

# PALLADIUM SHORT STORY PAGE

## A Woman Scorned

by Martha McCulloch Williams

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THE rosate radiance of a shimmering sunset bathed the ivy-covered gardens of Edgehill, painted each westerly window crimson, and tipped the golden weather vanes with iridescent glory. Even upon austere Winter days, or those of drenching easterly storms, it was the show-place of a millionaire's country-side. Now, in the fulness of midsummer growth, with roses to ruffle it in every riotous wind, with spice-scent of carnation coming hot and sweet through the dewfall, with gorgeous peacocks parading velvet lawns, crying raucous welcome to the coming night, and doves in fluffy clouds circling and wheeling above their red-tiled eot, it was as fair as paradise. Only the flutter of wings, the soft chirring of insects broke up the Summer hush. Now and again from the distant highway there came a dull burring of wheels, or the ghost of a horse whirling, but so faintly they merely accented the heavenly peace. Edgehill's master, hating noises and prying, had set his gray stone castellated mansion upon a fair hill, in the midst of so many acres, they made him secure from both.

In front there was parking and thick plantations, with a drive winding artfully through, giving here and there glimpses of gray walls soon to be ivy-grown. All the back was open. First came the sunken garden, then the grassed Plessance, with clipped yews, a fountain, and stone benches, also a weather-eaten sundial. From it the ground fell down in long velvet slopes to other and thicker plantations, masking various buildings. Through the green of these lower plantations, from the Plessance one caught flashes of color—red-tiled roofs, steep gables, and more gilded mermaids. The red tiles and golden vines covered the stables and their offices. Beyond was the training track. With a glass one could see all that went on there from the bell tower rising at the mansion's southwesterly angle. From the tower one could see also the flagstaff and the roof tips of Green Park's clubhouse, notwithstanding the course lay five miles away.

Mr. Luttrell, of Edgehill—to be exact, Blair Luttrell, Esquire—had, until three months back, spent in the gray castle the most part of what time he was not sailing up and down the seas in a marvelous yacht. A bachelor whose sole business was spending money he had not made, the estate and the yacht were very great helps. His friends were fit, but few; his darters, rivals, would-be friends, many; his loves—there discerned silence in heat.

The first friend, nearly as much at home in the big house as its inmates, did not even turn away their eyes significantly from the cottage and its chateaine. It stood at the stable level, but well apart from it. There was a wholly separate approach to it from the outer world; also a path, well screened and amazingly tortuous, running down to it from the greenhouses, which nestled at the west of the Plessance. Neither were eyebrows lifted when, upon voyagings, the chateaine went along. She did not act the part of hostess, merely that of unconventional guest. Moreover, she danced deliciously, and in soft dusks sang weird, croony things, half

although they had seen the race run thus together three seasons back since the park was opened, the pugilists was a surprise. For the impossible had happened—Luttrell was not merely in love, but resolved on matrimony. The fact was less astonishing than the girl. She was none of his own sort, not of the carefully nurtured virgins who, through so many successive seasons, had been thrown at his callous head. Instead, Cecily's master from Texas, without a glim in her vocabulary, and not on speaking terms with the letter R.

The meeting had been after a sort remanded; she had marched to him herself in the streets of a Mediterranean city, just where Luttrell and his friends, ashore briefly from the yacht, were looking up picturesque vagabonds and taking gaily to each other. The whole village had been rather riotous; the Chateaine had not come alone, and there had been variegated diversions at every port of call. Yet their talk had been serious, and the girl—perhaps by fate's dictate, she had singled out Luttrell and appealed to him all unafraid. She had said with a smile and a lifting of her dark, innocent eyes: "I have prayin' the good Lord to send me somebody that talk English. I reckon that's how you happened along. My French is all book—French, you see—and these poor folks are so ignorant. I can't make them understand."

That had been the beginning. The end none might foresee. Miss Jessamine Twiggs, restored to her proper wisdom, had decisively presented her father, the colonel, a turbulent gentleman, with a stout parent, who, in the warmth of his gratitude, had shaken hands twice with all of them, roaring out the white welcome to Texas, so pretty well everywhere. He went along straight back home, dazed but not broken, set a number of traps at the shorehead after she was off, and then, with a "flower," he hadn't wanted to take the "tower," but you had to do something with a 12-cent cotton plant up mother so sanctuous fast. Moreover, when you had just one gal-chick, and her young partner would—a-hem mighty lovesome stayin' at home and lettin' her preen off round the world. However, that didn't matter—there was his card, also his bankers—would the gentlemen, and especially Mr. Luttrell, when all were back again in God's country, please not to forget?

They had not forgotten—least of all Luttrell. The voyage had been cut short a full month, so as to fetch home about the time the tourist ship made port. Afterward Luttrell, looking himself seriously over, then the boy had said to him his was at first, but with the glancing mystery of a finished if unfinished equanite. All her art was learned in nature's school, which was possibly the reason it was so effective. The rest marvelled least at Luttrell's first infatuation than that it survived such constant sight of its object. He had actually haunted the moderate Twiggs establishment, not even blinking conspicuously, as to stable chances in any big event. But there he had stood, swelling out his chest and saying: "Come for tips—ever? Never give one ter nobody—but this I will say. Man that's got money, any money with white, and don't care his checks' bills with the date on them, he's got the hoss, isn't nothin'—but jest er plumb match-born fool!" Heathcote? Twiggs on Heathcote? No, or less jest about er good exercise gallop. If I had my will, I'd be somethin' in it that could make the hoss railey stretch himself."

"Gentlemen, will you listen? The hoss? Nock's clean dooty." Dowell had hung at the exultant trainer. "No wonder, though; my races won right off the reel might turn a horse's head, much less an old man's. But, say, Nock, if Enderby's the hoss, what, pray, are all the rest?" "Catties; not much more." Nock had retorted in high dinsal... "Eben you could see fit fer yerself if I choosed ter fetch out the hoss. Yes, I know them others is got heads, hair, huffs and tails, and some on 'em can race, rare cute amongst themselves—in springs and dashes like, er even git propped up ter stay a mile. But, Lord, what's hit of? The hoss can run rings round that best time, yet stay the four-mile route, same as Lexington and Sir Guy"—

"Come away! Nock's dangerous when he breaks out in pedigrees," Luttrell had interrupted, leading his guests toward the brakeman. But, with his foot on the bar, he had turned back, saying: "There is something I forgot to go on without me, please. I won't be long, and to-morrow we'll come back very early to be shown. I can't think what has come over Nock; in fact, his humor disquiets me. If we were cracked, as usual, I should know our money was as good as won."

As they drove upward Luttrell had said guardedly to Evans, at his elbow, "Have you imagination enough to fit the Jessamine flower into all this?" nodding comprehensively to the landscape as he spoke. Evans had merely shaken his head, so—Pentham had run on: "It's almost enough to make one believe in spells—the change here, the westerly white. She was going to cry instead. He knew it from the way her lips quivered, and her eyes grew soft and misty like a child's. And she had begged him into a tête-à-tête down at the end of the Flemish corridor, far from the rest of the party. Cecily was dove and serpent in one small wise person.

"But what can I possibly do about it to help you?" said the Dean in final desperation. "The Winter abroad would be delightful for you, and your mother—"

"Poor little mother doesn't know what to do with me," interposed Cecily, recklessly twisting up her chiffon veil into a wadded wreath. "You don't know what it is to be the mother of five girls," Dean Knowles.

The Dean hastily and gravely agreed with her. He didn't know.

"There's Jess' music keeps her busy." Cecily counted off her sisters on her small, tanned fingers. "Then Pauline is Asht Nell's special pride and pet, so she's most puffed for. Then Marjory married, and that settles her fate, and only leaves Edna and my own self. Edna's only fifteen and I'm nineteen. And all mother thinks of now is how to earth to dispose of me. Yes, she does, too!" (the Dean tried to interrupt.)

"You know she does. She tries to make me think I want to study art. I don't want to look at another single old picture. I—I just want to go home."

She was actually crying this time. The Dean took one hasty side glance and turned away his eyes, steeling his heart against the ways of Cecily. It was two months since the party had started from Iowa to "old" Europe. Every Summer the little college town took pride in sending over its contingent of tourists, who should shed some of Manisto's glory upon the old world.

And the Dean had agreed, reluctantly, that—was a month back. Since Luttrell had been asking Jessy, getting no other answer than plaintive looks, quick scarlet blushing and such speeches as "If you keep on bell' tressome, I'll send you to smoke with daddy," or "Did you ever play puss in the corner with yourself? No"



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There had been further reassurance as they drove from the station. They had come in at the back, by way of the stables, so had had a chance to note that the cottage was closed, every window barred and shuttered, the vines trailing unkemptly about the lattices. Evans had looked away from it, sighing under breath; Bentham had nodded to himself almost imperceptibly. But Luttrell, in the box seat, had turned away, flushing deeply. He was the youngest of them. The others had looked at each other, recalling now upon voyages, and the rare seasons when the Chateaine had sung for them there at Edgehill. Dowell's attitude toward her had been most distant of all, but somehow most touched with compassion.

It was partly to escape this consciousness that Evans had led them to the Plessance. As they trudged out Bentham shivered faintly and said in twain ear: "Luttrell ought to have come along with us. I'm not a bit superstitious, but don't you feel things in the air?"

Dowell had nodded, answering very low: "Yes; but we are real friends, we will; but think they are only good things."

Luttrell took the upward winding path, at the end of a brief whispered conference, Hardaway looked after him, chuckling grimly and clutching a huge fist, muttering to himself the white: "I well know how far you trust me—it's jest as far as you've got use fer me—damn you. But that's a trap sight furder, I trust you. Mr. Blair Luttrell. You don't deserve the hoss, but more'n you did the woman. I'm ten to see her hit her own back before makin' trouble fer you am I. Lord, of only you know! You take me fer stock er stone. Maybe you'll come ter know some day I'm er man—er better man'n you." Then he dropped his chin on his breast and stood massive and rumiant until the mazy path had swallowed up Luttrell.

Luttrell walked fast—rapid motion was a relief in his mood of tense uncertainty. At last he had made Jessamine listen to him seriously, and though she had said no more than, "Wait, maybe things will happen," he was somehow curiously elated. He wanted things to happen—first, a simple wedding, then a long, long honeymoon, afterward blissful years, full of horny delight. Jessamine would never care for society, no more than she would shine in

eccentric sights between his words. "Sight, my son! See right, behold the fulness of a hopeless dream—like pinstripes, like a sheaf, how I could make this dandy four-in-hand." Thank fortune, Blair will have none of bubbles. Now, good man, now look and die—with envy of your charlatan."

"Envy is worse than sinful foolishness," Bentham had said gravely as they climbed down and passed into the big hall.

"Consider, Blair has the bother of owning all this; we get the use, the sweet of it, with none of that bitter. Upon my word, we are times when I'm actually sorry for him."

"No need to be," Dowell had answered, "owning things is fun enough for him."

"Luttrell, for example. Shall I ever own a hair of him? Yet I love him, and rejoice in his success. He is the shadow of his former self because he is his to me. He is another man's, and Enderby twice over; he would hardly look at him. Maybe Blair can't help it; it's been the same with him about—oh, about pretty

She was truly a human orchid—as weird and vivacious in bloom as those kindred marvels of the tropics. The tropic Islands breed such. Many ships sail to them, pause in their harbors, then wing away. And the Island women are comely oftentimes, and sometimes very fair. Decent is through mothers. If this woman had traced her forefathers, she might have found a royal Dutch admiral at the head of them, and, further down, a sailor-Viking, and an English Duke's heir. Her heavy, unripped hair had a right to the pale gold, her eyes their corn-flower blue, her skin its dead whiteness, its pure carmine-red. Yet the prepotent Saxon strain had not wholly vanquished the black drop—which breeds in the blood through every artery. You saw it in the purple-white beyond the eye, the flower-blue pupils, the stained palms, the pigmented half-moons of the exquisite long nails. It showed, also, in the set of ear and throat, most of all in the race-look, undeniably indescribable, brooding within the eyes.

Luttrell placed her upon the bench, but again she slipped to his feet, laid her cheek against them and murmured soft, inarticulate endearments. This time he dragged her up, and half flung her from him, saying in a strained voice: "You must go straight back to the island. You can be quite happy there—where people understand."

"Will you carry me—you took me away?" the woman said, beginning to tremble violently. "You think I am like the rest—that I can't console myself. You are wrong—so wrong you have made me different—take me there, let me stay until you want me again. You—you may tire of that other?"

"Stand!" Luttrell said hoarsely, his eyes blazing, his face white and working. He caught the woman by both shoulders and shook her as he went on: "Understand—this there is—nobody but you and me. Understand, too, I am tired of you—sick—so sick, I loathe the thought of you. Yet I meant to be kind—to give you enough to make you a queen among your own. If you don't care for the island, go to Paris—you shall still have the money—but I will never see you again."

"If I say 'no'—what then?" the woman asked, her face hidden in her hands. Lut-

trell smothered an oath, and answered coolly. "There are places where a woman can be quite safe away. Only a mad woman, and a bad one, will keep chomping on my claims fully paid. Come! I must get you away!"

"You return to your peril!"

"Kiss me—once—and say you do not hate me. Then—you shall never even hear of me again." La-Lee entreated piteously, her face ashen. Luttrell pushed away her preferred lips, and drew her swiftly down the path. At the gate of the stable yard he called guardedly to Hardaway, and as Blair appeared said to him impatiently, imperatively: "Take this woman to the city—at once. Stay with her until she is aboard ship—El Rio sails southbound, a little after midnight. Give her money—ever comfort—but make sure she goes. She is a dangerous trouble—I think you know what to do."

With the last word he thrust La-Lee's hand into Hardaway's and darted into the gathering dusk. Hardaway had merely nodded—now he called to one of the men. Very shortly he was sitting beside La-Lee in what had been her special brougham, with the horses going a slapping pace, and the man on the box lost in amaze. Until they were nearing the city neither spoke. There was no need of speech—the hand-clasp had continued throughout the journey's throuwing silence. La-Lee at first had shrunk from it, but soon the warm tenderness of Hardaway's huge palm had begun whispering to her of hope and vengeance. When thickened and blazed, the light began to boom along the way. She leaned toward him, half looked up, and whispered: "You will help me—because you hate him?"

Hardaway nodded. It was a minute before he could speak. Then he gathered her within his arms, kissed her twice, and muttered: "Yes—but mostly because I love her."

Hardaway got back to Edgehill a little before daylight—chuckling to himself as he walked into the stable yard: "He said. Give her every comfort! Well, I done it. The comfort of gittin' eben is considerable."

Then in swift review he looked back at the night, and forward to the morning.

La-Lee was safe aboard ship—a transatlantic liner. By the next boat he would follow her—it would be easy to part for La-Lee after the Heathcote Day. Money would not stand in the way—he had sent some part of his absence in concourse with the king-pin among the bookmakers—a man able and willing to pay royally for information of moment. Besides Hardaway had already money in hand—he had bet shrewdly, lived sparingly, and been thrifty every way. He would marry the girl—Luttrell and the black drop, notwithstanding.

They would live abroad—foreigners, he knew, were less squeamish than his own people. He had coveted her, worshipped and afar, from the first. In the intoxication of passion he would not let himself remember what it was that had driven her to his arms.

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