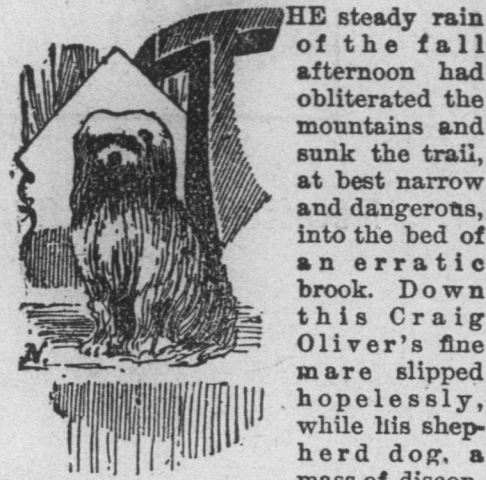


THE TROUBLESOME LADY

BY PATIENCE STAPLETON.

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CHAPTER I



HE steady rain of the fall afternoon had obliterated the mountains and sunk the trail, at best narrow and dangerous, into the bed of an erratic brook. Down this Craig Oliver's fine mare slipped hopelessly, while his shepherd dog, a mass of discolored wetness, trotted sullenly behind, his nose close to the horse's heels. Oliver's corduroys were soaking, from his sombrero a stream of water dripped down his back, and the damp carcass of a defunct antelope swung to his saddle became painfully odoriferous. That very antelope had lured him to the top of Sisty's peak and had taken revenge for the fine shot which had brought its demise.

Craig, naturally hot-tempered and impatient, swore audibly. He wondered why a man should want to go hunting in the Rockies; why, if he did, he could not tell when it was going to rain—or did anybody ever know Colorado weather; why, if a man knew enough to go to the top of a peak, he could not find his way down? He had no idea where he was, and night was near at hand; under the aspens, that slapped him merrily with wet branches as he passed, it was already dark.

He wondered where Dr. John was. That ass would make a jest of the matter; he was offensively personal in his jokes. He would not think of going to look for a comrade—not he, the laziest man in the world. Why, then, should Craig Oliver take meat to Dr. John, antelope steak he so favored, brought from the summit of a cloud-reaching peak? Yet that invidious doubt of Dr. John's! There must be evidence, or he would tell the story of an imaginary antelope and imaginary shot.

It grew darker—if possible, wetter. The sudden antelope flounced about, and the dog whined dolefully. "Confound you, Mac," cried Oliver. "If you are bored, what must I be? Do you think I'm doing this for pleasure? Besides, you can shake the rain off your coat, and it soaks into mine. If I stay outside to-night it means rheumatism, sure. I'll bet the doctor is huddling over the fire now with that infernal pipe of his, and Mike is cleaning his boots—the doctor's boots. I pay Mike, but he cleans the doctor's boots first, last, and all the time. Some men have a faculty of imposition."

The more uncomfortable Oliver became, the more he thought of his guest snugly ensconced in his hunting cabin miles away on the Troublesome—an untrustworthy little stream that meandered through the mountain park, irrigating the crops bountifully in the spring, but often annihilating them in midsummer.

"He's toasting his thin shanks at my hearth, smoking my tobacco, ordering my servant about, and he would leave me out here to perish. He knew it was going to rain; that is why he said he had the toothache. I swear he hasn't one of his own left. I believe it



MRS. DE RESTAUD AND HER DOG.

is gout ails him. And Mike hasn't sense enough to go out with a light. Hal there's one!"

The trees more widely scattered showed him a sudden glimmer of light across the dark below, like a fallen star. He urged the mare forward down a steep hill, and found from her quickened pace he was on a traveled road. Then she shied and stopped, and he was close to a shut gate. He dismounted, opened it, and, mindful of cattle, closed it after him. After a short walk he saw the dark outlines of buildings, a house with porches and barns; from the last came the savage barking of dogs and the clank of their stretching chains as they leaped from their kennels. Mac, in duty bound, set up a challenging uproar, silenced only by his master's whip. From the lighted windows Craig saw the house proper was built of logs and raised considerably from the ground, with a wide veranda approached by a long flight of steps. A door in the L that was on a level with the ground suddenly opened and a man came out with a lantern—an undersized man, with a white face, deep-sunken black eyes, and a scrubby beard around his chin of such a blue-black color that his face looked deathly pale.

"What a state's-prison mug!" Craig thought; but he said, politely: "I have lost my way."

"Well, this is not it," said the man, holding his lantern rudely near Oliver's face.

"I do not need your assurance of that, my civil friend; but if I insulted you with a bribe could you put up my horse and give me shelter for the night?"

"No."

"Western hospitality is evidently out of your line. I fancy New York or the adjacent islands are more to your taste than a ranch in the mountains. Perhaps you could direct me to Lord Morris's shooting box; it's on the Troublesome, about five miles from Parkville. I am a stranger here, as I only bought the lodge this spring."

"I don't know where it is."

"Ah! a stranger too. You own this place?"

"I don't see that that is your affair."

"I might make it mine, if the odds were not against me," Oliver muttered, turning and tightening his saddle girths. A door in the house suddenly opened, and in the flood of light streaming out Oliver saw a slight girlish figure peering into the darkness.

"What is it, Louis? Not M. de Restaud? Is—is he hurt?"

"Only a tramp. Go back into the house," called the man, rudely.

A fat little woman in a cap ran out, seized the girl's arm, and tried to drag her in the door; but the young woman defended her rights vigorously, and, freeing herself, ran down the steps.

"I have entered a romance," thought Craig, advancing to the steps. "After traveling in extremely beaten paths for forty years, I have suddenly achieved an adventure." "I have lost my way," he said, lifting his hat. "I am not a tramp at all, but a neighbor—even a landed proprietor. I did hope for shelter, but I will only ask a direction—"

"But I don't know any directions, sir, and I wouldn't trust Louis; he'd like to get anyone into trouble. I am thankfully ignorant of this horrid country; I want to be; I hate it. But you must come in and get dry and have your horse rubbed down. What a lovely dog!"

The fat woman, who had descended the steps unobserved, here interposed an objection, clutching the girl's arm tightly, and talking hastily in whispered French that sounded like a prolonged hiss, so great was her agitation.

"Hush up, hag!" said the singular young woman, again freeing herself. "And now do come in for a little while."

She was bareheaded, and wore some kind of a sleazy gown. As the rain was speedily wetting her shoulders, Oliver was forced to go up under the roof of the veranda.

"You needn't be shocked," she went on, merrily, "at what I said to her; she does not know a word of English, and she's gone and won't come any more. Half the fun I have is calling her names and saying things to her she would so like to know. Louis, take the gentleman's horse and give her good care. None of your tricks, for monsieur might think once like to be friendly; you never can tell; he and Lord Morris were. Monsieur can be agreeable, quite lovely, to strangers, if he wants to be."

The man, grumbling to himself, led the mare to the barn.

"I don't fancy leaving her to his mercies," said Oliver, uneasily, as he watched man and horse from the porch. "Somehow I have not overmuch confidence in your servant."

"Isn't he evil-looking? Annette, though, thinks he is beautiful. But Louis will be good to your horse; he is fond of them, and a thoroughbred, too, like that one, will delight him. His liking for horses is the only human trait he has. Do come in, just a little while; we're not robbers or benders, though things are funny. Bring your lovely dog. Will he fight a little mite of one?"

"If he did I'd disown him," smiled Craig.

She stopped and picked up a fluffy Skye terrier, and holding it in her arms, led the way into a luxuriously-furnished room with piano and fine pictures, a bright open fire, and evidences of travel and culture in bric-a-brac. It was strangely at variance with the wild and lonely country outside, but oddly natural in Colorado. In the Rockies the unexpected is always happening; a day laborer is often a college graduate waiting for a stake, or a cowboy may be the son of an earl acquiring experience.

"If we tried to snare travelers," said the young lady, coolly, "Louis would rather hurt our business, his manners are so bad. This is the den of Monsieur de Restaud, who came here to avoid the war with Prussia; he was only a yokel, but then, but a born coward; and his brother is a colonel in the French army, his father a general. He doesn't go back to France. Sit down, here's a chair for your coat; you will feel better dry. I'll excuse your shirt-sleeves."

Talking all the while, she set a chair for his coat, one for himself near the hearth, and then, kneeling down by the big dog, she put the little one on the floor and proceeded to make them acquainted. Skye instantly became a puff of growl and sigh; but Mac, with an envious eye, stretched himself and lay down to rest. He realized he was intruding, but meant to

make the best of it in peace. She jumped up, the dog under her arm, and flung a log on the fire.

"There; are you comfortable?" she asked, standing and smiling on him, a lovely flush on her face.

"Delightfully so."

Oliver looked at her in wonder. Was she child or woman? A slight, girlish figure, but beautifully formed, tiny hands and feet, a mass of short reddish curls around the neck, parted smoothly in the middle, hazel eyes with dark lashes, a nose retroussée, piquantly so, and a rosebud mouth that showed small white teeth of dazzling brilliancy. Her skin was almost unnaturally pale; and a dimple in her left cheek drew attention to its soft roundness. Her gown of yellow China silk clung to her beautiful curves, and the wide ruffle of the yellow around her throat was like the petals of a flower. He looked at her left hand; there was no ring; in fact, all the jewelry she wore was a bunch of silver bangles on her right arm.

"Do you live here?" he asked, lamely, as she knelt again on the rug to pat his dog, Skye, in her arms.

Instead of replying, she made her dog sit up on its hind legs and beg—an accomplishment Skye disliked showing, as he desired getting acquainted with the new dog, and this circus business seemed derogatory to his dignity.

"See!" said the young woman, breathlessly; "isn't he cunning? But he does it better when there is not company; he never will show off. Can your dog give his paw?"

"I don't think I ever asked him," stammered Oliver, who was thinking what a pretty picture the girl made.

"Well, he is too tired to tease now. Oh!" jumping up and standing by the fire, "you asked who I was?"

"No; if you live here?"

"Do you think," half sadly, "a person could live here?"

"I—I don't know."

"I do," said the young woman, emphatically. "I have tried it two years and winters, all the long shut-in months. I eat, sleep, breathe, but I don't live. I am called Minny—christened Minerva, after my father's ship—a funny name, that does not suit me. Children ought to be allowed to name themselves, don't you think so?"

"It might be better, but Minny is a pretty name, and," with a smiling glance of admiration, for Oliver liked a pretty woman, "suits delightfully. I was named Peter—think of that!—but



"DO COME IN."

luckily had a middle name. Allow me to introduce myself: Craig Oliver, of Denver, and your neighbor in the valley of the Troublesome."

"I am"—she hesitated a moment and looked at him defiantly—"Mrs. de Restaud. I knew you'd have to know. I put it off on purpose. Now please don't look at me out of the corner of your eye and wonder I am not more dignified and stop being pleasant to me because I am married."

"I don't see," said Oliver, unconsciously becoming more distant, "that your being married makes any difference."

"I am glad; for up here they don't talk politely to me because of monsieur; in fact, for weeks I only have Skye to talk to. I know I run on foolishly; but I am like an exile meeting a neighbor from the home country. No gentlemen come here; Lord Morris was not; he might have been once, but liquor changes everybody. Since Aunt Hannah was sent away, six months ago, there has not been a living soul here I even endured. By the way," smiling again, "are you hungry?"

"I breakfasted this morning," answered Oliver.

"Well, I'll get you something to eat. Please let me; it's such fun to have a visitor. And don't you mind if you hear growls from the kitchen."

She ran out before Oliver could object; so he sat and watched his steaming coat, wondering if the proprietor would shoot on sight. He remembered now seeing the "crazy Frenchman," as he was called in the valley, a small, wizened creature, looking as if he took morphine, from his strange color and the unnatural brightness of his eyes. The pity of it! the girl—a child, almost—was his wife. "This is odd," he thought, "an adventure, and Doctor John will never believe a word of it." Unfortunately, Mrs. de Restaud had left the door ajar, and Oliver became painfully aware of her conversation:

"Annette dear—how I wish the Utes would carry you off! how tired they'd be, though, of their bargain—let me get that tea. Don't you touch me. With! they'd hang you in Salem days. I am getting this for the stranger who looks like a hero out of a book—a big, broad-shouldered man; not a little, evil thing, like your dear monsieur or your own pet Louis with his Sing Sing manners. Such a charming stranger, with the kindest smile, and eyes that smile too, and a gentleman like I used to know before I was shut up here. Cat, let the waiter alone! I hate your monsieur! his own father called him a coward. Oh, wait, my love, until I practise shooting; some day I will put a little round bullet hole in your lovely cap-frill."

A crash of crockery, the slam of a door, and Mrs. de Restaud came back, flushed and triumphant, with a loaded waiter and a conquering air.

"Cold ham, fresh bread and tea," she said, setting it on the table. "It is

better than nothing. I have been on a foraging expedition and outgeneraled the enemy. Now, do eat! Perhaps you ought to have whisky; but monsieur has the keys."

"I have a flask," smiled Oliver, "but this tea is much better."

"I think so. And are things nice, truly?"

"The very best, and how good you can imagine to a man who has fasted since seven this morning. You see, I was bound to have that antelope; I was on his trail the whole day."

"It seems cruel to kill the poor little things," she said, wistfully; "they have such a hard time in the winter, and the elk are so starved when they come down to the corral and eat hay with the cattle. I would like to put hay out for them, but I am not allowed; and just think! my money has bought this ranch; it was mortgaged for all it was worth—monsieur spent everything, you know; but you don't know, and think I am dreadful." She ran to the window and looked out. "You would not mind," she said, anxiously, "harrying a little? Monsieur ought to be back any moment. If he and his friends have been drinking very much they are ugly—especially monsieur. Oh, I did not mean you should stop!"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

QUITE COMMON.

Incidents of the Centennial Celebration of the Battle of Lexington.

At the time of the centennial celebration of the battle of Lexington the roads from Boston to Lexington were thronged with carriages of every kind, for though the railroads did what they could, it was impossible to transport so much of the population of the country between seven and ten o'clock in the morning.

The immense crowds and the unavoidable confusion gave rise to many amusing incidents on this memorable anniversary. One of these was in connection with the dignified and august tribunal of Massachusetts. At one time a trembling aid rushed up to the chief marshal, and in a voice filled with awe said:

"Sir, the entire supreme court of Massachusetts is waiting round the corner in an ox cart!"

During some parts of the day order seemed an impossibility. The president's barouche was separated from its escort, and some members of the cabinet were reported to be engaged in frantic efforts to get where they belonged.

The police, worn out with their exertions, were not prepared to indulge in any respect for anybody, no matter who it might be. It was said that one of the members of the cabinet approached one of these guardians of the peace, and told him authoritatively to clear the way.

"Oh yes, I'll clear the way, my man, and I'll begin with you," remarked the policeman promptly, and exhorted the secretary to "move on."

"Evidently," said the other, "you don't know who I am. I am the secretary."

"Oh yes," responded the policeman indifferently, "we've had a lot of 'em round to-day," and the member of the cabinet was forced to "move on" and try his luck in another quarter.—Youth's Companion.

IKE HILL.

Duties of the Sergeant-at-Arms in the House of Representatives.

"The sergeant-at-arms will please see that order is restored;" or, "the sergeant-at-arms will see that the gentlemen take their seats," are familiar sentences to everyone who attends the sessions of the house of representatives.

It would take a man with gray hair to remember when a sergeant-at-arms has actually had to take a derelict congressman by the coat collar and shove him down into his pivot chair or to slap his hand over his mouth to keep him from talking, yet from time immemorial that august official of the government has been called on almost daily to perform the act, especially when an exciting question is occupying the attention of the house. Now, Ike Hill, as an occupant of the chair of peacekeeper of the house of representatives, makes a model officer. He is the best-natured man in the world and will go to the end of the earth to accommodate a friend. But he can look alarmingly stern, as many members well know. When the speaker gives the signal for action, Ike gets up and fixes his eagle eye on the member violating rules; he advances with deliberate tread in the direction of the delinquent. The sternness on his face increases as he sees no restoration of order. He gets nearer and nearer to the offender, who then takes his seat and looks like the bad boy of a school when trying to look innocent after getting caught in some mischief by his teacher. That's the way it happens every time. In the interest of variety it is to be hoped that some day the member will refuse to "shut up," and that Ike, in the loyal performance of his duties, will have to "put him up."—Washington News.

Even with Him.

A young fellow, just admitted to the bar, was walking down town to his office one morning, when he was joined by an old high-school friend.

"Good morning, John," said the second man, taking him by the arm. "Well, you've really put out your shingle, I see—like Judas Iscariot."

"Yes," said the youthful lawyer; "but Judas kept better company than I do."—Youth's Companion.

Family History.

Here is a scene from an oral examination at school:

"Can you tell me anything about the family of George Washington?"

"Yes'm."

"What is it?"

"He was the husband of Mrs. Washington, and, and—"

"And what?"

"And the father of his country!"—Youth's Companion.

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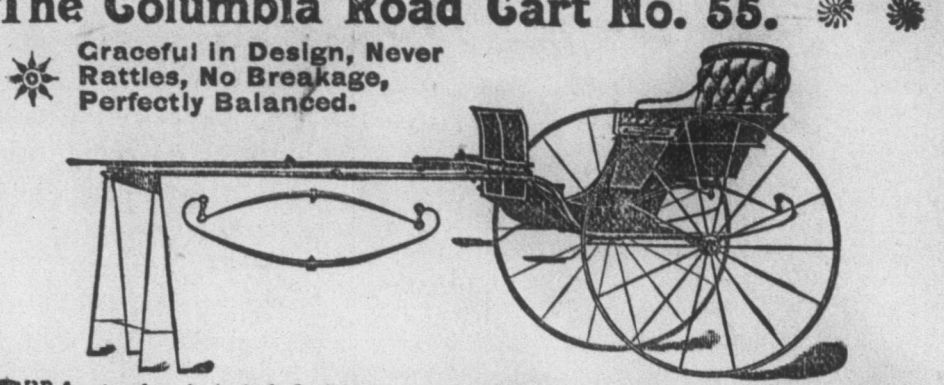
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