



CHAPTER IV.—CONTINUED.

As she seemed to know, he said, abjectly: "I helped Mrs. de Restaud get to the railroad."

"I didn't need no telling," she answered, promptly. "I'm clean beat out, I never rode on an animal before of any sort or kind. I've got real rheumatic pains in my back and shoulders. It is hard for a woman at my age to have to gallivant over an unsettled country hunting a connection."

"Here are some cushions," said Dr. John, coming out, his arms full. "Those chairs are uncomfortable. Now, isn't that better?"

"Yis, I suppose I'll eat my meals off the mantel piece for a week. Now, you being old and settled like, why couldn't you have helped Minny?"

"Because I was not here. Objection to smoking?"

"No land sakes, nor keep the smokers off, if they be any that kin git a living up here."

"Now, this is cozy," continued the doctor, lighting his pipe. "Oliver sat down near them. "You see, I was called off to a sick woman, and she died poor soul."

"Of what?" asked the newcomer, eagerly, all curiosity.

"I should say homesickness if I told the truth, but I called it mountain fever. Well, she was dying, I know, and here, as Craig is sitting alone over the fire, comes a little lady in a yellow silk gown (Mike told me, Craig; you needn't think you've been talkin in your sleep). On her white neck are big ugly bruises, welts from whips on her arms, and the little dog she brings with her, has been brutally kicked. She throws herself at Craig's feet, and begs him to save her."

"You don't never tell me that evil little foreigner dared strike Minny Paten!" cried the old lady. "Oh! I'd like to git my hands on him! All her mother's fault—always taking up with strangers."

"Any man would have helped her," said Oliver; "then he went on and told what he did; and how he left her safely at the train; he omitted her eccentric farewell—possibly because he had forgotten it."

"The poor little bird," sobbed the old woman; "my dead brother's child; and what a man he was—master of a ship at nineteen; and here's his Minny his idolized living in nowhere land with a crazy Frenchman. I put up with him for months when I visited here, for her sake; but one day—the Patents is all quick, on my mother's side I'm a Knox, and history tells what was—and I slapped Henry right in the face like he'd been a young one. He set me out the door, and I had to ride in a springless wagon, and, gitting home, found things going to rack and ruin with the shirtless folks I left taking care of my house. I did advise Minny to stay, though, Mr. Oliver," she said, looking at him with her honest, kindly gaze. "I'm an old-fashioned woman, so I bowed it was her duty; she'd made her bed and had to lie on it. You can't never tell me a



"OH, I'D LIKE TO GET MY HANDS ON HIM!"

girl is made to git married in this kentry, whatever it may be in France, an' Minny is awful frivolous. I hadn't no likin for men that sympathizes with young wives when they air young an' pretty."

"I should have dragged her back, to be killed the next time," Craig said coldly.

She rose, and held out her hand, wrinkled hand. "I think you done noble by her. Mr. Oliver, and though by your looks you seem to be one of this city bachelors that ain't no' good moral characters, I know her own dead father couldn't have done kinder by her. How you rid them miles in that time I can't see, for that warn an' set out afore sunup an' got to the Frenchman's just turned five o'clock. Now, how much money did you give Minny to frivil away?"

She took out an old leather wallet and began unwinding a strap that held it tight.

"I have no account. Wait until you hear from her."

"I am well-to-do, and Minny's all I've got to leave my property to; so that, needn't worry you; and I don't like her being under obligations to strange men. How much did you loan her?"

"What?" almost screamed Aunt Hannah. "Heavens to Betsy! you and me won't never set eyes on Minny Patten till every cent of that money is gone. She don't know the value on 't. She never had none of her own to spend afore."

"I think she will use it to good advantage," smiled Oliver. "Besides, it is better she has plenty, as she seems to have missed you. How did that happen?"

"I've been away six weeks, visiting connections by marriage in Iowa, an' I was coming here to see how she was treated, for she ain't writ to me for 'most two months, an' he's mean enough to keep her from it. None of the neighbors know where I'd went, on account of their curiosity: I told 'em mebbe Florida, an' boarded up the lower winder in my house."

"Well, the neighbors will take care of her," said the doctor, cheerily. "Here is Mike; so Miss—"

"Patten—Hannah Patten."

"There is nothing for you to do but to accept our hospitality—city bachelors live well, you know—and to me—

row go down to Denver with us. Mr. Oliver probably has a letter from Mrs. Minny at his office waiting for him, as he promised to let him know if she got home safely."

"I believe I will, and thank you," said Miss Patten, beginning to smooth down her hair. "The smell of them fried onions struck me all in a heap, for I ain't eat since breakfast, my niece's husband not even offering me a chair to set on, let alone something to eat, and I've got a feeling of giddiness that reminds me of one of Cap'n Sam's sea stories—Minny's father, you know—where a shipwrecked crew ate their boots and chewed sticks to keep 'em alive."

"You see," smiled Dr. John. "I was right about our humble vegetable. It appeals to every heart."

"And stomach," said Miss Patten, walking majestically to the house. "It mayn't be proper for me to stop here, but I guess our age protects us."

"Why, certainly," said Dr. John, meekly. "It's in the very air out here to do erratic things, but the neighbors in town shall never know, I swear it."

CHAPTER V.—

A week later Oliver's office boy, a freckled and red-headed youngster by the name of Sam, changed to Sam by the much-tried clerks, knocked and announced hoarsely: "Lady to see you." He threw such meaning in the words, his bearing and manner were so full of dark mystery, Oliver almost expected Mrs. de Restaud, instead of Aunt Hannah. No letter had come from the little lady of the Troublesome, and that disreputable showed she might almost merit her connection's condemnation: it was certainly frivolous to perfect assuring her preserver of her safety. The doctor had been especially unpleasant about it. "You see," he would say, "I told you there were two sides to every story; and the Frenchman may have been a much-enduring man." The office boy dragged a chair near Oliver's desk, and with a significant look withdrew.

"It's either breach or promise or some fellow's cheated her on a land deal," he said to the clerks as he sat down. "I guess there's meat in it, for the boss grinned when he see her."

"I hope you have good news, Miss Patten," Oliver said, eagerly.

"If no news is good I have," she answered, with a sigh. "I've heard from Mr. Perkins that keeps the depot, and he says she ain't been there at all, nor word come. There won't be mail for me neither. I seen that woman at Colorado Springs. She says Minny got there all right, and she brought her a plaid ulster, a hat and some other things, and Minny and the dog went into a court room for it, either."

"Suppose you search the man," said Oliver, smiling. "I will make a charge

brawny man in vine, but Sam gazed in open-mouthed admiration. Going to fires, he felt some days he must be a fireman; the longing was intense as engines sped by at lightning speed; but in a row or a deed of mystery how necessary the police, how high their positions, what chances for seeing things and driving the crowd, principally small boys, away!

"Sorry to trouble you, sir," said the man, awkwardly, "but the old lady said you was to be sent for, as you could testify to the bad character of the man in charge."

"What old lady?" asked Oliver, sharply, much annoyed at the matter.

"Name Patten, I think—a big woman, considerably thin. She came from your office, she said, and had noticed for days a black looking man a following her, and she strolls, carelessly like, towards the city hall, sit, right near she sees he's still after her, and she turns and grabs him and runs him in herself, as neat as any of the force could 'a' done."

"You don't know the man?"

"His face ain't in the gallery, sir, as if in apology, "but it's black and ugly enough to be, I'll say that for him. She tumbled the man down the steps right in the chief's room, and set me here. She wanted the man arrested for a suspicious character; so the chief sent me to get your testimony."

"I'll go down at once," said Oliver, picking up his hat. "I fancy I know the man."

"I'll walk behind, sir," said the policeman, politely, "for seeing me walking with you in the direction of the lock-up your friends might think you was being run in."

At the station, as he suspected, Oliver saw the man was Louis, De Restaud's servant, and black and ugly he was, swearing to himself in French, but refusing to answer any questions.

Oliver had seen master and man the past few days in Denver, and knew he himself was under their surveillance.

He told the chief that Miss Patten was justified in her proceeding; the man had a bad reputation in the North Park, and had certainly been acting in a suspicious manner; the past week he had seen him watching about the streets. The chief admitted the man was not handsome, might have acted oddly, but there must be some charge brought against him. Was the lady willing to go into court and swear she had fears of her life from this man Louis' hands?

"Me," said Miss Patten, majestically, "afraid of that rascal? Not a mite. But I won't have him trailing of me around, and if the perils can't stop it my umbrella will; so there! I won't go into no court room for it, either."

"Suppose you search the man," said Oliver, smiling. "I will make a charge



AS NEAT AS ANY OF THE FORCE COULD DO, against him of carrying concealed weapons."

Louis resisted, with frightful profanity, but the search was made, and the result was a loaded revolver and an ugly knife.

"A greaser's outfit," said a stalwart policeman.

"You ain't general," sighed Miss Patten, "much likin for lawin; folks gits in just as rats in a trap, and there ain't much of a property left when they git out—askin your pardon for being plain spoken, for I always speak my mind."

The exasperated Frenchman was led away, breathing curses and defiance. In Oliver's gray eyes was a smile of mirth; that Louis well understood. He had paid up that rudeness and the accounts were squared. There would be a debt still when Louis was free again; the man who laughs last laughs best. Just now Oliver was decidedly amused.

"I'm obliged to you, perlice," said Miss Patten, rising and plaining her shawl, "but I don't want you to think as I was in any mortal fear of De Restaud's hired man. I won't; for if I can't fight men with their own weapons of strength I can outwit 'em. Good-bye, Mr. Oliver; I'm sorry my friend has brought you so much trouble; but I can't leave from now on you've heard the last of us."

As days lengthened into weeks, and weeks into months, without a word from Hannah Patten or her erratic niece, Oliver's gray eyes was a smile of mirth; that Louis well understood. He had paid up that rudeness and the accounts were squared. There would be a debt still when Louis was free again; the man who laughs last laughs best. Just now Oliver was decidedly amused.

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