

AN UNTOWARD SURRENDER.

A Tale of the Plains.

Halsted's sister came out from the East. Mrs. Bergunson was her lifelong friend and Halsted was the Colonel's favorite subordinate. So the tiny frontier town with its handful of men for a garrison opened to her pretty gray eyes under the brightest of romantic colors. She had never seen the West, and now it lay around her with its sweeping prairies stretching green in the spring sun and its distant low hills cupping the basin like silent sentinels.

The Colonel's square house was the headquarters of the town, both socially and in a military sense, and it was just the place to see the Western life, for all sorts came there. It had a piano brought out with infinite pains—things reached the frontier in those days by easy stages and long relays—and the personality of the Colonel's wife had brought with it the atmosphere of other places.

"Entirely too pretty, my dear," said Mrs. Bergunson, "to be only one of you." And the girl laughed and dimpled and went for her first ride with Halsted, who was inordinately proud. It was the first revelation of the West to her, that ride on a long raking red horse, who showed her what a ride may be with a hundred miles of level green prairie to choose from and a mount whose stride was never hampered in his life. She came home from it with her eyes sparkling like harbor lights, and the breath all but shaken out of her.

And just beyond the dot's dozen buildings they met another revelation, a shaggy pony to the lazy swing of whose gallop a graceful figure in a blue shirt and dirty khaki trousers swayed uncertainly. It slouched to the pony's lope, every line of it, as if it was indissolubly a part of the beast. As they drew together the soft morning air blew back the flapping brim of his wide white hat, disclosing his face. It was an odd face, so peculiar in outline as to be almost repulsive; a strange face, stupid with drink. Straight, ink-black hair framed it, and heavy black brows and lashes stood out dully from its bronzed skin. As they swept by the drooping lids lifted and a pair of narrow black eyes looked sleepily at them for a moment. The girl turned to Halsted in amaze. She had never met a drunken man face to face before.

"That's Tharon Sales," he said. "A worthless half-breed."

She turned to look after him curiously, and quickly turned back. The swaying rider was facing round in his big saddle.

Two days later Tharon Sales rode by the Colonel's house, sober and on a better horse. Marion was on the veranda. She observed the slim figure of the man with interest.

"Ugh!" she shuddered to Mrs. Bergunson, "what a terrible face!"

Yet there was something in the free and splendid way he rode his big horse that made her look after him. After that she never rode with the Major or Lieutenant Brasser but that she met this silent renegade either coming in or going out of town. He never looked up save for one lightning glance as they passed on the road, but for some inexplicable reason the girl always felt a desire to turn and watch him ride. She had never seen a man ride like that before. It was as if he was unconscious of the animal beneath him, as though he rode without volition. He spent most of his time in town, hanging idly round the general store, sitting silently on a porch corner for hours. No one paid any attention to him save to notice that he had not been drunk for a longer spell than usual.

There was, on the outskirts of the dot, one of those ancient stone chapels so often found on the Southwestern frontier, whose worn stone floors could have told strange tales of blood and

carnage beneath the very eyes of the dim virgin above the crumbling altar. Every other Sunday the chaplain held services in the old church and Marion was eager to attend. She did more dreaming than listening as she sat forward on the rude bench with Halsted and Mrs. Bergunson—dreaming of the dark-faced heathen who had knelt on the cold floor, for this had been an Indian mission.

The dreams had left her in a pensive mood, and she felt no surprise when, on rising to leave, she saw the figure of Tharon Sales at the back of the chapel. He was dipping his fingers in the small stone font by the door, so old that the rim was worn away by the passing of pious hands, and next moment he had gravely crossed himself and gone out. Marion's lips parted.

"The drunken wretch!" she said to herself; but as she passed the font she glanced at it and an odd thrill passed through her. Lieutenant Brasser joined them and went to the square house for dinner. There was music in the cozy parlor after the late meal, and the Major dropped in. The warm Sabbath sun poured over the sweeping prairies and bathed the ring of hills to the south in light gold.

"What do you think of that tale Lacross brought in, Colonel?" the Major asked suddenly under cover of Marion's playing a rolling march. The Colonel frowned.

"Nothing and a good deal," he answered. "Big Thunder is an uncertain quantity." Then the sweep of Marion's march overlaid their voices.

But it did not cover the sharp click-clack of a horse's hoofs on the hard road outside. The girl felt that strange desire to look out, though she knew it was just the worthless Tharon Sales. She kept her eyes on the keys until the sound had passed. Then she glanced casually out the east window. It was to see the straight figure swinging easily to the long lope. She wondered why that odd character should rouse even a passing interest in her.

Coming in from a lone ride a week later (she had wrested that much liberty from Halsted), she met him face to face beyond the shoulder of the lone butte. He was riding the big roan, and, flashing up his one glance at her, his ugly face lighted wonderfully. He stopped abruptly, and, leaning over lightly, he caught her bridle. He sat still, his narrow velvet eyes fixed on her face with such an intensity of expression that she was silent from wonder. Out of them looked adoration, simple, unhidden adoration, so far apart from her, so abased in its detachment, that it bore the quiet boldness of the devotee at the altar. The renegade Tharon Sales sat in the spring sun and looked his fill at the girl from the East, looked as if he had forgotten the world around, looked until the intoxication of her face drugged his eyes into dreaming that was everything of primitive sadness. And the girl in astonishment looked back. Then reaction surged over her and sudden anger quenched her fear. She raised her whip and brought it down across his wrist. Her horse sprang forward and she fled to town with a mixture of unpleasant feelings. For a week or two the road before the Colonel's house was innocent of the hoofs of the big roan. Tharon Sales stayed out of town. Then one morning Mrs. Bergunson found on the front veranda the body of a splendid buck with a rifle hole between the eyes. Marion was filled with wonder.

"Your men?" she asked the Colonel.

But the Colonel was examining the fine antlers. "Good shot, that," he said; "looks like that renegade Tharon Sales; too fancy a shot for anyone else. I kept him out of trouble once."

But Marion had gone cold and hot with a sudden shame. After that the offerings were found all over the place, a brace of prairie hens on the

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