

Gloria's Romance

FIFTH INSTALLMENT.

"Daughters are dangerous charges, Pierpont," said Judge Freeman. The two elderly men stood watching the dance which was in full swing at the coming-out party of Gloria Stafford. The men were related to each other by marriage—the marriage of Stafford's son, David, and Freeman's daughter, Lois—whatever relations they made them.

Pierpont Stafford looked a worried assent to the judge's statement and, turning his eyes reluctantly from the grace and charm of his own girl, who was dancing with an almost lyric poetry of motion, enfolded in the arms of Richard Freneau, Pierpont looked for Judge Freeman's girl, Lois, to find a specific cause for the judge's colorful remark. What he saw puzzled him considerably. He saw Lois, not dancing, but watching Freneau and Gloria. There was a look of unmistakable jealousy and helpless rage on her face. He saw his son David speak to her and put his hand on her arm, only to have her shake him off and move away into the crowd.

Pierpont felt suddenly terribly afraid for his son's honor, and a gnawing ache at his heart for Lois' father, who stood beside him. But it was far too delicate a situation for the two men to discuss—yet.

"Children are hostages to fortune, as Bacon, the playwright, said," Pierpont murmured, putting his hand on the other man's arm. "After all, how little it is we can really save them from."

Gloria was being watched jealously by yet another. Dr. Royce, with the mixed feelings of a lover and an older guardian, felt cut to the quick as she passed directly in front of him in Freneau's embrace. He could see the look of perfect joy in Gloria's eyes and there was rapture in the whole happy swing of her youthful body. Anger at Freneau's unworthiness of this pure being almost choked him. When another man took Gloria away from Freneau for the last half of the dance and Freneau reluctantly walked away, Royce asked for a word with him, moving toward the library where they could be alone. Freneau followed with uneasy bravado. Once safe from observation, Doctor Royce let his rage break forth.

"You contemptible fortune hunter! Five years ago I warned you to keep away from Gloria. You lied to her then and your lie is still long live!" Freneau's face blanched with fury, and he raised his arm to strike Royce, but before the calm contempt in his eyes he changed his mind. He decided to forego the blow for the present and laughed as bravely as he could. Royce pursued him with an alarming threat.

"What if I tell of your affair with a certain married woman?" Freneau gave a surprised start, attempted to speak, changed his mind again. He was guilty of too much to risk a challenge. He was guilty of too much to risk a challenge. Shrugging his shoulders, he moved sullenly off and out of the room.

Royce smiled to himself. "It was a bluff, but it worked." He had caught a glimpse of Lois' jealousy and a faint suspicion had risen in his mind. Now he wondered if it were confirmed.

Royce walked after Freneau and had the satisfaction of seeing him depart without bidding goodbye to Gloria.

Royce thought he had won a signal victory. He would have taken little pleasure in it had he known that Freneau left so obediently because Gloria had already granted him a whole afternoon to be spent in her company alone on the following day.

Freneau felt so certain of his ability to win a promise of marriage from her with this opportunity that he could afford the seeming compliance with the order of Dr. Royce.

As he descended the outer steps of the Stafford home a footman signaled his car to pull into the driveway. A tramp who had been loitering on the street watching the gorgeous crowd of guests, caught sight of Freneau and seemed to go mad with rage. He rushed forward, shouting accusations. Freneau struck out viciously with his walking stick. The tramp fell to the ground, while Freneau, leaping into his limousine, motioned his chauffeur to make haste. He leaned out of his car as it turned and smiled to see the tramp pick himself up awkwardly and run after him, rushing wildly through the traffic of Riverside drive.

As Freneau's car turned into a side street the tramp still in pursuit, was caught by an oncoming automobile and knocked aside. One of the rear wheels passed over his legs. The car was stopped instantly and the occupants picked him up to hurry him to a hospital.

Freneau sat back in a daze at the truck tragedy. He could not tell how badly the man was hurt nor how much he could depend on his own release from danger in that quarter. It ruffled him considerably to encounter another relic of his adventurous past just as he was about to win a wonderful young wife for himself; a relic who had a just grievance and might well ruin him by exposure. To get out of his entanglement with Lois was delicate matter enough for him to handle without this new ghost. Truly, Freneau brooded, a brave, pleasure-loving, free lance like himself should have a wider field to move about in. The malice of this world was cramping his style!

Arriving at his own apartment he threw his overcoat at his valet and marched gloomily into the living room, flinging the door behind him. It only took a moment for him to realize that he could not count on such luck. Trask could probably escape with a few bruises and an added grudge, and he could again in a few days to pick up the trail.

A vision came in Freneau's mind of Nell Trask, as he had last seen her, when he left her beside a stream near a mining camp in the south.

Poor fool! She had pleaded so unreasonably that he should marry her and save her. When he refused she had thrown herself down on the bank in wild abandonment to her grief. As he mounted his horse he saw the girl's father pick her up and hold her in his arms while apparently she sobbed with her confusion. A look of such savage ferocity came over Trask's face that Freneau dug spurs into his horse.

On reaching the town he had noticed a train at once, leaving his belongings behind him. For that



DR. WAKEFIELD WHISPERED THE DREADFUL WORDS TO STAFFORD.

look on Trask's face surely meant death for him if he were overtaken. And now at last he was all but overtaken.

Soon, however, Freneau broke from his reverie, dismissed it as an unpleasant memory, smiled at himself for giving it any place in his thoughts, and turned his mind to Gloria—the bewitching girl whom to whom on the morrow he would tender his heart and hand, for all that they might be worth.

Meanwhile Gloria herself, tired beyond words, her pretty right hand stiff from the endless shaking of other hands at her reception, her tiny feet weary of their satin slippers and her ears tingling still with the buzz of compliments poured into them, was ecstatic as a fulfilled birdling after its first long flight.

The last of the guests departing, she threw her arms about her father's neck and gave him a resounding kiss. Swinging her feet free of the floor, she kicked off her slippers. Then she hugged Aunt Hortensia and thanked her, and please did she and father mind if the new social leader left them and betook herself to bed, where they might send her crackers and milk for her dinner before she toppled off to sleep?

They laughed through their own weariness as Gloria, gathering up her cast-away footwear, proceeded to drag herself up the staircase, bent far over in imitation of an ancient cripple.

Reaching her own room, she screamed lustily to Burroughs, her English maid, to run a hot bath for her, and for goodness sake to get her out of her wreck of a dress. As Burroughs fluttered between the two tasks Gloria hummed the "Aloha Oe" that had been played in water time for her last heavenly dance with Freneau. She picked a rose from her dressing table and went through the ritual of "He loves me, he loves me not," down almost to the last petal. But finding that it would come out on the tragic "not," she gasped, "How silly!" threw the rose away, casting a shy little smile at herself in the mirror.

Burroughs, having taken the woefully wilted and shredded tulle frock from her, wrapped her young mistress in a dressing gown. And Gloria went, still humming, to her bath.

In the midst of the splashing, while Burroughs was straightening the dressing room, she heard: "O Burroughs, do you think my new fur-lined driving coat looks very good on me?"

"Yes, miss, I do, indeed," answered Burroughs, surprised at the apparent irrelevance of the question.

"And, Burroughs?"

"What warm afternoon dress have I that I look awfully nice in?"

"Why, the brown velvet from Lucile, miss; you do look a perfect little doll in that, miss."

Another splash in the tub and a ripple of laughter.

"Thank you, Burroughs—you see, I'm driving the pony and sleigh out in the country tomorrow afternoon."

"Yes, miss?"

"And I'm not driving out alone, Burroughs?"

"No, miss?"

After this Gloria was silent. She hopped hurriedly into bed from her bath and ate her crackers and milk like a good child, smiling every now and then at her own thoughts. Then she told Burroughs to put out her lights and not allow her to be disturbed.

"You see, Burroughs, I'm a society queen now, and I have got to get my beauty sleep. Good night!"

"Quite so, miss, and good night, miss," said Burroughs, as she turned toward the door.

"Burroughs! Do you ever pray?"

"Oh, yes, miss; always, night and morning."

"Well, then, please pray for beautiful weather tomorrow."

"Certainly, miss. Anything else, miss?"

"No, nothing, thank you. Good night."

On the following day, all arrangements having been made by telephone to the Stafford country place, Gloria took Burroughs with her and motored out. They were met by a glowing and enthusiastic Freneau at the railroad station. Gloria took him on to her warm weather home, which managed to keep a majestic appearance in its mantle of snow.

The dogs started a wild hullabaloo



BILLY BURKE AS GLORIA STAFFORD.

of ferocity from their kennels when the car drove in. They changed their excited yelps of welcome as they recognized Gloria. But she left them disconsolate, for a groom brought up from the stable yard her shaggy ponies harnessed to the little Russian sleigh.

As she stopped to pet the noses of the ponies Freneau lost for a moment his confidence in his own power to win this small young beauty enveloped in a great coat, which made her seem smaller still, her eyes beaming, her cheeks flushed with the cold, her delicate pink blonde curls escaping from the little fur-trimmed hat.

With this palatial background, among the obsequious attendants, she stood, more than ever for him, the embodiment of power, youth, beauty, wealth. What had he to offer in exchange for that worldly trinity? Spoiled by women as he was, he felt that however sincerely he wanted this slip of a girl—wanted her more than he had ever wanted anyone else in his life—he might elude him.

Gloria turned the back of a "ration" on his eyes, blushed an even deeper rose than she had been wearing.

"I think we had better start at once if we are to get our sleigh ride," she said. "The days are so short now; we must make the most of this stinky sunlight."

"Right!" Freneau answered eagerly, as he helped her into the sleigh.

The ponies were clanking at the bits and jingling the bells and waving the pom-poms on their heads with every impatient movement. Gloria stepped into the driver's seat (she was going to drive them herself, wix girl!) and Freneau anchored the reins from the hands of a groom, saw that her little feet were in place on the foot warmer, and proceeded to wrap her snugly in. (How nicely he did things of that sort, she thought.)

"We will be back in a couple of hours; probably stop somewhere for tea," Gloria called to Burroughs as they passed the lodge door. She felt the thrill of being a runaway once more, and she was glad that her father was not present to thrust a chaperon upon them.

Out into the road and off they went, youth, health, and joy of life

in their veins; love in their hearts. The ponies pranced and cavorted, somewhat too strenuously, Freneau feared, until he realized how skillful Gloria's hands were in handling them. On they glided merrily, chatting of the big nothings of young love, Gloria pointing out paths and places of interest, Dick Freneau seeing them only as they were mirrored in her eyes, since he could not bear to turn away from her lest he lose one fleeting expression of her face.

After several miles of up and down dale, Gloria turned her ponies off the main road into one less used.

"I'm taking you to the dearest old-fashioned farmhouse, where we can have tea and the yummiest apple butter you ever tasted. Shall you like it?"

"I shall like anything and everything in this world, so long as I have it with you," Freneau breathed earnestly.

"Then that's all right," chirruped Gloria, happily. "You shall most certainly have this tea with me, and I'm famished."

When they reached the farmhouse, which called itself an inn, the plump landlady greeted Gloria with pleased recognition and ushered them into the parlor, saying that she would hasten with their tea and bring the table to them there by the fire. Freneau helped Gloria out of her great coat—his well he took off a coat, she thought. She emerged like a golden-brown butterfly in a velvet gown.

The blazing logs in the deep fireplace glided the beauty of a truly charming old room. Gloria fingered the quaint pewter pieces on the mantel and Freneau waited restlessly for Mrs. Bailey to hurry in with the tea things and hurry away. Soon they were left alone, seated opposite each other, the little tea table between them. Gloria beamed his sugar. She became suddenly timid and embarrassed. It did seem very intimate and daring. It was the first time she had ever asked a man about his sugar all alone with him!

Dick perceived her shyness and dismissed the sugar at once. He most speak now. He would never have a better chance, he thought. Putting down his cup, he reached across the table for her hand.

"Gloria, dear little Gloria," he

sighed, "my five years of probation are up. I've waited patiently and always hopefully. Mayn't I have my reward now? Please say that you will marry me quickly and put me out of my misery, will you?"

Gloria could not answer. She hung her pretty head and wriggled back a little farther into the grandfather's chair. Perhaps she did not want to end the luxury of keeping him anxious with a too immediate yes. He would not dally. He picked up the little table that stood between them and putting it aside dropped on one knee before her, like the true artist in love that he was. He clasped his arms about her, and she closed her eyes and gave him her lips.

They heard the untimely hostess approaching and he sat back in his chair, twirling his mustache, while Gloria tried to look as if nothing had happened. Nothing had happened except a short flight to heaven.

On the way home they chattered merrily of the everthings that would make up their new life. The scenery was the same, yet how different! They were betrothed now. For many reasons Freneau was impatient to have her father's sanction as soon as possible. Gloria decided that she would motor him home with her and heard her parent in his lair without delay.

Pierpont Stafford was not unprepared for the "Will you let me marry your daughter?" speech that Richard Freneau made him. He had given his own word five years before that if Freneau and Gloria found themselves in the same frame of mind at this date he would raise no further objections. He gave up the fight now, and took his defeat like the true sport he was, graciously concealing his own sad heart.

The radiance of his child and the evident sincerity of Freneau almost repaid him; at least they made him hopeful for her happiness. One stipulation only he insisted upon, that the engagement should not be made public at once. He knew that engagements were not necessarily certain to end in marriage, and he wanted to test Freneau a little further. He insisted upon guarding his daughter's name to that extent. If anything went wrong with them they should not have taken the great American public into the secret. Freneau agreed to this, the more readily since it would give him the more time to propitiate and get rid of Lois. And old Trask might have to give his quietus in one way or another.

While Freneau and her father held the council of war, Gloria had gone out to the hall to wait its outcome. There Freneau found her huddled up on the lower step, hugging herself as if she were cold. He rushed to take her in his arms for a kiss. She battled him with mock resistance, before she ran up the stairs to play Juliet to his Romeo. Then, throwing kisses, they parted.

When she reached her room, Gloria found herself shivering with a violent chill that all the warmth of her heart could not subdue. Burroughs was instantly alarmed. She summoned Gloria's father, who was even

more alarmed. He made her go to bed at once, ordered her covered with many blankets, and had hot water bottles filled.

The chill did not abate. In a panic he telephoned for Gloria's room to his old family physician, Dr. Wakefield, and was fortunate enough to reach him and be assured of his immediate attendance. Dr. Wakefield was a fussy medical man of the very old school. He had taken good care of the Stafford family, but latterly he had let science outrun him. Still he recognized pneumonia without difficulty. He whispered the dreadful word to Stafford and ordered in two trained nurses and no end of medicines.

Pierpont Stafford was frantic with anxiety. He telephoned for Gloria's brother and for Aunt Hortensia. Burroughs told them of the stolen sleigh ride and Freneau became less popular with the Staffords, father and son, than ever before.

Days and nights of harrowing fear dragged over that household. Wealth had not dulled affection; nor could it seem to bribe death. The fever line mounted on the nurse's chart like a mountain side, and Gloria grew weaker and weaker, except in her deliriums, when she seemed to be inhabited by demons of ferocious strength.

At length David felt that Dr. Wakefield had been given all the time to experiment with Gloria's life that could be afforded. He was for calling in a young man of the newest school of medical art. He called for Dr. Royce. Royce came with no hesitation over medical ethics or courtesies. Gloria was more than a patient to him, and old Wakefield was less than a doctor in his eyes, after he had questioned the Staffords as to the manner of Dr. Wakefield's treatment. Things were as he feared, all wrong. It was life or death. Dr. Wakefield could not cope with the disease. He must be dispossessed as politely as possible.

Dr. Wakefield, he learned, was in the sickroom above. Royce would not mince matters or wait on professional etiquette. He felt the eagerness of a lover in coming once more to the rescue of his idolized Gloria.

He ran up the stairs and walked into the room. He hardly knew his Gloria when he saw her. She was in the throes of a wild delirium. She imagined herself once more among the Seminoles who had held her in bondage when she ran away in Florida five years before.

In her tormenting fancy she was again dressed as a squaw and set to the task of gathering firewood and subjected to the worse task of enduring the old squaw's hatred and the young chief's love. She begged him to kill her rather than marry her and she fought with all her fury, seizing Wakefield's white hair with one hand and the nurse's black locks with the other.

There was no quieting her outcries. "Take me home; my father is rich! He will make you rich! Oh, they don't believe me! They don't believe me! Help! Help!" Then she smiled and cried: "Dick, Dick, it's you! You'll save me! Blessed, beloved

Dick! Oh, I'm so glad, so glad you found me!"

Then the frenzy left her and she sank back exhausted, but content. Dr. Royce realized that he had two antagonists now to fight—death and Richard Freneau—both of them trying to take from him the girl of his heart.

Death was the first to fight. Royce was too desperate to treat Dr. Wakefield with much formality. He asked a few questions which roused the ire of the old physician. He examined the patient, threw off the smothering blankets and exclaimed, "Fresh air is the best and only treatment for pneumonia." He flung up the window, shoved Gloria's bed against it, and let the cold air from the river sweep into the room and into her tormented lungs.

Almost at once her breathing became less labored. Dr. Wakefield left in as dignified a rage as he could manage. Royce threw away all the Wakefield medicines and gave the nurse a new set of instructions. The nurse, at least, whom Dr. Wakefield had prescribed, seemed a capable one. Royce welcomed her as a valuable ally in the gruesome fight. He arranged to stay all night, and allayed poor old Stafford's fears as best he could. But his own head was near to breaking with terror for the safety of Gloria's sweet life—and for her happiness if she lived.

(To be Continued.)

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