

TOMORROW'S TANGLE

BY GERALD BONNER

THIS, the fourth installment of the latest California novel by a famous California authoress, for the exclusive Western rights of which The Sunday Call paid \$1000, gives, perhaps, one of the most pathetic pictures ever penned of a young girl's disillusioning and subsequent struggle to escape malignant fate and re-adjust her ideals.

You cannot get this book elsewhere in any form for less than five times what it will cost you in The Sunday Call.

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BUT that's all over now. You need never be lonely again. I'll always be there to take care of you. We'll always be together.

"Don't you think things often change when they get to their very worst? It seemed to me to-night that I was just to open a door that led into the world, where nobody cared for me, or knew me, or wanted me."

"One person wanted you desperately."

"And then, all in a moment, my whole life is changed. It's not an hour ago that I was sitting here looking into the fire thinking how miserable I was, and now—"

"You are in my arms!" he interrupted, and drew her against him for his kiss. She turned her face away and pressed it into his shoulder, as he held her close, and said:

"We'll go to Europe, to Italy—that's the country for you, not this raw Western town where you're like some exotic blossom growing in the sand. You've never seen anything like it, with the gray olive trees like smoke on the hillsides, and the white walls of the villas shining among the cypresses. We'll have a villa, and we can walk on the terrace in the evening and look down on the valley of the Arno. It's the place for lovers, and we're going to be lovers, Mariposa."

Still she did not understand, and said happily:

"Yes, true lovers for always."

"And then we'll go to France, and we'll see Paris—all the great squares with the lights twinkling, and the Rue de Rivoli with gas lamps strung along it like diamonds on a thread. And the bridges arching over it, and the lamps stabbing down into the water with long golden zigzags. We'll go to the theaters and to the opera, and you'll be the handsomest woman there. And we'll drive home in an open carriage under the starlight, not saying much, because we'll be so happy."

"And shall I study singing?"

"Of course, with the best masters. You'll be a great prima donna some day."

"And I shan't have to be sent by Mr. Shackleton? Oh, I shall be so glad to tell him I'm going with you."

Essex started—looked at her frowning.

"But you mustn't do that," he said with a sudden authoritative change of key.

"Why not?" she answered. "You know he was to send me. I promised my mother I would let him take care of me. But now that I'm going to be married, my—my—husband will take care of me."

She looked at him with a girl's charming embarrassment at the first fitting of this word to any breathing man, and blushed deeply and beautifully. Essex felt he must disillusion her. He looked into the fire.

"Married," he said slowly. "Well, of course, if we were married—"

He stopped, gave her a lightning side-glance. She was smiling.

"Well, of course, we'll be married," she said. "How could we go to Europe unless we were?"

Still avoiding her eyes, which he knew were fixed on him in smiling inquiry, he said in a lowered voice:

"Oh, yes, we could."

"How—I don't understand?"

For the first time there was a faint note of uneasiness in her voice. Though his glance was still bent on the fire, he knew that she was no longer smiling.

"We could go easily, without making any talk or fuss. Of course we could not leave here together. I'd meet you in Chicago or New York."

He heard her dress rustle as she instinctively drew away from him.

"Meet me in New York or Chicago?" she repeated. "But why meet me there? I don't understand. Why not be married here?"

He turned toward her and threw up his head as a person does who is going to speak emphatically and at length. Only in raising his head his eyes remained on the ground.

"My dear girl," he said in a suave tone, "you've lived all your life in these small, half-civilized California towns, and there are many things about life in larger and more advanced communities you don't understand. I've just told you I loved you, and you know that your welfare is of more moment to me than anything in the world. I would give my heart's blood to make you happy. But I am just now hardly in a position to marry. You must understand that."

It was said. Mariposa gave a low exclamation and rose to her feet. He rose too, feeling angry with her, but

she had forced him to this banal explanation. There were times when her stupidity could be exasperating.

She was very pale, her eyes dark, her nostrils expanded. On her face was an expression of pitiful bewilderment and distress.

"Then—then—you didn't want to marry me?" she stammered with trembling lips.

"Oh, I want to," he said with a propitiatory shrug. "Of course I want to. But one can't always do what one wants. Under the circumstances, as I tell you, marriage is impossible."

She could say nothing for a moment, the first stunned moment of comprehension. Then she said in a low voice, still with her senses scattered. "And I thought you meant it all."

"Meant what? That I love you? Don't you trust me? Don't you believe me? You must acknowledge I understand life better than you do."

She looked at him straight in the eyes. The pain and bewilderment had left her face, leaving it white and tense. He realized that she was not going to weep and make moan—the wound had gone deeper. He had stabbed her to the heart.

"You're right," she said. "I don't understand about life as you do. I didn't understand that a man could talk to a woman as you have done to me and then strike her such a blow. It's too much for me to learn quickly. I—I can't understand yet. I can't say anything to you, only that I don't ever want to see you, or hear you, or think of you again."

"My dearest girl," he said, going a step toward her, "don't be so severe. You're like a tragedy queen. Now, what have I done?"

"I didn't think that a man could have the heart to wound any woman so—any living creature, and one who cared as I did—" she stopped, unable to continue.

"But I wouldn't wound you for the world. Haven't I just told you I loved you?"

"Oh, go," she said, backing away from him. "Go! Go away. Never come near me again. You've debased and humiliated me forever, and I've kissed you and told you I loved you. Why can't I creep into some corner and die?"

"Mariposa, my darling," he said, raising his eyebrows with a theatrical air of incomprehension, "what is it? I'm quite at sea. You speak to me as if I'd done you a wrong, and all I've done is to offer you my deepest devotion. Does that offend you?"

"Yes, horribly—horribly!" she cried furiously. "Go—go out of my sight. If you've got any manliness or decency left, go—I can't bear any more."

She pressed her hands on her face and turned from him.

"Oh, don't do that," he said tenderly, approaching her. "Does my love make you unhappy? A half-hour ago it was not like this."

He suddenly, but gently, attempted to take her in his arms. Though she did not see she felt his touch, and with a cry of horror tore herself away, rushed past him into the adjoining room, and from that into her bedroom beyond. The bang of the closing door fell coldly upon Essex's ear.

He stood for a moment listening and considering. He had a fancy that she might come back. The house was absolutely silent. Then, no sound breaking its stillness, no creak of an opening door, echoing through its bare emptiness, he walked out into the hall, put on his hat and overcoat and let himself out. He was angry and disgusted. In his thoughts he inveighed against Mariposa's stupidity. The unfortunately downright explanation had aroused her wrath, and he did not know how deep that might be. Only as he recalled her ordering him from the room he realized that it was not the fictitious rage he had seen before and understood.

Mariposa stood on the inside of her room door, holding the knob and trying to suppress her breathing that she might hear clearly. She heard his steps, echoing on the bare floor with curious distinctness. They were slow at first; then there was decision in them; then the hall door banged. She leaned against the panel, her teeth pressed on her underlip, her head bowed on her breast.

"Oh, how could he? how could he?" she whispered.

A tempest of anguish shook her. She crept to the bed and lay there, her face buried in the pillow, motionless and dry-eyed, till dawn.

CHAPTER X

THE PALE HORSE.

"Neanor lay dead in his harness."—Maccauba.

The day broke overcast and damp, one of those depressing days of still, soft grayness that usher in the early rains, when the air has a heavy closeness and the skies seem to sag with the weight of moisture that is slow to fall.

There was much to do yet in the rifted cottage. Mariposa rose to it wan and heavy-eyed. The whirl of her own thoughts during the long, sleepless night had not soothed her shame and distress. She found herself working doggedly, with her heart like lead in her breast, and her mouth feeling dry as the scene of the evening before pressed forward to her attention. She tried to keep it in the background, but it would not down. Words, looks, sentences kept welling up to the surface of her mind, coloring her cheeks with a miserable crimson, filling her being with a sickness of despair. The memory of the kisses followed her from room to room, and task to task. She felt them on her lips as she moved about the lips that had never known the kiss of a lover, and now seemed soiled and smirched forever.

After luncheon the red lacquer cabinet went away. She watched it off as the last remnant of the old life. She felt strangely indifferent to what yesterday she thought would be so many unbearable wrenches. Finally nothing was left but her own few possessions, gathered together in a corner of the front room—two trunks, a screen, a table, a long, old-fashioned mirror and some pictures. Yesterday morning she had bargained with a cheap carter, picked up on the street corner, to take them for a dollar, and now she sat waiting for him, while the day grew

duller outside, and the fog began to sift itself into the rain.

The servant, who was to close and lock the cottage, begged her to go, promising to see to the shipping of the last load. Mariposa needed no special urging. She felt that an afternoon spent in that dim parlor, looking out through the bay-window at the fine slant of the rain, would drive her mad. There was no promise of cheer at the Garcia boarding-house, but it was, at least, not haunted with memories.

A half-hour later, with the precious desk, containing the marriage certificates and Shackleton's gift of money, under her arm, she was climbing the hills from Sutter street to that part of Hyde street in which the Garcia house stood. She eyed it with deepening gloom as it revealed itself through the thin rain. It was a house which even then was getting old, standing back from the street on top of a bank, which was held in place by a wooden bulkhead, surmounted by a low balustrade. A gate gave access through this, and a flight of rotting wooden steps led by zigzags to the house. The lower story was skirted in front by a balcony, which, after the fashion of early San Francisco architecture, was encased in glass. Its roof above slanted up to the two long windows of the front bedroom. The pepper-tree, of which Mariposa had spoken to Essex, was sufficient to tell the age of the property and to give beauty and picturesqueness to the ramshackle old place. It had reached an unusual growth and threw a fountain of drooping foliage over the balustrade and one long limb upon the balcony roof.

To-day it dripped with the rest of the world. As Mariposa let the gate bang the impact shook a shower from the tree, which fell on her as she passed beneath. It seemed to her a bad omen and added to the almost terrifying sensation of gloom that was invading her.

Her ring at the bell brought the whole Garcia family to the door and the hall. A child of ten—the elder of the young Mrs. Garcia's boys—opened it. He was in the condition of moisture and mud consequent on a game of baseball on the way home from school. Behind him crowded a smaller boy—of a cherubic beauty—arrayed in a very dirty sailor blouse, with a still dirtier wide white collar, upon which hung locks of wispy yellow hair. Mrs. Garcia, the younger, came drearily forward. She was a thin, pretty, slatternly, young woman, very baggy at the waist, and with the same wispy yellow hair as her son, which she wore in the popular bang. It had been smartly curled in the morning, but the damp had shown it no respect, and it hung down limply nearly into her eyes. Back of her, in the dim reaches of the hall, Mariposa saw the grandmother, the strange old Spanish woman, who spoke no English. She looked very old, and small, and was wrinkled like a walnut. But as she encountered the girl's miserable gaze she gave her a gentle reassuring smile, full of that curious, patient sweetness which comes in the faces of the old who have lived kindly.

The younger members of the family escorted the new arrival upstairs. She had seen her room before, had already placed therein her piano and many of her smaller ornaments, but its bleakness struck her anew. She stopped on the threshold, looking at its chill, half-furnished extent with a sudden throbbing sense of homesickness. It was a large room, evidently once the state bedroom of the house, signs of its past glory lingering in the elaborate gilt chandelier, the white wallpaper, strewn with golden wheat-ears, and the white marble mantelpiece, with carvings of fruit at the sides. Now she saw with renewed clearness of vision the threadbare carpet, with a large ink-stain by the table, the rocking-chair with one arm gone, the place on the wall behind the sofa where the heads of previous boarders had left their mark.

"Your clock don't go," said the cherubic boy in a loud voice. "I've tried to make it, but it only ticks a minute and then stops."

"There!" said Mrs. Garcia, with a gesture of collapsed hopelessness, "he's been at your clock! I knew he would. Have you broken her clock?" fiercely to the boy.

"No, I ain't," he returned, not in the least overawed by the maternal onslaught. "It were broke when it came."

"He did break it," said the other boy suddenly. "He opened the back door of it and stuck a hairpin in."

Mrs. Garcia made a rush at her son with the evident intention of administering corporal punishment on the spot. But with a loud, derisive shout, he eluded her and dashed through the doorway. Safe on the stairs, he cried defiantly:

"Ain't done it, and no one can prove it."

"That's the way they always act," said Mrs. Garcia despondently, pushing up her bang so that she could the better see her new guest. "It's no picnic having no husband and having to slave for everybody."

"Grandma slaves, too," said the rebel on the stairway; "she slaves more'n you do, and Uncle Gam slaves the most."

Further revelations were stopped by another ring at the bell. Visitors were evidently rare, for everybody but Mariposa flew to the hall and precipitated themselves down the stairs. In the general interest the recent battle was forgotten, the rebel earning his pardon by getting to the door before any age else. The newcomer was Mariposa's expressman. She had already seen through the window the uncovered cart with her few belongings glittering with rain.

The driver, a grimy youth in a steaming blouse, was standing in the doorway with the wet receipt flapping in his hand.

"It's your things," yelled the boys.

"Tell him to bring them up," said Mariposa, who was now at the stair-head herself.

The man stepped into the hall and looked up at her. He had a singularly red and impudent face.

"Not till I get my two dollars and a half," he said.

"Two dollars and a half?" echoed Mariposa in alarm, for a dollar was beginning to loom larger to her than it



HER RING AT THE BELL BROUGHT THE WHOLE GARCIA FAMILY TO THE DOOR.

ever had done before. "It was only a dollar."

"A dollar!" he shouted. "Dollar for that load!"—pointing to the street—"say, you've got a gall!"

Mariposa flushed. She had never been spoken to this way before in her life. She leaned over the balustrade and said haughtily:

"Bring in my things, and when they're up here I will give you the dollar you agreed upon."

The man gave a loud, derisive laugh. "That beats anything!" he said, and then roared through the door to his partner: "Say, she wants to give us a dollar for that load. Ain't that rich?"

There was a moment of silence in the hall. A vulgar wrangle was almost impossible to the girl at the juncture to which the depressing and hideous events of the last few weeks had brought her. Yet she had still a glimmer of spirit left, and her gorge rose at the impudent swindle.

"I won't pay you two dollars and a half, and I will have my things," she said. "Bring them up at once."

The man laughed again, this time with an uglier note.

"I guess not, young woman," he said, lounging against the balustrade. "I guess you'll have to fork out the two fifty or whistle for your things."

Mariposa made no answer. Her hand shaking with rage, she began to fumble in her pocket for her purse. The whole Garcia family, assembled in the hallway beneath, breathed audibly in the tense excitement, and kept moving their eyes from her to the expressman and back again. The Chinaman from the kitchen had joined them, listening

with the charmed smile which the menials of that race always wear on occasions of domestic strife.

"Say," said the man, coming a step up the stairs and assuming a suddenly threatening air, "I can't stay fooling round here all day. I want my money, and I want it quick. D'ye hear?"

Mariposa's hand closed on the purse. She would have now paid anything to escape from this hateful scene. At the same moment she heard a door open behind her, a quick step in the hall, and a man suddenly stood beside her at the stair-head. He was in his shirt-sleeves and he had a pen in his hand.

The expressman, who had mounted two or three steps, saw him and recoiled, looking startled.

"What's the matter with you?" said the newcomer shortly.

"I want my money," said the man doggedly, but retreating.

"Who owes you money? And what do you mean by making a row like this in this house?"

"I owe him money," said Mariposa. "I agreed to pay him a dollar for carrying my things here, and now he wants two and a half and won't give me my things unless I pay it. But I'll pay what he wants rather than fight this way."

to the Chinaman, "go out and help that man with this lady's things."

The Chinaman came forward, still grinning. The expressman for a moment hesitated.

"Look here," said the man in the shirt-sleeves. "I don't want to have to come downstairs, I'm busy."

The expressman, with Ching behind him, hurried out.

Mariposa's deliverer stood at the stair-head watching them and slightly smiling. Then he turned to her. She was again conscious of how gray and clear his eyes looked in his sunburned face.

"I was writing a letter in my room, and I heard the sound of strife long before I realized what was happening. Why didn't you call me?"

"I didn't know there was any one there," she answered.

"Well, the boys ought to have known. Why didn't one of you little beggars come for me?" he said to the two boys, who were clambering slowly up the outside of the balustrade staring from the deliverer to the expressman, now advancing up the steps with Mariposa's belongings.

"I liked to see 'em fight," said the smaller. "I liked it."

"You little scamp," said the man, and, leaning over the stair-rail, caught his knickerbockers and drew him upward, shrieking delightedly. On the landing he gave him a slight shake, and said:

"I don't want to hear any more of that kind of talk. Next time there's a fight, call me."

to whom the usages of society were matters of indifference. He entered the room without permission or apology and stood looking inquiringly about him, his glance passing from the bed to the wife, old-fashioned bureau, the rocking-chair with its arm off and the ink-stain on the carpet. As the men entered with their burdens, he said:

"You look as if you'd be short of chairs here. I'll see that you get another rocker to-morrow."

Mariposa wondered if Mrs. Garcia was about to end her widowhood and this was the happy man.

He stood about as the men set down the luggage, and watched the transfer of the dollar from Mariposa's white hand to the dingy one of her late enemy. The boys also eyed this transaction with speechless attention, evidently anticipating a second outbreak of hostilities. But peace had been restored and would evidently rule as long as the sunburned man in the shirt-sleeves remained.

This he appeared to intend doing. He suggested a change in the places of one or two of Mariposa's pieces of furniture, and showed her how she could use her screen to hide the bed. He looked annoyed over a torn strip of loose wallpaper that hung dejected, revealing a long seam of plaster like a seared scar. Then he went to the window and pushed back the curtains of faded rep.

"There's a nice view from here on sunny days down into the garden."

Mariposa felt she must show interest, and went to the window, too. The pane was not clean, and the view commanded nothing but the splendid fountain-like foliage of the pepper-tree and below a sodden strip of garden in which limp chrysanthemums hung their heads, while a ragged nasturtium vine tried to protest its vigor by flaunting a few blossoms from the top of the fence. It seemed to her the acme of forlornness. The crescendo of the afternoon's unutterable despondency had reached its climax. Her sense of desolation welled suddenly up into overwhelming life. It caught her by the throat. She made a supreme effort, and said in a shaken voice:

"It looks rather damp now."

"Her companion turned from the window.

"Here, boys, scoot," he said to the two boys who were attempting to open the trunks with the clock key. "You've got no business hanging round here. Go down and study your lessons."

They obediently left the room. Mariposa heard their jubilantly clamorous descent of the stairs. She made no attempt to leave the window, or to speak to the man, who still remained moving about as if looking for something. The light was growing dim in the dark wintry day, but the girl still stood with her face to the pane. She knew that if the tears against which she fought should come there would be a deluge of them. Biting her lips and clenching her hands, she stood peering out, speechless, overwhelmed by her wretchedness.

Presently the man said, as if speaking to himself:

"Where the devil are the matches? Elsie's too careful for anything."

She heard him feeling about on shelves and tables, and after a moment said:

"Did you see where the matches were? I want to light the gas."

"There aren't any," she answered without turning.

He gave a suppressed exclamation, and, opening the door, left the room.

With the withdrawal of his restraining presence the tension snapped. Mariposa sank down in the chair near the window, and the tears poured from her eyes, tears in torrential volume, such as her mother had shed twenty-five years before in front of Dan Moreau's cabin.

Her grief seized her and swept her away. She shook with it. Why could she not die and escape from this hideous world? It bowed her like a reed before a wind, and she bent her face on the chair arm and trembled and throbbed.

She did not hear the door open, nor know that her solitude was again invaded, till she heard the man's step beside her. Then she started up, strangled with sob and indignation.

"Is it you again?" she cried. "Can you see how miserable I am?"

"I saw it the moment I came out of my room this afternoon," he answered quietly. "I'm sorry I disturb you. I only wanted to light the gas and get the place a little more cheerful and warm. It's too cold in here. You go on crying. Don't bother about me; I'm going to light the fire."

She obeyed him, too, object in her misery to care. He lit all the gases in the gilt chandelier, and then knelt before the fireplace. Soon the snapping of the wood contested the silence with the small, pathetic noises of the woman's weeping. She felt—at first without consciousness—the grateful warmth of the blaze. Presently she removed the wad of saturated handkerchief from her face. The room was inundated by a flood of light, the leaping gleam of the flames licking the glaze of the few old-fashioned ornaments and evoking uncertain glimmers from the long mirror standing on the floor in the corner. The man was sitting before the fire. He had his coat on now, and Mariposa could see that he was tall and powerful, a bronzed and muscular man of about thirty-five years of age, with a face tanned to mahogany color, thick brown hair and a brown mustache. His hand, as it rested on his knee, caught her eye; it was well formed, but worn as a laborer's.

"Don't you want to come and sit near the fire?" he said, without moving his head.

She murmured a negative.

"I see that your clock is all off," he continued. "There's something the matter with it. I'll fix it for you this evening."

He rose and lifted the clock from the mantelpiece. It was a small timepiece of French gilt, one of the many presents her father had given her mother in his days of affluence.

As he lifted it Mariposa suddenly experienced a return of misery at the thought that he was going. At the idea of being again left to herself her wretchedness rushed back upon her.

Her deliverer was evidently a person