

ed their heads and faced her when she was within several hundred yards of them, staring at her in the preliminary inspection which had always preceded their wild gallop toward the foothills as she drew closer, and she gave them little attention as she strode boldly forward.

But upon this morning they remained unusually steadfast, and at a distance of less than a hundred yards she waved her fishing rod at them, with a warning shout that she was coming and they had best beware. Then she suddenly paused, with a cold sensation creeping down her spine, for from out of their midst, with a low rumble, stepped the lance horned beast of the corral, the "bad medicine" that Kirkland had told her about at the selfsame time that he had warned her against what she was now doing.

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IN SOME manner he had escaped from his prison, and now as lord of the herd came muttering forth toward this frail creature who had dared to invade his domain. In a flash she remembered Kirkland's remark, "He hates a petticoat worse than he does a lariat, the difference being that he is afraid of a lariat."

She cast her eyes wildly about. The nearest fence, the one she had recently passed through, lay a good half mile behind, and the nearest tree was as far ahead, upon the borders of the stream for which she was headed. No other shelter was within reach of her eyes, and she was totally unarmed. Though her heart sickened with fear, she preserved a dauntless front and shouted at him menacingly.

He answered the challenge with a bel-low, and falling upon his knees drove one sharp horn into the earth and tore it viciously, arising a moment later to throw the dirt over his shoulder with his hoof. The bravest, most agile man, finding himself in her place, might with good reason have been worried at the outlook, and Dorothy, realizing her helplessness, was upon the chill verge of despair.

Unable to think of anything better to do, she turned abruptly at right angles and pursued her way at a brisk walk, her head turned over her shoulder. Instantly he came toward her at a rapid trot, his head held high and his throat rumbling. Incontinently she fled.

The trot of the beast at once became a gallop, and the now thoroughly terror-stricken girl, throwing aside her rod, ran with all her swiftness, but the lean brute, now in full pursuit, covered nearly two yards to her one. Within a score of seconds he was so close behind her that, seeing further direct flight was futile, she darted behind one of the larger clumps of sage and balanced herself there, with feet wide apart and muscles taut, as she stood prepared for a sidewise dart, no matter from what angle he might approach her. Close upon the other side of the barrier he paused and eyed her through it, his deep throat muttering and his eyes glowing wickedly. Then with catlike quickness he made his dart around one side.

Like a rabbit dodging the leap of a wolf, the girl threw herself the other way and with a despairing cry went leaping for a similar shelter that lay close at hand. Barely in time she made it, and barely in time she circled it, then with a few yards gained went speeding once more to her former place of strategic advantage.

This time her escape was even narrower, for one sharp horn caught her skirt from behind and the sharp rending of cloth filled her ears as she was almost thrown from her feet by the vicious sidewise lunge that ripped her garment. Utterly without hope, gasping and dizzy, she gained her refuge for what she well knew must be the last time.

As in a trance she heard a fierce yell from close at hand, and throwing a glance aside saw a horseman sweeping down upon them. The horse was upon a dead run, its nose stretched far forward and its ears laid flat; its rider standing

in his stirrups and whirling a broad noose.

At the hoarse, masculine roar from the rear the charging brute whirled in his tracks, and seeing the dreaded rope circling in the air and with the fear of the red-hot branding iron upon him, bel-lowed in dread as he backed away before the onslaught of what he had learned to his grief was a superior enemy. Dropping upon the ground, the girl gazed in fascination.

As though but half awake she saw the rope curl snakelike through the air and settle about the massive head; saw the swift rush of the horse past the enemy and the hawklike dart around his flank that tightened the noose and threw the great horned one bellowing among the cactus. Dazed though she was, she still marveled at the cunning of the horse, who kept his quarry stretched and helpless as the rider, throwing himself from the saddle, hog-tied the fallen one with a few deft turns.

Then with his face gray as wet ashes Kirkland arose from his task and hurried to her side.

"Hurt?" he demanded almost fiercely as he dropped upon one knee before her. She shook her head, saying nothing.

He searched her quickly with his glance—her face, her hands, her form.

"Sure?"

Her strength returned with the quickness with which it had fled and she shook her head once more.

"No. I don't believe I have even a scratch. I was merely frightened."

The fear his face displayed vanished and a stern look took its place. He got upon his feet and stood erect before her.

"Did I not tell you never to venture on foot among the cattle? What did you mean by doing so?" he demanded almost harshly.

Instantly and despite herself she became angry.

"Merely because I wished to. I did not understand that I was under the orders of any particular person."

His face flushed and his eyes bore upon her steadily.

"Nor are you. I warned you only for your own good, yet I presume you considered it another impertinence upon my part to suggest that I did not care to have you killed."

The tone of his voice did little to mollify her, and knowing as she did that she was wrong in retorting, she nevertheless did so.

"Of course I appreciate your intentions, still I do not see what particular difference it should make if I chose to be foolish and get injured."

Had she been a man she would have expected a blow for an answer, so steely was the look that came into his eyes, but being a woman, knew that she could address him with impunity.

"You say that it should make no particular difference to such as I if you were hurt, and I do not care to argue the proposition with you. But there are other things to consider. Because of your disregard of good advice I might have been compelled to kill a valuable animal to protect you. And there is another point that perhaps never occurred to you. Did you ever stop to think that your appearance on foot among them might stampede them and cause trouble and loss?"

"No," she was forced to admit. "I don't believe that I did."

The cold light faded from his eyes and his voice grew less harsh.

"Of course, you are free to do as you wish—I can only hope that when I warn you that a beast is not to be trusted or a trail is dangerous that you will bear in mind that I am merely trying to protect us all. Have I offended you?"

Her eyes dropped before his and her tones resumed their accustomed calmness.

"Not in the least. I am deeply grateful to you and will try not to cause you anxiety or effort again."

He approached a step, his hand extended.

"Permit me to help you to your feet." Her head shook rapidly.

"And you are certain that you are not injured?"

"Absolutely certain. I need no assistance. What are you going to do with that beast there?"

"Send the boys after him. For the last time I ask permission to assist you and see you safely home."

"No. There is no danger now, and I prefer to remain here."

For an instant he gazed at her without speaking, then with a shrug of his shoulders and without another word mounted his horse and went loping away.

She watched him until he had disappeared, then springing to her feet went scurrying like a hare through the sage toward the back door of the ranch. Bursting through the door she confronted Mrs. Andrews, flushed of face but serene of manner.

"I went on foot among the cattle and that brute that belongs in the corral had got loose and attacked me," she announced. "Mr. Kirkland saved me and I had to snub him afterward to get rid of him. I wonder what sort of a creature he will think I am! But I just had to sit there and be impudent until he got disgusted and left me."

The elder woman, her hands in the dough, held them up in astonishment.

"But why on earth, child—" she stammered.

Dorothy interrupted her.

"Hush!" she said, placing her fingers over the other's lips. "I will try and make amends some other time. But now I must have needle and thread, needle and thread."

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CHAPTER XI.

Kirkland Makes a Decision.

SITTING in the doorway of his cabin up the valley, Kirkland puffed at his pipe in unpleasant memory. Intermittently and absent mindedly he patted Captain's head as he gazed gloomily at the opposite mountains. He had not been down to the Fisher ranch since his rebuff by Dorothy six days before, and since that time had seen or heard nothing of her. Hence the gloominess of all things.

She had offended him somewhat upon several previous occasions, but he had always dismissed the thought overnight and approached her with an unruffled mind upon their next meeting. But the last affront had been altogether too much.

He had done her an inestimable service, for the brute would unquestionably have killed or at least badly wounded her had he not been at hand, and in acknowledgment of his services she had not only insulted him but had almost rudely commanded him to go away and leave her alone. The most thankless and undemonstrative Indian of the plains would have displayed some gratitude under similar circumstances, yet Dorothy Raymond, white woman, educated, cultured and even professing Christianity, had sent him away much as she might have dismissed an impudent menial.

At first he had tried to explain her action upon the theory that the fright had made her hysterical, but he had soon abandoned that. To begin with, she was not one of the hysterical sort. Then, too, barring the shortness of her breath and a rather flushed face that had persisted all during their conversation, she had evinced no symptoms of not being perfectly normal. Therefore there was but one solution of her actions.

She had read his secret and feared



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that he would make love to her; he, a wandering, prospectless prospector, make love to her, a woman of wealth and social position. Kirkland bit his lip at the thought. For that he did love her with a great and ever growing passion he could no longer deny even to himself, though he daily upbraided himself for his folly, but that he had been weak enough to betray himself made him self-angry beyond speech.

Should fate throw them together again he would certainly do something to disabuse her mind of fear on that score.

One day more he waited irresolutely, then decided to take fate into his own hands. He would search her out, make his speech and depart, leaving her un-annoyed in the future. So up he got.

At times of late he had realized that he was squandering his weeks for the sake of a few brief hours now and then with this woman who, fresh and alluring as her own green-clad hills, had come into this gray region of sage and rock to haunt his dreams by night and cast mirages by day that made his heart leap wildly until sudden realization of his folly crumbled his visions in self-disgust.

Yet despite himself his thoughts, often taking the bridle in their teeth, ran riot as they willed, and many hours had been spent upon the doorstep from which he had just arisen in idle dreams of the hours they had passed together, while day by day the woman hunger that comes to every man who has lived long apart from them grew stronger within him. But now he was resolved to put an end to his foolishness.

Absolutely nothing could be gained by remaining longer, and he would go back into the mountains on his quest. With the thought that she feared an open declaration of his passion galling him, he set resolutely forth.

It was midafternoon and already the shade of one or two of the higher western peaks had begun to steal across the valley. He went to his corral and saddled his horse. He had decided to go down to the ranch on the pretext of asking for his mail. Of course there would not be any, but it would do no harm to inquire, and once there he would make it his business to remain until he found an opportunity to speak to her alone. Would him though she had, he could not bear to leave her thinking as she undoubtedly did.

(To be continued next week.)

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