

Thrilling Tales of Love and Adventure

Her Marcus and a Miracle

By Elsie Endicott



HE COULD NEVER have been "The Back" had he not seemed much taller sitting than standing. On foot he was a stubby, clerical fellow; mounted, he was the Marshal Magnificent, after the populace's own heart. At work, he was the humble old bookkeeper at Cass & Stacey's; at play, he was Mars, chapeau crowned. To think that one's legs should make a difference like that! He despised those legs and the life he had led on them, but he gloried in his torso and the occasional triumphs it brought him. It must not be thought for a minute that horseback life held for him any visions of limitless desert or grassy plain, of sky and earth meeting in dim distances, of long forested paths, or of high-lifting mountain trails. The air of the town, the crowd at the curb, the roar of the band, the swing of following legs, and the drop of following feet, faces at innumerable windows, the magic melting of traffic ahead, color, music, glitter, cheer—all these were plenty good enough for him. The crowd will have nothing overdone, nothing underdone. It must have it done just right. That is the reason so many men on parade are failures. An ounce too shy or an ounce too vainglorious, and they are lost forever. It is a fine thing to gaze instantly the exact cathetical demand of a street full of people. Old Marcus Degremont could do that. Where he got the knack of it Heaven knows. One doesn't find such things on the leaves of a ledger. But he had it—infinitely and surely had it. The man who rides at the head of a parade successfully must possess that most rare of all faculties, the power to balance a long line of display. Any marshal can make a display of himself, but there are few marshals

who can make a display of the men behind him. Old Marcus Degremont could do that, too. He could do vastly more than that, indeed; he could embody, at the head of a parade, the spirit that lay at the foundation of all its units. To make 10,000 spectators feel fraternity when four lines of lodgement stripe the streets; to make 10,000 spectators see public improvement when civic societies follow the drum! Is it any wonder that when strangers asked the townspeople who the man on horseback was that they should reply: "Why, that is our Col. Degremont." All this was before the Spanish War. There was a real colonel in town now, to say nothing of captains and corporals, and there were even privates who were not adverse to display. Marcus Degremont had welcomed them heartily, but he did not know that they would ever threaten the place he had made for himself. It had not seemed possible to him, perhaps, that a real commander could ever care for the occasional honors of a mere make-believe. But these latter-day Spanish War veterans, with their ardent zeal of life, their youth, their rollicking responsibility, their khaki uniforms, so jauntily simple, their boyish faces—these young veterans of a young war were the ones to make things hard for him. "Col. Degremont, nice old boy! Colonel! Ha, ha! Col. Degremont of the—er—what regiment did you say?" Lancy was the new colonel's name. He was a tall, splendid looking fellow, with an inquiring but with not much chest to speak of. Marcus Degremont had noted that chest at once. It was too narrow and there were little creases over the clavicles. It was not a swelling chest. Marcus Degremont could inflate his chest till it strained the cloth of his stouter uniform and caused the brass buttons to protrude almost to bursting. And his legs? We say of crippled legs, "They are crippled," and that is all; further, pathos forbids. But

one could only say of Marcus Degremont's legs that they were funny—that is, one said it until one's glance reverted to the splendid body above them. Life had not, however, been entirely without its triumphs, its glory. The town could not recall when he had not led its parades. By some hazy process it had chosen him—the law of unconscious selection has been responsible for more than one man's fame—and having chosen him it abided by him on parade. It obeyed him by platoons, and when the parade was over it promptly forgot all about him by platoons. Shortly after the soldiers came home from Cuba there was a parade and Lancy rode at the head of it. Although he had not seen any more real service than had Degremont, he wore the halo which even playing at war sometimes confers. Then, too, he was a man of affairs and had been a social lion before the war. Is it any wonder that old Marcus Degremont felt the ground slipping from beneath his feet? What made his position intolerably bitter was the fact that after thirty years Dick Leyden was coming home. Leyden, the one real friend of his whole life, except his wife. He was coming home, honored of men, to find him still the nonentity, the drudge, the clerk. There was to be a triumphal procession to escort him from the station, through the principal streets, to the old house which had been his birthplace, and afterward many distinguished citizens would speak their word of greeting and appreciation. "They will ask you to ride at the head of the procession, Marcus," said his wife brightly, setting delicate stitches in a bit of napery. "No," said he, bitterly. "It will be Lancy." "How absurd! You can't imagine Col. Lancy is to permanently supplant you? What happened was merely a tribute to the returned soldier. Besides, the committee would think of no one so fitting to lead the procession as Dick's old friend."

"Nobody recalls the friendship, I'm afraid. It was too long ago. And Heaven knows it's no wonder they shouldn't connect us, Dick in his prosperity and I in my—"

"I won't have you saying things about yourself!" she cried, coming quickly to his side and stooping to press her sweet old face against his. "You are making yourself wretched about nothing. Undoubtedly the place at the head of the column will be offered you as usual. And Dick will understand that in your way you also are preferred of your fellowmen. O, you'll see! The committee will wait on you tomorrow."

But the committee did no such thing, although he did not leave the office until later than usual the next day. Indeed, it was nearer seven than six when, after a last anxious glance down the thinning street, he finally took off his black steeple sleeve protectors and got wearily into his coat. There was a letter from Leyden awaiting him at home. He had written briefly to say that he was coming, and, speaking of his life since he had been absent, he wondered if, after all, Degremont's way had not been the wise way, the better—to stay quietly in the old town, the spot which had been beloved of their fathers, making himself the more secure as time went by in the place he held there. Marcus Degremont's face spotted with color like a girl's, and he dropped the letter hastily into the fire lest his wife should ask to read it and the irony of it scorch her soul. At the moment the street bell rang and his wife brought in a communication from the committee. She stood back of his chair, leaning over his shoulder as he opened it. Her eyes were shining and very tender. "I told you so!" she triumphed. "I knew they wouldn't think of trying to get along without you."

He drew the brief lines from their cover and they glimpsed them together; then the paper fell and she hung in silence over him. The committee desired him to head the third division of the parade!

"You will do it, Marcus," she said. "You'll do it that no one can say that you were hurt. You can stand it—the mortification and the disappointment and the sense of ingratitude. But they mustn't pity you! You won't let them do that, I know."

So on that day which might have been the greatest and happiest of his life, old Marcus Degremont rode at the head of the third division. He rode his own mount, Pompey, a chestnut sorrel with a white mane and tail, and the walking gait of a conquering war horse. The mount was as familiar to the people as the man himself. He sat in the saddle exactly as he had sat for years. He held himself so for her sake, who would be watching for him, love and rebellion, mortification and passionate protest filling her, but with her old head carried high and an indomitable smile for all who glanced her way. After much delay Lancy finally got the parade in shape and started it off toward the depot. He looked uncommonly proud as he rode at its head on his dainty stepping, beautifully muscled horse. The old thrill was in the air and Degremont's blood began to race. But there, blotting out the brightness of the day, was Lancy's slender, impudent figure, and he wheeled Pompey halfway about that he might not see it. Then a shout brought him sharply around. Down the street from the first division four black horses hitched to a float swung about, topped their driver from his seat, and came plunging madly back through the line of parade. A panicky mob was instantly evolved from the orderly ranks. Men pushed and struggled and fought to get out of the uncertain course of the frightened animals. Drivers lost their heads and tried to pull into nearby alleys, jumbling the line of vehicles inextricably. The sidewalk crowds jammed ruthlessly into store entrances. Degremont spurred Pompey toward

the runaways. At the second corner they swerved suddenly, crashed the rear wheel from a projecting float and swung toward a flower-bedded phaeton that had pulled in to the curb. The woman in it tried to lift her two little children out of the way. Lancy, who had come galloping behind the runaways, shouting futilely, saw her and called to her in a frenzy of alarm. At that moment old Marcus Degremont swept by. He seized the nearest horse by the bit, and the force with which he came pulled the leaders to their knees and broke the pole of the float, the splintered end stopping within a foot of the phaeton's wheels. A great cheer went up from the dense crowd and Lancy flung himself from his horse. "Is your wife hurt, Colonel?" asked Degremont, leaning down from his horse. Lancy, an arm about his wife, reached up and gripped the gauntleted hand. "No, not hurt, thank God! You saved her and the children. Take my place," he added. "Nobody but you can straighten things out in time now. And it was your place anyhow—it shall always be your place."

A moment later, because of that magic which was his, scattered columns were reassembling. Horses and vehicles were taking their old positions, bands began to play, flags that had been abandoned were waving again, and Pompey and his rider took their old place at the head of the parade, the rider with his accustomed martial bearing, the horse with his conquering step. Degremont massed the first division in the square before the station, the others stretching away in beautiful, streamer-like lines. The train was just in and a few minutes later the welcoming committee came out with their distinguished guest. Cheers started in the square and ran down the lines. With uncovered head the visitor started forward to his carriage, then glimpsed the splen-

did old figure at the head of the parade. "A minute, gentlemen," he ran out in the square like a boy to grab Marcus Degremont's hand. There was a pandemonium of cheers at that which did not till Leyden returned to the scene. "This is a proud day to me, thus honored and seen by my old honored also," he remarked to the chairman. The carriage fell in behind the marshal and his staff, and the parade resumed. Never, it seemed to Degremont, had his heart been so proud, never had Pompey been so high. On the tiny balcony of the fashioned house with green shutters one of the last residents of the business district, Mrs. Degremont, awaited the parade. There was hurt in her eyes, proudly nonchalant, she turned her head from the glittering staff and tried to keep her gaze on the third division, where she thought her husband must be. Then her woman's curiosity of heart of her and she permitted herself one swift glance in the direction of the staff. No word of what happened had come to her. Just as she had done many times before when he reached that he Degremont turned, his horse alighted and a gallant salute to the side above. His wife stared in astonishment. Her Marcus! Had there been an accident? Aye, but she had felt all that something like that must have happened! What it was she did not know. He had kept his honor. That was enough. She snatched her husband from her bosom and waved to him, following him as long as could see him, and missing the tribute of the distinguished visitor in the carriage who, seated there, had bowed profoundly and ad his hat.

Grabbing off the Job

By Enos Emory



JOHN HENRY was a lazy man. "Born tired," the neighbors said. But his wife firmly believed that he was the victim of some mysterious ailment and waited patiently upon all his wants, real or fancied. True, he never missed a meal, and ate heartily of every good thing put before him. He was neither pale nor thin. Indeed, his entire physical appearance indicated an excellent bodily condition. There was reason enough why he should go to work. The Henrys were poor, and everybody knew it. The two girls taught school and the boy ran errands. Mrs. Henry herself was glad to do all the sewing that came to her door, and that was a great deal. Her sewing machine was said to run far into the night, and there were those who declared that some nights it never stopped at all. Henry's poor health had its beginning in an attack of fever. The fever was quickly routed from its lair; but somehow John remained poorly. He

thought he couldn't work and refused to try. At this juncture the postman brought them a letter from his old cousin who lived on a farm fifty miles in the country, and this dear lady wrote: "Cousin John—I've heard of your sickness and believe you will get better if you come out in the country. You live in a coal town and can't expect to get well in that smoky atmosphere. Come and visit me for a while. I need you, and maybe you need me. Don't wait. Come right along. Your cousin, Pamela." To make sure that he should "come right along," with the letter was a \$10 bill. So John Henry rather fretfully said he would go. Affairs were so quickly managed he never knew just how he got to Three Trees. As he stepped down from the coach a tall, gaunt woman, riding on a buckboard, drove up to the station. Yes, here she was. She hadn't changed a bit. John Henry recognized her instantly. She was Cousin Pamela, all right. "I'm your Cousin John," said he languidly, holding out a limp hand. "How do you do?"

With a glance from her keen old eyes she sized him up. "Huh," she grunted. "I'm the same old Sassy Sis you used to fight with thirty years ago. What's the matter? You're not looking very sick. Seems to me you're pretty hearty." John sighed deeply and softly closed his eyes. "The physicians seem unable to diagnose my case," he placidly replied. "Am I to ride on that buckboard? I thought you might have an automobile by this time." Cousin Pamela considerably hit the horse a cut and they clipped along at top speed. The country road was full of ruts and it seemed to John Henry that the wheels of the buckboard hit every hole there was in the ground. He was pretty well stirred up when Cousin Pamela at last halted at her door. "Better go right in the house, John Henry," she advised. "I've got to put up the horse and feed my chickens; then I'll come and we'll have supper. You're a whole lot younger than I am in years, but you're aged awfully somehow. Lord! I can beat you at anything these days." His vanity was touched. "This sickness of mine—" he began.

"Pooh!" she interrupted. "What ails you is nothing but lack of exercise. I knew it the minute I laid eyes on you. Here's three eggs, a slice of country ham and two baked potatoes. Get outside of them and then go upstairs and tumble into the first bed you come to. Breakfast is at 6 o'clock sharp." "So this is my Cousin Pamela," he thought as he went to bed. "She's got no sympathy for sickness, I can see that." No night in all his experience was ever so short as that one. The room was cool and sweet smelling, and he slept dreamlessly. It seemed to him that he had but just gone to bed when he heard his name called from the bottom of the stairs. "Yes—yes—coming," he replied and down he went. "Now, John Henry," began Cousin Pamela, "I haven't done any washing for eight or ten weeks, because my wash machine was broke. I've got it fixed and if you've a mind to you may turn the wheel, soon as we finish eating. I'll make the beds and wash dishes while you are busy with the machine." John Henry gasped. He really turned a little pale. But shutting his teeth

he grimly obeyed. "Can it be possible—can it be possible that I'm actually doing this horrible thing?" he asked himself as the machine clanked under his unsteady strokes. "I won't stand for it. I'll go home." There was an excellent dinner with chicken dumplings. Tired, sore, aching in all his bones, he yet did ample justice to the good things spread lavishly before him. Cousin Pamela was an excellent cook and skimped on nothing. "I may as well stay a few days," he groaned. "I'm nearly killed, but this job won't last always. And I do enjoy Cousin Pamela's good meals. Of course, my wife is a good cook, but she hasn't so much good stuff to cook with as there is here." Then he asked his cousin for a bottle of liniment, which she gave him and he rubbed it on his stiffened muscles. The day following his exercise on the washing machine Cousin Pamela called his attention to her garden. "When you was a boy, John Henry," she casually remarked, "nobody could beat you with the hoe. I just wish you'd go over my beets and beans once or twice. They need it awfully." John

Henry's heart sank nearly into his shoes, but he wouldn't flinch under Cousin Pamela's unsympathetic eyes. He'd do that garden or die in the attempt. He took the hoe from her. "It's so long since I've worked in a garden that I may cut down the beets and the beans," he replied, "but I'll see what I can do." "And I'll try my hand at a hot ginger-bread. You used to punish hot ginger-bread in your salad days," quoth Pamela. "I can punish it yet," and he hit a bunch of weeds. "Certainly looks that way." And she went into the kitchen. How he ever survived that strenuous forenoon he never knew. But he lived and labored. When the dinner call came he was too tired to feel hunger. He went into the house, pale and green. Cousin Pamela met him at the kitchen door. "My goodness!" ejaculated this general in petticoats, "you're awful wet and dirty. Go right in the bathroom. There is water and soap and towels and fresh clothes; take a warm bath right now or you'll be really sick. You've thirty minutes before dinner is on the table."

His soul rose in rebellion, but his lips were dumb. Again he obeyed a big, dark suspicion leaped into his brain. Never mind; he'd show the maid he was game! Yes, he'd do it. He did not like Cousin Pamela. She was rude and brusque and was ready with her eternal job that he had to do. But he rose to the requirements. He got where he had to go before she pointed him out to him, and did them. He went home that night with a much better and continued to live with his cousin for two months more. The announced that he was going home. "I've been expecting some such thing to happen," remarked Cousin Pamela relentlessly. "If you'll take advice and stay right here while we are needed I can place you in farm superintendent's office and you'll have your salary. He is going to California, and his house and his job are vacant." John Henry nearly fell over. Only he didn't die. "I'll grab the job with both hands," he said to himself. "Cousin Pamela, you've cured several troubles. I'll stay and for my wife."

When Hester Came Home

By Annette Angert



AS the front door closed quietly Hester leaned back in her chair and groaned. The breakfast table argument had been quite as futile as might have been expected and a little more energetic. With grim pertinacity she drew the morning paper toward her and studied the column that had paved the way for a subject which was taboo—the comic opera season just opening. She sighed profoundly as she read the criticism on "Martha," in which she had made such a tremendous hit a little over a year ago. Even now she could feel the thrill of that wonderful time of plaudits, congratulations and glittering, rose-colored dreams, which had waited her into the realm of grand opera and made of the world a fairland of brilliant possibilities until their sudden obliteration by an unexpected happening—the coming of John. As a sequence the close of the season found her not signing an operative contract, but, for weal or woe, entering into a life one.

very lonely. Then the company came to town, and she began to dream of "Martha" and the life behind her, all-satisfying until John came along. It was not a far step to long for it, to bring herself to believe that it was her duty to return to it. She found herself dwelling on the thought that God never gave one a talent to have cobwebs choke it. When longing became intolerable she put it that way to John. He did not belittle her talent, but ruthlessly put an interdiction on the channel in which she wished to direct it. "If you want to keep cobwebs away, why not take up solo work in a choir?" he asked. "Oh, what about some choral society, of—"

home, and for several months Tom Endicott, Jr. After phone greetings had been exchanged Hester said, "Mary, I want you to go with me tonight to hear 'Martha.'"

Mary's gasp came over the wire, then, "Gracious, Hester, I'd love to, but I don't see—"

"Then don't see," snapped back Hester. "Just come! I'll meet you at the box office at 8 o'clock. And, Mary, will it be all right for me to go out home with you for the night?"

"Why, surely! But, Hester, when I'll meet you about eight?" Hester hung up the receiver quickly.

At noon, when she knew John would be at lunch, she phoned a message for him that she was going to see Mary Endicott and would remain over night. She figured that tomorrow would be time enough to make known to him the important decision she had made.

At 8 o'clock she met Mary. By 9 she was completely under the spell of "Martha." Glancing at Mary, her heart leaped triumphantly. Mary was pale and extremely agitated. Mary was feeling the thrill of the old life. She leaned toward her, pressing her hand sympathetically.

Mary looked at her tragically. "Hester," she whispered, "oh, you think—would you mind—oh, I must get out of this."

Hester rose at once and led the way to the foyer. There her arm went around Mary's shoulders. "Mary, dear," she breathed, "I know you're suffering."

Mary switched away impatiently. "Well, if you do, for pity's sake hurry. But how in the world you knew

anything about the baby's bottle and my forgetfulness to tell Tom to put lime water in the milk beats me."

Mary was on the street by this time. She continued: "In half an hour that blessed child is apt to waken, and if Tom doesn't remember the lime water baby's just sure to have the colic. Hester, will you hurry?"

On the ear Hester pulled herself together. She had been like one in a dream. "Mary," she questioned, "is that all you thought of in the theater—the baby's bottle, lime water, and colic? Didn't you feel the thrill of the old life? Do you—do you ever think you'd like to be back in it?"

Mary faced her as though doubting that she had heard aright. "Back in the old life?" she ejaculated. "Do you mean living a life that wouldn't have Tom and my baby in it? Why, there is nothing in the glitter and fascination of the old life that could make up to me for the lack of Tom and baby!"

Neither spoke again until they entered the Endicott apartment, and the warble of a baby greeted them.

"That," Mary said and laughed softly; "that's the sweetest music I've heard."

For some moments Hester stood watching Mary as she nursed her baby. Babies did not interest her in the least, but there was something strangely attractive in the little fellow in Mary's arms. And Mary's face was so wonderful as she crooned over him! Tom didn't seem just the ordinary Tom, either. He looked down on his wife and baby, and his eyes said that his whole world was before him.

She sighed a little. John loved babies! She wondered suddenly what John was doing just then. He had

been very tired lately, and very pale, she remembered. She really hoped he would take care of himself when he was alone. Men were such helpless creatures in that way—just like helpless clinging babies. Yes, John loved babies and would be simply crazy over Mary's. Certainly he was a dear! "Mary," she whispered in sudden impulse, her breath coming

strangely, "will you let me hold your baby for a while?"

She held Mary's baby close, no longer awkwardly. She bent low over him and when he smiled up at her her heart leaped. She bent lower, and when his little wet mouth wandered over her cheek, deep in her a pulse of joy seemed beating, beating, calling her somewhere.

easy to stow all the bundles away, for she had no intention of swelling the royal coffers by a voluntary contribution.

Fortunately her skirt was not of the narrowst kind, and having placed her packages at least beyond the ken of human vision, even the eagle eye of the customs officers cannot penetrate woolen goods, though the hapless smuggler may sometimes feel that it does—she started for home.

The trip across took only the usual five minutes, and just as the crew were preparing to make a landing on her native shore, a gentleman standing back of the young woman in question leaned forward and said in a very courteous manner: "Pardon me, madam, but there is something hanging below your skirt."

Horror paralyzed her. There was not time to seek the women's cabin, where the arrangement might be changed before the boat landed. And there was no doubt in her mind as to what was hanging, for among her many purchases was an envelope containing "baby ribbon." She dared not "feel" those yards and yards of narrow ribbon trailing after her?

A moment later she stood at telephone. When she received the desired connection she said, "What great happiness in her voice, 'What will you go to the corner in a while? I'm coming home!'"

The happiness must have been over the wire, for she thought several wonderful, though he said, "Hurry up, Hester!"

The gangplank was down now, mechanically she moved ashore, to the other passengers. What were they to do for her for trying to smuggle? How much would she owe? On all she had "on" her.

Why, she was past them and had not stopped her! Had she had she would have run with all her might up the hill. But here was one where a friend of hers was waiting in the wire, she greeted her frantically.

"For Heaven's sake, tell me what's hanging?"

"About two inches of a green petticoat," was the reply. "What happened? Did you step on it?"

Now What Happened?

Mrs. Stubbs—John is said to be to the baseball grounds these days. Mr. Stubbs—Cold? Why, Mrs. Stubbs is as hot as blazes. What is it that you have the impression that world gave you the impression was cold out there?

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