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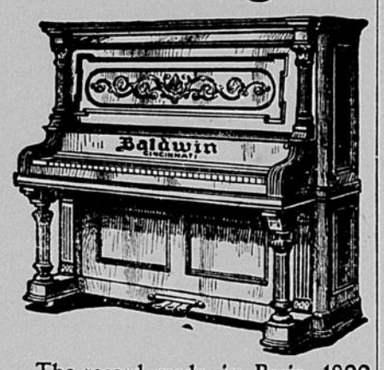

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"VIRGINIA of WASHINGTON"

By Eleanor Austin Harris

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"Hasn't he nice blue eyes?" said Miss Dressel.

"Horrors, child! Don't you say such things out loud! What if he should understand English?"

"Impossible, Aunt Ellen. German blondness, reading a German paper, traveling in a German train with baggage marked 'A. von S., Bremen.'"

"Virginia! What does possess you? I never heard you talk so."

Miss Dressel laughed a hearty American laugh. "I am so glad to shake the dust of Europe off my feet that I can't keep it in. I'm so glad we're headed for Hamburg, the Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse, America and Washington that—that—well, honestly I should like to kick the epaulets off the guard's gorgeous blue and gold uniform. Don't faint, Aunt Ellen. I'll stop and not say another word for an hour."

For an hour and five minutes Miss Dressel sat silent, ostensibly watching the valleys, the German gables, the green of meadows and forests, as they swept by. For an hour and five minutes their young German fellow traveler read his German paper, and for an hour and five minutes Miss Ellen Vanstrum enjoyed perfect peace of mind. Then Miss Dressel coughed, and Miss Vanstrum inwardly caught her breath.

"Aunt Ellen," said Miss Dressel, lazily waving her hand toward the scenery as if she were discussing it—"Aunt Ellen, do you know that young man has a dreadfully nice face, even if he is a German. Oh, don't look shocked. Just gaze out the window as if I were talking about the scenery, and he will never know the difference. I've been looking at him off and on for the last hour. Just see what a nice firm mouth he has. He's so well groomed too. Just look at his finger nails. Oh, Aunt Ellen, I wish you wouldn't gasp so. I like his looks better than any foreigner I have seen in the five years we have spent in Europe. Really, I shouldn't mind being married if I could get such a handsome, well groomed man as he is.

"Virginia, oh, Virginia!" groaned Mrs. Vanstrum. "It's—it's indecent to talk about a man like that when he can't understand."

"Don't jiggle your pompadour crooked, Aunt Ellen," said Miss Dressel calmly. "Don't worry. If he understood English he would have betrayed himself long ago. He might be a chunk of pink and white and yellow taffy for all he understands of the English language. Thank goodness, Aunt Ellen, here we are almost at Hamburg. Here, let me tie your veil. You are getting it on crooked. No, let me carry the suit case. It's a young house. Now for my last fee—almost—on foreign soil."

The train had hardly come to a long screeching stop in the great station at Hamburg when the door of the carriage was jerked violently open and a young man pulled the German out with a hearty grip, exclaiming in English:

"We're in luck. There was a stateroom unengaged on the Kaiser Wilhelm, and we can sail four days earlier than we expected. Good luck, man! Why don't you say something instead of looking at me like a dazed idiot?"

The German pulled himself together with a noticeable effort and began to stammer out something in German, when the other interrupted him impatiently.

"Aw, cut that out! You know perfectly well I can't understand a word of German. Never mind, come along!"

The young German flushed red, and with one appealing look straight into the eyes of the astonished Miss Dressel he picked up his suit case and was soon lost to view in the hurrying throng.

Miss Dressel silently picked up her luggage, carefully avoiding her aunt's eye, and for a minute after leaving the carriage she looked helplessly about her. Then the label "Berlin" on a carriage caught her eye, and without a word to her puzzled relative she took her by the arm, raced her across the platform and pushed her in, stumbling in herself, just as the guard put his hand on the door to close it.

"What—what—where"— said Miss Vanstrum.

"I don't know," said her niece desperately, "but most anywhere out of Hamburg."

"But our steamer!" gasped Miss Vanstrum.

"What's losing a steamer, Aunt Ellen, compared with my peace of mind? I'd no more sail on the Kaiser Wilhelm now than I'd fly. Aunt Ellen, you're a jewel not to say, 'I told you so,' nor even to look it."

"You haven't given me time," laughed Miss Vanstrum, "but I must say I certainly think it. There, I'm glad we're off at last. I don't think I myself care to come face to face with that young fellow again."

* * * * * * *

It was the evening of the last musicale of the season at the White House, and an unwonted air of anticipation pervaded the brilliant throng as it gathered in the great east room.

"They say she has one of the finest voices ever heard off the stage," said the wife of a South American diplomat. "But the family is one of the kind they call here 'F. F. V.' and will not let her accept any of the offers she has had for grand opera. This is her only appearance in public since she returned from Europe. There's Anton von Stosch. Did you ever see any one so eager to go everywhere as that man is? He's simply crazy about meeting Americans."

"American women strangers, you should say," laughed a man wearing the cross of the Legion of Honor. "You can get Tony von Stosch to go anywhere just by hinting that some 'new girls' will be there."

"They say at the German legation that by actual count Tony von Stosch has met 800 'new girls' since the season opened. And he's still going."

As the ripple of merriment greeting this expression of the well known foible of the popular Anton von Stosch died away some one said: "Hush. The programme begins."

For some time Anton von Stosch watched the artists come and go, his face wearing an unwonted look of weariness and discouragement. For months he had sought diligently for the two American women who called Washington their home, who had been his fellow travelers from Berlin to Hamburg on that fateful August day. More than once he had followed a lithe, active girl with glinting chestnut hair, only to find it was a stranger instead of "Virginia of Washington," as he had come to call her. Day after day, night after night, he had followed the whirl of the social wheel, but never had he found a clew to their identity. He had spent hours poring over the city directory, but never a young Virginia nor an elderly Ellen proved to be the first bearers of the names he had met so oddly.

As a ripple of enthusiastic applause greeted the appearance of the star of the evening Anton von Stosch raised his eyes and then grew rigid as he saw "Virginia of Washington" in the flesh, smiling acknowledgment to the enthusiasm. One long look to assure himself it was really she, and Anton von Stosch sat back in his chair with folded arms and a look of content upon his face such as it had not worn in all the months since he had arrived at the German legation. No sooner was the programme ended than he made his way to the blue room where Miss Dressel was holding court and without delay sought an introduction.

"Oh!" said Miss Dressel, her hand poised halfway toward his. "Why—oh, I'm glad to meet you, I'm sure," she ended lamely as she saw her exclamation and gesture had attracted attention. Anton von Stosch looked straight into her eyes as he took her hand.

"I am glad to meet you—again," he said quietly. "I have hunted this town over to find you. May I call tomorrow?"

"I—I—oh, I really don't know," said Miss Dressel. Then she began to laugh almost hysterically. "It's all too absurd—and I can't talk about it now—and please don't get offended, but I was so surprised and"—

"I'll wait," said Anton von Stosch, quietly falling back. "It is quite enough to know that I have found you at last."

Though he spoke no more to her that evening, Miss Dressel was well aware that he followed her from group to group and from room to room, as if fearful of losing sight of her. As the door of her carriage was snapped shut his face appeared in the opening, and he said quietly, but firmly:

"I shall do myself the honor to call upon you tomorrow afternoon."

Had Anton von Stosch been less eager or determined he would have waited until the conventional hour of calling and possibly have missed Miss Dressel for his conventionality, but as it was he arrived so early and unexpectedly upon the scene that he was ushered into the library where she sat.

"I don't know how they do things in America," he said after the first greetings, "but I'm not going to lose any more time. I desire much that you should be my wife," he said simply, dropping unconsciously into the German idiom.

Miss Dressel had seen the night before just what the intentions of Anton von Stosch were, and she had been trying to make up her mind whether to let the affair run its course or to evade the issue by another flight. She was taken wholly unawares by the expeditiousness of his attack.

"But I've only seen you three times in my life!" she gasped. "I can't consider anything of the kind from a man I know so little as that."

"You don't love another?" said Anton von Stosch, growing pale.

"No," said Miss Dressel, "but"—

"Then I'll make my fight," said Anton von Stosch, "and I mean to win. It's life or death to me—and no man who is a man will give up his life without a struggle."

That was the beginning of one of the prettiest courtships that ever crossed the horizon of Washington life, and since Anton von Stosch was a gentleman as well as a man of promise in his chosen career the June wedding bells rang merrily over smiles and happiness and genuine good wishes.

A Saving Scheme.

There was a struggling writer in the front studio and a struggling artist in the back. The struggling artist was very nice to the struggling writer for a time. He even helped her wash her windows once. Then it came about that one Friday he saw that she had a well filled envelope which contained some fives.

"I wish," said he, "that you would lend me one of those fives. I'm hard up this week. I will pay you back next."

The struggling writer knew all about those "next weeks" of the struggling artists.

"I would," said she, "but I am afraid I will lose your friendship if I do. Things like that have happened to me."

He looked at her sternly.

"You'll lose it if you don't," said he and set his teeth hard.

"Well, anyway," returned she, with a sigh, "I'll save my five."—Cincinnati Commercial Tribune.

Senorita Rita

By IZOLA FORRESTER

Copyright, 1906, by Ruby Douglas

"So you are going home, senor?" The girl looked straight ahead at the wide sweep of level prairie pasture, her red lips parted in a smile—a most tantalizing, annoying smile Carruthers thought as he caught a glimpse of it sideways.

"Perhaps," he returned moodily. "I have stayed too long already."

"You do not like Texas, senor?"

"You did not call me senor last week." He bent toward her slightly, but she did not turn her head. "You called me—Jack."

She laughed and flashed a hasty glance at him from her soft, dark eyes.

"That was a long time ago—last week—but I will call you it again if you wish, Mr. Jack."

Carruthers did not notice the concession or her gay scorn. He stared out to where the cattle browsed—a sea of still, brown waves, hundreds of them, motionless and peaceful in the morning sunrise. Here and there on the outskirts stood a figure of a horse with a silent rider watching the grazing herd. Carruthers' gaze swept over the mass until it rested on one herder at the extreme north. Even with the distance of nearly a mile between them he knew what the figure looked like, knew that it was watching them as he was watching it. It was not a pleasant knowledge.

"You have changed your mind, Senorita Rita," he said bitterly, "since Ramon came to the ranch. I was very happy—in Texas—until your old sweetheart appeared."

Rita laughed again, deliciously, warmly, with a full enjoyment of his mood.

"You are not tired of Texas, Mr. Jack," she said merrily. "You are tired of me—ah, yes, I say you are. You love me so madly, so entrancingly, until somebody else comes who also loves me so madly, so entrancingly, too; and then all at once you are jealous and distant and dissatisfied, and, presto, now, this minute, you say you will leave Texas, you will never, never come to the Fortuna ranch again. You are—what did you call me the day I cried when Pep broke his leg?—kid, that is it. You are a big, foolish kid, Mr. Jack. When a man loves he does not sulk and ride away. He stays and fights. See!" She held up her hand and snapped her small tanned fingers sharply in the air. "I would not give that for the silly kid lover who rides away. Ramon is a Mexican, but he is brave; he can fight. If I but let him know the least bit I loved him he would carry me off on his horse 'way, 'way south over there to Mexico. You would not carry me away to your home like that, would you, Mr. Jack?"

"I would carry you to the end of the world," retorted Carruthers.

"But not to your home?" she persisted.

"I have no home," said Carruthers. "When I came here to Texas I meant to stay even before I met you."

"But you are rich. Ramon says you could buy all of the Fortuna for a pastime if you cared for it. And the Fortuna is the richest ranch within a hundred miles of the border. There is no cattleman so rich as my father in Mexico."

She lifted her head with the little tilt of pride he knew well. Senorita Rita Riaz, heiress of the Fortuna, could well afford to lift her head a trifle higher than other girls. But to Carruthers the motion brought merely regret. He knew the truth about the Fortuna—knew what every Texan as far as San Antonio would know within a week—that old Diablo Riaz had squandered his wealth in gambling; that not a thing on the Fortuna was unmortgaged save his daughter, and even she, it was rumored, was pledged to Ramon Doranda in return for his promised assistance when the crash came.

Carruthers might have given the same assistance and claimed the same reward, but something within him revolted against making the hand of the girl he loved the stake in a transaction over old Riaz's gambling debts. If he could win her, if he could hold her promise freely from her own lips, then he felt free to buy up the whole Fortuna when the crash came and lay it at her feet. But she must be free to say yes or no. And she would say neither. She would only laugh.

"Have you told Ramon you would marry him?" he asked, with sudden curtness. The uncertainty was maddening to him.

"Why do you ask?" she answered teasingly.

"Rita," he pleaded, "be serious. If you do not"—

She raised her arm with a sudden, imperative gesture and pointed to the herd.

"Look!" she cried. "They are stampeding!"

Carruthers looked. The brown sea had suddenly stirred to life. Undulating, swaying, branching out loosely at the edges, it was lurching toward them. There seemed to be nothing rapid or swift about its coming. Carruthers thought, almost idly, of how it resembled the swing of a bunch of race horses rounding the end of the field, when the movement was so concerted, so deliberate, that it hardly seemed a movement. The herders were riding here and there in confusion. They seemed mere specks of helpless misdirection in the distance.

Rita's face had lost its color. She turned her horse about, the rein held short and tight in her clinched hand.

"We must race before them as they come," she said. "If the horses keep their strength they will not trample us."

But Carruthers had slipped from the saddle.

"It is sure death to try to ride with them," he answered. "Dismount and do as I tell you."

The stern masterfulness of his tone startled her. He had never spoken like that to her; no one had.

"Hold the horses," he ordered. She obeyed, watching him in breathless silence. The brown cloud on the prairie was becoming more and more distinct. There was a heavy, low rumble in the air like far off thunder. Carruthers drew a cigarette case from his pocket, and after hunting carefully he produced one match.

"That is the only one I have," he said. "Pray that it doesn't go out."

He struck it on the box. The faint flame wavered in the southeasterly breeze, caught the end of the cigarette and lit it. Before the match went out Carruthers smelled it and set fire to the grass. It was dry and yellow from the sun and caught the blaze with a snap. The wind fanned it, and a wavering line of thin smoke slid like a snake along the roots for several feet. The horses reared and kicked at the first whiff, and Carruthers seized the bridles from the girl.

"Take the cigarette," he said, handing it to her. "Keep it alight and set fire to the grass as far as you can reach in a straight line facing the north. The wind is from the southeast and will blow the fire toward the herd. It may turn them."

Holding the plunging, trembling horses, he watched her. There was no fear, no sign of weakness. She was alert and sure in her touch as she knelt here and there in the grass and fired it. As the cigarette failed she tore a bunch of grass, tied it with another wisp and set it blazing like a torch. In another minute a wall of smoke and smoldering flame closed them in from the rushing herd line.

"Come back," called Carruthers. The herd were not a quarter of a mile from them. He could see the leaders, heads down, and behind them line after line of tossing horns.

"Will they reach us?" whispered Rita as she stood close beside him, her face lifted to his.

"God knows; I don't," said Carruthers desperately. "It is all we can do."

"Jack, listen to me." There was a new light in her dark eyes, a new softened tone to her voice. "Ramon has done this. The herd has never stampeded before. He has done it for revenge upon you and me. Last night I told him no. I know about him and the claim he holds over the Fortuna and my father, but I would rather lose it all than"—

"Than what?" Carruthers let the bridles trail on the ground and held her close in his arms. The tremble of hundreds of hoofs shook the ground, the thunder grew louder, now and then there came a low, threatening bellow from some steer gored by its fellows in the onrush.

"Than lose you," Rita whispered as she closed her eyes to meet what might come.

The herd was on them, but as the leaders caught the first sickening whiff of smoke they hesitated and wavered. Low leaping tongues of flame flashed up before them and rolls of smoke curled upward.

The leaders swerved westward. After them plunged the frightened herd, maddened and scared at the smell of the fire. The two horses, loosened, joined them in the frantic gallop, and in less than three minutes the danger had passed, and on the blackened bit of land stood Carruthers and Rita alone.

"The river will stop them," said Rita. "Ramon—I know he has done this to harm you. You must leave the ranch. No one can say what he may do next."

Carruthers bent to pick up something from the ground. It was the stub of a cigarette. He placed it tenderly and carefully in his case before he spoke.

"I know what Ramon will do next, sweetheart. He will cross the border into his own land tonight or else land in the hands of the sheriff. I mean to stay in Texas, and there is not room for both of us."

"On the Fortuna?"

"On our ranch," he said. "I bought the Fortuna yesterday to make sure of Ramon and of my senorita."

He Didn't Lie.

There is in the service of a Baltimore man an elderly darky who is much given to rebuking the mischievousness of his grandson, also in the employ of the Baltimorean. One day the latter chanced to overhear a conversation between the first and third generations, from which it was at once apparent that old Mose was scolding the boy for some trifling fault. The cross examination appeared unsatisfactory to old Mose, he suspecting the pickaninny of concealing something.

"Jackson Brown," said the grandfather sternly, "yo' is shore keepin' sumthin' back! 'Member what de good book says, chile!"

"Yassah," glibly responded the third generation; "I knows dat de Bible says yo' all mustn't lie, but it don't say yo' all got to tell de truf all de time!"—New York Times.

Black Under the Eyes Explained.

"In the north country," so goes the story in "Sun Babies," by Cornelia Sorabja, "in the month of Kartik is worshiped by the women folks the great and terrible god Bhishma. Lighted lamps must be placed at the crossroads of the village, under the sacred fig tree, at the shrine of Shiva, and one little lighted lamp is sent adrift on a raft in the village tank. When the lamps have burned low it is good to rub the black from the wicks under the eyes. It keeps away the evil one. So that is the reason to this day we women put the black beneath the eyes."

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