

SPANISH PEGGY

A STORY OF YOUNG ILLINOIS

By MARY HARTWELL CATHERWOOD

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walls. It might be that the cousin of Shickshack's girl had not as much to say as he had given out that he had. But New Salem would hear him and judge. Minter Grayham's pupils—particularly the smaller ones—were lined up on front benches, which their own long use had worn to the smoothness of glass. The stranger had advertised through their schoolmaster that he would give the prize of a book to any boy or girl who could, at the close of the lecture, stand up and spell correctly the word Ompompanoosuck!

Unusual war had raged on the playground at both recesses and noon concerning the spelling of this word. Camps divided to play Indian or horse-thief met to wrangle over combinations of letters. Some sly ones who thought they were going to get the prize retired to puzzle alone. Minter Grayham, who thought a modest amount of spelling, the Testament, the English Reader and the Rule of Three in arithmetic to advanced scholars, was in honor obliged to look as ignorant as he felt in this great matter.

Some women saw with consternation that the boys from Clary's grove were gathered on the back seats, a couple of dozen young villains, whose leader, Redmond Clary, was the most desperate rider in the Sangamon country. The gravest charge brought against these uncurbed youths was their determination to govern the community. In them the life of the frontier found its wildest expression. When one of them had a colt to break he summoned the others, and they forced it into the Sangamon river. One sat on its back, another hung to its tail and the rest clung about and hampered it in every way. The untamed thing, obliged to swim for its life carrying weight, finally came out of the water a subdued beast. They were ready to deal in like manner with anything that antagonized them. Each man had brought an egg carefully bestowed on his person, and at a concerted signal he expected to throw it at the lecturer, for the mere sport of seeing an uninteresting foreigner smeared from head to foot. But he caught their fancy.

Don Pedro Lorimer, smiling on the plain men and women of New Salem, told them he was traveling through the states to urge everywhere the annexation of Cuba. He described the tropical luxuriance of Cuba, and its relative position to the continent; and some of his hearers learned for the first time that there was such a place. He told how planters were made to suffer in estate by unjust tyranny of a dominating European power. Some like himself had even been driven into exile, with only a remnant of their once large fortunes. So bad was the government that people had starved there in the midst of abundance. He begged to have Cuba admitted into the union. Such a novel plea had never been urged before upon men who were struggling to get a living out of the scarcely upturned sod of a new state.

Some older men smiled at each other, thinking the United States had all she could do at that time to take care of her own territory. But it was flattering to have a rich island, represented by an elegant man of the world dressed in the best clothes which money could buy, appealing to them for protection; and they helped their neighbors stamp vigorous applause every time he rounded one of his glowing periods with—"If Cuba may only be annexed to America!"

Still there was a hard-headed element that held out against the stranger. They would give him fair play, but they would test his arguments.

"Look at Abe Lincoln," one Carolina settler whispered to another during the stir which followed the conclusion. "I'd like to hear what he thinks. He can beat this fellow all hollow making a speech."

"Abe says the fellow looks just like gamblers he saw in New Orleans when he went down with the flatboat."

"I allow," said a third Carolinian, "and I have been watching him close, that this brown gentleman, with his shiny hair and eyes, is a runaway slave putting on a bold face and trying to get through to Canada. Some body-servant that knows how to wear his master's clothes."

"What spite would Shickshack have against a runaway slave?" objected the first man. "And his hair is as straight as that little girl's at the In'an's cabin. I'd sooner take him for a horsethief. We've had some fine looking horsethieves in this part of the state."

Mahala Cameron's father, who, on account of building the mill, had claimed and obtained the privilege of naming the town, and had called it New Salem for old Salem where he was born on the Massachusetts coast, put in his word.

"I had an uncle," he said, "that followed the sea, and made voyages to Cuba. It's about such a place as the man describes."

While private opinion thus seceded, the row of Minter Grayham's pupils on the front benches, roused from drowsiness to keen interest, stood up at the stranger's bidding, and accumulated the worst kind of a case against him. For however they attacked Ompompanoosuck—

pompous—it was not right; and the audience began to laugh with appreciation of a joke. Martha Bell Clary heard her own brother Redmond shouting with such delight as she struggled hopelessly with Ompompanoosuck, that she turned and made what was called in New Salem "a mouth" at him. Though the lecturer endeared himself greatly to the Grove boys, it was plain he had only put up Minter Grayham's scholars to be made ridiculous before their parents and friends.

"I'd hate to have him for a relation, even if I was as bad off as Peggy Shickshack," whispered Martha Bell to Mahala Cameron.

"So would I," responded Mahala. "I don't believe he has any book to give as a prize. And I don't believe he has any plantation in Cuba, either."

Shickshack's wife came in late, and sat by the schoolhouse door, looking steadily at the speaker. It was the first time the village had ever seen her at any meeting. The women nearest were more occupied in being repelled by her than they were with the annexation of Cuba. It surprised nobody



SHICKSHACK'S WIFE CAME IN LATE, AND SAT BY THE SCHOOLHOUSE DOOR, LOOKING STEADILY AT THE SPEAKER.

that she should come out to hear Shickshack's enemy. But it surprised some who departed slowly after the dismissal that she had a word or two, and touched hands with the stranger as he passed by her at the door. An unlovely nature had worked so long on features striking for angularity that she carried habitually a malignant look. The boys of New Salem liked to venture on Sally Shickshack's doorstep, or climb her garden fence, and have her chase them with gouts of hot water. Though she had been so short a time in the village, it was already known that Antywine La Chance, a former husband's son, had not inherited a fip'ny-bit of his father's property; and as a fip'ny-bit was smaller than the proverbial shilling with which heirs were sometimes cut off, it was plain that Antywine La Chance had been cheated by his stepmother.

Don Pedro Lorimer mounted his horse the following morning, and took the eastward-stretching road which separated north and south beside the Sangamon. He nodded to everybody he saw along the narrow street. His departure was as public as his errand had been, and a not unkindly feeling went with him and would welcome him again. For a man who traveled around at his own expense, without charging a price, to lecture on the annexation of Cuba, must be in earnest; and frontiersmen respected a person in earnest.

Lincoln usually closed his store soon after the village supper-time, in order to recite his daily lesson to Minter Grayham in the cooper-shop. Few customers were so belated as to need anything at the store when candles were lighted. Those who dropped in met to talk and whittle; and since the nightly study blaze had begun to show in the cooper-shop these gossips felt obliged to seek another rendezvous. The law student therefore found himself delayed by Shickshack, who entered with Antywine as he was about to blow out the lights.

"What shall I show you, Shickshack?" said Lincoln. The Indian looked around at a country stock; barrels of New Orleans salt and sugar, and sacks of coffee; a few scant shelves of calico; hoes, rakes and shovels; a grand leghorn bonnet or two, of mighty brim and crown; threads, needles and pins; and all the simple necessities of people on the edge of civilization. He shook his head.

"We want to talk. Shut the door." Lincoln closed the door and sat down on the counter, drawing up his knees and encircling them with his arms in a favorite attitude for relaxing chat; motioning his visitors to make use of the same high bench. Shickshack got up and curled his legs under him Indian fashion, but Antywine remained standing by the door. Two candles on a high shelf at the rear cast swaying shadows of the white man and the red man and the crowded objects in the little store.

"I rec'd an old New Salem is talking

to-night about the man you were going to kill when he came to town."

Shickshack glowered at his young counselor.

"Me wrong to give the war-cry. Me ought to keep still, and stab him in the dark! But when see that man me forget me Christian Indian!"

"The whoop might pass muster better than the stab among Christians," suggested Lincoln.

Shickshack fixed his restless eyes like the eyes of a snapping-turtle on the rugged and sincere face before him.

"Pedro Lorimer is a bad white man. He not one of Don Luis' sons."

"He says he wants Cuba annexed to the United States. Is he a Cuban planter?"

The Sac uttered a contemptuous grunt.

"No! No planter. No Cuba. He is New Orleans man; gambler."

"I reckoned so," said Lincoln.

"Me live in my tribe's country, where the chief Black Hawk has his village. Pedro Lorimer come there and trouble me. If my tribe take my part, all the people who want their land will say, 'These Sac are dangerous. Drive them out.' So Black Hawk say to me, 'You love white men; go to Belleville. Me go to Belleville. Think me marry a white woman; she help. An Indian cannot get a very good white woman. But me see the Widow La Chance, and Antywine, her husband's son. Me getting old; and Antywine is young. He can take care of the child when me die. So year ago me marry the Widow La Chance. The first thing she hurt the child. And Antywine—' Shickshack uttered the words deliberately, turning his head toward the figure at the door—he is nothing but a squaw!"

Antywine opened the door and went out, closing it behind him, and sitting down on the step.

"Pedro Lorimer follow to Belleville, and trouble me there. Me come to New Salem. The moon has not changed four times since me come to New Salem; and he is here to trouble me again!"

"What does he want?" inquired Lincoln.

"He want the child's money."

"Has Peggy money? How much has she?"

The Indian held his hands less than a yard apart; the length of a full-grown rattlesnake.

"A snakeskin full of gold."

"What have you done with it?"

"Me hide it from my white woman and Pedro Lorimer. Sometimes me think she divide it with him, if he could help her get it. All day, all year, she want that money herself. But she take what is Antywine's, and was his father's, and give him nothing."

"You have fed and clothed Peggy by your own labor."

"She is my adopted child. Me send her to white man's school, too. Me give the schoolmaster four dollars."

"You are a mighty good fellow!" said Lincoln. "But Pedro Lorimer is gone; so what troubles you now?"

"He come back. He would steal the child to make me give up her money as ransom. He would take her as far as New Orleans."

"Does he know what she has?"

"No. But he would rob her of the last piece and leave her to starve. He got much that belonged to her people."

"Have you put Peggy's money where he cannot find it?"

"It's in a safe place."

"Has he ever made any attempt to carry her off?"

"Me no let him make attempt. Me watch."

"As a relative, he might prove that he had a right to guardianship if he were a fit person."

"What a white man want he can take from an Indian!"

"No, Shickshack, you stand your ground and fight him. If he troubles you again in this community count on me for all the help I can give. Every decent man in New Salem would take your part."

Shickshack's face relaxed from sternness to satisfaction.

"Such men as you and the young chief Yates and the chief Lorimer make an Indian want to live with white men."

The tavern directly across the street had its windows open to let in the soft spring night air. At intervals a chorus of bullfrogs came faintly across the dark from where the Sangamon, swelling with freshets, rose frothing yeastily toward its brim. As Peggy hopped on her crutch around the tavern she could see a white fog floating over Rock creek in the valley, like fairy linen spread to bleach by starlight. One of Rutledge's deer-hounds loped up from the stable down the slope to bay at her, and recognizing the intruder, drew back at once with a greyhound's sensitive apology.

Near the east side of the house stood a log hand-mill, one end being firmly planted in the ground, the other hollowed by burning and scraping. The pestle, hanging from a long pole weighted like a well-sweep, was a knot of hard wood spiked with nails, and had a crossbar handle. In this primitive mortar parched corn could be readily pounded to meal. A deerskin was stretched and fastened snugly over the top to keep grains in when the mill was in use, and litter out when it stood idle. Peggy caught hold of the sweep and lifted herself to a seat on the hand-mill. She could see, through a deep embrasure of logs, the Rutledge family at home. The tavern windows were movable sashes, with the tough oiled paper like transparent skin laid firmly upon them. Part of a tree smoldered crimson without flame in the white clay chimney. Shickshack's wife never allowed more than one candle lighted in his house. Mrs. Rutledge drew tallow tapers out of candle molds and filled a six-branched candelabrum of old English silver. It stood on a table surrounded by the children at their tasks, and the father, reading a paper, brought in the

weekly mail. The younger girls were sewing; Anna sat at the flax wheel.

"The Rutledge girls can't say I'm tagging anybody now, because I'm not tagging," breathed Peggy. "But goody! I can watch them through the window!"

The most desirable thing in the world was to be lovely. She looked at Ann Rutledge, to whom hearts were given on sight. An ungraceful movement seemed impossible to Ann. There was no angle in the lines of her tall, supple body. Her deep blue eyes sometimes turned golden in moments of happiness. Unconscious that any outsider watched her, she lifted them and smiled at darkness through the open window. The passes of her hands as she spun and the sweetness of life expressed in her face brought a sob up Peggy's throat.

"I'll never be like her," whispered Peggy. "I'm a peg-legged Spaniard, little for my age, and ugly. I can't spin. I can't sew. Sally says squaw clothes are good enough for me, and Shickshack has to cut them out, and we piece them together as well as we can. He's done it ever since we left his people and have had no Indian women to help us. I can't read like Ann Rutledge does. If I could even knit I could make stockings for Antywine and Shickshack. They are the only men in New Salem that have to keep on wearing neaps wrapped around their ankles for stockings."

She set her teeth together so the grating was audible. Something stirred behind her, like one of the hounds creeping near, but she paid no attention to it. A blanket dropped over her head.

Peggy fought it with both hands, hearing the crutch that had laid across her knees roll to the ground. This was the last sound she heard. Screaming in the muffling folds, she felt herself dragged off the hand-mill and carried away.

CHAPTER III.

Ann Rutledge heard through the open window Peggy's muffled cry and struggle, and ran to the door. By starlight it was barely possible to see a shadow fleeing from the hand-mill; but Antywine La Chance, in pursuit of it, passed across the bar of light, a lithe, long-bodied and long-limbed shape, his uncovered blond hair flying back from a face cut like the high-bred features of a French noble. He bounded by the hand-mill and crossed a fence at the foot of the garden.

When Antywine thought he was about to overtake the object down the ravine, a scamper of horse's hoofs sounded through the valley. Peggy's captor had left a horse ready for flight. Instead of making south-eastward for the Rock creek bridge and the road to Springfield, he rounded the bluff and the village, and was evidently striking toward Beardstown. The western continuation of New Salem street, stretching across the prairies, until it met and curved with bluffs along the Sangamon, was the route to Beardstown, which stood at the junction of the Sangamon with the Illinois.

Light-footed as a deer, scarcely pausing to think, Antywine with inherited instinct turned east toward the river, though it was the direction opposite that in which Peggy was carried. A boat could be found at the mill. The river was high and running swiftly. By taking advantage of the unusual current he might reach the bluff road as soon as a horse floundering across the mud of the prairies would be able to reach it. What he would then do afoot he did not attempt to foresee. There was a small settlement at the mouth of Rock creek called Wolf. Oxen were more plentiful than horses in Wolf, as New Salem; yet Antywine had one passing flash of determination to go there and demand a horse. But breathless with haste, he plunged through naked woods and down the terraced bank of the Sangamon, sliding on dead leaves in his descent, straight to the mill.

The boat was tied above the dam. He pushed out before he thought of the dam, half covered by swelling water and roaring across the width of the Sangamon. Antywine was never more alive than when his feet were planted in a boat. He came of a line of voyagers who had threaded Canadian rapids time out of mind. Although his later years had been spent in Belleville, off great stream courses, his in-born dexterity was too much a part of him to be forgotten. There was no time for thought. He swooped down the curve poised in the stern of his boat, laughing aloud at the shock, which nearly swamped him. The boat ran without direction, making for partly submerged trees while he bailed with his hands. "Antywine stuck out an oar for a rudder, and turned his craft into the racing current. So, baling with one hand and steering with the other, he got under way, and was soon able to sit on the bench, fit the oars into rowlocks, and pull with the racing force which spun him along. Branches and logs menaced his dim course.

The shores were black. Froth spots like white money appeared and disappeared around him with phosphoric swiftness. And underneath rose and fell the bullfrogs' diapason.

Not many miles down was the fork of the Sangamon, where the stream turned toward the Illinois. Beardstown, by prairie and river-bluff route, was nearly 40 miles from New Salem. Frost was out of the ground, and a bottomless trail would delay the most hurried rider. The scalloped bank, ascending and descending in serrated cliff and hollow, seeming to swim past Antywine, finally curved away from a wider current; and he made for shore through drift. He drew the boat out, and left it beached above the rising water.

There was no sound abroad in all that void darkness except the Sangamon's low note and the intermittent cry of frogs. He thought of sloughs on the Beardstown road and of hungry wolves infesting the night. Starlight had become lost in thickening mist, and as Antywine pushed on he felt the sting of rain in the face. He tried to distinguish a track which ought to darken the pallid turf near this place, and set out in the direction of Beardstown.

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He heard at his left the suction of horse feet in mud. It came nearer, and he braced himself to spring at the bridle, if he had been so fortunate as thus to intercept Peggy's captor. But two horses, instead of one, plunged up from a slough, and swept past him in a tearing race toward Beardstown. "Shickshack and Steur Abe," thought Antywine. He shouted after them, but they did not hear him. There was so little travel at that season he felt sure these riders were in pursuit of Peggy, and comforted, he followed lightly on, keeping to the spongy dead grass by the roadside.

The humid forest stretching from the bank of the Sangamon still darkened his way with skeleton trees. He passed an empty cabin which he had

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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