembers it—how for six weeks it was the daily food of Calaveras county; how for six weeks the intellectual and moral and spiritual competency of Mr. James Byways to dispose of his property was discussed with learned and formal obscurity in the court, and with unshowered and independent prejudice by camp fires and in barrooms. At the end of that time, when it was logically established that at least nine-tenths of the population of Calaveras were harmless lunatics, and everybody else's reason seemed to flutter on its throne, an exhausted jury succumbed one day to the presence of Peg in the court room. It was not a prepossessing presence at any time, but the excitement and an injudicious attempt to ornament herself brought her defects into a glaring relief that was almost unreal. Every freckle on her face stood out and asserted itself singly; her pale blue eyes, that gave no indication of her force of character, were weak and wandering; or stared blankly at the judge; her over-sized head, broad at the base, terminating in the

middle of her narrow shoulders, was as hard and uninteresting as the wooden spheres that topped the railing against which she sat. The jury, who for six weeks had had her described to them by the plaintiffs as an arch, wily enchantress, who had sapped the falling reason of Jim Byways, revolted to a man. There was something so appallingly gratuitous in her pliances, that it was felt that three millions was scarcely a compensation for it. "Ef that money was give to her she earned it sure, boys; it wasn't no softness of the old man," said the foreman. When the jury retired it was felt that she had cleared her character; when they re-entered the room with their verdict it was known that she had been awarded three millions damages for its defamation.



Peggy in court.

She got the money. But those who had confidently expected to see her squander it were disappointed; on the contrary, it was presently whispered that she was exceedingly penurious. That admirable woman, Mrs. Stiver, of Red Dog, who accompanied her to San Francisco to assist her in making purchases, was loud in her indignation. "She cares more for two bits than I do for five dollars. She wouldn't buy any thing at the 'City of Paris,' because it was 'too expensive,' and at last rigged herself out in a perfect guy, at some cheap shop-sops in Market street. And after all the care Jane and me took of her, giving up our time and experience to her, she never so much as made Jane a single present." Popular opinion, which regarded Mrs. Stiver's attention as purely speculative, was not shocked at this unprofitable denouement; but when Peg refused to give anything to clear the mortgage off the new Presbyterian church, and even declined to take shares in the Union ditch, considered by many as an equally sacred and safe investment, she began to lose favor. Nevertheless, she seemed to be as regardless of public opinion as she had been before the trial; took a small house, in which she lived with an old woman who had once been a fellow servant, on apparently terms of perfect equality, and looked after her money. I wish I could say that she did this discreetly; but the fact is, she blundered. The same dogged persistence she had displayed in claiming her rights was visible in her unsuccessful ventures. She sunk \$300,000 in a worn out shaft originally projected by the deceased testator; she prolonged the miserable existence of The Rockville Vanguard long after it had ceased to interest even its enemies; she kept the doors of the Rockville hotel open when its custom had departed; she lost the co-operation and favor of a fellow capitalist through a trifling misunderstanding, in which she was derelict and impenitent; she had three lawsuits on her hands that could have been settled for a trifle. I note these defects to show that she was by no means a heroine. I quote her affair with Jack Folsinbee to show she was scarcely the average woman.

That handsome, graceless vagabond had struck the outskirts of Red Dog in a cyclone of dissipation, which left him a stranded but still rather interesting wreck in a ruinous cabin not far from Peg Moffat's virgin bower. Pale, crippled from excesses, with a voice quite tremulous from sympathetic emotion, more or less developed by stimulants, he lingered languidly, with much time on his hands and only a few neighbors. In this fascinating kind of general deshabille of morals, dress and the emotions he appeared before Peg Moffat. More than that, he occasionally limped with her through the settlement. The critical eye of Red Dog took in the singular pair—Jack, voluble, suffering, apparently overcome by remorse, conscience, vituperation and disease; and Peg, open mouthed, high colored, awkward, yet delighted; and the critical eye of Red Dog, seeing this, winked meaningly at Rockville. No one knew what passed between them, but all observed that one summer day Jack drove down the main street of Red Dog in an open buggy, with the heiress of that town beside him. Jack, albeit a trifle shaky, held the reins with something of his old dash; and Mistress Peggy, in an enormous bonnet, with pearl colored ribbons a shade darker than her hair, holding in her short, pink-gloved fingers a bouquet of yellow roses, absolutely glowed crimson in distressful gratification over the dashboard. So these two fared on, out of the busy settlement into the woods, against the rosy sunset. Possibly it was not a pretty picture; nevertheless, as the dim aisles of the solemn pines opened to receive them, miners leaned upon their spades and mechanics stopped in their toil to look after them. The critical eye of Red Dog, perhaps from the sun, perhaps from the fact that it had itself once been young and dissipated, took on a kindly moisture as it gazed.

The moon was high when they returned. Those who had waited to congratulate Jack on this near prospect of a favorable change in his fortunes were chagrined to find that, having seen the lady safe home, he had himself departed from Red Dog. Nothing was to be gleaned from Peg, who, on the next day and ensuing days, kept the even tenor of her way, sunk a thousand or two more in unprofitable speculation, and made no change in her habits of personal economy. Weeks passed without

any apparent sequel to this romantic tale. Nothing was known definitely until Jack, a month later, turned up in Sacramento, with a billiard cue in his hand, and a bears over-charged with indignant emotion. "I don't mind saying to you, gentlemen, in confidence," said Jack to a circle of sympathizing players—"I don't mind telling you regarding this thing, that I was as soft as that freckled faced, red eyed, tallow haired gal as if she'd been—a—a—an actress. And I don't mind saying, gentlemen, that, as far as I understand women, she was just as soft on me, You kin laugh; but it's so. One day I took her out buggy riding—in style, too—and out on the road I offered to do the square thing, just as if she'd been a lady—offered to marry her then and there. And what did she do?" said Jack, with a hysterical laugh. "Why, blank it all offed me \$25 a week allowance—pay to be stopped when I wasn't at home!" The roar of laughter that greeted this frank confession was broken by a quiet voice asking, "And what did you say?" "Say!" screamed Jack, "I just told her to go to— with her money."—"They say," continued the quiet voice, "that you asked her for the loan of \$250 to get you to Sacramento—and that you got it?"—"Who says so?" roared Jack. "Show me the blank lar." There was a dead silence. Then the possessor of the quiet voice, Mr. Jack Hamlin, languidly reached under the table, took the chalk, and, rubbing the end of his billiard cue, began with gentle gravity: "It was an old friend of mine in Sacramento, a man with a wooden leg, a game eye, three fingers on his right hand and a consumptive cough. Being unable, naturally, to back himself, he leaves things to me. So, for the sake of argument," continued Hamlin, suddenly laying down his cue and fixing his wicked black eyes on the speaker, "say it's me!"

I am afraid that this story, whether truthful or not, did not tend to increase Peg's popularity in a community where recklessness and generosity conduced for the absence of all the other virtues; and it is possible also that Red Dog was no more free from prejudice than other more civilized but equally disappointed matchmakers. Likewise, during the following year, she made several more foolish ventures, and lost heavily. In fact, a feverish desire to increase her store at almost any risk seemed to possess her. At last it was announced that she intended to reopen the infelix Rockville hotel, and keep it herself. Wild as this scheme appeared in theory, when put into practical operation there seemed to be some chance of success. Much, doubtless, was owing to her practical knowledge of hotel keeping, but more to her rigid economy and untiring industry. The mistress of millions, she cooked, washed, waited on table, made the beds and labored like a common menial. Visitors were attracted by this novel spectacle. The income of the house increased as their respect for the hostess lessened. No anecdote of her avarice was too extravagant for current belief. It was even alleged that she had been known to carry the luggage of guests to their rooms, that she might anticipate the usual porter's gratuity. She denied herself the ordinary necessities of life. She was poorly clad, she was ill-fed—but the hotel was making money.

A few hints of insanity; others shook their heads, and said a curse was entailed on the property. It was believed, also, from her appearance, that she could not long survive this tax on her energies, and already there was discussion as to the probable final disposition of her property.

It was the peculiar fortune of Mr. Jack Hamlin to be able to set the world right on this and other questions regarding her.

A stormy December evening had set in when he chanced to be a guest at the Rockville hotel. He had, during the past week, been engaged in the prosecution of his noble profession at Red Dog, and had, in the graphic language of a coadjutor, "cleared out the town, except his fare in the pockets of the stage driver." The Red Dog Standard had bewailed his departure in joyful obituary verse, beginning, "Dearest Johnny, thou hast left us," wherein the rhymes "bereft us" and "deplore" carried a vague allusion to "a thousand dollars more." A quiet contentment naturally suffused his personality, and he was more than usually lazy and deliberate in his speech. At midnight, when he was about to retire, he was a little surprised, however, by a tap on his door, followed by the presence of Mistress Peg Moffat, heiress, and landlady of Rockville hotel.

Mr. Hamlin, despite his previous defense of Peg, had no liking for her. His fastidious taste rejected her uncomeliness; his habits of thought and life were all antagonistic to what he had heard of her niggardliness and greed. As she stood there, in a dirty calico wrapper, still redolent with the day's cuisine, crimson with embarrassment and the recent heat of the kitchen range, she certainly was not an alluring apparition. Happily for the lateness of the hour, her loneliness and the infelix reputation of the man before her, she was at least a safe one. And I fear the very consciousness of this scarcely relieved her embarrassment.

"I wanted to say a few words to ye alone, Mr. Hamlin," she began, taking an unoffered seat on the end of his portmanteau, "or I shouldn't hev intruded. But it's the only time I can catch you, or you me; for I'm down in the kitchen from sunup till now."

She stopped awkwardly, as if to listen to the wind, which was rattling the windows, and spreading a film of rain against the opaque darkness without. Then, smothering her wrapper over her knees, she remarked, as if opening a desultory conversation:

"That's a power of rain outside."

Mr. Hamlin's only response to this meteorological observation was a yawn, and a preliminary tug at his coat as he began to remove it.

"I thought ye couldn't mind dot's me a favor," continued Peg, with a hard, awkward laugh, "partik'ly seein' ez folks allowed you'd sorter bin a friend o' mine, and had

stood up for me at times when you weren't any particular call to do it. I hev'n't," she continued, looking down on her lap, and following with her finger and thumb a seam of her gown—"I hev'n't so many friends as sings a kind word for me these times that I remember them." Her under lip quivered up a little here; and, after vainly hunting for a forgotten handkerchief, she finally lifted the hem of her gown, wiped her moist nose upon it, but left the tears still in her eyes as she raised them to the man.

Mr. Hamlin, who had by this time divested himself of his coat, stopped unbuttoning his waistcoat, and looked at her.

"Like ez not that'll be high water on the North Fork, ef this rain keeps on," said Peg, as if apologetically, looking toward the window.

The other rain having ceased, Mr. Hamlin began to unbutton his waistcoat again.

"I wanted to ask ye a favor about Mr.—about—Jack Folsinbee," began Peg again hurriedly. "He's allin' agin, and is mighty low. And he's losin' a heap o' money here and there, and mostly to you. You cleaned him out of two thousand dollars last night—all he had."

"Well?" said the gambler coldly.

"Well, I thought ez you was a friend o' mine, I'd ask ye to let up a little on him," said Peg with an affected laugh. "You kin do it. Don't let him play with ye."

"Miss Margaret Moffat," said Jack with lady deliberation, taking off his watch and beginning to wind it up, "ef you're that much stuck after Jack Folsinbee, you kin keep him off of me much easier than I kin. You're a rich woman. Give him enough money to break my bank, or break himself for good and all; but don't keep him forlin' round me in hopes to make a raise. It don't pay; Miss Margaret Moffat—it don't pay!"

A fiercer nature than Peg's would have misunderstood or resented the gambler's slang and the miserable truths that underlaid it. But she comprehended him instantly, and sat hopelessly silent.

"Ef you'll take my advice," continued Jack, placing his watch and chain under his pillow and quietly unloosing his cravat, "you'll quit this yer forlin', marry that chap and hand over to him the money and the money makin' that's killin' you. He'll get rid of it soon enough. I don't say this because I expect to git it; for when he's got that much of a raise he'll make a break for Frisco, and lose it to some first-class sport there. I don't say, neither, that you mayn't be in luck enough to reform him. I don't say, neither—and it's a derned sight more likely—that you mayn't be luckier yet, and he'll tip and die afore he gits rid of your money. But I do say you'll make him happy now; and, ez I reckon you're about ez badly stuck after that chap ez I ever saw any woman, you won't be hurtin' your own feelin's either."

The blood left Peg's face as she looked up. "But that's why I can't give him the money—and he won't marry me without it."

Mr. Hamlin's hand dropped from the last button of his waistcoat. "Can't give—him—the money?" he repeated, slowly.

"No."

"Why?"

"Because—because I love him."

Mr. Hamlin rebuttioned his waistcoat and sat down patiently on the bed. Peg arose and awkwardly drew the portmanteau a little nearer to him.

"When Jim Byways left me this yer property," she began, looking cautiously around, "he left it to me on conditions; not conditions ez was in his writin' will, but conditions ez was spoken. A promise I made him in this very room, Mr. Hamlin—this very room, and on that very bed you're sittin' on, in which he died."



"On that very bed you're sittin' on."

Like most gamblers, Mr. Hamlin was superstitious. He rose hastily from the bed and took a chair beside the window. The wind shook it as if the discontented spirit of Mr. Byways were without, re-enforcing his last injunction.

"I don't know if you remember him," said Peg, feverishly. "He was a man ez hed suffered. All that he loved—wife, fammery, friends—had gone back on him. He tried to make light of it afore folks, but with me, being a poor gal, he let himself out. I never told anybody this. I don't know why he told me—I don't know," continued Peg, with a sniffle, "why he wanted to make me unhappy, too. But he made me promise that, if he left me his fortune, I'd never, never—so help me God—never share it with any man or woman that I loved. I didn't think it would be hard to keep that promise then, Mr. Hamlin, for I was very poor and hedn't a friend nor a livin' heir; that was kind to me but him."

"But you've as good as broken your promise already," said Hamlin. "You've given Jack money, as I know."

"Only what I made myself. Listen to me, Mr. Hamlin. When Jack proposed to me, I offered him about what I halikized; I could earn myself. When he went away, and was sick and in trouble, I came here and took this hotel. I know that by hard work I could make it pay. Don't laugh at me, please. I did work hard, and did make it pay—without takin' one cent of the forlin'. And all I made, workin' by night and day, I gave to you'd sorter bin a friend o' mine, and had