

BOLD BILLY'S FAULT

By ANNE STORY ALLEN

MOIRA when her aunt was specially busy, Moira went to the Riding Academy.

It was at luncheon that Aunt Laura said to her at five o'clock in the afternoon to visit the half-orphan's classes in manual training.

Moira asked, "Are the whole-orphan's trained differently, Aunt Laura?" And her aunt explained quite seriously that the new assistant rector had some excellent ideas of helping the half-orphan's, that they might be of assistance to the remaining parent, and might become self-supporting at the earliest possible moment.

"You see," she elaborated in ambiguous plurals, "if they have mothers, they aren't often able to support them, let alone having them taught anything; and if they have fathers they almost always marry again, and the first wife's children are usually neglected. It is a most worthy object, and one I am glad to add to my list. Nothing, my dear Moira, is so pathetic and helpless as an orphan."

"That is quite true," assented Moira. "What Aunt Laura remembered that she really would have done much better not to have made that remark, for the small, pale niece sitting opposite her had been a half-orphan and was now bereft of both mother and father."

Out of the West had come Moira, out of the Golden State that she loved with all her heart; saddened, bewildered by her father's death, straight across the broad, and it seemed to her endless, continent, the train had borne her to the Eastern Gate, and here in New York, she was beating the wings of her soul against the padded prison bars of her aunt's ugly, comfortable home.

to ride, but who had pulled his horse into a canter and was looking straight at her. The tears shook themselves from her eyes just as she discovered the face before her, and in a second they had passed each other.

"Poor little child," the man heard himself saying. "I wish I knew him!" cried Moira, with heart, and then she blushed all over her face at what her heart had said. "Had you an enjoyable ride?" asked Aunt Laura at dinner.

Moira said yes, and her aunt praised the Talbot girls. She said it was nice for Moira to have them to ride with. Then she told her niece all about the manual classes and what the assistant rector had said and done, and how he had called it his pet work, the child of his heart and brain. And Moira gathered that Aunt Laura was proud and happy to be the step-mother of the charity that called the assistant rector father.

As Moira took her soup, she saw quite distinctly the figure of a man sitting tight to a saddle and riding rather faster than the law permits down the gravelly path by the river. Then she listened to Aunt Laura, and after a while, as she ate her salad, she saw the head and shoulders of someone before her, but blurred a little and indistinct. Then when she sipped her coffee she found in place of Aunt Laura's countenance opposite her, a man's face; a stern mouth, shut tight as if to keep its own counsel, and two marvelously dark eyes that melted from inquiry to a tender sympathy.

And Moira murmured, "It would be nice," and then caught herself in fright. Aunt Laura beamed upon her across the table. "I was afraid you'd say no, dear child. I will take you next Thursday. Dear Dr. Stone will be so pleased." And she found she had committed herself to visit the manual training class.

As the weeks went by Moira adjusted herself to conditions. She soon realized that Aunt Laura's philanthropy was chronic, not just a now-and-then occurrence. Her absences from home were frequent, her time and attention practically absorbed in the new project.

that the gray eyes that had haunted him had looked straight at him. The next minute the black horse had bolted. Like an arrow he was off. Past the man he flew, the small hands of his rider tugging gallantly at the reins. Moira had been off her guard. It was no easy job to pull in Bold Billy, when she had him fairly well in hand. Now he had caught her napping and was showing her a thing or two.

The path was clear. Moira settled to her saddle, unfrightened, but wondering how long she would have the road to herself; wondering when the mix-up that was bound to come would be upon her. Then she heard a long, fast gallop behind her. Bold Billy heard it, too, and wagged his ears wickedly, and increased his stride a bit. And Moira laughed a little, for she knew someone was going to reach her before the mix-up took place. And she knew who the someone was. Not his name, of course, but that didn't matter, she knew him, had known him since that day in the Park when she turned her tear-filled eyes straight on two that knew her, knew her instantly.

She heard him right close behind her, then a "Steady, little girl, steady!" and glancing around, there was a brown muzzle near Bold Billy's flank and then the brown mare's head came alongside, and then a gloved hand reached out for Bold Billy's bridle. It was all over, and Bold Billy, not a bit ashamed, walked haughtily by the brown mare's side, while Moira explained that it was her fault, that she had been inattentive, that she knew Billy was apt to bolt, but he never did it if you kept him remembering that you knew about it.

And the man who had stopped Billy said, in a voice that shook just a bit, "Your people shouldn't give you a horse like that." Moira said, and her voice shook a little, too, that she didn't have any people except an aunt and a guardian, and that they had bought her a little sheep called Maud, and it was because she had to

lowed the impulse of her heart, and it led her to the places where she had seen him. And at last one day he could stand it no longer, and he did the same thing—had his brown mare saddled, and rode over the places where he had seen her. And right at the first place they met he raised his hat very soberly, and she bowed as sedately as though her heart were not pounding so hard it hurt.

Then at the place where Bold Billy got the bit in his teeth they met again. This time he looked at her steadily, his mouth quite stern, but she was not afraid, for she saw his eyes. And there, where he had asked her to be very careful, they met for the third time, for he had wheeled about as he had done before, and Moira smiled and said, "I don't believe I even thanked you." At her words the stern mouth relaxed, and he answered: "Then you will now, won't you? for I've wanted to hear your voice again."

Moira was not offended at all. She felt happier that she had for a year, and differently happy from any time in her life. So she cantered along beside him, and they talked about anything and nothing, and she forgot that it was Thursday, till the two Talbots and the groom passed them; then Moira went quite white and the man at her side remembered that she had been with two nondescript girls on the first day he had seen her, and felt what had happened.

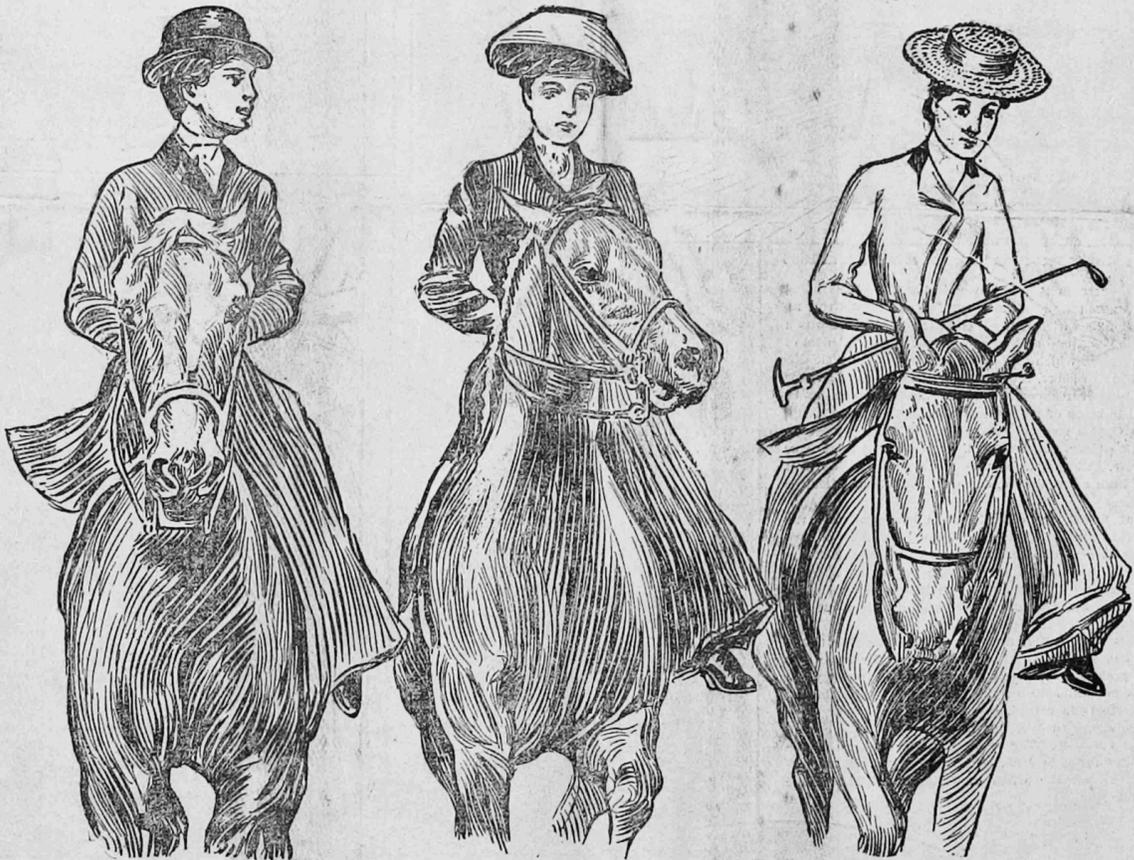
He blamed himself bitterly. He leaned towards her. "I remember them," he said in a low tone. "But you have done nothing you shall ever be sorry for." The elder Miss Talbot smiled sweetly. "We met Moira in the Park as we were driving down."

And the younger added: "That black horse is a beauty, but hardly a lady's horse, is it?" Aunt Laura slipped into her armor with marvelous swiftness. "Moira can manage any horse, I think," she said pleasantly. "I am glad she got through in time to ride. It's about the only thing she cares for just now, poor child."

"What horse are they talking about?" she was asking herself. The younger Miss Talbot smoothed a gloved finger. "She is fortunate in having so fine a horseman for an escort," she said, and smiled inclusively at Aunt Laura and her sister. Aunt Laura's armor held good. She smiled back and hoped her face didn't look as stiff as it felt.

"She is fortunate," she agreed, and then added boldly, "and so is he." Then she changed the subject. They bade her adieu a little later, and she sat down to think. Her thoughts were not pleasant ones. She had neglected Moira, her dead brother's only child!

She went to a window to watch for her niece, and as she stood there she planned many things for Moira. She would earn the child's confidence. It should never be on her conscience again that she had left her to the mercy of those spiteful creatures, the Talbot girls. And so Aunt Laura stood and waited. Out on a country road Moira was riding; close beside Bold Billy was the brown mare. The early Spring twilight was closing in.



The Talbot Girls and Moira rode side by side.

"We must go back," said Moira. "We must," said the man, reluctantly. They turned their horses. "Moira!" "Yes."

He leaned over and took her hand. "The day I saw you, little girl, that first day—" "I remember!" "There was, had been, someone who had made me reckless. I could not have what I thought I wanted. Then I saw you and I knew I had never wanted anyone before. Do you believe me?" "I believe you."

"There will never be anyone but you, Moira." She turned and looked at him. "I don't want there to be," she said in a whisper. He drew her glove from the hand nearest him; the soft little palm turned to his. He took from his finger a seal, a ring heavy and massive. "With this ring," he said, "I'll be another."

"I don't want another," said Moira, and she kissed the stone. "If only it might be now, Moira!" She started. "Now?" "Have you anyone for me to look after?" "No one to ask, exactly. I am free."

He checked the horses. "Shall we turn? There is a small town a few miles on." Her clear gray eyes looked into his. "Will you always love me?" "To the end of my life and yours." "I will go."

They came out of the rectory a short while later. He put her upon Bold Billy and she mounted the brown mare. He held her hand tight as they rode slowly through the soft evening dark and she asked no questions. They turned at last through a gateway. A big, rambling house lay at the end of a winding drive. "This is your home," he said. "My home," she echoed.