

GOLDEN THRONE.

[A ROMANCE BY SAMUEL P. PUTNAM.]
CHAPTER XVIII.

"Mr. Morton, I believe?" said Blanche, with piquant grace.

"Yes," said Charlie. "I'm surprised. I didn't expect to see you."

"I suppose you are anxious to see little Pete?"

"Yes, I called for this purpose. I hope he has the good fortune to be living here."

"Yes, and as happy as a lark."

"I should think he would be. I should call it paradise."

"A little better than Golden Throne for him, isn't it?"

"I should say so. It wasn't good for his health to stay there, was it?"

"He has told me about it. What a queer place Golden Throne must be! I feel quite well acquainted, Pete has told me so much. There's Grubbins and Prince Hal and Sol Jones and Pilkins and Paddie John and Bill and Big Dick and Jennie and Tim. I'm curious to know all about them."

"They're scattered. Bill and I have left Golden Throne to make our fortune."

"What, in this big city! Are you not afraid of being swallowed up?"

"We'll take our chances. If we go to the wall, we'll take to digging again. Our arms are strong, and fortune can't crush us."

"And the rest?"

"Paddie is in the city. He's Jon McConnel now, in civilized parlance. He's on the press, and I suppose you read some of his dashing articles every day. Big Dick is in the fire department. Mr. Richard Cole is his name on the books. Sol Jones is running for office, and Grubbins is in the legislature, and Pilkins is anywhere between two hundred and fifty and three hundred pounds. Prince Hal, I suppose, is asleep. Like Rip Van Winkle, he will wake up some fine morning and find himself rich; for Golden Throne is bound to grow, and all one has to do is to stay and grow with it, like Jack on the bean-stalk. Jennie and Tim are one and the same. The gray mare is the better horse."

"I forgot about Gooch. Pete used to describe him and his praying and singing Psalms and reading the Bible."

"Gooch is pursuing his only earthly or heavenly desire, to make money; and he knows how to do it in a quiet way. He buys and sells always on the nick of time, and prays with one eye open."

"I'm quite interested in all these doings," said Blanche. "I'm so glad to see you. Shall I go for little Pete? He will be delighted to see you."

"Of course, I want to see the little cuss; but, really, I've lost my interest in him since seeing you."

"Oh, that isn't fair! If it hadn't

been for little Pete, I should never have seen you."

"I did like little Pete," said Charlie. "There was something about him so strange and showy, as if he wasn't fit for this world, and ought to be an angel. I presume he's changed, though."

"Indeed, he is. You wouldn't know him. I assure you he's quite stylish, and learned, too. Do you know he can play on the piano and paint? He has some notion of being an artist."

"I shouldn't wonder if he was a genius. He looked half-crazy. Bring him. I do want to see how he looks now."

"You would know him, if you saw him?" said Blanche, looking at him with a bewildering glance and dazzling smile. Again, the strange familiarity swept over her features.

"Where have I met you?" he cried.

"Met me! How you talk, sir!"

"But I have met you," said Charlie. "I saw you at the Opera House on the evening of Ingersoll's lecture, and thought then that I had seen you somewhere. Your face has haunted me, and—yes, I must confess it now that I have found you—I have longed to see your face ever since."

"Is that so?" said Blanche, delightedly; "and now I may confess that I saw you too, but you looked so abstracted that I thought it no use to speak and claim old acquaintance."

"Old acquaintance?" said Charlie. "What do you mean? Where could we have known each other? Certainly never, unless it was in some fairy kingdom before we were born."

"Oh, we have met since then, and I remember it well."

"Tell me if you are not really a fairy, where it was."

"Let me see. It was a dim, weird place, about midnight. The moon was shining over the rocks and trees. On the one side is the Buried Castle, and not far off the Throne Room, and around, darkly glooming, Conscience Pass. There are two horses, a solitary figure—and that I believe is Charlie—and there is a sudden report, and then another figure, and that"—said Blanche, with blazing eyes and trembling lips, with a boyish tone in her voice and a sudden flinging back of her head.

"Was little Pete," said Charlie, "and"—

"And Blanche, too," burst forth the girl, impetuously.

"Is it possible?" said Charlie. "You that little cuss—I mean that little—lady!" "I'm thunderstruck. Little Pete not himself after all, and you— Well, I don't know myself any more. Please stick a pin into me, so that I can find out whether I am dreaming or—waking."

"You didn't think you were carrying a woman in your arms on that lovely night, and that you might have made a runaway match of it," carolled Blanche. "Isn't it romantic? Why, how you stare! You look as if you didn't like it. Do you wish I were a boy again?"

"Yes, for then I shouldn't be breaking my heart. But come, tell me all about it. I'm burning with curiosity. I'm like a woman, and must have the whole story."

"It's along one and a sad one," said Blanche.

"I fear it is, but what a beautiful ending! You have nothing to fear now."

"I suppose not, only that man. I do so dread to think of him. If he should find me out"—

"Don't fear him, whoever he is. He's dead."

"Dead? Are you sure?"

"I saw his body with my own eyes."

Blanche buried her face in her hands. For a moment, she could say nothing.

"Oh, I am thankful" she murmured at length softly. "He was the horror of my life."

"Who was he?" asked Charlie.

"My husband. I fled from him as from a serpent."

"Your husband! I am amazed! What is behind all this?"

"Listen. I will tell you. My father, as near as I can remember and learn, was a man of literary genius, but indolent and shiftless, floating from place to place. My mother was a bright New England girl, whose parents lived comfortably on a farm. Falling in love with my father, Ralph Kenneday, she married him, and they came to New York. He earned a precarious living by writing songs, etc., and sometimes playing in the theatres. My mother soon died, overcome by hardship, when I was a little girl. My father growing desperate, married a woman who kept a saloon on the Bowery. Oh, the horror of those years! My father died, and I was left in the hands of this terrible step-mother. She treated me cruelly. I was compelled to sell papers on the street, to sing songs, to beg at times. Finally, I was put into a variety theatre. Then, this man came along. I suppose he gave money to my step-mother. She whipped me, and compelled me to marry him; but, somehow, after the ceremony, while they were in the midst of their drunken revels, I escaped. I got on board the cars, and begged my way West. I feared that he was on my track, pursuing me like a relentless hound. I went farther and farther. I crossed the plains. I crept up among the mountains. I came at length to Golden Throne as little Pete. I saw him that night when I fled. You know the rest. Well, I came to this city. I had heard from my father of an elder brother,

living here somewhere. His name was William Kennedy. He was much older, and had come to California when my father was a little boy; and so for years they were separated, and almost forgot each other. I presume, on some accounts, there was little sympathy between them; for Uncle William was a thorough-going business man, and would have no regard for the vagrant genius of my father. I tried to find this uncle on my arrival in the city. Thanks be to the gold you gave me, I was enabled to do so with comparative ease. I found him living in this elegant house. He was a bachelor, and quite aged. He had no one to care for, and greeted me as if I were his daughter. My identity was soon established, and he made me his heir. A few months ago, he died; and now I am mistress of this mansion and of wealth that I really cannot count."

"This is indeed a fairy tale," said Charlie. "And this is little Pete—that little devil, as we used to call him. You did look funny, no mistake, with that scared expression and silent ways. Well, it's lucky I didn't let 'em hang you. I don't know what made me interfere so desperately—a mere whim, I suppose. Another time, perhaps, I'd let things go. You see we get awful rough and cruel in this country."

"I see that, yet there's much good that shines out. Even Big Dick has some genuine good feeling. He has a spite against me though; but I guess, if he should see me now, he'd soften a little, wouldn't he?" said Blanche, with a ringing laugh.

"I think he would. But he's married, and it wouldn't do any good for you to capture him. You look high now, of course—a lord or a duke or a millionaire, at least."

"Why shouldn't I? I have had all I want of poverty and disgrace, and now I am going to look high and keep high. I'm going to take the best man that comes along."

"You can have your pick," said Charlie, disconsolately. "I came to seek my fortune. I have lost it already, for a thousand are ahead of me."

"I told you little Pete could play. Listen and hear if he can't," said Blanche.

She ran to the piano as gracefully as a fawn, and sat down, and the music sparkled forth like a fountain. The swift notes glided on in perfect harmony. Then she sang, and her rich voice expressed the very spirit of the song. There was nothing formal about her, though she was so elegantly attired. She was animated by a beautiful and, in some respects, extraordinary genius. She inherited her father's literary and poetic faculty, with much more steadiness of character, which came from her mother's side.