

Lavender Creighton's Lovers

By OLIVIA B. STROHM

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CHAPTER XIX.

It was June when Winslow was once more able to be about.

Although he was pale and thin, he made great effort to get strong. For he must soon agitate the school project, and he must see Lavender. He had received no message direct from Aaron Burr, and, so slow was travel, knew nothing of the trial or its progress. He only knew that the governor general—to whom he was the bearer of letters from Aaron Burr, was on his way to denounce the man, his partner, as Winslow believed, in the transaction. Much of the mystery of that transaction might be cleared by those letters—but there was no hurry, and still he kept his own counsel.

Meantime word had been brought him by boat to St. Louis from a friend then established in New Madrid. The letter ran:

"My script is scant, and it behooves me to make a living in these wilds. I am going to teach the western rustics how to trip the light fantastic in the little frisks they hold in the barns. Murray, too, is here—do you remember him? His ambition is equally high-soaring with mine; he is to teach the 'fiddle' (he dare not say the violin, or he would have no pupils). As for yourself—go thou and do likewise. Find some young ideas, and teach them how to shoot—something, anything. We are all scattered for the present; stranded—like snags along the river. But it is not for long. Burr will be acquitted; God bless him, and then we will all go back in a blaze of glory."

And Winslow, too, took this hopeful view. Of course his leader, too wise, too brainy for trickery, must succeed in proving his innocence—proving that he was no traitor, no arch-plotter against the nation's peace. For whatever light the lamp of history may have thrown upon it, the accusation of Aaron Burr seemed to Winslow as a willful bit of party slander, wrecking the hopes and destroying the prospects of innocent men; a fabrication founded upon malice, and fostered by ignorance and sycophancy.

And here, as in St. Louis, he had no hesitation in freely speaking his mind, with small respect for authority. If here, too, he met with no opposition, it was mainly due to ignorance, not of the facts, merely, but of the parties concerned.

One afternoon, at sunset, Winslow walked along one of the narrow by-paths which diverged from the main road. Elder blossoms waved their parasols of snow on either side, and a multitude of wild roses trespassed on the right of way. At the end of the view rose a pile of clouds, downy and purple, a royal couch for the sun. Suddenly, in the hollow of a rail fence, and from over the top of a screening tangle, Winslow espied a bit of blue cotton. Seen closer, this took the form of a sunbonnet, and inspection revealed a girl's face beneath. Perched on the highest rail, her hands tightly clasping the bar, she made an attractive spot in the landscape. But a nearer view marred the effect. Her face was white with dismay, her jaws apart in fright. For in the grass at her feet, as if waiting her first movement to attack, was a snake—long, mottled, ugly.

One blow of the stout cane Winslow carried, and the thing, vengeful in death, writhed with impotent swing of its ringed tail. There was a pause, and the girl drew a long shuddering breath.

"I'm ever so much obliged" was all she said, but the grateful sigh lent dignity to the words.

"Don't mention it, I beg," and Winslow stood gravely regarding her from his own point of vantage.

She climbed from the rail, stepping gingerly as if to avoid the yet quivering snake.

Winslow extended his hand to help her; she was about to take it, for the first time closely observing him. Then, with a sharp cry, she backed away from him, and leaned upon the fence, staring at him with wide, frightened eyes. "No, no," she murmured.

He smiled reassuringly. "Does this bandage alarm you? It is nothing—a mere scratch."

To his amazement, she fell to sobbing, her face buried in her folded hands.

Stepping close to her, he said, kindly: "You are unnerved by your recent

fright; I do not want to leave you until you are quite calm; shall we walk on together?"

Still she did not answer. At a loss, and loath to leave her, for night was falling, Winslow persisted: "Other snakes may come to the funeral of their fellow—it is low and damp here; come."

She seemed so young and helpless, a timid child. He gently touched her shoulder. "Come."

But she shook off his touch, and, raising her eyes, met his with a look of mingled fear and defiance. "You must not touch me—you must not speak to me. Go on, oh, please go on."

He made no reply, but his glance of cold inquiry traveled from her to the yet writhing snake, and back again. To the disdainful reproach of his manner she hastened to say: "Yes, I know you saved me—I am not ungrateful, but, oh, no—I can't forget!"

Winslow was puzzled and not a little angry. Was the girl crazy? He was tempted to leave her and return to the inn. He was tired the dew fell heavily, and his wound—not yet healed, was aching. He was in no mood for rustic coquetry nor maiden caprice. But the lane was lonely, sunset clouds were now a bank of blackness in a fast darkening sky; he ought not to go without the offer, at least, of escort. So, curbing his impatience, he said: "Pray explain; you cannot forget—what?"

Her voice sank to an awed whisper as she replied: "That night in the forest; your face—and, and, his."

In a flash it occurred to him that she alluded in some mysterious way to the night of his struggle in the wood. How much did she know? It could scarcely be less than his own knowledge of the affair, and so he told her. "I presume you are speaking of the night when I was attacked, but I did not see you. In fact—" and he shrugged his shoulders, "I'm afraid my wits were wool-gathering, for I saw nobody, until the man sprang at me."

With a quick impulse to shield her head, she said: "Father did not know it was you."

Horror and surprise were blended in his tone: "Your father? Then it was—"

Susan Miller lowered her head until the sunbonnet hid her face. Misunderstanding her silence and shrinking, Winslow spoke lightly: "That need not prevent your accepting courtesy at my hands. I bear no ill-will, I assure you."

Her eyes dilated with scorn, and she seemed a woman now, as she faced him proudly: "You can talk so calmly about it; you who killed him!"

Her words cut the air like a knife, and his wound pained afresh with the sting of it. Steadying himself with an effort: "I'm afraid I don't understand you," he said. "Your father was my assailant in the forest, and you say I killed him."

Her silence gave consent, and he continued, quietly: "There is some mistake; I did not kill him."

She repeated his words slowly, as if learning a lesson. "You did not kill him?" There was more conviction than query in her tone, for she believed him already. And then, as belief in him came, another suspicion fastened upon her like a nightmare.

She listened, stock still, while he told her all he knew, adding: "My only weapon was a pistol, which I could not reach, had I wished to use it. You heard no shot fired?"

She shook her head, and he went on: "You must believe me, then. The last sight I recall was the flash of steel in your father's hand."

He stood in deep thought for a moment, then: "They all think me guilty, I suppose?"

She bowed, but before he could speak hastened to say: "You need not be alarmed, sir. None will think the less of you; my poor father had no friends."

There was bitter shame and sorrow in the short sentence, and Winslow's heart stirred with pity. There were many things he wanted to ask—why her father had assaulted him, a harmless stranger, how she happened to be present, and other questions which might bring light upon the coil of uncertainty. But he would not further hurt this orphan girl. "It is no wonder you shrank from a hand you thought stained with your father's blood, but—" and he leaned gently toward her, "but you will take it now."

She laid her soft palm in his without a word. Through her simple mind ran a thousand thoughts which her tongue had no power to utter. She saw his generosity, and was grateful for this manna of kindness in her starved life. But only the pressure of her hand revealed her feelings—only the look in her eyes that, like the fawn's of her own wild wood, told much for lack of speech.

"It is growing late; do you live far?"

"Yonder at the end of the lane. Then let us haste, or see, Charles Wain will be there before us."

On they went through the sweet-scented night; the narrow way seemed hemmed in by tree and bush and creeping ivy that begrudged to man even this tiny path.

Little was said by either. Sue's thoughts were busy. She was saddened by the brooding fear that had oppressed her since first she knew this man was not her father's murderer. For if not he, who? None other was near except—and an agony tugged at her heart as she realized that Gerald, too, was there! Her lover, who had been threatened, provoked, perhaps, beyond endurance. Had his, then, been the murderous knife or arrow (for none had known, nor cared to find out which weapon had ended so worthless a life)?

Was it, then, her promised husband whose blow had locked her father's lips, while yet a curse contorted them?

Winslow interrupted her quiet reverie with a laugh. "Do you know that I hope soon to be a landowner? I am going to take up a thousand arpents, but have not yet decided upon the location. You see, I intend to take plenty of time to fulfill every requirement of these erratic laws. The tomahawk mode of adjustment is too primitive. Time was when primitive and honest went together, but I'm afraid that day is past."

Sue was grieved by the reminiscence which the stranger's words conjured. Though in different language they expressed the same fear that Jabez had been prey to.

Winslow was saying: "It must give quite a feeling of importance—this landed proprietorship. Can you not imagine that beyond that clump of trees stands a lodge with ancestral halls at the end of the drive? The park and deer are here, we only need the family plate and portraits."

He was trying to rouse her out of this pathetic mood. But though she laughed, her mirth was forced, dampened not only by the trend of her thoughts, but by awe of this stranger. He and Gerald Creighton were the only gentlemen she had ever known. With the one she had no sense of inferiority. For, as by the power of love she was raised to him, so in degree, Gerald had sunk to her level, and the difference in station was wiped out. But simple friendship has keener vision, and with Winslow she was herself the "branch-water girl," reserved to shyness.

Near the ash-tree in the lane she turned. At the end of a weedy path squatted the cabin. A dingy platform was its porch, connecting the corners where the logs met in unfriendly union. On the step a female figure sat with the inert huddling of the body which no mind directs.

Winslow paused at the entrance to the garden. "You are safe now," and, lifting his hat, he was going away.

But she stopped him with a sudden gesture. "Mr. Winslow, what are you going to do about—about what people think?"

He faced her, inquiringly: "What people think?" he repeated.

"I mean about the death of poor dad. Everybody believes you killed



"I WILL KEEP YOUR SECRET," HE SAID AND EXTENDED HIS HAND.

him; are you going to tell the truth?"

"As plain as speech can make it," he replied.

Then, amazed to see her distress: "Would you not have it so?" he asked, in wonderment.

And his wonder grew when she answered, rapidly, gaining courage with every word: "I would not. The only good that would come of it would be to clear your name, and that, sir, it does not need. I know these people; I know how little they care for human life—less than this—" and she shook the petals from a wild rose.

Then, ruefully, as she gazed at the bared heart of the flower: "And my poor father's life was taken, as all suppose, fairly in defense of your own. Not a word has gone against you; ain't they all proud to have you for a teacher—a friend? Then, sir, let it rest there."

She paused, amazed at her own temerity; overcome with the rush of words which her distracted heart-beats pushed from her as the blood they measured.

To Winslow it seemed an odd request—odd, above all, that she should make it. And even as she spoke, one thought stood out through the fog of doubt; he knew now the reason for Lavender's coldness—knew why she shrank from seeing him. She thought the blood of an old man was on his

hand, a death upon his soul. He could scarcely wait to tell her the truth—to clear himself in her eyes, whoever else believed him guilty.

The repeated words of the girl at his side recalled him. "Let it rest there! Child, what are you saying? Do you not realize how proud and glad I shall be to tell them all the truth? Thank God! no man's death is at my door, and you shall be, of all, the last to let it rest there."

A troubled look came into the brown eyes; at last she found courage to say: "Suppose I wish to spare another?"

It was dark, but he could see that her averted head was bowed, her shoulders drooping. "I am afraid this web is too tangled for my unraveling," he said. "Will you do it for me?"

There was a note of fatigue in his voice, and involuntarily one hand rubbed the wounded shoulder. The girl noted this. "Will you sit on the bench and rest? I want to tell you everything; it is only right."

And then she read the riddle for him, as well as her imperfect knowledge could interpret it. "You see, sir, that since you are not the guilty one, we must suspect that other—the man my father supposed you to be—the man who came to meet me—the man I loved."

There was infinite pathos in the unconscious use of the past tense; pathetic, indeed, if she no longer loved him, but doubly so, if, as Winslow suspected, she felt guilt in the love yet cherished.

After a pause he said: "Do not answer me, unless you prefer, but it would make our course easier if I knew the name of the man I am to shield by silence."

The demand grieved her, but it was just, and she replied, bravely: "He does not live in the village, but a mile or so down the river. I don't know his family, but I have heard they were fine people." She was talking thus at random to defer the evil time when she must speak the beloved name.

A sudden suspicion darted through her listener's mind, and he asked, impatiently: "His name?"

"Gerald Creighton."

The silence which followed was broken by a rasping voice: "Sue, Sue, Sue." Three times called the figure at the door, waving long arms in time to the eerie cry.

The interruption jarred on the overwrought nerves of both. Winslow staggered to his feet. "I will keep your secret," he said, and extended his hand.

She grasped it in both of hers, then slowly slipped her hand along his sleeve until it rested on the bandaged shoulder. "You have been good to his daughter—you will forgive him?"

He smiled sadly: "I were churl indeed, child, to refuse what Heaven has long since granted."

She stood watching him as he went slowly down the lane—a dark speck on the white ribbon of road.

"Sue, Sue, Sue," called the voice again, and she hurried to the cabin. There, on the step of the rotting porch, she sat, and resting both elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands, she stared into the dark. The half-witted girl crouched at her side. After a sighing silence, Susan roused herself to see the other's eyes fixed upon her in dumb sympathy. Patting her affectionately, Sue said: "Don't worry about me, Jane, I'm all right; only—how I wish I could tell him about the coal!"

(To Be Continued.)

Peace After the Battle.

The wife of a well-known western senator is a southern woman who was married to a senator late in life. While still a young girl she left her native state and came north to live, but from time to time she would revisit her old home.

On one of these occasions shortly before her marriage she happened to meet the old colored "mammy" who had been her nurse, and who was vastly surprised to find that "Miss Mary" was still unwedded.

"Lan, Miss Ma'y!" she exclaimed, "ain't yo' married yit?"

"No, not yet, Aunt Sally, was the answer.

"My, my! Who'd a-thought it? An' yit," she mused, determined to soften this disgrace, "aftah all, dey does say dat ol' maids has de happiest life; dat is, aftah dey quits strugglin'."—Pittsburg Press.

Hencroach!

A French literary man, proud of his really excellent English, visiting one of our present cabinet ministers, had spent a delightful afternoon viewing the picture galleries and art treasures of his host. In expressing his pleasure to that gentleman, he observed that, "charming though the experience was, he must not venture, he felt sure, to cockroach longer on such valuable time." "You speak English so beautifully, monsieur," replied his host, "that I think you may like me to tell you that we do not say 'to cockroach,' but 'to encroach.'" "Hencroach, of course, of course, hencroach; oh! you genders, how they do puzzle me!" said monsieur. "Oh! hencroach, of course."—Dundee Advertiser.

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Swords Into a Plow.

During the centennial celebration in Philadelphia in 1876 the members of the Universal Peace union assembled to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the order.

A number of officers and descendants of officers gave their swords to be made into a plow as a symbol of peace. The weapons were afterward fashioned into a homely agricultural implement, which, however, instead of being a plow, took the shape of the ordinary field cultivator.

This cultivator may now be seen in the hall at Geneva, Switzerland. Over it is an inscription giving the history of the implement.

WHEN THE 'BED GOES 'ROUND

But Smith Was Too Wise to Wait on the Procession.

"That was an amusing story about the congressman who caught his bed the fourth time it came around. It reminded me," continued the narrator "of the first time I heard the bed phrase. It happened in Harrisburg, where I was then stationed, and it happened to a legislator whom I shall call Smith.

"At the first session Smith became famous for his ability to comfortably carry more liquor than any other man in the legislature. At the opening of the second session some Philadelphians got together and put up a job on Smith. They arranged relays, so that when one party had enough another should take hold, and thus keep going until they had Smith down and out. Well, they began with Smith one evening, and after two relays had succumbed their successors noted with much satisfaction that Smith was mixing his beverages—they didn't know that was his custom, and he fooled them all. The bout continued all night and all of the next day, and when the second evening came Smith was the only man able to get away unaided.

"Several days later I asked Smith how he got along after he reached his hotel. "When I got into my room," he replied, "I saw a procession of beds coming in my direction. I grabbed the first one, fell into it, and woke up the next afternoon."—Pittsburg Chronicle-Telegraph.

Hasty Nervous Chewing of Food the Cause of Dyspepsia

If your teeth are fit, chew, chew, until the food is liquid and insists on being swallowed.

If teeth are faulty, soften Grape-Nuts with hot milk or cream, or allow to stand a minute soaking in cold cream.

"There's a reason," as follows:

Grape-Nuts food is in the form of hard and brittle granules, intended to be ground up by the teeth; that work not only preserves the teeth but brings down the saliva from the gums so necessary in the primary work of digestion.

Many people say (and it is true) that when they eat Grape-Nuts they seem able to digest not only that food but other kinds which formerly made trouble when eaten without Grape-Nuts.

Chew! "There's a reason" for

Grape-Nuts