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FINAL ACCOUNT.

Notice is hereby given that the undersigned administrators with will annexed of the estate of Aurelia K. Nibley, deceased, have filed in the County Court for Union county, Oregon, their final account, and the court has set Tuesday, Oct. 27, 1925, at 10 A. M., at the County Court Room, La Grande, said county and state, to hear objections to, and for the settlement of same.

EDITH O. STODARD, AURELIA CLEGG, Administratrixes, La Grande, Oregon.

NOW THEN—TO GET RID OF THE CAT



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CHAPTER XXI (Continued)

Meanwhile, as "Polon continued his celebration, Rouletta grew more and more miserable; at last he sobbed up sufficiently to realize he was hurting her. He was frankly puzzled at this; he met her reproaches with careless good-nature, brushing aside the remonstrances of Lucky Broad and his fellows by declaring that he was having the time of his life, and arguing that he injured nobody.

In the end the girl prevailed upon him to stop drinking, and then bound him to further sobriety by means of a sacred pledge. When, perhaps a week later, he disappeared into the hills Rouletta and her corps of self-appointed guardians brooded over her.

But the boys did not relax their watchfulness; Rouletta was their charge and they took good care of her. None of the Hill's patrons, of course, was permitted to follow up his first acquaintance with the lady dealer. Some member of the clan was always on hand to troop down such an attempt.

Broad or Bridges usually brought her to work and took her home, the Snowbird and the Mocha Kid made it a practice to take her to supper, and when she received invitations from other sources she declined in her name, and treated the would-be host with such unexcused suspicion that the invitation was never repeated. Far from taking offense at this espionage, Rouletta rather enjoyed it; she grew to like these ruffians, and that liking became mutual. Soon most of them took her into their confidence with a completeness that threatened to embarrass her, as, for instance, when they discussed her hearing incidents in their colorful lives that the Mounted Police would have given much to know. The Mocha Kid, in particular, was addicted to reminiscence of an extraordinary sort, and he totally ignored Rouletta's protests at sharing the secrets of his glibly part. As for the Snowbird, he was fond of telling her fairy stories. They were queer fairy stories, all beginning in the same way:

"Once upon a time there was a beautiful Princess and her name was Rouletta."

All the familiar characters, the Wicked Witch, the Great King, the handsome Prince; there were other characters, too, such as the Wise Guy, the Princess's Son, the Hooded Detective, the Tough Mazy Ann and the Snow-birded Jester. The Snowbird possessed a terrible fancy but it wasn't troubled enough; although he hunted his stories according to Grimm, he would bring through some of them, of violence, and of bloodshed, too realistic to be the product of mere imagination. The adventures of the beautiful Princess Rouletta were blood-curdling in the extreme, and the danger of her various associates were unmistakably autobiographical. Naturally, Rouletta never felt free to repeat those stories, but it was not long before she began to look forward with avid interest to her nightly entertainments.

Inasmuch as these Phillips would off with the same time as the Roulettas, they met frequently, and more than once he acted as her escort. He offered with a marked contrast to the other associates of the Roulettas, his treatment of her was at such total variance with theirs that he interested her in an altogether different way. He was an engaging personality, but

just why she grew so fond of him she could not tell; he was neither especially witty and accomplished nor did he lay himself out to be unusually agreeable. He was quiet and reserved; nevertheless, he had the knack of making friends quickly. Rouletta had known men like Broad and Bridges and the Mocha Kid all her life, but Pierce was of a type quite new and diverting. She speculated considerably regarding him.

His acquaintance, while interesting, had not progressed much beyond that point when Rouletta experienced a disagreeable shock. She had strolled into the theater one evening and was watching the performance when Laure accessed her. As Rouletta had not come into close contact with any of the dance-hall crowd, she was surprised at the tone this girl assumed.

"Hello! Looking for new conquests?" Laure began.

"Miss Kirby shook her head in vague denial, but the speaker eyed her with open hostility and there was an unmistakable sneer behind her next words:

"What's the matter? Have you forgotten all the budding citizens?"

"I've finished my work, if that's what you mean."

"Now you're going to try your hand at fox-rustling, eh?"

Rouletta's expression altered; she regarded her inquirer more intently. "You know I'm not," said she. "What are you driving at?"

"Well, why don't you? Are you too good?"

"Yes," the visitor spoke boldly. "I've turned away, but Laure stepped close and cried in a low, angry voice:

"Don't order me. I can't take orders." Laure was beside herself at this defiance. She grew blind with rage, so much so that she did not notice Phillips himself; he had approached within hearing distance. "You've got the boss; he's crazy about you, but Pierce is mine."

"What's that?" It was Phillips who spoke. "What are you saying about me?" Both girls started. Laure turned on him furiously.

"I'm serving notice on this far-outrage, that's all. But it goes for you, too."

Phillips' eyes opened, his face whitened with an emotion neither girl had before seen. To Rouletta he said, quietly:

"The other boys are busy, so I came to take your home."

Laure cried, wildly, hysterically: "Don't do it! I warn you!"

"Are you ready to go?"

"All right," Rouletta agreed. Together they left the theater.

Nothing was said as the two trod the snow-banked streets, not until they halted at the door of the Courtesan House. Old Rouletta spoke; then she said:

"I wouldn't have let you do this only—I have a temper."

"So have I," Pierce said, shortly. "It's humiliating to own up."

You're a brick, Miss Kirby, and I'm sorry if you had an unpleasant moment." He took Rouletta's hand and held it while he stared at her with a frank, contemplative gaze. "You're an unusual person, and you're about the nicest girl I've met. I want you to like me."

As he walked back down-town, Pierce pondered Rouletta's words, "a square deal all around, even to yourself." They were a trifle puzzling. Whom had he cheated? Surely not Laure. From the very first he had protested his lack of serious interest in her, and their subsequent relations were entirely the result of her unceasing efforts to appropriate him to herself. He had resisted, she had persisted. Nor could he see that he had cheated—in other words, injured—himself. This was a liberal country; its code was free and it took little account of a man's private conduct. Nobody seriously blamed him for his affair with Laure; he had lost no standing by reason of it. It was only a part of the big adventure, a passing phase of his life as came to every man. Since it had left no mark upon him, and had not seriously affected Laure, the score was even. He dismissed Rouletta's words as of little consequence. In order, however, to prevent any further unpleasant scenes he determined to put Laure in her place, once for all.

Rouletta went to her room, greatly disturbed at her own emotions. She could still feel the touch of Phillips' hand, she could still feel his gaze fixed earnestly, meditatively, upon hers, and she was amazed to discover the importance he had assumed in her thoughts. Importance, that was the word. He was a very real, a very interesting person, and there was some inexplicable attraction about him that offset his faults and his failings, however grave. For one thing, he was not an automaton, like the other men; he was a living, breathing problem, and he absorbed Rouletta's attention.

She was sitting on the edge of her bed, staring at the wall, when the Countess Courtesan knocked at her door and entered. The woman had become good friends; frequently the elder one stopped to gossip. The Countess flung herself into a chair, rolled and lit a cigarette, then said:

"Well, I see you and Agnes saved the bankroll again."

Rouletta nodded. "Agnes is an awfully bluff, I never load her. But of course nobody knows that."

"You're a queer youngster, I've never known a girl quite like you. Everybody is talking about you."

"Indeed? Not the nice people?"

"Nice people?" The Countess lifted her brows. "You mean those at the barracks and upon the hill? Yes, they're talking about you, too."

"I can imagine what they say," Rouletta drew her brows together in a frown. "No doubt they think I'm just like the dance-hall girls. I've seen a few of them—at a distance. They avoid me as if I had measles."

"Naturally. Do you care?"

"Certainly I care. I'd like to be one of them, not a specimen. Wouldn't you?"

"Um-m; perhaps. I dare say I could be one of them if it weren't for fourousness. People forget things quickly in a new country."

"Why did you take him back? I'm sure you don't care for him."

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