Richard the Brazen

... By ...
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Continued from last week.

"Very good seat for an Englishman, my lord!"

For Richard of course sat on his horse like a plains rider who loathes the up and down motion of England and the riding school.

For a long time Miss Renwyck and her father awaited their guest's return in great anxiety until they were relieved at last by the sight of him coming down the road at an easy canter, evidently master of the situation.

"He rides well, father, doesn't he?"

"He does," the old gentleman replied and added something which qualified a firm opinion.

Richard soon reached the paddock fence, forcing his jaded mount to take it for a second time, crossed the field and dismounted at Miss Harriet's side. The horse stood still, his head drooped again, but this time in utter weariness, not mischief. His glossy coat was streaked with foam, his widespread nostrils inflamed and red, while his barrel heaved to the pant of his labored breath. He shivered in defeat and offered no resentment of his rider's arm about his neck in a rough caress.

"Look here, young man," said Mr. Renwyck's greeting, "where did you learn to ride like that?"

"I was uncommonly keen on riding as a boy," said Richard, falling into a lazy drawl, "and, besides, I stayed for several months in Texas, you know."

Miss Harriet started and fixed a searching gaze on the speaker's face, but her father nodded gravely.

"Umph!" he returned. "I see. Good instructors, those fellows on the plains, eh?"

"Well, rather," assented Richard, with a laugh. "My trainer was a gentleman known colloquially as Dog Faced Sam, though I dare say his parents never bothered to christen him at all. Jolly sort, those—er—cow chaps, 'pon my word!"

There was a short silence; then Mr. Renwyck blurted out abruptly: "Well, the horse is yours, of course. You rode him for a full half hour."

Richard took out his watch, glanced at it and closed it with a snap and a sigh.

"Twenty-eight minutes!" he exclaimed in well assumed dismay. "By Jove, I've lost my wager!"

"Hold on there," cried the old gentleman, but laughing in spite of his earnestness, "you can't squirm out of it that way. Why, bless my soul, you could have stuck on him till he dropped dead. No, Lord Croyland, I'm not a welsher, nor do I shy at a margin of two minutes. No, sir, Hawk is yours!"

For answer Richard made a twitch of his thumb and finger, opened the horse's mouth and pointed to a badly swollen gum.

"He has a bad tooth, Mr. Renwyck, which perhaps accounts for his ugly temper. Fill it and you'll find a very different animal."

"What has that to do with the bet?" demanded Mr. Renwyck obstinately.

Richard fastened in his monocle after a desperate struggle and smiled and instantly lost his labor, for whenever he smiled it dropped out again.

"Couldn't think of accepting a different animal, y' know. Really, as Bills says, it wouldn't hit off with my conscience."

"Croyland," said the old gentleman, thrusting out his hand, "I didn't take to you much at first. But if you'll come with me to the house I'll introduce you to something that I keep strictly for friends."

Mr. Renwyck led the way with his wife, while Miss Harriet and the guest came sauntering after him.

"Lord Croyland," the young lady whispered, "I don't admire you especially because you know how to manage a horse—I've known other men who could do that—but"—

"But what"

"I do admire you for knowing how to manage father. May I decorate you with this rose?"

CHAPTER VII.

WHILE dressing for dinner after a delightful afternoon with Harriet Renwyck, Richard took his first lesson in modern English history and geography. The well trained Bills attempted to take full charge of the toilet, but upon this the new master put his foot down firmly.

"Bills," he said, "just about eighteen years ago, if I remember right, my nurse came to the conclusion that I was then old enough to get into my breeches without her able assistance. The conditions remain unchanged. Sit down and talk to me about London."

Gingerly availing himself of the edge of a chair on account of this condescension of inexperience, the valet detailed an account of his master's movements for the past three years. On the whole, the story was interesting, though distinctly unflattering at times to a member of the nobility. Outwardly Bills was as expressionless as a sphinx; inwardly he enjoyed his own narrative hugely. It was seldom he had so glorious an opportunity of laying bare his private opinions of his whilom master.

"Umph!" grunted Richard as he tried on one of Lord Croyland's dinner jackets. "So I am responsible for three entanglements and one scandal of which I still wear honorable scars. Drop that part of it. I'm a seeker after general information only."

Bills looked disappointed, but strove to earn his salary on less tasteful lines. He was a shrewd man, and his knowledge of the requirements of Richard's case led him to give valuable information. He described Hyde park, Piccadilly, the Strand and many other haunts of the fashionable set; also a club or two and various prominent

"Stop right there!" commanded Richard sternly.

English people likely to be mentioned in general conversation.

Richard was possessed of a retentive memory, which he now stored full of odds and ends which would help him pass muster, provided, of course, he did not run foul of the initiated, in which case he shuddered to think of the possibilities. His alleged sojourn in the United States, especially his winter in Texas, accounted in a measure for occasional slips, but even with this in his favor the position was a trying one.

There was another feature of the enterprise which troubled him sorely. It was comparatively easy not to seem to appreciate a joke and to intersperse small talk with a few stock phrases delivered in a British drawl, but when he looked into the eyes of the woman he loved he longed with all his heart to be for once and all time an American. He sighed for the sweep of the wide free plains, for a gallop with her across the fragrant prairie, to speak to her in his natural native tongue and to tell her he loved her as he loved his land.

"Woolsey," he sighed, and it amused him to notice how the valet resented the use of his Christian name, "I'm afraid, after all, I shall have to ask you to tie this neck thing. The ones I had at home were ready made and could be cinched up properly with a practical buckle at the back."

The valet deftly adjusted the bow, then gave a pull here and a poke there to the dinner suit, to which the master submitted meekly.

"M' lord," observed Bills, surveying his charge with an expert's eyes, "askin' your lordship's pardon for presumin' to mention it, the—er—the other one never looked quite so convincin', m' lord."

"Thank you, cardinal."

"Thank you, sir, an' I ain't no judge if the lady don't think so too."

Richard wheeled upon him sharply.

"Lady? What lady?"

"W'y, Miss Renwyck, sir, the lady wot strikes me as"—

"Stop right there!" commanded Richard sternly. "There are certain subjects which are not discussed between a gentleman and his servant. This is one of them. Please remember it."

"Thank you, Mr.—er—I mean m' lord," said the valet respectfully. "Very good, sir."

In sizing up his man the astute Bills had made a grave mistake, wherein he found much food for reflection regarding his future line of conduct. He had long since learned to manage his former master by various cunning little artifices, but this wide awake Texan with his square chin and steely blue eyes, was quite another proposition. Although Bills had divined the object of this masquerade, it did not seem as if he would profit much by it, and yet there must be some way in which he could turn it to his own advantage eventually, he was sure.

Meanwhile the adventurer descended into the drawing room and was presented to several other members of the small house party who had arrived by the late afternoon train for the week end. First there was Miss Caroline Schermerly, half sister to Mr. Renwyck and belonging to the haute noblesse of old Manhattan. Flatterers described her as a lady of uncertain age, although there was little doubt as to her personal antiquity. She was tall, somewhat angular and incased in a formal coat of blue blooded sleet, which had never thawed sufficiently to admit of a husband being warmed to her side. She approved of earls. They represented caste; therefore she promptly took Richard under her molting wing, to the vast discomfiture of the gentleman thus appropriated.

Then there was Miss Imogene Chittendon, a bosom friend of Miss Renwyck, newly released from boarding school and radiant in the glamour of her first season out. She was blond, fluffy, giggly, enthusiastic, delivering her sentences in a short, jerky staccato, with a deal of unnecessary emphasis, until her conversation suggested some one playing telegraph operator with a vichy siphon.

"She was so glad to meet a real live English lord! Really, it was de-lightful! How did it feel to be a nobleman instead of just an ordinary American? But of course he couldn't tell the difference, never having been anything else, you know," and so on ad libitum.

In his heart Richard agreed with her literally, but was not in a position to make explanations.

He was now introduced to the last of the guests, Mr. Cornelius Van der Awe, an overyoung young man, sad eyed, dark and in love with Miss Chittendon to the verge of melancholia. He said he was very much pleased to meet Lord Croyland and asked if they were having much fog at home.

Richard had been posted on London fogs and was enabled to draw a picture sufficiently dismal to meet with the questioner's desires.

"Dinner is served," announced a tall butler, who fortunately chanced to be an Irishman. Otherwise there might have been whisperings over some of the strange earl's characteristics in the servants' hall.

"All right," said Mr. Renwyck; "we won't wait for Michael. He never missed an opportunity of being late in all his life."

Richard, who against his every inclination was forced to take in the stately Miss Schermerly, was wondering vaguely who "Michael" might be when suddenly his heart stood still at the entrance of the gentleman himself, and again in his ears sounded the haunting echo of that doubtful compliment:

"Very good seat for an Englishman, my lord."

Mr. Michael Corrigan was a merry, hearty little man, brother to Mrs. Renwyck, not ashamed of his immediate Irish ancestry and a thorn in his brother-in-law Jacob's side. The two gentlemen had never got on well together, owing to an utter dissimilarity of tastes and a bulldog tendency to argue out their respective sides of every question to the bitter end. If one made a statement the other was sure to combat it, no matter what his private convictions chanced to be, and poor Mrs. Renwyck lived in mortal dread of a tilt a la outrance between the two. Moreover, there had been a recent discussion, which, had Richard known it, would have caused him much distress of mind, for the rock on which the brothers-in-law had split was a business deal with one Bill Williams of San Antonio, Tex.

Before the advent of Mr. Corrigan, Richard had been pluming himself on having carried out his role so successfully. It was comparatively easy to throw sand in the eyes of the Renwycks and their guests, but Mr. Corrigan put a different complexion on the face of things, for the Texan recognized the gentleman as a stanch friend of his father's who had visited their ranch some ten years before. Richard was then a mere boy and would scarcely be remembered, he hoped, especially when masquerading as a foreigner. Still he had his quaking doubts and redoubled his efforts to appear un-American. As the dinner progressed he was rejoiced to detect no sign of recognition, but before the salad was served he found himself in trouble.

For the benefit of his guests Mr. Renwyck recounted the afternoon's feat of horsemanship, and Richard found himself upon the defensive. Fortunately he knew the details of the real Lord Croyland's venture in Texas cattle and told the story with good effect, thus accounting for his ability to ride anything that ran on four legs, yet all the while he felt the steady gaze of Mr. Corrigan's little gimlet eyes, which made him most uncomfortable.

When this ordeal was passed Miss Chittendon forced him into one more complication.

"Oh, Lord Croyland," she gushed from her seat on the opposite side of the table, "won't you please tell us a lot about England? I've never crossed, you know, and I'm just dying to see the places I've read of in so many books."

"My dear young lady," Richard returned, with unnatural languor, "you wouldn't find it half so jolly as your own country. Really, you know, I'm becoming such a good American that I fancy I shall never return to England again."

He was not to get out of that coil so easily, however, for the ladies plied him with difficult questions until he wished with all his heart that three of them at least were confined for life in the Tower of London, while he talked to the fourth of bronchos and love and things he understood. Then Mr. Corrigan took a hand.

"Lord Croyland," he began, leisurely sipping his port, "it has been many years since I was in London, but I have always retained a most delightful recollection of Hyde park. Very few changes there, I suppose?"

Richard brightened visibly. This was a subject on which the astute Bills had drilled him well. He could speak of it, he thought, with little danger of a slip. Mr. Corrigan went on reflectively:

"Quite a park, as I remember it."

"Vast," agreed Richard, wishing his mentor had been a little more explicit as to dimensions.

"I was especially impressed," said Mr. Corrigan, with delusive blandness, "with that splendid statue of Napoleon, which stands at the main entrance. You are familiar with it, of course, Lord Croyland?"

"Oh, quite!" assented Richard boldly, screwing in his monocle and looking Uncle Michael straight in the eye, with never a tremor in his own. "To me it is quite the finest bit of bronze I've ever seen."

Mr. Corrigan seemed puzzled.

"Bronze?" he murmured thoughtfully. "Now, that's strange. I was under the impression that it was done in marble." He looked up with a smile and a sigh. "I dare say I'm getting old, my lord."

Richard began to feel beads of cold perspiration gathering upon his brow, but dared not call attention thereto by mopping.

"It is quite weather stained, you know," he explained, with outward calm, "and perhaps—well, you see, the sculptor's name is Thornton. I've never heard that he worked in marble, though I may be wrong."

"But what I don't understand," exclaimed Mr. Renwyck, "is why you Englishmen ever put up a statue of Napoleon at all. Seems to me that hating him as you did it was rather a curious thing to do."

"Not at all," said Richard desperately; "prisoner, y'know—St. Helena—and all that sort of thing—er—magnanimous."

Uncle Michael did not seem convinced and was about to ask more questions when Mr. Renwyck turned upon him sharply.

"Michael, you are doing this for the sake of argument. I don't believe you know anything about it, and, what is more, I think Lord Croyland is humoring you for the sake of politeness. I'll prove it." He turned to Richard. "My boy, I ought to have warned you in advance. My brother-in-law is a crotchety old lawyer who has never got over his bad habits. Tell me—honestly now—is there a statue of Napoleon Bonaparte in Hyde park at all?"

"No," smiled Richard, greatly relieved at this turn, "there is not."

"Who is it, then?"

"Wellington," said Richard, with triumphant carelessness, although he really did not know whether there was such a statue or not. But then neither did any one else at the table, although all but Miss Chittendon had visited England, some of them many times. The company laughed at Mr. Corrigan's discomfiture, while the victim himself seemed to enjoy it with the keenest zest. That dangerous incident was closed.

The dinner was finished at last, and Mr. Corrigan, pleading an appointment, departed, greatly to Richard's relief. The rest of the evening was spent in company with the ladies, for the young man's efforts to single out one in particular were invariably frustrated by the other three. It was not until nearly 11 that he had a short half hour with her alone, but in this he was repaid for all his tribulations. Miss Harriet was dressed in an exquisite pale blue gown, modestly revealing a neck and shoulders which to Richard were the most beautiful in all the world. They sat on the front veranda overlooking the river, she in a low wicker chair and he on the steps at her feet. Behind him were clusters of wistaria blooms, while beyond in the darkness the first of the fireflies twinkled like stars. To them came the nighttime scents and the murmur of the wind across the mighty Hudson on its journey to the sea.

Miss Harriet told him of her trip to Texas and of the gallant cowboy who had saved her life, while Richard listened with a bounding heart. He longed to claim a hero's place, to confess his deception and tell her the plain, bare truth. And yet he paused. To confess would involve disclosing the reason of his deceit, and he dare not risk the chance of losing her yet. She was young, romantic. The very daring of a lover's bold design might appeal to her; but, on the other hand, it was better to wait till he had won her heart than to ruin all by foolish precipitance.

"And what sort of chap was this cowboy?" he asked her presently.

"Oh, splendid!" she answered, with enthusiasm. "He was tall and straight and strong. Why, he lifted me as though I had been a child and set me down as tenderly as my own mother might have done. It all came so suddenly and I was so bewildered that I scarcely even thanked him. I know he thinks me perfectly horrid, and I would give anything on earth if I could only tell him that I'm—that I'm not."

"And you saw all that in five minutes?" he asked eagerly.

"In five minutes!" she exclaimed, surprised. "How do you know how long it was?"

"Oh—er—a perfectly natural inference," he stammered, hunting for cover desperately.

"Well, it was a short time," she sighed.

"And yet you did not learn his name?"

Miss Harriet shook her head.

"No. We came away at once, and I had no chance. You see, I only saw him for a moment—that is, after he put me down—and—and he was in such a hurry to catch his cows."

Richard smiled into the wistaria vine and was silent for a time.

"I suppose," he began presently, "that the young fellow was of the ordinary type of cowboy we see so frequently on"—

"No," interrupted Miss Harriet, with a decisiveness that pleased him to the quick; "he was nothing of the sort. Of course he was roughly dressed, as they all are, but a gentleman is a gentleman even in a flannel shirt, and 'chaps' don't they call them? Do you know, Lord Croyland, he reminds me in many ways of you. He—no, no," she added hastily, "I don't mean that. He—was quite different. You see, he was an American."

"Lucky beggar!" observed the pseudo earl, with a heavy sigh. "Miss Renwyck, I, too, would love to become an American if—won't you teach me how?"

"I?" she laughed. "Yes, I will, if you promise to follow instructions implicitly."

"Done!" he answered. "I'm ready for my first lesson. How will you begin?"

She thought for a moment, then looked down upon him impishly.

"First I think I should like to destroy your monocle with—with a croquet mallet."

Richard screwed it into his eye with renewed vigor and stared up at her through it with an excellent simulacrum of a wondering English incomprehension, stammering out with delightful vagueness:

"D'ye mean while I am—ah—wearing it, Miss Renwyck?"

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER Miss Renwyck had retired Richard lighted a cigarette and sat alone on the veranda, turning over in his mind the events of his first crowded day and his plans for the future campaign. Mr. Michael Corrigan troubled him. This little fat man was nobody's fool, and no one could tell what sort of mischief was being hatched behind those piercing eyes, which, if they continued to twinkle about the Renwyck place, would shortly discover many things. Richard sighed and flicked the stump of his cigarette away. He rose and was about to pass into the house when he was met in the doorway by Mr. Renwyck.

"Croyland," said his host impressively, "there is a little matter which I should like to talk over with you, and I have purposely waited until the ladies retired."

Richard fancied there was a certain grimness in Mr. Renwyck's tone and jumped to a swift conclusion. He was found out. He wished to avoid a scene if possible, but from what his father had told him of Mr. Renwyck's temper he could gather little hope.

"Certainly," he answered evenly, rather relieved that the expected break was coming. "Shall we sit here on the porch?"

"No," said the old gentleman; "I don't care to be overheard by any of the servants. If you don't mind walking we'll move away from the house."

Richard was convinced. He was