

The Lady of the Four

By David Potter

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CHAPTER XX—Continued.

"Constan," I said sternly, "there has been lying by others besides Arnold. You! Haven't you been lying to me ever since I came here—lying by words and actions? Perhaps you do know your own mind. She looked up at me pitifully, but I continued, 'I've seen you in the cabin in Lost Hollow, talking as a friend with a woman I know to be a very fiend. Why do you gallop about the country at all hours of the night—as I know you do? What sort of girl is it who'll write proclamations for the Pine Owls?'"

"Oh!" she said. Her eyes brimmed with tears. "Ah, but I deserve it." She struggled to control herself. "I'll tell you everything—by and by—when the Pine Owls are coming here tonight. This morning I went for a ride. I was worried by—by thinking too much." Her eyes fell before mine. "I rode as far as I could—in the afternoon I came to Mary Pedersen's cabin. My friend she showed me."

"I warned you against her!" "Oh, yes. But I didn't believe you. I didn't wish to believe you."

"What happened in the cabin?" urged Mr. Stockton. "The old woman lost some of her sweetness. What! Dropped the mask, did she?"

"Not at first. She talked to me as a sister, for a long time. After a while she made tea. She insisted so hard I should drink some that I remembered what you had written me, constan, and I refused to take it. She said she was coming to me behind my back—I was frightened. Before I could make up my mind to go, Mr. Arnold came in."

"Ah," remarked Hubbard, "Mr. Lawrence Arnold of Fairview. Very good." "Yes. He had been drinking. I started to go then, but they insisted I should stay. I began to be very much afraid, but I didn't know what to do."

"Poor child," I said. "Mary and Mr. Arnold were determined to have me sit with them while they drank."

"The woman drank, too, did she?" asked the bailiff. "Oh, yes. After Mr. Arnold came in she began drinking steadily. By and by, a man they called Brownie came in, and more and more men, until the place was full."

"And you alone with them," I said. "She hung her head. 'I wasn't so much afraid of the piners hurting me. I had seen the man they called Brownie, and three of the others before. But I knew all those men must have come together for some violence. I soon found out from their talk they were coming to attack Morvan—and you.'"

"They'll be made welcome." "When I understood, I said I wouldn't allow it. They only laughed at me. Then I told them that when I'd agreed to help Mr. Arnold frighten you away, he had said there would never be anyone hurt—had promised me that if you wouldn't go, we would give you the money and I would suddenly. 'Constan, that day at Pole Tavern, I couldn't play my part—I couldn't warn you in desperate earnest—because I didn't really believe you would be in desperate danger. And I didn't write those notes from Pine Owl. I suppose Mr. Arnold did. The one you saw in my belt that same day at Pole Tavern had given me to post where you would be sure to see it. But I didn't post it at all—the paper was too dirty.'"

"What!" exclaimed the lawyer. "That proves it never pays to take a woman into a conspiracy. Wouldn't post the notice because the paper was too dirty?"

"Go ahead, ma'am, if you please," said Hubbard. "What happened after you'd told me you were doing in the mire than you'd bargained for?"

"I said they all knew they had beaten that poor Buckaloo without my knowledge—I would never have consented to it. I told them they mustn't attack Morvan."

"Well!" urged Mr. Stockton. "What then?" "They laughed at me. The man Brownie said the bargain between Mr. Arnold and me was nothing to them—that they were after the plunder. The bargain they had made was for the money and the place in Morvan, and they would have it if they had to kill you to get it. Then I said I'd come and warn you."

"Good heavens!" I cried. "They might have murdered you!" "I thought they would, at first. But Mr. Arnold made them be quiet. He said I was a fool, but they'd simply leave me there with Mary to watch me, until it was all over. Then the others went out to make ready, but Mr. Arnold and Mary made me sit down by the fire—and made that awful snake coil down near me, too. Oh! She buried her face in her hands."

"The hell call!" I said. "But I was almost as much afraid of Mr. Arnold as I was of the snake. He kept looking at me so strangely, and he'd taken care to see the money and the place in Morvan, and they would have it if they had to kill you to get it. Then I said I'd come and warn you."

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"Dear," I began, and could say no more. The bailiff was clamping his jaws together. Mr. Stockton blew his nose fiercely. "A brave girl, Henry—a brave girl. What!"

CHAPTER XXI.

The Attack. "It seems to me if the candle was 'most burned down to that fat pine-wood, may be your witch has got her punishment, by this time."

"Well," he went on, "one snake's had his back broke by a poker, and another's got herself singed very likely, but there's still a whole knot of 'em alive—and headed this way."

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men on foot issued from the darkness and began to move toward the door. "Now, str," muttered the bailiff, "better stop 'em before they get too close."

"I threw my German rifle into the hollow of my arm, and stepped from behind the pillar. "Halt, there!" I shouted. "Now, then, gentlemen—what do you want?"

The effect of my challenge was magical. The footmen hesitated one instant—then, turning, were swallowed by the night. Only Pius Owl himself remained. He lifted his head—the shapeless black face stared up at me. Then very slowly the horse began to move backward, inch by inch the hase crept from tall to haunch—to saddle. The figure of the rider melted away. For an instant the horse's head stood out—then it, too, was gone.

We gazed at each other. The whole thing might almost have been a ghostly apparition. "Just so," said the bailiff. "We did the surprise they thought they were going to do. Better get under cover, air—that was a rifle the leader had. He might—"

"A stream of fire shot from the darkness, followed by a sharp report. A tiny shower of splinters flew from the pillar not an inch above my head. I sprang for shelter. "Are you hit, Squire?" cried Baker.

"A close call," commented Hubbard coolly. "If it hadn't been so hazy, he'd have you all right. I guess the mist sort of made your head look bigger that it was. They mean business, that's sure. Well, so do I, if that's their game." He drew a pair of huge horse pistols from the flaps of his waistcoat.

"Squire," said Dick's voice behind us. "Mastah Thomas wants to know if anybody's hurt, and do you want him to come here."

"No. Tell him we expect another attack soon. Keep a sharp lookout at the rear, there."

Five or six men came into our range of vision at a run. They bore what must have been axes and billets of wood. In the lead, rifle in hand, ran a broad-shouldered man on foot—I knew it must be Lawrence Arnold.

"Halt!" I cried. "Halt, or we'll fire into you." "Fire and be damned!" roared the leader. "Come on, boys!"

"Fire!" I shouted. At the word, Baker and Dick emptied their pieces into the crowd. There were several shrill cries. The whole group turned and ran back as before. Only the leader stood his ground.

"Come on, you cowards!" he cried, his voice sounding muffled behind the black bag that hid his face. "Come on. There's only a nigger or two."

Several of his followers halted. I saw they would regain courage in another instant. I crouched by the porch rail.

"Fire!" I cried. "I know you, sir. I warn you, we'll shoot to kill if you compel us."

His rifle leaped to his shoulder by way of answer. Our pieces sounded like one report. Even as I fired I remembered Mr. Stockton's favorite maxim: "Aim at his kneecap."

Again I had a narrow escape—the bullet was buried in the balustrade that shielded my throat. But the half-ounce ball from my German rifle struck Pius Owl below the knee and smashed the bone. He uttered a harsh scream, and crumpled to the earth. His followers dragged him away.

"That's the style," said the bailiff in grim approval. "A good shot, sir. I'll bet he don't do any more owing for one while. Baker and the boy peeped some of the others, too."

"Dick," I ordered, "get back to Mr. Stockton."

The boy hurried away, and I turned to Hubbard. "I'm sure that was Arnold. He's down—that ought to discourage the others. He's the moving spirit—the rest are only a cowardly mob."

"I ain't so sure about that," responded the bailiff. "There's another fellow in the gang is a good deal of a fighter."

"Brownie" Davis? Charging a house full of armed men is different from gouging out eyes—or even robbing a traveler."

"That's so. You I guess Arnold's got all he wants tonight, but—"

The sound of a horse's hoofs interrupted him. The animal, hidden by the mist, seemed to move from front to rear of the house at full gallop.

"Can Arnold have mounted again?" I exclaimed. "With a wounded leg!"

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ones again. "One more try, and we'll be through."

Hubbard's face set in grim lines. "Gentlemen," he said hurriedly, "for the peace of the state, we'll have to make an example of some of these fellows. I happen to know their leader is a professional high-wayman. Pull up that settle and those chairs for a breakfast here. Yes, the clock, too. Are all your weapons loaded? Where's Dick? Dick!"

The black boy came running from his post above. "They're comin', Mastah Thomas!" he cried. "A whole lot of 'em with a big log, and the man on horseback behind 'em."

"All right," said the bailiff sternly. "Put out the candles, Buckaloo. Now, gentlemen, as soon as they break through, let 'em have it. We've got to break up this gang, once for all."

There was a tramp of heavy feet without. "Stand clear!" shouted the hoarse tones. The battering ram struck with terrific force. The door leaped from its hinges and fell in the hall with a clang. Over it poured a stream of ghastly figures.

"Fire!" muttered the bailiff. Our weapons thundered together. I discharged both barrels of my Manton. Mr. Stockton's pistols cracked, then catching up my rifle, he emptied that as well. Buckaloo, swearing fiercely, did the same with shotgun and flintlock.

There was a chorus of shouts and cries. The attacking column was withered. Men staggered and fell, rose to hands and knees and crawled away, moaning.

Outside a raging horseman was visible in the moonlight. The bailiff fired twice with his heavy pistols. Pius Owl reeled. He stiffened himself—then galloped away, lurching horribly in his saddle.

An awful silence reigned. In the darkness we could hear the thumping of each other's hearts.

"Dick, light the candles," said the bailiff softly. "Buckaloo, help me fix that door the best way we can. Gentlemen, Pius Owl and the boys from the Barrens will never trouble this county again."

CHAPTER XXII. The Last Trick. From the chaos of the back hall I hurried to the front of the house. Bram still crouched, brooding, in the window chair. He did not lift even his eyes as I strode past him.

In the library Ferriss and Sue sat side by side, their arms about each other. Jerry stood facing the door.

"Who's theyah?" he demanded valiantly. "That you, Mastah Henry?" "Yes, yes. We've driven them off, Ferriss. It's all over."

"Is—la he safe, Squire?" exclaimed Sue. "Lem' safe and sound. None of our side is hurt—except Mr. Stockton. He has a few face scratches."

Ferriss looked up at me. I noticed the pitiful drop of her mouth, and the dark circles under her eyes.

"The others?" she said. "The—other side?" "Some of them are badly hurt. I think we don't know whether or not any are killed. There's nothing in sight, at any rate. They've taken their wounded and

dead away—if there are any dead." "Oh, horrible!" "Yes, but they brought it on their own heads. They were solemnly warned off. We were forced to fire upon them."

"I know, but—oh! it's all upon my account. If it hadn't been for me, they'd never have come here. It's all my fault."

"No, no. You've been misled all along by a clever scoundrel. Remember, the bailiff told you themselves they were after plunder—they didn't come for any other reason. Cousin," I went on, "you must be worn out. Let Sue put you to bed. You can go home when you're rested tomorrow—or today—it must be nearly morning."

"She was so weary to protest. Indeed, she had been through an agony of terror and anguish that might well have turned her brain. I slipped my arm about her shoulder, and supported her to the very door of Sue's room. She gave me a long look. Then Sue closed the door softly behind her. Dick was extinguishing the candles in the hall. It was almost daylight. Mr. Stockton and Hubbard were awaiting me.

"Sam has gone for our horses, Henry," said the lawyer. "Now's the time to finish up this business." He brandished a handful of warrants. "You and I and Hubbard must be riding. Yes and Bram, too."

"Where are we going?" "Everywhere—everywhere. What! I'll send Dick down to the village to my clerk, Fithian. Fithian will see that the machinery of the law runs true. Of course, we'll have to report all this fighting to the authorities. Fortunately I'm about the chief authority myself—in this particular case—I and Hubbard. Are you ready there, Bramfield?"

"My cousin" got on his feet. He stretched himself stiffly. "Yes, sir," he answered. His tone was grave, but free of resentment. "I'm ready. Let's get through with it."

In five minutes we were all booted and spurred and swung about our horses. We all mounted and swept around the house. Several plashes of blood were distinctly visible upon the withering grass.

"Just so," said the bailiff. "Some sick people in the swamp today, I guess." The sun rose out of the pines as we cantered slowly down the slope. In those same pines murder had lately been hatching—perhaps ruffians were even then dragging their shattered limbs through the thickets.

Mr. Stockton seemed to be lost in thought. The bailiff, too, looked grim. I did not care to ask them our destination. However, I soon perceived that we were making toward Fairview township. Doubtless we would trap Lawrence Arnold, lurking like a wounded tiger in his den. We might even hope to overtake him on the way.

But I was roused side-long at me from time to time. If I looked as I felt, my face was not encouraging; but when our horses fell to a walk, he relined beside me.

"I've been a cad, Hal," he said. "I must have been crazy."

Unmistaken his character too well to believe that he was endeavoring to fend off punishment by this acknowledgment. His words told of a genuine repentance, but I was in no position to answer him. He surveyed me ruefully, and fell back to his place.

We gained the Fairview turnpike and galloped along it. It was a glorious autumn morning. Silvery networks glistened in the grass beside the road. The sky above the pines was blue as steel. A woodpecker called plaintively from a blasted oak.

It was the spot where the avenue to Fairview branched from the turnpike, yet we were passing it at a gallop.

"This is the place, Mr. Stockton," I called. "Aren't we going to Fairview?" "But don't fret, Henry," answered the lawyer over his shoulder. "We're after a craftier fox than Lawrence Arnold. No, no, it's the keystone of the arch we want. If we break the keystone, there won't be any arch. What! Come on, before he out-arches us!"

Amazed, I spun my roan after him. "But, Pine Owl!" I said, as we pounded along. "He must be the man we want." "Yes, you're right, Henry—you're right. Pine Owl's the man—if he's alive. Yes, yes, if he's alive."

but because he's the highwayman I've been after for two years past. Yes, sir—he rebbed Mr. William Hancock on the Clayville Road very lately, and has been mixed in a dozen other matters I could name. I got hold of the proofs not long since, but his life has been forfeit to the law these two years or more. Yes, sir, if I hadn't killed him he'd have had to swing. I guess it's better as it is."

"A hundred times!" said Mr. Stockton. "You've nothing to blame yourself for, Henry—nothing. Now, for Arnold's," he went on. "Hubbard, you take charge here, will you? Make everything right for the business. Want! Luckily William Hancock is cornered just now, and he's not likely to see beyond the end of his nose. But arrange things so he won't have to look too closely. You understand?"

"Yes, sir. This is in my line," responded the bailiff. "It'll be all right." Bram was holding the horses below the house. He gave us a questioning look.

"He's dead," said the lawyer. "He's killed himself." Bram paled. He gazed from one to the other. "Dead, John Dayton—killed himself!" "Yes—dead by his own hand, sir," responded the lawyer firmly. "He has committed suicide—suicide. Mr. Bram, a most unfortunate occurrence. A party of gentlemen—his nearest relatives and neighbors—come to see Mr. John Dayton a morning call—to ascertain if he has by chance been made the object of a similar attack to that just directed against the main branch of the family. They find him dead—yes, a note in his own hand stating that he was tired of life, and had resolved to end it. The coroner can't fail to find a verdict of suicide upon that note."

"Ha!" "Yes, Mr. Bram. A very lamentable affair. And ending greatly to be deplored for so old—and ah!—so well connected a man. Very regrettable—suicide."

CHAPTER XXIII. Evil Spirits. In fifteen minutes Mr. Stockton, Bram and I rode up the avenue to Fairview. Several servants hastened out. "Is your master at home?" demanded Mr. Stockton.

"No, sah," answered one of them. "He ain't been home since yistiddy forenoon." Ah, he hasn't! Is your mistress in?" "Yes, sah. Miss Kitty's here, but Ah don't guess she's dressed yet."

"Mr. Bram," said the lawyer. "I'll have to ask you to go in and make sure our man isn't here. If you see him, if you please—on your honor. Bram nodded. "And be careful he doesn't pistol you with a close!" cautioned the lawyer. "I dare say he doesn't love you just now."

"Tossing his reins to a darkey, Bram ran into the house, toward the village. The second story I so well remembered presently a joyful cry.

"Damn his effrontery!" I muttered. Mr. Stockton gave me a quizzical glance. Bram ran out. "He isn't here," he declared. "I'm sure of it."

"Where can he be?" "He's at Mr. Perry's," suggested Bram. "If his leg's smashed, it would be too far for him to try for Mary Pedersen's."

"Very likely—very likely. We won't need you any more, Mr. Bram. Tell everything—everything, mind, to her. He nodded to ward the house. "Make a clean breast of it, Mr. Bram. Then, if you please, get her to ride over to Morvan within an hour and break the news of Mr. Dayton's suicide to Miss Ferriss. She's her friend—she'll do it best. Let her break the news."

"Very well, sir." "Go, and sin no more, Bramfield, if I may say so."

"I'll have a try for it, Mr. Stockton. Hal, I'll have a try." "Now, go along," said the lawyer. "I dare say you'll have to explain to your wife why you didn't keep your engagement with her last night."

"His wife!" I fairly shouted. "Eh? What! Yes, his wife." The lawyer chuckled. "That's the best of gossip I promised to tell you when I got back from Trenton. Dr. Garrett married them the day Baker and Sue were married. Miss Katharine—Mrs. Bram now—was at church with Miss Dayton—didn't you see her? They were married immediately after her—in the rectory. Miss Ferriss was a bridesmaid, and I was witness—Mrs. Garrett and I. Bram swears me to secrecy."

"Bram, why didn't you tell me?" I exclaimed. "Well, by Gad! Henry, it was a secret, d'ye see? Lawrence would have raised the very deuce, if he'd known it. He wanted a rich husband for Kitty—not a poor rip like me. We'd cared for each other a long time—he was ready to fight me on the spot. No, no, we stood it as long as we could, and then he stole away and got married. We had to keep it a secret."

"I've had ghastly suspicions about you—and your wife," I said. "I was doing you gross injustice." "Did you know something about it?" He gazed at me and perhaps guessed what I had seen. He flushed but laughed good naturedly. "Well, well, Hal, I didn't know anyone was about. No, by Gad! He stopped, and sighed heavily. "Poor little Kitty! The worst is coming for us now." A magnanimous idea flashed into my mind—I had almost come to believe I was really Henry Morvan.

"The worst isn't coming, Bram," I said. "Not if I have anything to do with it." "And you have," said Mr. Stockton, "and you have."

Her Beautiful Eyes
James Whitcomb Riley

Her beautiful eyes! they are
blue as the dew
On the violet's bloom when
the morning is new,
And the light of their love is the gleam of the sun
O'er the meadows of Spring where the quick
shadows run
As the morn shifts the mists and the clouds
from the skies—
So I stand in the dawn of her beautiful eyes.

And her beautiful eyes are as mid-day to me
When the lily-bell bends with the
weight of the bee,
And the throat of the thrush is a-pulse in the heat,
And the senses are drugged with the subtle & sweet
And delirious breaths of the air's lullabies—
So I swoon in the noon of her beautiful eyes.

Her beautiful eyes! they have smitten
mine own
As a glory glanced down from the glare
of the Throne;
And I reel, and I falter and fall, as afar
Fell the shepherds that looked on the mystical Star
And yet dazed in the tidings that bade
them arise—
So I grope through the night of her
beautiful eyes

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