



HOWARD SSBLY.

Of course an occasion so celebrated as this crowning event of the frontier season had attracted the widely scattered beauty of the region. Miss Cordelia Delaney, the "Wild Rose of San Saba," the perfume of whose attractions had been blown abroad by the prairie breezes as far east as San Marcus, was present to blossom anew and to excite even more fragrant fancies in the minds of her poetic admirers. Miss Flo' Brooks, clear eyed and bewitching, held out alluringly the fascinations of her native town of Paint Rock. There were other humbler importations against whose staid mediocrity these celebrated beauties flashed as against a sadder background. The local honors were sustained by Miss Bertha Maverick and Miss Cynthia Dallas.

But public interest in the San Marcus ball was better shown in the attendance of the men. There was a generous sprinkling of frontier celebrities. Mr. Joe Tredwell was on hand, generously disguised in liquor, having accomplished the great feat in riding from San Marcus to San Saba on his bicycle—a distance of over 800 miles—and finding it necessary to stimulate freely to overcome fatigue after the exploit. "Kickapoo Dick" lent the occasion his frontier playfulness and humor. Mr. Josh Blunt was present, the truculent but unwavering satellite of Miss Flo' Brooks. Captain Jack Foraker, conspicuous among the bearded cowboys for his military bearing and complacent curling of his gray mustache, was devoted to Cynthia, but generally observant of the fair ones, as if he were under the impression that he was giving the ladies a treat.

And the elder Dallas, morbidly alive to the fact that Foraker was his daughter's escort, had placed the "Silent Mary" and his violin in his shabby carry-all, driven down to San Marcus and put in an early appearance on the scene of action. Stowing the heavy goose gun carefully away behind the ballroom door, so that it might be available in case of emergency, he entered "Tarrier's hall" with his trusty fiddle in a green balsa bag beneath his arm and an eye biliously observant of the festive scene. Not that he really had any intention of playing at the fete, but that, in his nervous anxiety, he took it along with him from a sense of loneliness and sympathy, and perhaps, too, from force of habit.

A certain aged violinist, renowned on the frontier for his music and erratic evolutions upon the floor while playing, had already opened the ball. The waltz, tortured by cowboy enthusiasts into something between a cancan and a Dutch "galop," was exciting the laughter of Edith Stafford and Henry Bruce.

"You see some strange steps here," remarked the gentleman to Judge Natchez, who was present. "At least they strike me as strange from their novelty, but I suppose you have become used to them."

"Not at all," replied his honor, smiling—the gentleman was descended from one of the first families of Virginia—"not at all, sir; I have passed a good 20 years on the frontier, but there are some steps taken here tonight which I think I can safely say I never expect to get used to."

"Ab uno disce omnia," and I say no more about the grotesque evolutions out that night by slippers and booted feet. If Miss Stafford laughed, it was guardedly, for she feared to give offense, and whenever she could she disguised the cause of her merriment by glancing at the fiddler, who collided with the dancers and moved about the ballroom like a musical rascal.

But at one time gravity was out of the question. It was when Alcides Dallas—who had stood aloof in a corner of the room regarding the proceedings with malevolence and ill favor—all at once selected a large chair, and placing it gravely in the center of the floor seated himself with a deliberation that was unmistakable. Here he removed his violin from the green balsa bag, and without stopping to tune it entered into hearty and heart-breaking rivalry of the regular musician.

No pen can describe the order of dancing from that moment. The waltzing continued, interrupted by frequent lancers and quadrilles, but from the time that Alcides began to support the local fiddler the music of melody fled the scene. "Isn't the floor just lovely?" remarked Miss Bertha Maverick to her escort after an intoxicating whirl in the effort to keep time to the music.

"Yes," returned Mr. Ludeling, "the floor is well enough, but the orchestra paralyzes me altogether. Let us walk out upon the gallery and get a chance to think."

And indeed the more philosophical and those apparently beyond the influence of sound followed the suggestion. Even "Lampasa Jake," who was stone deaf, was seen to leave the room abruptly. How far the rumor that the proprietor of the Half Way House had broached a barrel of rye whiskey in the neighboring wagon shed may have influenced this sudden exodus is a matter of conjecture. Certain it is that many of those who left returned with a peculiar light about the eye and a disposition to frankness in deportment.

seatings. So she fell back in condemnation of the orchestra.

"Really, Mr. Jerrold," she said, smiling sweetly up into his face, "I could not dance one step to such time as those fiddles are keeping. I have just refused Mr. Bruce here. Shall we not walk upon the porch?" And with this pretext she left the room on his arm.

Bruce, abandoned thus to himself, found the time drag wearily. He was not edified by Cynthia's behavior with Captain Foraker. Beyond a mere slight recognition, little conversation had passed between them. But throughout the evening she flirted with the officer desperately and with an ostentation that irritated Bruce.

The captain accepted his fair companion's advances complacently. He waltzed a great deal, and it was noticeable left the ballroom at the end of every dance. By degrees the effect of these frequent trips began to be apparent in his manner and gestures. He did not confine his attentions to Cynthia, but was mildly playful and familiar with the other ladies. Miss Dallas appeared a little annoyed at this, but attempted to disguise it in conversation with Miss Maverick and her escort.

At last, during one of his most genial moments, Captain Foraker crossed the ballroom unsteadily to the place where Edith was sitting. She had returned and was chatting with Mr. Jerrold. The captain posed himself engagingly before Miss Stafford, and without the formality of an introduction requested the favor of the next dance. Miss Stafford raised her brown eyes in surprise, regarded the captain a moment and then turned coldly away. Temporarily disconcerted, the gentleman described a half circle to the left, and coming back to the same point repeated his request. His gray mustache, elevated at an inebriated angle, gave his countenance a droll expression.

"I de-shire favor of f w-waltah," repeated the captain in a very high key.

This was too much for Henry Bruce. The blood rushed to his face as he rose to his feet.

"You forget yourself, sir!" he said sternly. "The lady is not dancing, and if she were you are not in a condition to remember what etiquette demands."

Captain Foraker gazed at Bruce in a dazed way. It was a ludicrous but critical moment. The next a blow might have been struck and a scene followed. The moment passed. An imbecile smile spread itself over the officer's puffed face, as if of the humor of his predicament asserted itself in spite of his drunken discomfiture. He turned on his heel and returned to his position at the opposite end of the room.

A diversion was here afforded by the entrance of a singular figure. He was a tall, lean, cadaverous man, with long, jet black hair, straggling beard, low brows and piercing black eyes. He strolled into the room with an impudent swagger, his slouch hat on the back of his head, his hands in his pockets and his pantaloons tucked into his boots. In neglecting other details of his toilet he had also omitted his abutments, and his general appearance was disordered and unseemly. But none of these facts apparently contributed to the general sensation at his entrance. The ladies stared; the men scowled; some of the latter swore, and others laughed; an audible murmur of astonishment went round the room.

But the effect upon Alcides was most peculiar. It put an instant stop to his music. He set down bow and fiddle and rose with nervous haste. After regarding the intruder a second with a glance in which rage and surprise struggled for the mastery, he took a few hasty steps in the direction of the "Silent Mary," apparently thought better of his resolve, came back, and sweeping chair, violin and bow before him seated himself against the opposite wall, tilting back and plunging his hands deep in his pockets with an expression of smug resignation. In this position he remained, apparently uncertain what he should do next.

Meanwhile the uncleanly individual, after looking boldly about the room, sauntered over to a corner where certain of the uninvited guests were standing polluting the atmosphere of the ballroom with cheap cigars and generally absorbed in the incidents of the evening. The manner in which the newcomer was received by this group was not flattering. No one offered a word of greeting or even a sign of recognition. Apparently the entrance of Mr. Lemuel Wickson, the horse thief, upon the San Marcus festivities was regarded as an intrusion.

There was a sudden stir near the door, and Sheriff Mosely entered. He strode to the center of the ballroom with his quick, nervous stride and cast a sharp glance in every direction. He was armed, and his manner was significant. For a second he stood quiet, his alert eyes glancing about. The next he espied Lemuel Wickson, and with a hurried gesture to his belt he sprang forward.

A rush in that quarter on the part of the men immediately followed. The ladies huddled together—a frightened bevy—in the upper end of the room.

Lem Wickson awaited the approach of Sheriff Mosely with composure. Beyond the slipping of his right hand carelessly beneath his coat he did not change his attitude. The sheriff did not stop until he reached that quarter of the room, when halting suddenly the formality of a surly nod was exchanged.

"Time's up, Lem," remarked Ike coolly. "I want you."

"What for?" demanded Mr. Wickson gruffly, without moving a muscle.

"In particular on a warrant sworn ag'in you for horse stealin by Alcides Dallas and Buck Jerrold," replied Mr. Mosely, "but it orter happened some time ago for hog stealin and gin'ral cussedness."

"Not this evening, Ike," replied Lem incredulously, leaning against the wall and allowing one hand to rest carelessly on his hip. "I reckon to put in my time at this hyar ball tonight—dance with the girls and enjoy myself gen'rally."

"Oh, ye do?" said the sheriff, his blue eyes taking on a sudden, hard glitter; "well, I don't reckon that little diversion to take place if there's any law in the

Lone Star. Wot's more, I'm the man to prevent it."

He made a quick dash at his belt and a sudden spring forward. There was a rush and a scuffle, during which the figures of both men whirled before the eyes of the spectators. A second later Lem Wickson held the sheriff by the throat, his right hand leveling upon him a large "Smith and Wesson."

The sheriff struggled frantically in his grip, his hand plucking at his revolver, which appeared to be caught. The rough men looking on held their breath. It changed that Henry Bruce was nearest to Wickson—the brandished weapon at full cock within the reach of his arm. With a sudden dart forward he grasped the horse thief's wrist with his left hand, and seizing the "barrel catch" between the finger and thumb of his right by a quick, strong pull unshipped the barrel, throwing the cartridges all over the room.

It was an act sublime in its desperation and the skill of its achievement. It showed, moreover, a remarkable knowledge of the weapon. In a twinkling Bruce had closed with the disarmed and astounded ruffian, and pinning him against the opposite wall released the sheriff.

"Well done!" gasped the nearly throttled Ike, glancing admiringly upon Bruce. He took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and by a quick movement secured his prisoner. Then he turned upon the breathless crowd.

"I don't mind sayin right here that this's about the neatest trick I ever yet seen done, and of Lem that had had a 'colt's' my life wouldn't been worth a pecan. Doggone this old greasy belt!" he exclaimed, glancing down where his revolver had slipped beyond the hammer in the worn leather, thereby making it difficult to draw; "doggone it! I hev had trouble with that holster afore, and now it nearly closed my record. I reckon I'd better make a requisition for a new belt."

"Give us yer hand, pardner," he said again, turning once more to Henry Bruce. "It does Ike Mosely good to feel the grip of a good man and true. If yer ever wantin anythin very bad or needin any help, I reckon ye know whar you kin get it arter tonight. Ye kin count on the sheriff of Oakaloo any time, and es often es you want to, for the last drop o' his blood. I don't know on the whole," he added, with a sudden change of manner, "but what I might as well cement that statement with a practical snifter."

He took a flask of whiskey from his pocket and extended it to Bruce.

The latter declined courteously.

"Jes es you say," remarked Ike quietly, "but yer not actin es sensible es ye did a minute ago, and yer losin a chance to spill some mighty good liquor. I sampled this myself."

"Well," he said, pausing to take breath before testing the qualities of his flask, "here's the health of a man the county is proud of. I'm lookin at ye, pardner, along with the rest of the town of Oakaloo."

He raised the flask to his lips and tossed off a draft with an accompanying smack. With characteristic good will he turned immediately to Wickson.

"No hard feelin's, Lem," he said generously, "seem the late unpleasantness is over. Ef yer feelin like tryin this stuff, I don't mind holdin it far ye to git the benefit."

He extended the flask good humoredly to the latter's lips. But Mr. Wickson was not in the humor for whiskey and signified it by turning impatiently away.

"All right," said Ike, restoring the flask to his pocket without pressing the hospitality further upon the thronged crowd, a few of whom wore an expression which made it evident that refusal was extremely unlikely.

"It's a singular thing sometimes how good liker goes beagin. Not that it often occurs here in Texas, but that when it does it's worth while to take note of it. I disremember heretofore in this country any such depressin state o' facts. Good evenin, gentlemen. I trust I hev'n't materially interfered with the festivities."

He turned on his heel, and with his hand on the arm of his prisoner left the ballroom.

Of course so exciting an occurrence as the recent arrest was not without its effect upon the general gayety. After the sheriff's departure it was a difficult matter to get the frightened ladies in the humor to resume dancing. Possibly this difficulty was materially increased by the fact that the fiddler was not to be found, but was at last discovered asleep in an old carryall in the shed, hard by the whiskey cask already alluded to and with a glass of spirits in his hand. His violin had fallen from his grasp during his recent alcoholic weakness and had been crushed by the bootheel of some other follower of Bacchus.

No one dared think of the elder Dallas in this emergency, but he too had fled the ballroom. Under these discouraging circumstances the ladies lingered a little, chatting with their escorts, and by and by began to go home.

The clear round moon rode high and alone deeply down when Bruce and Edith departed. As they did so, the former caught a glimpse of a figure stalking along beneath the bright light and carrying a heavy gun. It was Alcides Dallas.

The singular movements of the old man awakened his curiosity, and his eye mechanically followed him as he moved up the road. He appeared to be following some one and suspiciously noting his movements. Glancing ahead Bruce beheld in one of the moonlit spaces of the level road the figures of Cynthia and Captain Foraker proceeding slowly. Miss Bertha Maverick and the younger Mr. Ludeling were some distance behind. The captain was walking unsteadily and discerning some question in a decidedly loud tone of voice. Cynthia was endeavoring to quiet him.

Bruce could not repress a smile as he realized that, the entire party was unconsciously under the armed surveillance of the suspicious Alcides. But though in a measure amused he did not direct the attention of the fastidious young lady at his side to the humor of

the incident. During the walk home he conversed but little, being occupied with his reflections. As laugh when they arrived at the Half Way House, he surprised Miss Stafford with the information that he intended taking a short ride or walk before retiring.

"At this hour of the night!" exclaimed Edith, who was a trifle piqued by his recent abstraction. "I should think, Hal, you were absolutely daft."

"Not in the least. Only bored with the noise and excitement of that pandemonium," Bruce replied as they passed up the broad steps of the veranda.

He bade her good night in the hallway and turned away, leaving her gazing curiously after him as he went out again into the moonlight.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

HE REPENTED.

And Then a Little Thing Occurred That Made Him Silent.

He was something of a flirt. She was poor and pretty, and the other girl was possessed of a fortune and hair which her friends called "auburn." He and she sat on a bench in Lincoln park one bright May afternoon, and the hyacinths on her hat danced as she talked.

"You didn't come over last Sunday afternoon," she said.

"No. The fact is I was not feeling very well and—"

"And you thought a walk with Eunice would do you good?" she put in mischievously.

He assumed an injured air. "I did happen to meet Miss Eunice," he said stiffly, "quite accidentally, I assure you. I suppose Tom told you?"

"Well, yes," she admitted, "he did."

"And of course you allowed him to prejudice you against me," he returned bitterly. She drew a geometrical design on the gravel with the tip of her parasol before she replied:

"Oh, not at all! It was quite natural for you to join Eunice when you met her," but her tone belied her words.

"You know I don't care anything for Miss Eunice," he said tenderly. "Why, I should think those lovely eyes of yours could see more plainly than that."

A little smile lifted the corners of her mouth. This time the design she traced on the gravel was a very intricate one. He looked around to see if any one was watching and then threw one arm carelessly over the back of the seat.

"Eunice is a very nice girl," she said demurely. "It is not her fault if she does wear a No. 6 shoe. She wouldn't if she could help it, poor thing."

"I—don't!"—he stammered.

"Of course it isn't, and not matter what anybody may say I am sure that she does tell the truth occasionally."

He was fidgeting with his cane.

"Oh, well, Miss Annie," he said, "any foot would look larger after yours."

She moved a little nearer to him and cast a side glance at the russet shoe which protruded from her gown.

"I shan't listen to your flattery," she said. "I just know you don't mean it."

"It isn't flattery, and I do mean it," he asserted stoutly, "and you have no vanity at all, or you would know it is all true."

"Oh, Jack!"

This time the parasol slid out of her hand. When he returned it, their fingers met and lingered.

"You know I don't care for anybody but you," he said tenderly.

The sun was setting when they arose to depart. He looked down at her with a proprietary air.

"You know now that I don't care a fig for Miss Eunice," he said softly.

"Oh, yes," she answered pleasantly, "and it is lucky you don't."

"Lucky, why so?"

"Because," she responded brightly, "she passed right by us awhile ago when you were holding my hand and saying that you did not care for any one but me."

They walked on in silence.—Chicago Tribune.

Their Venetian.

It isn't surprising that army officers are so fine looking. They are all made to order.—Troy Press.

Believed of Worry.

Adorer (feeling his way)—I—suppose your sister does not like my coming here so often, does she?

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