The Wandering Gipsy

PHOTO-PLAY IN STORY-FORM

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I WATCHED the old fellow as he was idling away a pleasant evening in front of a San Francisco hotel.

I sized him up for a miner, just in from the hills, and I was more than willing to start a gabfest with him.

My experience with metals is confined to the baser kind—I'm traveling for a house hardware firm. But I'm always looking for a chance to strike up acquaintance with some one. I find it brightens one's wits, and you never know where your next boost is coming from.

So I watched the old fellow as he flicked away the flies with a folded newspaper and let the ashes of his black cigar splatter on his vest.

Down the street came a gay colored figure—a gipsy woman decked out in red and yellow, the national colors of the fortune telling tribe.

"Tell your fortune, mister?" she asked, but I turned my back and growled something about not having time for foolishness.

The old man must have seen my scowl, for after he had given the gipsy a round dollar that evoked a million blessings, he turned to me.

"Young man," he said, "don't despise a gipsy. You never know what's going to happen."

I slipped into a vacant chair. I knew there was a story coming.

"Young man," he continued, "if you'd seen what I've seen you'd never turn down a gipsy. It was a good many years ago, but the picture is clear.

"Bill Regan, I believe, was the meanest man God ever let come into the world. He came from the east somewheres and even the rattlesnakes in our country gave him the go by. He was a grand nephew of old Pap Morgan, half owner of the Silverdore mine.

"In those days, old Pap just had a claim staked out and he lived in a cabin with his granddaughter, Marie. Now Marie Morgan was some girl in looks and spirit and she and her granddad were mighty snug and comfy until Regan showed up. No one knew what brought Regan to the gulch. Maybe he'd heard the old man had some gold in a hole in the ground.

"Anyway, Regan was smart as a fox and mean as a hornet. He talked mighty sweet to his granduncle for a while and he honeyed the old man into giving him a quit claim deed to the mine. After he did that, his disposition changed. He began to put the boots to the old man and he began to get fresh around Marie, which was almost as hard for Marie to bear as Regan's cruelty to her granddad. Oh, he was a sweet-scented proposition!

"On the day I'm telling you about Marie was out in front of the cabin doing some of the chores a woman can always find to do when her work's done inside. The old granddad was mending rope for some ore buckets and thinking how nice it would be for him and Marie if Regan would fall and break his neck.

"Regan showed up about half way to noon and he looked tough. He'd had a wild night down at Whipple's camp and he was hungry for breakfast and for a fight. 'Step lively, my little pink and white fairy,' he growled at Marie, 'see if your dainty fingers can't fix me up a mess o' grub.' The old man shook with anger at the insult to the girl and he half rose from his chair. Regan gave the old man a kick that sent him to the ground.

"And right there's where the gipsy came in. Regan didn't see the feeble old woman plodding up the path to the cabin. She'd walked all the way from Beatty's place and she was bent nearly double with age and weariness. But her eyes were keen and she saw the kick that Regan gave to pap. It would have been better for Regan if she'd been blind.

"'Get up,' shouted Regan at pap, 'let's go to work.' And he loaded the old man's arms with picks and shovels and started him down the path with blows and curses. He turned to see Marie giving the gipsy a drink of water. That was a situation that just suited Regan. He came back to give the old woman a slap across the face and send her reeling down the path with an ear full of curses.

"That was the last Regan ever saw of the gipsy, but it wasn't the last she saw of him. She stood at the foot of the hill until Regan and pap disappeared in the gulch. Her arms were raised in imprecation, as though she were calling down the vengeance of heaven on Regan's shoulders. When the coast was clear she returned to the cabin. Marie gave her food, and in return the gipsy told the girl's fortune.

"'Little one,' she said, 'you are in the midst of trouble and can not see your way out. But your hand tells me that good fortune is near you. Watch for the dark young man who is coming out of the far west.'

"The gipsy didn't wait for Regan to return. She staggered out into the desert." The old fellow paused. He tore the band from a fresh cigar. "Confound these new fangled smokes," he said. He puffed and reflected until I thought he had forgotten my existence.

"I don't take much stock in palmistry," was my offering in the hope that it would put him back on the track of his yarn.

"Young man," he resumed, "you don't know what you're talking about. There's a lot in palmistry and I know it.

"Out there in the desert there was a youngster named Burton—Bob Burton. He'd just turned 21 and he was hiking from California to dig a fortune out of the rock. He sat down and took a long drink from his canteen. Not 50 feet away the old gipsy I've been telling you about was toiling along. Her steps were getting weaker and weaker and her path in the sand was a wavering line. Suddenly she fell exhausted. But Burton didn't know she was there. She was hidden by the cactus.

"I've often wondered what brings folks together like that. Is it fate? Some day all these strange things may be explained to us.

"Anyway, Burton thought he'd enliven his lonely breathing spell. He pulled his gun and cut off a cactus leaf right over the gipsy's head. She came back to life with a shriek of fear. Burton was the most surprised man in the world when he heard that woman's cry out in the desert when he thought he was miles from a human being. He ran over expecting to find her shot. But she wasn't. A drink from his canteen brought her to her feet.

"'Who sent you here?' she exclaimed.

"'Nobody,' said Burton.

"'I knew you were coming,' she shouted. 'I saw it in her hand. The spirits have sent you!'

"Burton thought she was cracked. 'You'd better rest a bit,' he said.

"'No rest for me,' she replied. 'You and I are needed over there.' And she pointed in the direction of the Morgan cabin. Then she told him all she had seen and heard that morning.

"'Take me there,' said the gipsy. Leaning on Burton's arm, she and her spirit sent friend walked toward the hills.

"The gipsy mumbled as she staggered on. 'It's a fool's trip,' thought Bob, 'but it's taking me to a meal at least, unless the old dame is completely daft. The gipsy insisted on going on and on. She would not stop to rest. Burton was tired enough himself but pride kept him at her side as she strode on. The woman seemed to gain strength as they neared the goal. Bob thought the walk would never end, but finally he caught a glimpse of smoke through the undergrowth.

"In half an hour more they were in sight of the cabin. Bob and the gipsy were standing on a ledge of rock. Below them in a grassy hollow nestled the little home. The three dwellers there were at the cabin door. The grandfather was cringing at his seat by the step. Regan had just struck him with his fist.

"Burton saw the blow and saw the pain and anger painted on Marie's face. The girl ran to Regan. 'Don't strike him,' she cried. 'You coward!'

"Regan slapped her.

"Burton gave one mad cry of rage. He dashed down the narrow path. He did not stop to poise himself. One blow sent Regan to the ground, half conscious.

"Then Burton turned to Marie. The anger died in his heart—and something else took its place there.

"'Did he hurt you?' asked Bob.

"'No,' she answered, 'but I think you've hurt him.'

"Burton and the girl turned away and sat on the bench beneath the window. Neither of them saw the look that Regan gave Burton. Neither heard the muttered threat.

"Something else had come into the lives of both of them, I guess. They forgot all about Regan. Marie forgot about her grandfather, who still sat blinking by the doorstep. But she told Bob all about herself, how Regan had come and robbed them of their little mine, of his cruelty and her granddad's misery.

"The gipsy still stood on the ledge, a picture of menace as she looked down at the couple, her arms folded and a grim smile on her lips.

"'Let's stroll,' said Bob to Marie. 'I've got a friend on the ledge over there and she'll be anxious to see you.'

"It may have been jealousy, I'm sure it wasn't rheumatism that brought that sharp twinge to Marie's heart. But she smiled again when Bob went on to explain how he had met the gipsy in the desert.

"As they walked toward the ledge Regan leered through the half closed door of the cabin. He slipped quietly toward the ledge until he stood almost beneath the boulder that marked its summit. Bob and Marie followed the path. They would come into sight among the bushes in a moment. Regan drew his gun and took careful aim. He meant to fire as soon as Burton's head came into sight.

"The woman on the ledge saw it all. It was like a play being acted before her eyes. It was useless for her to shout a warning to Burton. For once, she thought, the spirits were going to disappoint her. She leaned over the ledge and saw Regan half crouched below her, his revolver pointed unwavering at the opening in the brush.

"At her foot was the boulder. With a cry of joy she put her shoulder to it.

"She thought it would never move. She gave it every ounce of strength. The stone tilted, lost its balance and fell.

"Marie and Bob found the boulder and its victim.

"'God in his anger has killed Regan,' said Marie.

"Bob put his arms about her and led her back to her granddad. But he never forgot that gipsy."

"Call for Mr. Burton," yelled a bellboy at my elbow.

My new found friend rose. "Coming," he said.

And he left me out on the piazza, dreaming.

1 REGAN STRIKES PAP MORGAN

6 BURTON STOPS REGAN

2 THE GYPSY SEES GOOD FORTUNE

7 LOVE AT A GLANCE

3 REGAN THREATENS MARIE

8 PREPARES TO KILL

4 BURTON IN THE DESERT

9 THE GYPSY'S AMMUNITION

5 "OVER THERE," SAID THE GYPSY

10 REGAN WILL TROUBLE NO MORE