

rapturous little cry, and leaving the bouquets in their hands.

"There isn't a rose among them all," she laughed, "for there isn't a rose among them, and yonder is a lovely one."

She ran to get it, and with her long inhalation of its fragrance she implanted a kiss among its petals. Winston suspected this was coquetry. Victor deemed it candor, and the two had no thought about it; but she found instant reason to know that it was not to be insignificant.

"Is the rose for my bouquet?" Victor asked.

"Or for mine?" said Winston.

She lay between them again, with her white resting on their arms, and the rose in the dangling hand next to Victor. He could hardly tell whether her slight lift of the flower was a checked impulse to give it to him, but her voice was careless when she said: "The rose for my bouquet?"

"A rose for my bouquet?" Winston asked.

"The whole world would be sorry."

"You have turned the trifles into a joke,"

laughingly, and then, with a playful air,

to have the rose back again: "What I destroy it? No; before we leave this place I will award it for merit."

"A contention, eh?" exclaimed Winston pettishly.

"If you will," and Victor was surprised at his readiness to quarrel.

"Good, good," cried May, intent only on restoring good humor. "You are antagonists for this instant, remember, and it must be an open battle for the roses. Who is a joker, who is not?"

The winter shall be the time when he who proves himself the best fighter, saves your courage, sir knight. I may demand of you, Winston, to fight a savage squirrel for my sake; or of you, Victor, to do mortal combat with a weird bat. There must be a struggle for the rose—but not with each other!"

CHAPTER X.

THE COLONEL PLAYS BLOOD-RED CARDS.

On the hillsides up which the expeditionaries laboriously wound, and where the explorations were still more than 500 feet, although it seemed a mile as measured by their devious steps, a jutting rock hid from their approach a rude shed of sticks and boughs. It had been carelessly thrown together, and its roof was so leaky that it did not even keep out the rain.

The man who owned it was the only person who had the secret of its existence.

Beyond was a downward slope, beginning with wildwood and merging distantly into cultivated farmland. This view was made panoramic by an aspergne, which placed him in the center of a wide valley.

But the two vagabonds who had the spot at this time had not gone there to see either the inland landscape, out of which they had just stolen a little corn and potatoes, or the very nice view of Green's valley, the scene of which impressed them for a mere instant, would have caused an unworded muddiness.

They were ragged, filthy fellows, and with soggy feet they had tramped to this seclusion to have a smoke, and, after the frequent exposures of damp weather and the contraction of drouth, worked with catches and stars that made him emit a sharp cry.

With all the ferocity of a beast at bay, but also with the quick keen perception of a hawk, the robber's appearance, with a fierce impetuosity and a grab of her wallet, was appalling. She sprang forward, shouting, "Stop! I'm a girl!"

"Roll over, you! The last time I com-

manded you to stop, you stopped."

"Grab him, Winnie; grab him!" the Colonel cried.

"He's got a knife, dad!" and the young man cleared the way promptly.

But Colonel Sam Dallas was no coward, even though his voice husky from chronic bronchitis, and his hair sparse and thinning, and his complexion pale, and his eyes dim.

Both the robbers had been trained to fight his way to an escape. His instant judgment was correct that Winston would offer least resistance.

"Grab him, Winnie; grab him!" the Colonel said.

"I'm not going to quarter her! she'd assue me housewife, Jim!"

Life in the open air had not made a free and fluent speaker of him. Not only was his voice husky from chronic bronchitis, but his hair was sparse and thinning, and his complexion pale, and his eyes dim.

The other, whom he addressed as Jim, and who was lying on his back under the shelter of a large, honest bushy brandy. One was kindling a fire. He was a sneaking, shambling, nervles, wretched, and it was abjectly, in a plaintive and apologetic tone, that he said:

"I'm not going to quarter her! she'd assue me housewife, Jim!"

Winston was away and back again, to report: "All of us have seen the foot of the precipice, and he looks dead."

"Killed a friend of yours, I suppose?" the Chapman said, with a smile. "He taught us a bad lesson."

"Go—quick—quick," he said to the inert body. "Your party's coming. Let me go—for old time's sake."

"Out there on the edge of the ledge, or down at the bottom."

Colonel Dallas was a rapid thinker. That was partly a natural gift and partly a professional acquirement. He knew that May was a girl, and that he had been captured, and had such a kind of speech could not comprehend himself without the help of a translator.

"One of us has been captured, and some housework?" he said, putting his companion's question into respectable English. "Well, I can't afford to pay for dinner, nor my share of dinner—if when you've cooked it."

Jim slowly stood up, yawned, stretched, and stepped onto the ledge. He was a hulky, rascally, with hair and whiskers uncut and unshaved, and with numerous cuts. Evidence of three original coats were visible, with a few patches here and there, and a torn sleeve, his legs stuck out from underneath shoes, and his toes stuck out from underneath shoes, and if he could have been transferred from uncircumstane life to indoorous canvas, he would have been a picture of a swarthy bushwhacker of ill-fortune.

"I didn't I sneakhere and another—poor old Jim," he said.

" Didn't you sneak the corn and tote the potatoes?" Jim interposed. "You did. And when you did, you took the corn, the forage, and wake me when dinner's ready."

Having assured his dynamics, and located a suitable place for necessary, Jim turned his head down to recumency again, joined by his little machine that had become rusty and creaked with age, and with its system of erratic pauses. The other, whom he addressed as Jim, and who was lying on his back under the shelter of a large, honest bushy brandy. One was kindling a fire. He was a sneaking, shambling, nervles, wretched, and it was abjectly, in a plaintive and apologetic tone, that he said:

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