

A SUDDEN FORTUNE.

A STORY OF CALIFORNIA OF TO-DAY.

BY ALFRED H. CARBON.

Author of "New Tales of the West," "Our Southern Mountaineers," "Montezuma," "The Antipoleans," Etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

TELEVISION SITUATION.

AS Dora waved her hand in the introduction between her father and Commodore West she stopped to one side, the two men met; their hands were clasped.

"Commodore West, I bid you a hearty welcome to Buena Vista; but there are two things I deeply regret in connection with your coming: the first is the sad accident that befel your nephew, but which, unfortunately, is not so severe as we at first thought it might be; and the second, the fact that you find me an invalid. The hard work of a long life is beginning to tell on me, and my eye, strained for years in a chemical laboratory, have suddenly gone back on me, and I am forced, for the present, to remain in partial darkness."

"You have my sincere sympathy, Colonel Morton," said the commodore; "I am far from being as strong myself as I was twenty years ago, although I should resent the idea that I am an old man, for I am yet under fifty; but many years at sea have induced rheumatism, from which I suffer at times. Were it not for this I should have come to California myself instead of sending Ralph, and the colonel, permit me to thank you and your charming daughter for the great attention you have shown my boy. I am an old bachelor; Ralph is the son of my only sister, long since dead, and as he was assigned to my care while yet an infant, I have felt that our relationship was that of father and son, rather than that of uncle and nephew."

"I have personally thanked Judge Davidson for being the means of our knowing your nephew. From his first coming he won the hearts, not only of our own household, but of all our neighbors, as you will presently discover, and we all deplore the accident, for accident it certainly was, that came so near ending his life."

"Yes," said the commodore, "it was what he called in the service, a 'close call'; but the lad is so much better—for how could he help getting well—with such faithful and gentle nursing."

Here the gallant sailor bowed, and waved his hand to Dora and the captain.

"The experience will do the boy good, though I much for the injury from which he is at present suffering is not of the head so much as of the heart."

"That," said Colonel Morton, "is an experience through which we have all passed."



"DORA INTRODUCED HER MOTHER."

"Which, no doubt, did you a great deal of good at the time. But I shall not detain you. Dinner is ready, and I am sure you will excuse my being present this evening."

"I deeply regret the cause, and hope to have many a pleasant chat with you before Ralph and I leave Buena Vista, which will be as soon as the doctors say he is ready to travel."

The commodore bowed to Dora, gave her his arm, and she conducted him into the dining room, where Doctor Ellerton and a number of visitors from the neighboring estates were present, as usual, and to whom, with characteristic grace, Dora introduced the sailor.

The chair at the head of the table was vacant, but to the great surprise of the servants, and of Doctor Ellerton and the guests, who had not seen Mrs. Morton for a year, she appeared to take the vacant chair. Dora introduced her mother to the commodore, and he took the seat at her right hand.

Colonel Morton prided himself on his fine estate, his fast horses, his cellar, stocked with the richest wines, and his beautiful daughter, but his friends who dined with him were inclined to give first place to his cook, who was a Frenchman imported from Paris, and whose skill excited the envy of other California millionaires. The cooking and service were all that could be desired, and Commodore West, owing to his long residence from San Francisco, was in a humor to enjoy them.

From the instant of his entrance into the room his appetite and self-possession seemed to have departed. When introduced to Dr. Ellerton he was in the act of shaking hands with him, but suddenly stopped and bowed, instead; the kindly expression vanished from his eyes, his face became flushed, as if in anger, and his manner to the doctor might be construed to be positively rude.

It has already been noted that there was a striking personal resemblance between Dr. Ellerton and Colonel Morton, a resemblance so strong that it induced those who did not know differently to take them for twins when together, and to confuse them one with another when apart. To destroy this likeness as much as possible the doctor wore a mustache only, and the colonel had none. In addition to this, the colonel usually wore glasses, though a careful observer might have noted that he did not find them necessary when reading or writing.

Twenty-three years had passed since Commodore West had seen Leonard Martin, the man who had robbed the bank, which brought disaster, ruin and death upon Ralph Holmes' father. Yet the likeness was so indelibly stamped upon his memory that he would have known him no matter where they met. Counting for the changes made by the intervening years, this man, Doctor Ellerton, was exactly such a person as he would have expected to see in the case of Leonard Holmes' father. Yet the likeness was so indelibly stamped upon his memory that he would have known him no matter where they met.

The first flush of indignation passed, his cooler reason asserted itself; he concluded that this man must have known of his coming, and that if he were Martin, he would not have dared to meet him.

This belief was strengthened by the cool, gentlemanly bearing which he assumed at the side of the table. Doctor Ellerton, though he must have noticed Commodore West's manner, and possibly have suspected the cause, yet never changed his bearing. He was quite polished, smiling, and affable; expressed himself delighted to see the commodore, and congratulated him upon his nephew's recovery, as did the other people about the board.

But the commodore's surprise was not at an end. He was introduced to Mrs. Morton, who was some distance away, and seeing that she made no advance, he bowed, in his courtesy fashion, and remained standing until she had taken her seat at the head of the table. At a sign from the commodore's face, from which the flush of indignation

had wrought changes in her and in him, but this was the woman whom he had loved, and who had vowed that she loved him, and yet, who, within one year after his departure for the Pacific coast, had married another, because a richer man.

The old sailor's heart was in a whirl, and his heart was throbbing like a war drum. He did not for an instant forget his good breeding, but concealed his confusion and suppressed his whirling thoughts, and went through the form of eating the many courses and sipping the many wines placed before him.

During dinner the conversation, in which Mrs. Morton took a quiet part, was about the wounded youth, the miracle of his escape, and delight at the prospect of his speedy recovery.

After dinner, as the honored guest, the commodore offered his arm to Mrs. Morton, expecting they would retire to the drawing room, but she bowed and said, without looking at him:

"Commodore West, I am sorry that you find Buena Vista at this time something of a hospital. My husband, as you have seen, is an invalid, your nephew is still confined to his room, and I am suffering from nervous prostration. I am scarcely able to meet my friends at this time, but that I must appear this evening, to welcome you to Buena Vista."

"And I, madam, heartily thank you for the sacrifice you have made for me," said the commodore, bowing, and opening the door that led to her own apartments, that she might pass through it.

Then, turning and addressing Dora, the old sailor continued:

"I am sure, my dear child, you and your friends will pardon me for not going into the drawing room. You know the reason for my coming here. Ralph is alone and I feel that it is my duty to be with him."

"Certainly, Commodore West," replied Dora, "that is just what we expected, and I and my friends should feel we were selfish if we required your presence with us, much as it would add to our pleasure."

The commodore hurried back to Ralph's room, and found him lying on a lounge, his dinner just finished, and a Chinese servant in attendance.

CHAPTER XIX. UNCLE AND NEPHEW—MOTHER AND DAUGHTER. Waiting until the servant had gone out with the things, and closed the door behind him, the commodore threw himself into a chair.

"My God! Ralph, what kind of a place is this you have brought me to?"

"Kind of a place," replied Ralph, in surprise, "why, Uncle George, it's the most charming estate on the coast; and as to the people, I cannot imagine that, if they were my own flesh and blood, they could have treated me more kindly. But you look startled! What is it?"

Before replying, the commodore sprang from his chair and took two or three turns about the room, running his hands through his wavy, gray hair, meanwhile. At length he came back, and sitting down again, said:

"Of course, Ralph, I am mistaken, and it is a delusion, but I would have sworn as quickly as I would to my own identity that I have dined to-night with the man for whom I have been in search."

"Who do you mean?" asked Ralph.

"I mean Leonard Martin! That man Doctor Ellerton looks so much like what this scoundrel must be, at his present age, that I am still inclined to think I was not mistaken, but that he must be the man of whom Albert Howard told me."

"Well," replied Ralph, "I am very sure you are mistaken. Dr. Ellerton, as I understand it, is a sort of factotum and manager for Colonel Morton. He is, as you may have noticed, a man of excellent address, well-bred, and I should unhesitatingly say a gentleman. Why, just think! If he were the man we are in search of you think he would so deliberately place himself in our way, that he would be among the first men I met in San Francisco, that he should drive me here, be my friend and companion since coming, and meet you this evening as he has done? Why, the idea is preposterous. As to resemblance, it is a very uncertain thing to go on. Twenty-four years must have wrought such a change in the appearance of a man like Martin as would make him unrecognizable to those who knew him of old. So banish that thought from your mind, and depend upon it the man is just what he claims to be, nothing more and nothing less."

"No doubt you are right," said the commodore, after some hesitation, "but the surprise produced by this man was nothing compared to that that came to me when I was introduced to Mrs. Morton."

"Let me say," said Ralph, "that you are mistaken in seeing her at all. She welcomed me to Buena Vista, and I have since learned that it was a distinguished honor that she does not usually bestow upon her guests, for the lady is an invalid, and seldom leaves her apartments. But, pray, what did you discover in Mrs. Morton?"

"Discover?" exclaimed the commodore, "why, my God! man, I discovered that she is, or rather was, Alice Turney."

"Alice Turney?" replied Ralph.

"Yes. Don't tell me you haven't heard me speak of her!" said the commodore, somewhat indignantly.

"You don't mean your old sweetheart, your old fiancée, the woman who cast you off for another man?"

"Yes," said the commodore, with emphasis, "I mean that, and nothing else, the woman who, even more than Martin, has shadowed me, and made miserable the life of the man that with her might have been happy. Tell me frankly, my boy, I want you to get well as soon as you can, for so long as I remain in Buena Vista, no matter what its attractions may be, I shall feel as if I were suffering."

"Did she recognize you?" asked Ralph.

"She must have done so. Why, my very name and rank would indicate me to her at once, even if my face was changed that she could not at once recognize me."

"And how did she take the meeting?"

"Oh, with her usual genteel, quiet way. But I will tell you this, Ralph, if I were a devil, and wished that the life of the woman who had blasted mine should be wretched, that wish would be gratified. She is unhappy, miserable, wretched. I could see it in the hunted look in her eyes, the pained expression, the effort to restrain herself, and every sign of a spirit in itself unhappy, bravely trying to appear happy and contented to be absorbed in thought."

Suddenly he sprang up with the manner of a man who has come to a decision, and taking from his trunk another, and a better, suit of clothes than that he was putting on, he dressed himself with great care.

The innkeeper and his servants were Mexicans, and having been taught by the members of the family, they regarded the son as a privilege.

And the captain ordered breakfast to be sent to his room, so as to avoid Pelham and the man who, he had learned, had arrived the night before.

Captain Almedo, as the landlord well knew, was frequently pressed for money, but he always dressed well and kept a good mood. As soon as he had finished his breakfast he went down to the stable and ordered his horse, a saddle animal that could not be displaced in the great stable of which Colonel Morton was so proud.

It was yet early in the morning, and knowing that Colonel Morton was not an early riser, or, rather, that the family did not breakfast early, he took a two hours' gallop along the sandy beach, which, on this part of the coast, is as smooth and as hard as an asphalt pavement.

About half-past nine he appeared at Buena Vista, and one of the grooms, who appeared to be always on the watch for the arrival of strangers, came to take his horse.

"I wish to see Colonel Morton at once," he said to the servant who met him at the door. He was conducted into a reception room, and after a few minutes the servant entered to say that Colonel Morton would see him in his private office.

There was nothing in Colonel Morton's reception of Almedo to indicate that he did not entertain for him the warmest friendship, or that he wished him a hundred feet under the ground. He shook hands with the captain, gave him a cigar and a light, and said, when they were seated:

"My God, Ralph!"

"I am afraid, captain, I treated you a little rudely at our last interview. Will you forgive me?"

"Had I not already forgiven you," was Almedo's reply, "and if I did not still hold myself to be your friend, I should not be here."

"Ah! I am glad to hear you say that. It increases my respect for you, Almedo, to know that you do not treasure animosity. A busy man like myself is apt to have his nerves and his patience tried, and while I am very sure that the shooting of my guest was an accident, how could it be otherwise?—yet it angered me, and I confess that I spoke more harshly than I intended."

Almedo bowed in recognition of this, which he considered to be a suitable apology, and flipping the ashes from his cigar with the tip of his little finger, he drew his chair near to that of his host, and, lowering his voice, asked:

"When have you seen this Lord Pelham?"

"Not since he left here for Monterey, some days ago," was the response.

"And you do not know where he now is?"

"No; and my interest in the man has nearly ceased. I had a business transaction with him, closed, as I believed, but at the very moment when I was about to sign the contract, he was consumed, his lordship, for he did not assign, telegraphed that he had backed out. Of course he will hardly have the audacity to return to Buena Vista under the circumstances."

"He may not return to Buena Vista," said Almedo, "but he is no ordinary man."

"What do you mean?" demanded the colonel, as he sat more erect, and looked intently at the captain.

"I mean," replied Almedo, "that he is now at the Golden Gate Hotel in San Francisco."

"Have you seen him?"

"This morning, and in my own room, where he had the audacity to come, about sunrise," said Almedo, with seeming indignation.

Colonel Morton hesitated for fully a minute, stroking his eyebrows against the grain with his thumb, and then, as if much perplexed, then he suddenly looked up, and said:

"I should think his lordship would hardly have the audacity to call upon you after his treatment while at Buena Vista."

"I did not think so myself; but I am glad to hear, for at least it is a challenge, to challenge him, if he remained, and now I shall carry out my purpose."

"I challenge passed between these men and their wives, and I am sure that, if they were to meet, it would be in accordance with Colonel Morton's exact, but seeing that it would be a matter of eight days, he advised his visitor to do nothing that would render himself amenable to the law. As soon as he was able to get away, he added fuel to the fire."

"Almedo backed away from Howard's hand, as though it held a dangerous missile, and when he had reached the wall, he said, while he still continued his dressing:

"You insulted me, Lord Pelham, and had you remained here I should have challenged you, and you would have been the loser."

"With a loud laugh that ought to have added to the insult, Howard replied:

"I am a plain, blunt man, and accustomed to speak my mind. If I have done you any injustice, Captain Almedo, permit me to apologize, for I certainly do not mean to wrong you, or any other man. By the way, you have just said that you were not to be disturbed by me. I am sorry to hear that. That, sir," responded Almedo, his indignation seemingly increasing with the other's desire to be friendly, "is my business."

Paying not the slightest heed to his manner, Howard said:

"I understand that your father once owned the Buena Vista estate, and that, for the sharp practice of the law, he was ordered by Colonel Morton, it would now be yours, and, instead of being a comparatively poor man, as I understand you are, you would have been one of the richest landlords on the coast. Is that true?"

"That, sir, is my private affair. Who are you, that you should enquire into my business? I decline to make any statement. Now, will you please, sir, to leave this room?"

"Yes," said the commodore, with emphasis, "I mean that, and nothing else, the woman who, even more than Martin, has shadowed me, and made miserable the life of the man that with her might have been happy. Tell me frankly, my boy, I want you to get well as soon as you can, for so long as I remain in Buena Vista, no matter what its attractions may be, I shall feel as if I were suffering."

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COL. YORK THE TEXAS TERROR

He Did Not Prove so Bad as He Had Been Painted.

HE WAS PROFANE BUT KIND OF HEART.

How He Treated a Youngster Whom He Found Cutting Down One of His Trees—Good for Evil—One of Alex. Sweet's Stories of the Early Days of Texas.

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Judge Schultz came to Texas from Germany with his mother and sister, when he was a mere boy, and made his home near the flourishing German settlement on York's creek. The judge went on to tell how, being unacquainted with backwoods life, he built a cabin, which, however, as far as protection from the rigor of the Texas north was concerned, was an architectural failure. The roof leaked, the covering being of cotton cloth, while the door, which was constructed on the north side of the cabin, and consisted of a curtain, was just where the norther wanted it, so to speak, in order to make the cabin as cool and chilly as possible.

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