

THE WORLD'S BEST SHORT FICTION

Jack and Jill of the Sierras-by Bret Harte

A Love Story of the California Mines, in Three Parts



"Hastened recklessly down the trail to the spring."

They passed out on the trail. Now I must take your arm," he said, laughing, "not you mine." He passed his arm under hers, holding it firmly. It was the one he had touched. For the first few steps her uncertain feet took no hold of the sloping mountain side, which seemed to slip sideways beneath her. He was literally carrying her on his shoulder. But in a few moments she saw how cleverly he balanced himself, always leaning toward the hillside, and presently she was able to help him by a few steps. She expressed her surprise at his skill.

"It's nothing," he said quietly; "I carry a pail of water up here without spilling a drop."

She stiffened slightly under this remark, and indeed so far overdid her attempt to walk without his aid that her foot slipped on a stone, and she fell outward toward the abyss. But in an instant his arm was transferred from her elbow to her waist, and in the momentum of his quick recovery they both landed panting against the mountain side.

"I'm afraid you'd have spilt the pail that time," she said with a slightly heightened color, as she disengaged herself gently from his arm.

"No," he said boldly, "for the pail never would have stiffened itself in a tiff and tried to go alone."

"Of course not—if it were only a pail," she responded.

They moved on again in silence. The trail was growing a little steeper toward the upper end and the road bank. Bray was often himself obliged to seek the friendly aid of a manzanita or thorn bush to support them. Suddenly she stopped and caught his arm. "There!" she said, "listen! They're coming!"

Bray listened; he could hear at intervals a far-off shout. Then a nearer one—a name—"Eugenia." So that was hers!

"Shall I shout back?" he asked.

"Not yet," she said. "Are we near the top?"

A sudden glow of pleasure came over him; he knew not why, except that she did not look delighted, excited, nor even relieved. "Only a few yards more," he said, with an unaffected half-sigh.

"Then I'd better untie this," she said gently, beginning to fumble at the knot of the handkerchief which linked them together. Their heads were close together, their fingers often met; he would like to have said something—but he could only add: "Are you sure you will feel quite safe? It is a little steeper as we near the bank."

"You can hold me," she said simply, with a superbly unconscious lifting of her arm, as she yielded her waist to him again, but without raising her eyes.

He did, holding her rather tightly, I fear, as they clambered up the remaining slope, for it seemed to him as a last embrace. As he lifted her on the road bank the shouts came nearer, and glancing up he saw two men and a woman running down the hill toward them. He turned to Eugenia. In that instant she had slipped the tattered dust coat from her shoulder, thrown it over her torn sleeve, set her hat straight, and was calmly awaiting them with a self-possession and coolness that seemed to shame their excitement. He noticed, too, with the quick perception of unimportant things which comes to some natures at such moments, that she had plucked a sprig of wild myrtle from the mountain side and was wearing it on her breast.

"Good Heavens, Genie! What has happened? Where have you been?"

"Eugenia, this is perfect madness!" began the elder man didactically. "You have alarmed us beyond measure—kept the stage waiting—and now it is gone!"

"Genie! Look here, I say! We've been hunting for you everywhere. What's up?" said the younger man, with brotherly brusqueness.

As these questions were all uttered in the same breath, Eugenia replied to them collectively. "It was so hot that I kept along the bank here, while you were on the other side. I heard the trickle of water somewhere down there, and searching for it my foot slipped. This gentleman—she indicated Bray—was on a little sort of a trail there, and assisted me back to the road again."

The two men and the woman turned and stared at Bray with a look of curiosity that changed quickly into a half-contemptuous unconcern. They saw a youngish sort of man, with a long mustache, a two days' growth of beard, a not over-clear face, that was further streaked with red on the temple, a torn flannel shirt, that showed a very white shoulder beside a sunburned throat and neck, and soiled white trousers tucked into muddy high boots—in fact, the picture of a broken-down miner. But their unconcern was as speedily changed again into resentment at the perfect ease and equality with which he regarded them—a regard the more exasperating as it was not without a suspicion of his perception of some satire or humor in the situation.

"Ahem! Very much obliged, I am sure. I er—"

"The lady has thanked me," interrupted Bray, with a smile.

"Did you fall far?" said the younger man to Eugenia, ignoring Bray.

"Not far," she answered, with a half appealing look at Bray. "Only a few feet," added Bray, with prompt mendacity; "just a little slip down."

The three newcomers here turned away, and surrounding Eugenia newcomers in an undertone. Quite conscious that he was the subject of discussion, he lingered only in the hope of catching a parting glance from her. The words "You do it," "No, you," "It would come better from her," were distinctly audible to him. To his surprise, however, she suddenly broke through them, and advancing to him, with a dangerous brightness in her beautiful eyes, held out her slim hand. "My father, Mr. Neworth; my brother, Harry Neworth; and my aunt, Mrs. Dobbs," she said, indicating each one with a graceful inclination of her handsome head, "all think I ought to give you something and send you away. I believe that is the way they put it. I think differently. I come to ask you to let me once more thank you for your good service to me to-day, which I shall never forget." When he had returned her firm hand-clasp for a minute, she coolly rejoined the discomfited group.

"She's no sardine," said Bray to himself emphatically. "But I suspect she'll catch it from her folks for this. I ought to have gone away at once, like a gentleman, hang it!" He was even angrily debating with himself whether he ought not follow her to protect her from her gesticulating relations as they all trailed up the hill with her, when he reflected that it would only make matters worse. And with it came the dreadful reflection that as yet he had not brought the water to his expecting and thirsty comrades. He had forgotten them for these lazy, snobbish, purse-proud San Franciscans; for Bray had the miner's supreme contempt for the moneyed trading classes. What would the boys think of him? He flung himself over the bank, and hastened recklessly down the trail to the spring. But here again he lingered—the place had become suddenly hallowed. How deserted it looked without her! He gazed eagerly around on the ledge for any trace that she had left—a bow, a bit of ribbon, or even a hairpin that had fallen from her. As he slowly filled the pail he caught sight of his own reflection in the spring. It certainly was not that of an Adonis. He laughed honestly; his sense of humor had saved him from many an extravagance, and mitigated many a disappointment before this. Well, she was a plucky, handsome girl, even if she was not for him, and he might never see eyes on her again. Yet it was a hard pull up that trail once more, carrying in impossibly pail of water in the hand that had once sustained a lovely girl. He remembered her reply to his handiwork, "of course not—if it were only a pail," and found a dozen pretty interpretations of it. Yet he was not in love. No, he was too poor and too level-headed for that. And he was unaffectedly and materially tired, too, when he reached the road again and rested, leaving the spring and its little idyl behind.

By this time the sun had left the burning ledge of the Eureka Company, and the stage road was also in shadow, so that his return through its heavy dust was less difficult. And when he at last reached the camp, he found to his relief that his prolonged absence had been overlooked by his thirsty companions in a larger excitement and disappointment, for it appeared that a well-known San Francisco capitalist, whom the foreman had persuaded to visit their claim with a view to advance and investment, had actually come over from Red Dog for that purpose, and had got as far as the summit when he was stopped by an accident, and delayed so long that he was obliged to go on to Sacramento without making his visit and examination.

"That was only his excuse—mere flapdoodle!" interrupted the pessimistic Jerold. "He was fooling you. He'd heard of us 'then better. The idea of calling that affair an 'accident,' or one that would stop any man who meant business!"

Bray had become uneasily conscious. "What was the accident?" he asked.

"A fool woman's accident," broke in the misogynist Parkhurst, "and it's true! That's what makes it so unusual. For there's allus a woman at the bottom of such things—bet your life! Think of 'em coming here. That ought to be a law again it."

"But what was it?" persisted Bray, becoming more apprehensive.

"Why, what does that blasted fool of a capitalist do but bring with him his daughter and auntie to see the wonderful scenery with papa dear? As if it was a cheap Sunday-school panorama! And what do these chockle-heads about, and playin' 'here we go round the mulberry bush,' until one of 'em tumbles down a ravine. And then there's a great 'do, and 'dear papa' was up and down the road yellin', 'Me cheyld! me cheyld!' And then there was camphor and sal volatile and eau de cologne to be got, and the coach goes off, and 'papa dear' gets left, and then has to hurry off in a buggy to catch it. And so we get left too, just because that old fool, Neworth, brings his women here."

Under this recital poor Bray sat as completely crushed as when the fair daughter of Neworth had descended upon his shoulders at the spring. He saw it all. His was the fault. It was his delay and dalliance with her that had checked Neworth's visit.

Worse than that, it was his subsequent audacity and her defense of him that would probably prevent any renewal of the negotiations. He had shipwrecked his partners' prospects in his absurd vanity and pride! He did not dare to raise his eyes to their dejected faces.

He would have confessed everything to them, but the same feeling of delicacy to her which had determined him to keep her adventures to himself now forever sealed his lips. How might they not misconstrue his conduct—and here! Perhaps something of this was visible in his face.

"Come, old man," said the cheerful misogynist, with perfect innocence, "don't take it so hard. Some time in a man's life a woman's sure to get the drop on him, as I said afore, and this yer woman's got the drop on five of us. But—hallo, Ned, old man, what's the matter with your head?" He laid his hand gently on the matted temple of his younger partner.

"I had a slip—on the trail!" he stammered. "I had to go back again for another pail. That's what delayed me, you know, boys," he added quickly. "But it's nothing."

"Nothing!" ejaculated Parkhurst, clapping him on the back and twisting him around by the shoulders so that he faced his companions. "Nothing! Look at him, gentlemen; and he says it's 'nothing'! That's how a man takes it. He didn't go round yellin' and wringing his hands, and sayin', 'Me pay! me-pay!' when it split. He just humped himself and trotted back for another. And every drop of water in that overset bucket meant hard work and hard sweat, and was as precious as gold."

Luckily for Bray, whose mingled emotions under Parkhurst's eloquence were beginning to be hysterical, the foreman interrupted.

"Well, boys, it's time we got to work again and took another heave at the old ledge. But now that this job of Neworth's is over, I don't mind tellin' ye suthin'." As their leader usually spoke but little, and to the point, the four men gathered around him. "Although I engineered this affair and got it up, somehow I never saw that Neworth standing on this ledge. No, boys, I never saw him here." The look of superstition which Bray and the others had often seen on this old miner's face, and which so often showed itself in his acts, was there. "And though I wanted him to come, and allowed to have him come, I'm kinder relieved that he didn't; and so let whatsoever luck's in the air come to us, five alone boys, just as we stand."

The next morning Bray was up before his companions, and although it was not his turn, offered to bring water from the spring. He was not in love with Eugenia—he had not forgotten his remorse of the previous day—but he would like to go there once more before he relentlessly wiped out her image from his mind. And he had heard that, although Neworth had gone on to Sacramento, his son and the two ladies had stopped on for a day or two at the Ditch Superintendent's house on the Summit, only two miles away. She might pass on the road; he might get a glimpse of her again and a wave of her hand before this thing was over forever and he should have to take up the daily routine of his work again.

It was not love, of that he was assured; but it was the way to stop it by convincing himself of its madness. Besides, in view of all the circumstances, it was his duty as a gentleman to show some concern for her condition after the accident and the disagreeable contempts which followed it.

Thus Bray! Alas, none of these possibilities occurred. He found the spring had simply lapsed into its previous unsuspecting obscurity, a mere niche in the mountain side that held only—water. The stage road was deserted, save for an early, curly-headed school-boy, whom he found lurking on the bank, but who evaded his company and conversation.

He returned to the camp quite cured of his fancy. His late zeal as a water-carrier had earned him a day or two's exemption from that duty. His place was taken the next afternoon by the woman-hating Parkhurst, and he was the less concerned by it as he had heard that the same afternoon the ladies were to leave the Summit for Sacramento.

But then occurred a singular coincidence. The new water-bringer was as scandalously late in his delivery of the precious fluid as his predecessor. An hour passed, and he did not return. His unfortunate partners, toiling away with pick and crowbar on the burning ledge, were clamorous from thirst, and Bray was becoming absurdly uneasy. It could not be possible that the accident had been repeated. Or had she met him with inquiries? But no, she was already gone.

The mystery was presently cleared, however, by the abrupt appearance of Parkhurst running toward them, but without his pail. The cry of consternation and despair which greeted that discovery was, however, quickly changed by a single, breathless, half-intelligible sentence he had shot before him from his panting lips, and he was holding something in his outstretched palm that was more eloquent than words—gold!

(To be concluded.)

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JIMMIE'S UNCLE'S GREAT SHOT

Jimmie thought his Uncle Tom was the most wonderful person in the world because he often came to the house wearing a hunting coat, carrying a real double-barreled shotgun in one hand and a brace of birds in the other.

Uncle Tom could tell the finest shooting stories that a boy ever heard.

"What were the most birds you ever killed at one shot, Uncle Tom?" asked Jimmie one day.

Uncle Tom thought a minute, and then said: "Twenty-seven."

"Twenty-seven!" exclaimed Jimmie. "Whoopie! How did you manage to do it, Uncle Tom? What kind of birds were they—real big birds?"

"Real big birds? Well, I should say so," replied Uncle Tom. "You see, I was coming home late one afternoon, after hunting all day without any luck at all. I happened to look up in a tree, and on one limb I saw twenty-seven wild pigeons, all sitting in a row. I raised my gun to fire, but did not hope to get more than two, or maybe three, at the most."

"I blazed away, and what do you suppose happened? The shot split that limb, and the toes of every bird on it caught in the crack! It was the last I had, and so I climbed the tree, cut the limb off with my hunting knife, slung it across my shoulder, and marched home with the limb, twenty-seven birds and all!"

THE BOY AND THE RATS

In a large warehouse in Liverpool a boy named Edward Scott was employed to run errands. There were many rats about the place and he was told that if he could catch one and singe its tail all the others would leave. A trap was set and a rat was caught, but while singeing its tail according to directions the lighted paper blew into a pile of straw and started a conflagration that burned four big buildings and inflicted a loss of half a million dollars.

There are some smart boys in this world, but there are also some smart rats, and it is just as well to keep them apart. If the rat had caught the boy and singed his hair there might have been eight buildings burned.

DIAGNOSIS OF HEADACHE

"There are more than fifty kinds of headache," said the physician, "and sufferers from the more common forms may cure themselves by locating the cause and treating themselves accordingly. The more frequent forms are a dull pain across the forehead, due to dyspepsia; a pain in the back of the head, due to the liver; a bursting pain in both temples, due to indigestion; an ache on the top of the head, as though a weight pressed on the skull, due to overwork; an ache between the brows just above the base of the nose, due to eye strain."

STALE BRAINS

Of course there is no future for stale brains or for a man who stands still and ceases to grow. He is old who thinks he is old and useless who thinks he is useless. When a man has ceased to grow he begins to die, and many people are half dead at fifty, not because of age, but because of their mental attitude, because of the way they face life.—Success Magazine.

Ellen Terry

THERE is no actress on the English-speaking stage comparable to Miss Terry. But she is more than a great actress. In England she is a national figure, and here in America no visitor is received as an older or a closer friend.

Into the fifty years which have elapsed between the entrance of the slim little girl of eight dragging a tiny go-cart on the stage and lispng her first spoken part, and the wonderful jubilee celebration of last year which crowned Miss Terry's fiftieth year on the stage, are crowded some of the most fascinating of human memories. Her intimates have included the greatest actors and actresses like Bernardt and Irving, poets like Tennyson, novelists like Charles Reade; her experiences have embraced the most dramatic occasions on both sides of the Atlantic. But it is the peculiar merit of Miss Terry's recollections that, more than any description, they suggest her own delightful personality, her vivacity, and the exquisite feminine quality which is inherent in every part she acts.

This is no formal autobiography. The pages which McClure's will print from time to time deal with separate events of Miss Terry's life. In early numbers we shall print the story of the tiny attic and the little window that the child could scarcely reach by climbing on the bureau, one of the very earliest of Miss Terry's recollections. She will tell of her entrance on the stage, her first experience of applause and of terror; the incidents of her childhood freshest in her memory; of her early friendships and marriage; how she retired from the stage and hid with her babies in a most delicious little walled garden deep in the country, and how one day the famous Charles Reade, following the hounds, in his pink hunting coat, came galloping down the road, leaped the wall, gazed with amazement on the actress whom he had so long lost sight of, and carried her back to London to a career of uninterrupted success.

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John Norman's Opportunity

By C. R. Frame

The hands of the city clock pointed to six, and the streets leading to the station fairly hummed with life. Suburban shoppers, business folk and the idle idlers were all homeward bound. Electric trams whirred and changed in every direction and eager crowds surged into them.

"Rosedale! Rosedale!" shouted the starter.

Helen Gray gathered her suit case, string bag and Boston fern and made desperate efforts to secure a place. In her haste she tripped on a loosened shoestring and fell heavily into her seat. She was weary beyond words with the day's shopping. It was a hot evening and the train was packed. Passengers behind her crowded and pushed, jamming her against a man at the seat's end. A brass curtain rod which she was carrying prodded him sharply in the ribs. She turned to apologize, but the words died on her lips when she found herself confronted by the eager face of The Enemy. With a brief word she drew the offending rod into place and tried to edge away from him.

He had passed her early in the morning bound cityward in his motor car. She had encountered him a number of times during the day, and when she had committed her one extravagance, lunch at Maclean's, he, too, had sauntered in and had seated himself at a window table beside hers. The enjoyment of her lunch was spoiled by the scrutiny of John Norman's gray eyes.

The feud between the Normans and Greys was of the fine, unreasonable, New England type. There had been real cause for grievance at the outset, two generations back, but when the granddaughters of Ezra Grey came to live in the old homestead, John Norman, grandson of William the Offender, was more than ready to bury the hatchet; and it was the irony of fate that he should fall in love at sight with Helen Grey.

He was rich and popular, and the most eligible of Rosedale bachelors. He had never before been anxious in regard to friendship with women. During his thirty-six years there had been so many things that he had considered more important. But for the past four months he had planned and schemed to reach a friendly footing with his neighbors and had failed. They quietly ignored his friendly advances, snubbed him a few times, and now, the fear of marring the armed neutrality, kept him from overstepping their limit.

As Helen settled beside him in the train, he was very conscious of the pressure of her arm against his, and of the weary droop of her pretty head. He had had her under espionage all day and this accounted for his unusual proceeding, going back to Rosedale by trolley.

He was eager to take some of the heavy bundles that encumbered her lap, but he dared not make the suggestion, her shrinking movement from him and her unfriendly glance were earnest of a rebuff.

Twilight deepened and the lights twinkled in the car. When there was elbow room she must tie her loosened shoestring. She made two or three attempts to reach it, but to tie a shoe in a crowded car, with bundle-laden feet and gloved fingers is no easy feat.

John Norman was aware of her efforts, as his foot was beside hers on the rail of the seat ahead. When he felt a sharp tug at his shoe string he understood its significance. He knew also, by the energetic twist that the offending string was tied in a hard knot, and that was as it should be.

She signaled the conductor to stop at a corner some distance from her home, rather than at the nearer one, where they must alight together. He understood the significance of this also. She was getting off, bundle-laden, to avoid the possibility of any association with him. Norman's hand stroked his mustache to conceal the smile at her transparent tactics.

As the car slowed she rose burdened with bundles. Then came a struggle, confusion and sickening distress, as she dropped back fairly on John Norman's knee. Then she realized what the trouble was—she had tied her shoestring to his. She was profoundly grateful for the cool, matter-of-fact way in which he took her wild behavior. She struggled to her feet again, and all of Rosedale that was riding home in that special electric craned its neck in intense enjoyment at what was going on.

The motorman, angry at the delay, changed the bell with furious insistence, and the conductor's sharp "Hurry up! Hurry up, lady, don't keep the car waiting," added still further to her nervous embarrassment.

John Norman's clear voice rang out, "Wait a minute, conductor," in the tone of one used to being obeyed. The conductor had a profound respect for Mr. John Norman, and ran forward to stop the clanging bell. In the meantime, Norman had produced his pocket knife and had cut the knotted laces, his and hers. She gave a confused murmur of thanks, and Norman, hastily catching up the parcels, followed her out. There was no word of protest, and his sympathetic glance revealed quivering lips and big brown eyes suffused with tears.

The car whirred away, and a faint echo of laughter was borne back. It was the last straw.

"Fools," he ejaculated, while the girl leaned against a nearby wall and laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks.

The vagaries of women were beyond his comprehension, and he looked his bewilderment, standing mutely, with suit case, bulging string bag and pot of fern.

"Please, please forgive me," she pleaded. "I cannot imagine how I came to do such a stupid thing."

He liked the pleading tone and the kindly way in which she looked at him.

"It was a happy mistake for me," he said eagerly, and I hope that we may be friends."

She had an inkling that there was more than the thought of goodfellowship in his mind as he held her hand in a lingering good-night.

Some months later Mrs. John Norman, looking particularly pretty and charming, leaned across the dinner table and put a pertinent question to her husband.

"John, do you remember the evening that I tied myself to you?"

"Of course, I do. Is it likely that I should forget anything so delightful?"

She hesitated. "I've been thinking—Color came to her face. 'John, did you know that I tied that string to yours?'"

Norman leaned back in his chair and chuckled.

"Of course, I did. Why, didn't I tell you, dearest, do you think that after watching and waiting for months to make your acquaintance, I would throw aside such an opportunity. You tied yourself to me and I knew it a significant omen for our happy future."