

The Overton Claim.

BY MARY H. WILLIAMS.

A thunderous knocking fell on the floor. Mr. Hildreth's voice called: "Major Overton! Major Overton! Can you open the door?"

CHAPTER XXII.

"This caps the climax of villainy, but I see Hawkins in it all," Mr. Hildreth said when a few minutes' rapid speech had made him master of the facts.

"How did you happen to come thus in the nick of time?" Major Overton asked. Dare had risen, but stood with eyes still fast on the dead man's face.

"Ask those two," Hildreth said, with a shrug, pointing to Vance and Allen Fauntleroy. "All I know is that they came upon me like a whirlwind about dark, had me sworn a special deputy, had a posse all ready for me and then rode either side of me, telling me: 'Go fast! Go fast!' We went first to Ridgeley. It seems they had got an inkling of what your danger was. There we found ourselves three hours too late, but with a plain trail to follow, which, thank God, we did not lose. But I tell you it was rough experience, pushing through these hills, this tangle, and never knowing but the next hollow might lead you into ambush. Our beasts are so blown that, little as I like the place, I think we must stay here till morning. Luckily that is not far off. It must be 3 o'clock now."

"Later," said Vance. "But, Fauntleroy, why don't you speak? Major, it is all his doing. He has been watching your enemies, and as soon as they were ready for this grand coup he was ready with checkmate for it."

"I thank him deeply," the old man said, with his stateliest courtesy. Dare went impulsively forward, saying, with quivering lips:

"Oh, Mr. Fauntleroy! I hope you will never know how it feels to be snatched from the very jaws of death."

"I did nothing," Allen said. Then in a low whisper: "Dare, I envy that dead man. Whatever his sins, he truly died for you."

"Hear the wind, the thunder! This is a storm to remember," Vance said, with a shiver. "Suppose we were out in it on those black hills again!"

Nobody answered him. The room, lit here and there by a smoky glimmer of lanterns, was weirdly spectral. In their light the dead man's face seemed to mop and mow as though the soul had come back and sat there mocking its fellows.



Allen drew Dare to him, Vance laid a handkerchief over it and motioned to two of the posse standing huddled about the door to lift the corpse to the long table at one side.

One came forward readily enough. The other hung back, whispering: "Wait, wait! Don't ye know lightning'll strike ye if ye try to move a dead man while it's thunderin' this way?"

Truly the rush and roar of wind, rain, thunder, were appalling. The windows of heaven seemed to be open, the eternal hills to be cracking about their ears. Still Vance bent above the dead man, looking almost in pity at the face, so white, so stilled, so goodly. Two or three others came forward and made to lift the poor clay from the floor, where it lay so inert.

Slowly, slowly they raised it, laid it fair and straight. Before a hand fell to the side there came straight overhead an appalling flash, a deafening noise. The old house shook and quivered, groaning through all its timbers as its big stone chimney toppled half to earth.

"I knowed it. I told ye, but ye didn't believe it," said the man who had shrunk from laying hands on the dead man. The rest stood silent, in awed expectation of they knew not what. It might be even a deadlier flash. But the storm king had done his worst. Very shortly the wind sobbed itself out; the rain ceased; the thunder drew away to the river valley. As the east reddened for dawn, stars were peeping in the sky through veils of lacy mist.

"Thank God and my friends for daylight! I never thought to see it again," Major Overton said fervently, his hand on Dare's shoulder. Suddenly Vance gave a sharp, low cry. He stood at the room's end, critically contemplating the lightning's work. As the rest turned to look he darted across the wide hearth, caught something that lay amid the

masses of loosened rock, waved it in front of them, crying out:

"The record, the record! Major, no matter who saved your life, I have as good as found your fortune."

There indeed was the missing volume, released by the lightning stroke from its 50 years' entombment.

"Open it quick, quick," Major Overton almost shouted. Vance hurriedly turned leaf after leaf, then silently held the book before the old man's eyes.

Then a fine hubbub broke out, for there, plain to view, undisputed, indisputable, the Overton claim was fully confirmed upon those yellow pages.

"How on earth did it ever get here?" asked Hildreth.

Major Overton thought a minute, then said slowly:

"I remember now. They were building this chimney when the first hint came that our title was in dispute. Bruce Stirling no doubt stole the book and gave it to old Ike to hide for him. Ike as a conjure man easily terrified the black chimney builders into putting it here. No doubt it was in a sort of niche, where, if need were, it could have been reclaimed. Dare was right. That accounts for the path. Jincey knew and all those years has come here to gloat over her secret."

"She repented at last. See what she gave me," Dare said, laying in the lawyer's hands the papers from the bottom of the chest. After one glance he said:

"The day of miracles is not past, major. With the deeds, the record, our case is won. You, Miss Dare, are the greatest heiress in the state."

Allen Fauntleroy came forward, holding out a hand to the major and to his granddaughter. Both were eagerly clasped, though Dare drew her hand quickly away, noting that it bore yet the stain of Royal Cleve's blood.

"Heaven only knows how glad I am that this wrong is righted at last; that after so many, many years you are to come into your own," Allen said, looking full into the old man's humid eyes. Major Overton half turned away his head, saying:

"Sir, in the presence of death we forget much, very much. I am an old, old man; you just upon the threshold. Into your hands I commit both the fortune that is mine and the woman to whom it must rightfully descend. I do not say, 'Take care of them.' Your conduct for the last month proves to me that you could do nothing else."

Allen drew Dare to him and led her out into the fresh, dripping morning. As they crossed the threshold where their fate had so strangely culminated he said, looking over his shoulder at the rigid figure they left behind:

"Dare, darling, I do not envy him any more. Poor fellow! He loved and lost you! And though he died for your life, it is my privilege to live for your happiness."

Dare said, "I love you, Allen," but she, too, looked back at the dead, and her sigh was half a sob.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"We must bring him here and at once. It is the only thing to do," Vance said to Major Overton as the struggling daylight fell full on the tall, dead man, so straight and stock and still. The old man nodded, saying:

"Yes. It will take half a day to get out of this wilderness. Besides we could never carry him, and to come back"—he stopped with a half shudder—"is impossible and impolitic," Vance finished. Even as they spoke came a noise of pick and shovel outside. Dozens of rusty tools lay under the rotting sheds about, and willing hands were plying them to put out of sight the poor, reckless creature, who had paid the fullest penalty of his sins. By time the sun was above the tree tops a long grave had been scooped in the little glade back of the old house. Dare at the springside, her face, her hands, refreshed and spotless, turned to Allen, saying softly:

"Ask them, please, grandfather and Mr. Hildreth, if we may line the grave with boughs and put others above him."

"Surely we may," Allen said, pressing her soft palm to his cheek. "My Dare, it is like you thus to do good to them that despitefully use you. We will make together for our enemy a green bed and give him a pillow of flowers."

Hand in hand they went about the wood plucking sheaves of goldenrod, stalks of cardinal flower, of iron weed and early asters. Allen had spoken a little apart with the gravediggers. Already they had torn flat, leafy boughs from the thicket and covered with their green all the dank cold clay. Across the western end of the narrow yawning pit Allen laid the flower sheaves fresh from Dare's hand. And down in that cool and flowery darkness they laid Royal Cleve, his two hands folded peacefully under more green leaves, to await the summons at which all life must answer for the deeds done in the body.

Then, as though a weight had been lifted from all souls, the cavalcade made its way out of the wilderness. Major Overton's horse had been left behind, so precipitate was the flight of his captors. Dare rode upon an improvised pillion behind her lover when the steep hill road did not make it necessary for both to dismount. They said little, those two. The silence of overful hearts lay between them. But Major Overton talked and smiled with his friendly lawyers in a fashion none had ever seen before.

"Oh, for an hour of Hawkins now!" Hildreth said to Vance as they found themselves nearly at the outer edge of the iron land.

"You will hardly ever enjoy it, I fear," Vance returned. "Plague on that storm! But for it I meant to try to get at him before he learned the miscarriage of his scheme. As it is, he has no doubt heard it in time to quit the country."

"Do you think so?" Hildreth asked, with an odd smile. "Man alive, there is no think about it. Hawkins is as far from being a fool as from being an honest man. After this—why, it's a hanging matter with the proofs we have."

"No doubt, if we don't use them," Hildreth said. "You forget he had a

partner in all this—one, too, who will make it possible for him to go scot free."

"Do you mean—it cannot be Mrs. Townley?" Vance said.

Major Overton leaned from his saddle to say very low:

"Gentlemen, good friends, please forget that—that you have spoken. What- ever we may know, Dare has no suspicion of the treachery of her own blood. Pray do not make it necessary that she should be saddened with such knowledge."

"Agreed, on one condition, major—that you let us settle with Hawkins. He is not the man a gentleman can touch. I know you want to shoot him, but that would result in some awkward explanations," Vance said, laying a hand on Major Overton's arm. Still Hildreth smiled queerly, looking a little over his shoulder to where Allen and Dare walked in blissful company. At last he said:

"Major, here we are at the back side of Exeter. I move that we go in and breakfast with Mrs. Townley, or without her."

Major Overton sat up very straight, saying: "Excuse me, sir. I cannot break bread there. The sight of that woman—"

"Major, I ask it as a personal favor," Hildreth interrupted. Vance looked at him hard.

"In that case I have no choice after last night," Major Overton said, with a shade of the old techy staleness. Hildreth said only, "Thank you."

Five minutes later Black Patsey was crying out: "De lawdy, Miss Dare, yo' des done foun yo'slf des too late, Miss Mel, she des 'ome got ma'rid ter dat er crank mouf 'er Hawkins an drib 'way lickety split wid libery stable horses—say de got ter ketch de train. But she know somehow yo' was comin, comin hyer, tole me git breakfast ready, an hab it good, an gib her love, an say she wish yo' well, an she gwine write of she can't wait ter see yo'. De preacher, he's in de parlor room yet, an how come it yo' got sech er many gentlemen ter fine an fetch yo' outen dat dar coalin' place?"

"I'll tell you, Patsey. There's another wedding on hand," Vance said, his eyes twinkling; then as he got down from his horse: "Let me help you a bit, major. I think you will be the better for breakfast and six hours of rest." Major Overton waved him back a trifle impatiently and made to dismount in the old alert fashion. But even as he swung himself from stirrup a pallor overspread his face.

He tottered and hung limp across the saddle.

Kind hands lifted him reverently thence, bore him inside and laid him in the wide dim hall. Dare knelt at his side, chafing the nervous, veiny hands that were learning thus late in life what it was to tremble.

"Drink this. You are overspent," Hildreth said, holding to the old man's lips a draft of milk and brandy. Major Overton drained it; then, as his face grew less gray, beckoned to Vance and half whispered:

"I know what it means, the beginning of the end. I must live a few hours longer or though. Dare—Allen—she must not—"

"What is it that you wish, major? We will do it or hang, but never think of dying. You are good for years yet," Vance said, trying to speak in his old cheery voice. Major Overton's lips moved, but hardly a sound came from them. Allen, hurrying to his side, caught the old man's eyes of appeal. Kneeling, he took Dare's hands within his own, then laid the two clasped across the other nerveless palm. Instantly Major Overton's eyes brightened. He whispered painfully, "Yes, take her—now."

Dare laid her cheek softly to the withered one on the pillow and said, sobbing: "Oh, grandfather, surely you do not want to be rid of me. Let everything go until you are well again."

"I am—well—now. Life has—been—a fever," the old man said in a strange, husky whisper. Hildreth touched Allen's arm.

"I have sent a swift messenger for a license," he said half under his breath. "In two hours it will be here. You must marry Dare at once. It is what the major wishes and the only thing to do. Poor old fellow! He has lived on his hope and courage this 40 years or more. Now that the strain is ended, no wonder he has broken down."

"I am more than ready to do as he wishes," Allen said in the same hushed voice. "But Dare—can she bear further excitement after all she has undergone?"

"Ask her," Hildreth said, stepping to the bedside. There he took Major Overton's hand in his and said aloud: "Now, major, all is as you would have it. The minister is here; the license soon will be. You must drink some more brandy and go to sleep until we wake you for the wedding."

"Yes," said Vance as the old man almost smiled, "but first let me tell you that Miss Dare is even more an heiress than we thought. Our friend, the parson, has just put into my hands a deed of gift to Exeter and all it contains, executed by Mrs. Hawkins within five minutes of her marriage. It may not be quite valid, but I think it will stand."

"No, I fear we have lost Hawkins for good and always," Hildreth said as Major Overton's eyelids fell in sleep.

Two hours later, robed all in white, with a white rose in her hair and another at her breast, Dare gave her hand to Allen Fauntleroy, standing just where her mother had made her bridal vows. They had hung wide door and windows. Outside the summer sun fell golden; the summer winds laughed softly through the leaves. Within the heavy tarnished splendors kept still their note of gloom, though Patsey had done her faithful best to brighten them with feathery asparagus, sprays of scarlet trumpet vine and white August lilies.

Stretched helpless upon a rich faded couch, Major Overton looked through tears at the last of his line, given thus at his own wish into the keeping of her hereditary enemy. But they were not bitter tears. Though Dare's eyes were modestly downcast, happy blushes chased

one the other eloquently over her face. Allen's countenance said even more plainly that he had come through storm and stress to his heart's dear desire.

"I pronounce you man and wife. What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder," the minister said sonorously. And with one thought the wedded pair turned from him to kneel in front of Major Overton and bow their heads for his blessing.

He had seemed past speech and motion, but with a last flash of the will that had never quailed he half raised himself, laid his hand on Dare's head and said, with clear distinctness, "God bless my children and keep their hearts full of love."

"Amen!" said the minister, and every listener only echoed it. Then a solemn hush fell on them all, for the old face,

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the old eyes, were radiant; a smile lay about the parted lips, through which came the stifled shortening breath. Outside a thrush began singing loud and clear. The wind dropped. A vagrant sun ray slipped into the room. It fell on Dare's head as she stood too rapt for tears, her eyes full upon the dying face. Before it mounted to the wall the gasping breath was done. Francis Overton slept with his fathers. He had won a lifelong fight, and the hour that brought victory found also death.

THE END.

KING OF BELLS.

Monstrous Mass of Metal Which Welcomed the Czar to Moscow.

The great bell whose booming thunder announced the opening of the coronation festivities in Moscow is the striking thing within the Kremlin. It is in the Cathedral of the Assumption, where the coronation took place. It rests at the base of the great Ivan tower, 325 feet in height, and is called the "King of Bells." It resembles a huge tent of bronze when it is approached. Its weight is 444,000 pounds. Within this bell, whose walls are two feet thick, forty people can assemble



THE "KING OF BELLS."

at one time. In fact, its cavity has been used as a chapel. It was cast as long ago as 1730, and the great gap in its side was made soon after the mass of metal cooled. This fracture was due to a flaw made, it is believed, by the jewelry, coin and precious metal thrown into the liquid by the ladies of the city. The piece which fell out weighed eleven tons, and this accident practically ruined the work. Through the aperture thus left a tall man may pass without stooping. In the tower near it hang not less than thirty-six bells, two of which are silver. The largest in the tower weighs 130,000 pounds.

The Barber Who Doesn't Use Gas.

A Germantown barber had just finished lathering his best customer's face the other day when the door gently opened and a mild looking man with pink whiskers entered the shop. "My friend," he inquired, "do you use gas?" Naturally inferring that the question implied a doubt as to his ability to remove the hirsute adornment of the face without recourse to anesthetics, the barber arose in his wrath and smote the stranger sore. When finally separated, the man with the pink whiskers emerged from the fray with a battered face, and the floor was strewn with gas burners. "You didn't give me a chance to finish," he sadly remarked as he wiped his face with a bandanna handkerchief. "I am introducing a new gas burner on the market, with a patent tip, and I thought perhaps you would like to try some." In his contriteness of spirit, the barber bought two dozen.—Philadelphia Record.

It Fooled the Dog.

In a New York restaurant, where an orchestra plays during the evening dinner hour, one of the numbers recently was accompanied by a novel imitation of a feline Romeo serenading his Juliet. This so excited the feelings of the proprietor's fox terrier, which was tied in the cellar, that it set up a terrific barking and could not be quieted for an hour. The musician who imitated the cat was vastly pleased, and all the customers seemed greatly amused.

It Couldn't Be.

Willie—I don't believe it is wicked to chew tobacco. Nellie—Why, Willie? Willie—Well, it ain't. I tried it and it made me sick. Wicked things is all good.—Cincinnati Enquirer.

WHY?

I married my wife, why? Listen and I'll tell you: Not because she makes good pie, Tho' she can, I tell you; Not because she's wondrous wise, Versed in Greek and Latin; Not because she likes to dress in fine silk or satin; Not because she rides a wheel, I still wear the bloomers; Not because in kindness All my crochets humors; Not because on politics She keeps always posted; Not because she knows how I Like my meat when roasted; Not because of beauty rare, That is quickly over; Not because while she works hard I could live in clover; Not because she does possess Fortune that's immense; Simply just because she's got Good sound common sense.—Charles W. Hird, in Boston Post.



Yes, that's the title of my story. "Oh, we won't like that story at all," I think I hear you exclaim, but please begin it, and I think you will enjoy it. It's true, every word, and happened nineteen years ago in a country district about thirty-five miles north of the city of San Diego.

THE STORY.

"Why, Miss Kate, I don't see the school-house." "I think perhaps we're not near enough yet," answered Miss Kate, rather doubtfully.

"Oh, yes, we are. Don't you remember we could always see it when we reached this tree?" said the little boy again.

"Well, Willie, I do believe you are right and that our own little school-house has been either swallowed up or blown away!" exclaimed the young teacher, as she stopped suddenly in the path, gazing with astonishment at the place where the building should have been.

"We went it all wight yest'day afternoon, didn't we, Mith Kate?" "Yes, Daisy dear, but it's gone now; let's go up to where it stood and see if we can discover what has become of it."

So up the steep hill they climbed; when they arrived at the spot, which was really a very barren, unsheltered place, they found that some mischief-worker had been very busy during their absence.

One of the walls of the building lay at quite a distance, while the other three were piled on top of each other near at hand.

The hills and knolls around were strewn with a medley of papers, clock, stoves, pencils, chalk, desks and books.

Who or what had done the mischief? How could it have happened?

After talking it over quite a while they decided it must have been a sudden squall of wind, purely local, which had played havoc with their little temple of learning while they had been soundly sleeping the night before.

Dispatching one of the boys for the trustee who lived in the neighborhood, Miss Kate and the rest of the children went to work to gather up those of the furnishings which had not been ruined.

The schoolmaster felt pretty blue; the hot tears filled her eyes as she bent over her task. What was she to do? Here she was far away from home. Ah, she thought of her mother, brothers and sisters in that home, whom she was trying so hard to help, and now she had no schoolhouse in which to teach! Was it not disheartening?

It was a very lonely place; thinly settled. The trustees had been paying her a high salary, and had even given her an extra amount for teaching on Saturdays, because she was the very first instructor who had been willing to remain during a whole term.

Thus her thoughts ran, her face growing more serious all the time.

"It was a good thing it happened at night, Miss Kate," said one of the boys, trying to cheer her.

"Yes, Benny." "Jush shink, Mith Kate, if it had happ'd the day you forgotten to bring the key, and we all had to wub in and out of the wido! We'd been all hurted badwy wen, wouldn't we?" chimed in dear little Daisy Brownie.

"Oh, here comes Mr. Case!" they shouted, running to meet the easy-going, good-natured man.

"Wall, I declar, Miss Kate," said he, puffing and blowing after his climb, "this is too bad, reely! What are you a-going to do?"

"Mr. Case, I think I'll pack my trunk and start for home to-morrow; I believe a steamer sails from San Diego for the north to-morrow, does it not?" said she, with trembling lip and flashing eye.

"Thar, thar, not so fast. Of course I can't say just what the other trustees of the district will want to do, but I swan, we'd all better to have you go."

thing as the schoolus's blowin' down! Will we, young uns?"

"You bet your boots we won't," shouted the boys.

Thanking him for his encouraging words Miss Kate and her faithful little flock started for home—a long walk of a mile and a half before her.

It was in the lovely springtime of the year and the air was so full of the songs of birds and the sweet fragrance of flowers that they soon recovered their good spirits and had not gone very far when they had to stop and have a good hearty laugh over the funny misfortune.

One by one the boys and girls made their teacher good-by as they reached their homes, rushing with eagerness to tell the exciting news to their parents, who were filled with wonder when they saw their children returning from school so early in the day.

During the evening Miss Kate received the promised call from Mr. Case, who brought the welcome news that the schoolhouse was to be immediately rebuilt, that the trustees had determined to build it much nearer her boarding-place, in a pretty, little sheltered dell.

Until it was ready, which he thought would be in about a week, she was to hold her classes in his front room.

Again thanking him for his kindness and bidding him "good-night," she went to bed with a very happy heart.

The next day the children met with their teacher in Mr. Case's front room, and every day after that until the school building was ready.

Mr. Case's house, by the way, consisted of two tiny rooms, the one in which the lessons were recited being the family sitting and bedroom.

And worst of all, there was a teething baby in the house, whose peevish cries often drowned the voices of teacher and pupils.

My! how glad a day it was when the little unpainted schoolhouse was ready for its occupants once more, even though it had no floor save the one furnished by Mother Earth—even though its stove and clock were warped and rusty and its books and maps tattered and torn. Then the kind trustees had placed it in such a pretty spot.

All during the days of the spring term the one little window and the door were thrown wide open to admit the sweet scents and the sounds of the season.

Mocking-birds sang in the canyon close by.

The little squirrels were wont to come and sit on the wood pile by the open door.

Humming-birds, oh, so brilliant, dandied and thither, and the down were so abundant and so gorgeous that the dell seemed to have been deluged with vari-colored paint from the great pots of the giants on the mountain tops above.

So you see, my dears, it was not such an ill wind, after all, that one night blew down the little country school-house.

Uncle Sam's Menagerie.

The sovereign power of the government has won a victory in a legal controversy which is officially labeled "the United States vs. seventeen boxes of snakes and twenty-three monkeys." It was a peculiar case, and appears to have been the outcome of the jealousy of a clique of importers of snakes and monkeys in New York toward a rival. The members of the clique made up their minds that they would not tolerate a new dealer, who might become a formidable competitor in the market. When they were called on as experts to fix valuations they named their estimates so high that the consignee of the snakes and monkeys could not afford to pay the duty assessed. The goods were detained by the custom-house authorities and placed in bond. Government officials did not know how to take care of the goods. Snakes should have a bath every day and these did not get proper treatment. The monkeys, too, were not well cared for. The result is that about all the reptiles are now dead, and the decision of the court is that the government need not make good the large loss of the consignee. This may be good law, but wherein the justice of it consists it is impossible to see.—Buffalo Express.

The Eskimo Character.

We found the Innuits very quick-witted and intelligent; with unwavering good nature and a keen appreciation of fun, they proved themselves completely reliable in spite of their uncleanliness. Their skill manifested itself in many ways during these long excursions. Later in the year it showed itself on one occasion, in a particularly interesting way. Having found it necessary to cross a glacier on a hunting trip, Innuits passed at the edge and had to load to ascertain the direction of the echo. On the return a storm of snow and fog had obliterated all landmarks, but the Innuits easily found the way by means of the echo.

There was always a charm in their strange melodies, and particularly at night, as they slowly rowed along the black waters among ghostly, beautiful icebergs, under the starless sky. The songs were like the sighing of the winds, low, contented, full-breathed, yet with an undercurrent of sadness. But at times their songs were vibrant with joy and action.—Cincinnati Enquirer.

Not a Financier.

"Look here," said the city editor to the new reporter, "you allude in your story to Mr. Roxwell as a financier."

"Why, he handles a great deal of money."

"I don't care if he does. I don't want you to call him a financier. He handles any side whiskers."—Washington Post.

There is a certain kind of man who will do any amount of effort will ever make a man out of.