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A DARING ACHIEVEMENT,

From People's Home Journal.

CHAPTER I.

BY EMERSON BENNETT.

Lolu Brandon was eighteen and a beauty; black hair, long, fine, and in great profusion; black eyes, melting, tender, and softly shaded by drooping lashes; an oval face of olive hue, with tinted cheeks and rose-bud mouth; a temper amiable, a disposition loving, an intellect bright and sparkling. She was the daughter of an American cattle trader, fairly well to do, who had married a Mexican lady and settled on the Texan side of the Rio Grande.

Lolu Brandon had many suitors, some quite wealthy, but her heart's choice was a young American who had his fortune to make.

Charles Grayson had come to Eagle Pass with that spirit of adventure which often takes enterprising persons hundreds of miles from their native localities in search of that something they seldom find to content their restless natures.

Charles Grayson, though he had not so far found riches fancied he had discovered the only human being in the wide world, in the triumphant person of Lolù Brandon, to satisfy the cravings of his manly heart; and to make her his wife, and secure her against rivals, now became his prominent desire.

That he loved her, he found an opportunity to tell her; and that she preferred him to all other suitors, he had reason to believe; but she was a good, dutiful daughter, and would take no important step without her father's sanction.

Now, when young Grayson applied to Mr. Brandon for his daughter's hand he was informed that there were three other suitors ahead of him, and that before he [the father] should make a final decision, he would consult his daughter and her mother, and take many important matters into consideration.

As Charles Grayson knew that at least one of these suitors, Hiram Stockwell, was a wealthy ranchman, he felt almost certain the decision would be against himself, and he became much depressed in consequence.

As there was no time fixed for the verdict to be given, but a positive request that he would refrain from seeing Lolù again till all should be settled, our anxious lover found himself the victim of a miserable suspense.

Then, all of a sudden, he was horrified with the terrible news that Lolù Brandon, while out riding a little way from home, had been captured and carried off by Mexican bandits.

He ran to her father's house for further information.

Several of his rivals, Hiram Stockwell among the number, were already there, and the father, mother, and servants were nearly distracted.

Lolu had been captured for some hours; but the news had just reached Eagle Pass by a frightened messenger, who had himself been captured and then sent back to make the fact known, the bandits declaring she would be held a certain time for ransom, due notice of which would be given.

While all was excitement and confusion at the Brandon dwelling, a little dog, which had accompan-

ied Lolù on her horseback ride, came running home in fright, as if he knew of the misfortune of his mistress, with a note fastened to his collar.

This note, when seized and read, made known the fact that Lolù Brandon would be held ten days for ransom, in the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars in gold, to be deposited on Eagle Peak by not more than two men and one donkey, within the time specified, on penalty of death to her if delayed.

"Heaven have mercy!" cried the distressed father; "I've not got the means to save my poor darling!"

"If I pay her ransom may I have her for my wife?" selfishly questioned Hiram Stockwell.

"If she isn't rescued I shall go mad!" cried the father, wringing his hands; "and as I've not got the power to save her myself, I'm constrained to say I'll give her for wife to whoever restores her to home and friends."

Overhearing this, Charles Grayson felt his heart sink with despair.

He had not the money to pay for her freedom, while to head a force in pursuit of the outlaws, even if he could do that, would only result in her destruction, however they might subsequently be discomfited and punished for their crimes.

So the young lover withdrew with a sad heart and downcast look, and his wealthy rival watched his departure with a feeling of triumph.

"The poor fool," he thought, "to pit himself against me—poverty against gold—a mere shifting flirt of sand against a wall of adamant! I'm rich, and I'll pay for her, and then I'll have her and own her."

Charles Grayson in his despairing mood strolled out of the village into the country, and soon found himself buried into a deep, dark wood, the same in which his beloved Lolù had been riding, when captured by bandits.

While strolling about, plunged into almost crushing dejection, the idea came to him to hurry away to him to hurry away to Eagle Peak, conceal himself in that vicinity, and see what might come of it.

In this mood, to decide was to act, and with a quick examination of his trusty revolver and bowie-knife he set off at once.

Eagle Peak was seven miles distance on the other side of the Rio Grande; but as the nearest way to it from Eagle Pass would probably be watched by the captors of Lolù, her lover started in a different direction, and went a long way round, so as to approach it on the side farthest from the town.

In this manner he reached the foot of the acclivity about dusk, and had begun to ascend it, for no purpose that he could have declared, other than that it seemed as if he might thus somehow be nearer the girl he loved, when he heard human voices, and at once arrested his steps and listened.

The speakers were men conversing in Spanish, which Grayson could understand, and were only

a few paces from him, ascending the hill by a path known to them.

"It's all folly to think that the ransom will be there to-night, if it ever is," said one. "Twenty-five thousand dollars in gold is not got together in a hurry, and it would not surprise me if it never came at all, let alone getting there to-night."

"I think the captain made the price too high," responded another voice.

"That's my opinion," joined in a third speaker. "If the father and his friends are not able to raise the full amount, of course they'll not come at all, and then we'll not get anything."

"Ten thousand would have paid well, and that might have been raised perhaps," observed the first speaker.

"Lieutenant Pedro was of that opinion, and said so to the captain, who was too stubborn, like he always is, to change his decree."

"It will come," I heard him say. "The girl is beautiful, and has got at least one rich lover, who'll pay the amount rather than have her killed."

"She's such an innocent, sweet kind of a thing, that it would seem a pity to butcher her!"

"That's true for you, Juan; and I hope, if she's doomed, it will not fall to my lot to put an end to her!"

"I'd rather give up my next share of plunder than be picked out for the order!" protested a third voice.

The bandits passed on up the hill, and Charles Grayson shivered in the warm air.

"She shall not die if my miserable life can prevent it!" he vowed to himself, as he silently glided on after the speakers.

They reached the top of the acclivity, where there was a great peaked rock, which had suggested the name of the elevation.

Here, after the wait of an hour and a consultation, one of the three was sent back to the general rendezvous.

Grayson determined if possible to follow this man and find where the fair captive was concealed.

This tracing of him through the thick wood was rendered comparatively easy by his carrying a small lantern, whose glimmer now and then became a sure guide.

It never occurred to the anxious follower that there was any danger to him, except from the outlaws, till once he chanced to find himself on the verge of a precipice, where another step would have plunged him down to certain death on the sharp rocks below; and then, while groping his way back to safety, the light got so far away from him that he nearly lost it altogether.

It was perhaps two miles from Eagle Peak, and up the steep sides of a wild, rocky gorge, that our brave adventurer traced the light to the mouth of a cave, before which a fire was burning, and around which were grouped a number of dark figures, cooking their food, chatting and laughing.

TO BE CONTINUED.



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