

The Lady of the Spur

By David Potter

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CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

"His horse brushed against me, and hurt me," she said. "He wouldn't even stop to speak to me—though the Lord knows I don't look like much." She looked abruptly and her black eyes stared at me. "Why—oh! excuse me, sir. I thought you were Squire Morvan."

"I am," I returned. "I'm Henry Morvan."

"Oh—the new squire. I took you for Mr. Bram when you spoke. Not that you look much alike, but he's generally with Lawrence."

She dried her tears carelessly. I wondered who she could be—an accused curiously got the better of me.

"You know my cousin, then?"

"Oh, yes. Bram Morvan used to come to my house with Lawrence."

"Lawrence Arnold. But he doesn't come any more. I don't miss him, nowadays, though—I've company enough without him." She saw my look of inquiry. "I'm Letty Miller," she said.

The name meant nothing to me, and I found nothing to say. However, plainly she did not expect an answer. Her eyes traveled over me—then she smiled.

"My house is right here," she waved her hand toward a sizable cottage in the pines. "Won't you rest a while, Squire?"

"I believe I will," I responded. I dismounted and still holding my horse's bridle, sat down on the steps of the porch. "Ought I to know your name. I've only just come to the country, you know."

"Before she could reply, Ferris Dayton rode around the turn of the path.

I sprang to my feet, and advanced toward her with lifted cap. The dark brown settled in his mane above the luminous eyes. She looked straight at me, and rode by without moving a muscle of her face. She had cut me dead.

I stood too dumbfounded to speak. Then I ground my teeth—the girl's vagaries were enough to drive a man mad.

Striving to hide my discomfiture, I resumed my seat on the porch. My hostess, leaning against a pillar, seemed completely oblivious of the whole incident.

"I'll have your horse taken, Squire," she said.

She pursed her lips—they were invitingly red and full—and whistled twice. A stout black woman appeared at the cottage door. "There'll be a gentleman to supper, Sarah," said my hostess, "and send Billy for the horse."

"Yes," responded the woman, and departed.

I congratulated myself that I had not called my pretty acquaintance "Letty," as I had been about to do. Thank Heaven! I had said "Squire" only once.

What sort of a girl was this, who ruled a cottage of this size, and had at least two servants to wait upon her. I must have made a mistake in judging her position. I stole a side-long glance.

Her gown was simple enough—my masculine taste did not suffer me to understand that the material was far too rich for the time and place. The clocked stockings and silver-buckled shoes showed a well-turned ankle.

Her eyes followed my glance at her feet. She laughed and trust not of them coquetically forward.

"Ought I to know who Letty Miller is?" I asked.

"Well," she said, "may be not, you being a newcomer; but some of the gentlemen do. Oh, yes. She smiled frankly. "My father used to be a tenant of Lawrence Arnold's. Dad died in the poorhouse, and I—"

She paused and regarded me significantly. "Well, a girl doesn't have to go to the poorhouse—not if she's pretty, you see?"

Yes—I saw at last. Her husband's passionate exclamation, the morning I had seen her rebuff Arnold, seemed to ring in my ears: "Go, ask one of your own people, who can't help herself. You can't turn my dad out to starve, like you did Letty Miller's!" Letty Miller! Letty Miller! and Ferris Dayton had cut me dead.

"Here's Billy," said the woman, as a well-dressed darky appeared. "Billy, take the gentleman's horse."

I rose hastily. "No, no! I must be going—I've some business to attend to."

I left her, staring after me in a puzzled fashion. Lawrence Arnold, and "some of the gentlemen"—perhaps my "cousin" Bram—had given her a ghastly idea of men. And Ferris Dayton had cut me dead!

woman has taken me for my cousin. The first time I regretted it—now, upon my soul I wish I were he."

She recolle, and the light from the open door illumined my face. "Oh! you aren't Bram?"

"I'm his cousin, Henry Morvan."

"Mr. Henry Morvan?" Her tone was not flattering.

"Yes. I've lost my way. Will you honor me with your name?"

"I am Katherine Arnold," she answered very stiffly. "Mr. Lawrence Arnold's sister—and this is Fairview."

Here was a pretty kettle of fish. "I didn't know," I said. "I'm almost a stranger in the country, of course. I lost my way, and stumbled on you entirely by accident. If you'll be good enough to direct me toward Morvan, I need not trouble you longer."

The girl seemed a little taken aback by my proffered willingness to withdraw. She lit her lip, and gazed up at me uncertainly. She was very small—far too much so for my taste—but exceedingly pretty. Her blue eyes, fair hair, and oval face made a charming picture against the light.

"I don't mean to be inhospitable," she said hurriedly, "but only yesterday you attacked my brother, and I can't pretend to be friendly."

"It was a fair fight," I interrupted.

"My brother is said to be the best boxer in the county," she retorted. "If it had been a fair fight—"

Again I broke in. "You seem to know Bram well. When you next see him, got him to tell you about the mill—he was present. And if you like, got him to explain why I fought your brother."

"Lawrence has told me that himself," she cried. "You were angry because—because he wouldn't let you treat one of your tenants as you wished."

I laughed shortly. "Ask Bram to explain to you about that, too. In the meanwhile, I must have been near midnight, and it must have been near midnight, and it must have been near midnight. Was I mistaken, after all? Or had Pine Owl been too badly injured to be really moved? Perhaps his fellows had taken him to the cabin in Lost Hollow—yet it was an impossible distance, if he were really much hurt. I should have gone to Letty Miller's cottage. Not long since he would have found warm welcome there.

An owl hooted weirdly from the thicket nearby. I settled into my cloak. I would see this thing through, if I waited until dawn.

At last even the light in Miss Arnold's room was extinguished. The owl still hooted persistently not a rod from me, but felt about for a stone to silence him, but could not lay hold of any.

The light above suddenly gleamed out again—and was again extinguished. Twice was this manoeuvre repeated. The owl hooted again. My heart began to beat heavily.

Then a man stepped from the thicket, a ladder in his hand. He stole swiftly across the open space and the moonlight fell upon his face. It was Bram Morvan.

He planted the ladder in the shadow of the wall, and mounted without an instant's pause. The window opened softly to receive him.

I stumbled to my horse, and galloped fiercely homeward. If I encountered Pine Owl and his men again, so much the worse for them—I would have relished fighting

my way madly through them.

Bram Morvan the betrayer of his friend's sister! I was sick to the very soul, but what a judgment on Lawrence Arnold! The laughter of the gods for the soul of Letty Miller!

CHAPTER XVII.

By the Lake.

The night passed quietly. Whatever mischief Pine Owl and his night brawlers had been bent upon had probably been abandoned after their encounter with me. My bludgeon had shattered their enterprise for that night, at least. But the thought of what I had seen at Fairview made the world taste bitter the next morning. I fear I received Sam's cheerful grin rather sourly.

"What's the news, Sam?" I demanded.

"Purty considabul, Mastah Henry. Betsey she has a schumpshus dinnah fo' the bride and groom yesterday. Must ha' been fo'ty-fifty folks here, Ah guess. O' co'se, me and Dick key' watch las' night. Yas, and ole mast Buck'loo, too."

"Has he recovered?"

"Purty near. Swears quite some few yit—but he's all right."

"Where's Mr. Bram?"

"Jest come ridin' in a few minnits ago. He's been up early—or mebbe out mighty late. Ah ha'!"

"That will do, Sam. You may go."

I ate a solitary breakfast. Afterward letters claimed my attention. Amongst others I found a note from Mr. Stockton—saying that he was on the point of starting for Trenton, and that he would tell me an interesting bit of gossip when he saw me again. I wondered if Bram, or Lawrence Arnold, had been engaged in some additional iniquity.

I decided not to mention my encounter with Pine Owl to anyone at Morvan. The story of my danger, coming after the attack on Buckalon, would only increase the terror of the domestics, and could lead to no good result. In addition, it might detract from the happiness of Baker's honeymoon.

I had come to this decision, when Baker himself entered the library.

"Do you want me for anything today, Squire?" His tanned face was shining, and there was no need to ask after his happiness.

"Yes, Baker," I said. "I want you to give my best wishes to your wife, and accept them for yourself. And I don't want to see either of you for a week—although I think you'd better sleep here and night for your own protection."

"Thank you, sir. Then Sue and me—we was thinkin' we might go down and fix up our house today."

"Good. If you want any of the servants to help you, take them along."

"All right, sir. But I guess we'd kind of like to be by ourselves today."

"Go, quick," I rejoined, "or Sue will be wondering if you've forgotten her."

After Baker had gone, I wandered moodily about the manor. I was involved in a web of villainy in which I was able to discover neither reason nor outcome. I did not permit myself to consider that I was spicing a peach of my own.

"Go, quick," I rejoined, "or Sue will be wondering if you've forgotten her."

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"Yes, yes. I study Morvan closely, because Morvan is rightly mine—mine, sir. His eyebrows frowning up at me, reminded me grotesquely of Ferris. "You will hear

the story in the country, sir—perhaps have already done so."

I nodded.

"Then, sir, you know my claims. They're just—just by Heaven! And I'll have my rights yet." He shook his cane at me. "I'm not too old to see the day. No, no, Mr. Irving. I'm not too old."

"I really believe a Morvan, all this time, would have been mighty ungrateful for me. The fact that, by the disguise of a name to which I had no claim, I was keeping the old gentleman from his heritage, was even more distasteful. However, I kept a discreet silence.

He gave a grim laugh. "Perhaps you don't agree with me, sir. The broken of an old man, Mr. Irving—an old and broken man."

As if willing to change the subject, he pointed to a pair of woodpeckers that had paddled out from the reeds and were beginning to smooth their feathers.

"See those ducks? There's nothing more to be done, properly stuffed with wild celery and chestnuts. Now, if you had a fowling piece—or even a good pistol, eh?"

"I have a pair of pistols—"

"Oh, at home, of course."

"No, with me," I answered, "but I think—"

"Eh? Oh, toys! It will take more than toys to bring down those woodpeckers."

"These are first-rate duelling pistols," I explained, "but I think I won't fire on the ducks. The noise might alarm the neighborhood."

I was careful to speak in a high key, and he followed my words with the most earnest attention.

"Certainly," Mr. Irving? There was a certain unsteadiness in his tone. He remembered Bram had not given him a character for courage. "You go heavily armed, sir?"

"Yes, since the recent outrage here."

"A man was beaten by outlaws close by here," I shouted, "Haven't you heard?"

"Yes, yes, of course. Mr. Lawrence Arnold was telling me of it yesterday—a disgraceful piece of business. Mr. Arnold was saying that although he dislikes Mr. Henry Morvan personally, such an act is shameful. I also have reason to dislike the name of Morvan, but I abhor violence, sir—abhor violence. So you think it advisable to go armed. Mr. Irving—would you are only a peaceable citizen like myself—yes, like myself?"

"I happened to pick up some pistols of Mr. Stockton's today."

"The pistols I'm carrying are Mr. Thomas Stockton's."

"God bless me! You don't say so? If Mr. Stockton believes it's time to be carrying pistols, I shall have to find a pair for myself. The county must be in a very dangerous condition, indeed, sir—a disgraceful condition, I should say."

"I fancy no one would attack you," I returned.

"You mean I'm too old. Yes, it's true—true. Mr. Irving—and too poor, too. I have confidence in your discretion, sir—I am too poor to tempt footpads, I confess. He beat the ground with his stick.

"I have a daughter—a daughter to look after."

"Then why the devil don't you do it," I muttered, "instead of letting her gallop all over the county?"

"Sir? The devil what, sir?"

"The devil seems to be loose in the county."

"Hah! Very good. The devil in the shape of a charcoal owl on a charcoal horse—eh, Mr. Irving?"

"Have you seen one of Pine Owl's proclamations?" I cried.

"Heaven forbid! Mr. Arnold was telling me about one. Mr. Henry Morvan never heard of it."

"Where did Mr. Arnold see it?"

"Mr. Arnold? No, I believe Mr. Bramfield Morvan saw it. It was told Lawrence. Yes, yes—a skeleton own, drawn in charcoal, I think. A dangerous condition of the county—very; but only to be expected in a county that prefers General Jackson to John Quincy Adams. I take it as a gentleman of property, your politics are those of Washington and Hamilton, sir."

The old man began to bore me. "Well, sir, I'll bid you good morning," I said. "Please present my good wishes to Miss Dayton."

"Eh? Oh, certainly, certainly. I will do so. Good morning, Mr. Irving."

I bowed, and turned away. "By the way," I said. "I have a mount near here. Can't I set you on your way home?"

"Sir? Oh, my mount. Yes, it's waiting for me a few yards back. Mr. Arnold is kind enough to place one at my disposal from time to time. He's very obliging, I'm sure."

I left the old man to his sullen brooding over his rights to Morvan, rights not imaginary, if he but knew the truth. On the other side of the thicket the horse Arnold had lent John Dayton was contentedly gnawing at some sassafras twigs. He was a bay, a good sixteen hands high. There was something vaguely familiar about his powerful outline.

As I passed close to his head, he laid back his ears, and rolled a wicked eye at me. Now, I usually walk liked by animals of all sorts. This one's evident hostility struck me with peculiar force. I stopped, and examined him attentively. Full between his eyes, a heavy blow had cut out a little square of flesh.

"By Heaven!" I muttered. "I knew it! It was Lawrence Arnold."

"The Gloucester hunt, I take it, sir," I managed to say.

"Yes, sir." He whooped like a wild Indian in my very ear as the brush of a big red fox flickered an instant on the rise of a hill. "Ye-a-a! (Some away! a-w-a-a-y-y-y)"

Last I realized my wife, and began to pull back. The huntmen speedily forced ahead of me—all except the square-set man on the large skewbald, who kept so long neck-to-neck, that I gazed at him in puzzled awe.

"When he saw that I was aware of his particular attention, he clapped spurs to his hind, and went away from me at a great pace. The last I saw of him he had turned in his saddle and was straining back, his face still a-frown."

I could not recall that I had ever seen the man before, but his actions caused me a deal of uneasiness. Although I was bold enough to face it, yet I was not in a position to submit to any, even a stranger's scrutiny without a qualm.

So little did I like the sound of a chorus ringing from the common-room—I will plain that I was in the act of crossing the hall, bearing a salver piled with eatables. She nearly dropped her load when I called her by name.

"Lord! It's Squire Morvan."

"I have you fairly trapped now, Peggy."

She laughed up at me, her arms outstretched to support the tray. "Sure I'm deft enough now, that's the truth."

"I won't take an unkind advantage of you."

"Ah, Squire—for a man that's got a pair of live devils hid in the backs of his eyes, you're the most forbearin' one I ever did see. You'll find the master in the bar, sir."

"I don't care to mix with the company at the bar. I'll go into the parlor."

She barred my way hurriedly. "It's engaged, sir. If you please, I'm carryin' a snack in there now, sir—if you please."

"I'm sorry, sir. I do please. There's room for another in the parlor, I suppose."

"Well, sir—I don't know."

"Come, come, Peggy. You're talking nonsense."

"Don't be too sure of that, sir." Her eyes twinkling, she suddenly lifted the waver within an inch of my nose. "Do you smell that? That's the truth."

"What?" Then as a fragrant aroma arose from a steaming kettle. "Tea! O-oh! it's a lady who's engaged the parlor?"

"It is that! A squire, sir—you've seen her before."

"I have?"

"Sure, you have so—though she hasn't a well on now."

"What! Peggy, you're a jewel. Let me have that tray. No, no—I'm her cousin, you know—it'll be a pleasant surprise for her. You needn't come in—I'll do the serving myself. I dare say there's enough for you here."

I overrode her protests, and bore the salver into the tavern parlor.

If I had been in any less defiant mood, I would have beaten a retreat before the look that greeted me from the girl at the window-table.

"Sir!" she exclaimed before could speak, "how dare you intrude—"

"I fancy you'd be surprised, Cousin," I rejoined pleasantly. "It's not often you've had such a Gynamede as I." I placed the eatables on the table. "I vow I'm a rare hand at the service of a—godness."

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh!" In a very faint of temper she was half-way to the door.

"Don't touch the whole house," I said quickly. "If you leave me like this, I swear I'll make the place ring with your name. It would be precious tit-bit for the tavern loungers to know that Miss Dayton refuses to sip tea with her cousin, Mr. Morvan. From the corner of my eye I saw the shot had told—some to an uncertain halt.

I began to arrange the tea things, talking carelessly the while. "Yes, the tongues would have sneered over the scandal of the county families. Sit down, Cousin. At least, you can leave me as well after you've drunk a bit of the whole house."

Indignation choked her—yet I noticed, with an inward smile, that she came a step nearer.

"I suppose it is useless to suggest to Mr. Morvan that a gentleman would withdraw?"

"Quite useless," I agreed. "Your chair implores you, Cousin—also, the bohea is growing cold."

"With a flutter of her hands—almost as if she were yielding to actual force—she sank into a seat.

I eyed her covertly as I poured her dish of tea. She wore her riding habit as usual, the close-fitting bodice, the patched skirt, the skinned boot with its bent but shining spur. Of the frayed whip I had robbed her, but I noticed with a pang that the gloves beside her plate were her old ones.

Through the window behind me the sunlight touched her hair, and drew a golden band above her eyebrows. Her red mouth, firm and sweet, trembled a little—reluctantly, as her hands had done.

"Why have you followed me here?" she asked. "I came here to—to be quiet—to be away from—everything for a day. Why track me no?"

"I track no one," I answered. "I found you here by chance, came here like yourself, it seems—to be at ease. No, I'll leave tracking to such as are more skilled in owing than I, be it day or night."

Her eyes fell before mine. She stared into the air, and slipped in front of her into the chair. "Drink your tea, Cousin. I saw Miss Dayton's biscuits, toasted in butter! Yes, and a pot of Mistress Evans' spicy cherries. A fit feast for a queen!"

Mechanically obeying my command, she sipped her tea a little, then began to nibble at biscuits and jam.

"I don't know what to make of you sometimes," she said.

"Cousin Ferris, there's a Lucifer and a Gabriel in every man—that's an old story. But I confess to you, the devil in me ramps more fiercely than he does in many a worse man."

"You mean you find it hard to keep him chained?" She was almost smiling.

"Yes. He's unchained now—since I first saw you here—when was it—ten days ago."

The smile was undoubted now, though faint. "I hope not because you saw me."

"God knows," I said so gloomily that her smile faded.

"Ferris," I said after a heavy silence, "I haven't forced my company upon you to talk about angels and devils. Yesterday morning, when we talked at Saint Peter's after the wedding no one was ever more gracious than you."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A Dish of Tea.

Never found me far on my way to Pole Tavern. After leaving John Dayton, I had a few minutes' distance for Morvan, and all it meant, and had determined to rid it of my presence for the rest of the day.

I knew of no place more likely to afford me refuge than the hostelry on the Gloucester road. To exchange thrusts with Peggy, the pretty bound-girl, was better than to mope about the manorhouse. Peggy's saucy ways and honest Irish eye would be a relief after the insolent whims of Ferris Dayton and the significant glances of Letty Miller.

True, by visiting Pole Tavern I ran some risk, not only from Evans' impertinent curiosity, but also from the possible recognition of chance travelers. However, I felt myself hardy enough to endure the danger. He would be a bold man who would dare to accuse the Squire of Morvan of being Tom Bell, the notorious highwayman.

I was riding along the border of an oak wood when a great hullabaloo broke out on my left. Before I could pull up, men, dogs and horses burst upon me from the corner of the grove. The baying of hounds, the cracking of whips, the cries and whoops of the men made a very bedlam of the Gloucester road. For a moment I thought the sheriff with his whole posse committed was at my heels.

A glance at the pack of dogs—six couple if one—and a second at the riders, told me there was no cause for alarm—I had blundered upon a hunt, or rather it had blundered upon me and bade fair to sweep me before it.

A lively young fellow in a green jacket rode at me, shouting: "Which way? Which way, sir? The red fox! Did he break cover this way?"

I waved my hand vaguely. Green Jacket thought he understood. "To the southward? Yes—a! Come on, gentlemen! We'll give the old rogue this time, if we run him clear to the bay." He shouted back at me, his chin on his shoulder. "Won't you take us, sir? Join us—join us!"

LET US FORGET
JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

Let us forget. What matters it that we
Once reigned o'er happy
realms of long ago
And talked of love, and let our
voices low,
And ruled for some brief sessions
royally?
What if we sung, or laughed, or
wept maybe?
It has availed not anything, and so
Let it go by that we may better know
How poor a thing is lost to you and me.
But yesterday I kissed your lips,
and yet
Did thrill you not enough to shake
the dew
From your drenched lids—and
missed, with no regret
Your kiss shot back, with sharp
breaths failing you:
And so, today while our worn eyes are wet
With all this waste of tears, let us
forget!

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CHAPTER XVI.

The Laughter of the Gods.

I had been so absorbed in the events of the afternoon that it was not until I rode away from Letty Miller's cottage that I noticed how late it was. The brief autumn afternoon had faded. It was quite dark by the time I had followed the bridle-bath a mile or two. In my confusion, I somehow took a wrong turn, and presently realized that I had lost my way.

This in itself was no great matter, for I was certain to run across a house, sooner or later, but in the unsettled state of the country, I had good cause to be on the alert. I confess, the noise of a gray squirrel crashing its homeward way through the branches of a hickory made me start and grip my cudgel. However, this was a weapon of extraordinary potency—I balanced it in my hand with satisfaction.

I had fashioned this cudgel the day before. I had drilled a hole half the length of a piece of water-soaked oak—a stick as long as my arm, and nearly as thick as my two thumbs. In to this hole, I had poured melted lead, and afterward capped the stick with rings of the same metal. As a result, it was provided with what, at a little distance, might pass for a heavy riding whip, but what was in reality a formidable bludgeon—a weapon to be compared to the mace of a Richard Lion Heart. Its weight, dangling from the lion about my wrist, was very reassuring.

I pushed along the unknown path as briskly as the darkness would allow. In half an hour or so, I was relieved to come out on the turnpike, although at a point that was strange to me.

As I hesitated, I espied the lights of a house on a little eminence. Setting my course toward this light, I descended through a handsome gateway and, at the end of an avenue, found myself before a stately mansion. It might have stood for a counterpart of Morvan—a large brick-edged house, built in the days of Lord Berkeley.

Hastily I had my horse's hoofs sounded on the gravelled road, when the door was flung open and, with the flood of light, a charming girl rushed out.

"Oh, Bram!" she cried. "Is that you at last? I thought you were never coming! All the servants are off to a husking—and I'm all alone."

I bowed to my saddlebow. "Madam, for the second time within an hour a pretty

girl, a bottle, and a gun. To make the seasons fit—And the three, when it is done. A girl's the best of it. I lifted my face toward the rising moon, and roared in Bram's most jovial manner. A faithful hound, a gallant horse—The strains against the bit—A girl—

"Good Lord, Squire," said a voice at my horse's nose, "we hope one of you gits the gal—but don't wake the dead to tell 'em about it, so to speak."

My startled glance fell upon a group of men moving along the road. Wrapped up in my emulation of Bram, I had ridden into their midst unawares. Six or seven men on foot trudged beside a single horseman.

As I looked, an awful thrill went through me—the men were without heads! And then I realized the truth—every man's head was covered by a black bag. It was Pine Owl and his men!

At the same moment, they, too, perceived their mistake. A fierce yell went up. "It's the other! The new squire! It's him!" They rushed upon me from all sides.

I whirled up my formidable bludgeon. "Keep off, you scoundrels!" I shouted. "I'll kill the first man that touches me."

They hung back a little, and I spurred desperately forward. The horseman now seemed to recognize me for the first time. With a peculiar sharp cry he wheeled his mount in front of me. Leaning forward, he snatched a pistol from his holster and presented it at my breast. My descending bludgeon dashed the weapon from his hand and fell unheeded full between the eyes of his luckless beast. Man and horse went down as if struck by lightning. I spurred headlong over them, and striking right and left, won clear in an instant.

I was forty yards away and going like the wind before the ruffian dreamed of pursuit. Even then, as their dimming shouts speedily showed, they realized that for footman to pursue a mounted man was sheer folly.

In three minutes I galloped out on the turnpike. In the noise I had become turned about and was retracing my path. But I was by no means disturbed—I counted myself born under a lucky star to be alive at that moment. My road dropped to a walk. I looked up at the moon and felt a lively sense of astonishment that it should still be shining.

Convinced not only that I was unhurt,

but that the world still wagged as usual, I resolved to satisfy myself of Pine Owl's identity. I had had only a glimpse of the black-bagged head, shapeless and terrible, but the body I had seen as it fell. The man was too slender for my "cousin" Bram—besides one of the footpads had taken me for him. He sat his saddle too skilfully for "Brownie" Davis. It must be Lawrence Arnold.

A ready way to make certain was to keep watch on Fairview until its owner should return. Although my blow had not touched Pine Owl at all, yet his fall must have shaken him severely. I reasoned that he would make for his home and a chance to recover from the shock.

Fairview was surrounded by a grove of oaks, and all along one side of the house the scrub oak and undergrowth grew close to the wall—a perfect hiding place.

I tied the roan well back in the trees, out of sight of the avenue. Then I borrowed out a place in the thicket, and disposed myself for my watch. Without being compelled to do more than raise my head, I could see the approach up the avenue, and the path that wound to the side door.

So sure was I of my man that I had supposed my vigil would not be a long one; but the hours went by and there was no sign of Lawrence Arnold.

Half a dozen black servants straggled in, laughing and talking after the manner of their race. The lights in the house went out until only one remained—still I did not see the bulky shoulders or hear the heavy tread I had expected.

Fairview was wrapped in darkness, save for the light that burned steadily in the upper window. Two or three times I saw a woman's figure pass across the curtain. Miss Katherine Arnold was making her leisurely preparations for the night. I wondered if she would ask Bram, when next she should see him, the real reason for my quarrel with her brother.

It must have been near midnight, and Arnold had not appeared. Was I mistaken, after all? Or had Pine Owl been too badly injured to be really moved? Perhaps his fellows had taken him to the cabin in Lost Hollow—yet it was an impossible distance, if he were really much hurt. I should have gone to Letty Miller's cottage. Not long since he would have found warm welcome there.

An owl hooted weirdly from the thicket nearby. I settled into my cloak. I would see this thing through, if I waited until dawn.

At last even the light in Miss Arnold's room was extinguished. The owl still hooted persistently not a rod from me, but felt about for a stone to silence him, but could not lay hold of any.

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Then a man stepped from the thicket, a ladder in his hand. He stole swiftly across the open space and the moonlight fell upon his face. It was Bram Morvan.

He planted the ladder in the shadow of the wall, and mounted without an instant's pause. The window opened softly to receive him.

I stumbled to my horse, and galloped fiercely homeward. If I encountered Pine Owl and his men again, so much the worse for them—I would have relished fighting

my way madly through them.

Bram Morvan the betrayer of his friend's sister! I was sick to the very soul, but what a judgment on Lawrence Arnold! The laughter of the gods for the soul of Letty Miller!

CHAPTER XVII.

By the Lake.

The night passed quietly. Whatever mischief Pine Owl and his night brawlers had been bent upon had probably been abandoned after their encounter with me. My bludgeon had shattered their enterprise for that night, at least. But the thought of what I had seen at Fairview made the world taste bitter the next morning. I fear I received Sam's cheerful grin rather sourly.

"What's the news, Sam?" I demanded.

"Purty considabul, Mastah Henry. Betsey she has a schumpshus dinnah fo' the bride and groom yesterday. Must ha' been fo'ty-fifty folks here, Ah guess. O' co'se, me and Dick key' watch las' night. Yas, and ole mast Buck'loo, too."

"Has he recovered?"

"Purty near. Swears quite some few yit—but he's all right."

"Where's Mr. Bram?"

"Jest come ridin' in a few minnits ago. He's been up early—or mebbe out mighty late. Ah ha'!"

"That will do, Sam. You may go."

I ate a solitary breakfast. Afterward letters claimed my attention. Amongst others I found a note from Mr. Stockton—saying that he was on the point of starting for Trenton, and that he would tell me an interesting bit of gossip when he saw me again. I wondered if Bram, or Lawrence Arnold, had been engaged in some additional iniquity.

I decided not to mention my encounter with Pine Owl to anyone at Morvan. The story of my danger, coming after the attack on Buckalon, would only increase the terror of the domestics, and could lead to no good result. In addition, it might detract from the happiness of Baker's honeymoon.

I had come to this decision, when Baker himself entered the library.

"Do you want me for anything today, Squire?" His tanned face was shining, and there was no need to ask after his happiness.

"Yes, Baker," I said. "I want you to give my best wishes to your wife, and accept them for yourself. And I don't want to see either of you for a week—although I think you'd better sleep here and night for your own protection."

"Thank you, sir. Then Sue and me—we was thinkin' we might go down and fix up our house today."

"Good. If you want any of the servants to help you, take them along."

"All right, sir. But I guess we'd kind of like to be by ourselves today."

"Go, quick," I rejoined, "or Sue will be wondering if you've forgotten her."

After Baker had gone, I wandered moodily about the manor. I was involved in a web of villainy in which I was able to discover neither reason nor outcome. I did not permit myself to consider that I was spicing a peach of my own.

"Go, quick," I rejoined, "or Sue will be wondering if you've forgotten her."

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"Yes, yes. I study Morvan closely, because Morvan is rightly mine—mine, sir. His eyebrows frowning up at me, reminded me grotesquely of Ferris. "You will hear

the story in the country, sir—perhaps have already done so."

I nodded.

"Then, sir, you know my claims. They're just—just by Heaven! And I'll have my rights yet." He shook his cane at me. "I'm not too old to see the day. No, no, Mr. Irving. I'm not too old."

"I really believe a Morvan, all this time, would have been mighty ungrateful for me. The fact that, by the disguise of a name to which I had no claim, I was keeping the old gentleman from his heritage, was even more distasteful. However, I kept a discreet silence.

He gave a grim laugh. "Perhaps you don't agree with me, sir. The broken of an old man, Mr. Irving—an old and broken man."

As if willing to change the subject, he pointed to a pair of woodpeckers that had paddled out from the reeds and were beginning to smooth their feathers.

"See those ducks? There's nothing more to be done, properly stuffed with wild celery and chestnuts. Now, if you had a fowling piece—or even a good pistol, eh?"

"I have a pair of pistols—"

"Oh, at home, of course."

"No, with me," I answered, "but I think—"

"Eh? Oh, toys! It will take more than toys to bring down those woodpeckers."

"These are first-rate duelling pistols," I explained, "but I think I won't fire on the ducks. The noise might alarm the neighborhood."

I was careful to speak in a high key, and he followed my words with the most earnest attention.

"Certainly," Mr. Irving? There was a certain unsteadiness in his tone. He remembered Bram had not given him a character for courage. "You go heavily armed, sir?"

"Yes, since the recent outrage here."

"A man was beaten by outlaws close by here," I shouted, "Haven't you heard?"

"Yes, yes, of course. Mr. Lawrence Arnold was telling me of it yesterday—a disgraceful piece of business. Mr. Arnold was saying that although he dislikes Mr. Henry Morvan personally, such an act is shameful. I also have reason to dislike the name of Morvan, but I abhor violence, sir—abhor violence. So you think it advisable to go armed. Mr. Irving—would you are only a peaceable citizen like myself—yes, like myself?"

"I happened to pick up some pistols of Mr. Stockton's today."

"The pistols I'm carrying are Mr. Thomas Stockton's."

"God bless me! You don't say so? If Mr. Stockton believes it's time to be carrying pistols, I shall have to find a pair for myself. The county must be in a very dangerous condition, indeed, sir—a disgraceful condition, I should say."

"I fancy no one would attack you," I returned.

"You mean I'm too old. Yes, it's true—true. Mr. Irving—and too poor, too. I have confidence in your discretion, sir—I am too poor to tempt footpads, I confess. He beat the ground with his stick.

"I have a daughter—a daughter to look after."

"Then why the devil don't you do it," I muttered, "instead of letting her gallop all over the county?"

"Sir? The devil what, sir?"

"The devil seems to be loose in the county."

"Hah! Very good. The devil in the shape of a charcoal owl on a charcoal horse—eh, Mr. Irving?"

"Have you seen one of Pine Owl's proclamations?" I cried.

"Heaven forbid! Mr. Arnold was telling me about one. Mr. Henry Morvan never heard of it."

"Where did Mr. Arnold see it?"

"Mr. Arnold? No, I believe Mr. Bramfield Morvan saw it. It was told Lawrence. Yes, yes—a skeleton own, drawn in charcoal, I think. A dangerous condition of the county—very; but only to be expected in a county that prefers General Jackson to John Quincy Adams. I take it as a gentleman of property, your politics are those of Washington and Hamilton, sir."

The old man began to bore me. "Well, sir, I'll bid you good morning," I said. "Please present my good wishes to Miss Dayton."

"Eh? Oh, certainly, certainly. I will do so. Good morning, Mr. Irving."

I bowed, and turned away. "By the way," I said. "I have a mount near here. Can't I set you on your way home?"

"Sir? Oh, my mount. Yes, it's waiting for me a few yards back. Mr. Arnold is kind enough to place one at my disposal from time to time. He's very obliging, I'm sure."

I left the old man to his sullen brooding over his rights to Morvan, rights not imaginary, if he but knew the truth. On the other side of the thicket the horse Arnold had lent John Dayton was contentedly gnawing at some sassafras twigs. He was a bay, a good sixteen hands high. There was something vaguely familiar about his powerful outline.

As I passed close to his head, he laid back his ears, and rolled a wicked eye at me. Now, I usually walk liked by animals of all sorts. This one's evident hostility struck me with peculiar force. I stopped, and examined him attentively. Full between his eyes, a heavy blow had cut out a little square of flesh.

"By Heaven!" I muttered. "I knew it! It was Lawrence Arnold."

"The Gloucester hunt, I take it, sir," I managed to say.

"Yes, sir." He whooped like a wild Indian in my very ear as the brush of a big red fox flickered an instant on the rise of a hill. "Ye-a-a! (Some away! a-w-a-a-y-y-y)"

Last I realized my wife, and began to pull back. The huntmen speedily forced ahead of me—all except the square-set man on the large skewbald, who kept so long neck-to-neck, that I gazed at him in puzzled awe.

"When he saw that I was aware of his particular attention, he clapped spurs to his hind, and went away from me at a great pace. The last I saw of him he had turned in his saddle and was straining back, his face still a-frown."

I could not recall that I had ever seen the man before, but his actions caused me a deal of uneasiness. Although I was bold enough to face it, yet I was not in a position to submit to any, even a stranger's scrutiny without a qualm.

So little did I like the sound of a chorus ringing from the common-room—I will plain that I was in the act of crossing the hall, bearing a salver piled with eatables. She nearly dropped her load when I called her by name.

"Lord! It's Squire Morvan."

"I have you fairly trapped now, Peggy."

She laughed up at me, her arms outstretched to support the tray. "Sure I'm deft enough now, that's the truth."

"I won't take an unkind advantage of you."

"Ah, Squire—for a man that's got a pair of live devils hid in the backs of his eyes, you're the most forbearin' one I ever did see. You'll find the master in the bar, sir."

"I don't care to mix with the company at the bar. I'll go into the parlor."

She barred my way hurriedly. "It's engaged, sir. If you please, I'm carryin' a snack in there now, sir—if you please."

"I'm sorry, sir. I do please. There's room for another in the parlor, I suppose."

"Well, sir—I don't know."

"Come, come, Peggy. You're talking nonsense."

"Don't be too sure of that, sir." Her eyes twinkling, she suddenly lifted the waver within an inch of my nose. "Do you smell that? That's the truth."

"What?" Then as a fragrant aroma arose from a steaming kettle. "Tea! O-oh! it's a lady who's engaged the parlor?"

"It is that! A squire, sir—you've seen her before."

"I have?"

"Sure, you have so—though she hasn't a well on now."

"What! Peggy, you're a jewel. Let me have that tray. No, no—I'm her cousin, you know—it'll be a pleasant surprise for her. You needn't come in—I'll do the serving myself. I dare say there's enough for you here."

I overrode her protests, and bore the salver into the tavern parlor.

If I had been in any less defiant mood, I would have beaten a retreat before the look that greeted me from the girl at the window-table.

"Sir!" she exclaimed before could speak, "how dare you intrude—"

"I fancy you'd be surprised, Cousin," I rejoined pleasantly. "It's not often you've had such a Gynamede as I." I placed the eatables on the table. "I vow I'm a rare hand at the service of a—godness."