

outfitted man of the city into the glittering temples of the green cloth—the love of chance and skill; a fire in the blood as old as the blood that bears it. Had here was skill, the unerring work of nerves that knew no tremor, of eyes trained from infancy to the piercing of the distance, and it was the common heritage of them all.

At last the common shooting palled, and the marksmen began making fancy matches; here a shell turned bottom out beyond the farthest mark, and there a silver coin hung on a swinging card. Worthy of praise each hand that held an antiquated gun; but finest, surest, steadiest, were two men who worked against each other without a passing word—two men, one young and for ever smiling, the other older, dark of visage, stern; and, close behind them both, a silent youth who rode a lank, brown mare.

Here was where they took long chances. As the competition became closer and closer, they watched with eager eyes, pledging their little all, and at last backing their favourites with the long-eared hounds, and even with the long rifles whose worn stocks held here and there a deep, mysterious notch.

Stakes were lost and won; the turkeys, some dead, having served as targets, and some alive—the prizes for the fancy shots—were separated among the crowd.

The interest was rising higher as a man from out the country angrily put up a big, grey mule to prove his marksmanship, when suddenly there appeared upon the shooting ground that unusual sight—a woman.

Slight and small, clad in her shabby garments, yet with unwonted dignity she came. The crowd stared open-mouthed.

With a movement of her hand, she swept the slatted sunbonnet from her head, and stood before them—old man Clabhorn's gentle daughter. She was white to the lips, and in her face was the look of a shot doe brought to bay, and peering through the sudden forced courage were the gaunt eyes of despair—*waiting*.

Her body trembled with the shrinking of her modest soul.

"Gentle-min!" she said—and her voice caught as if her throat were dry—"gentle-min, I ber come here ter-day ter do somethin' which ye may think I nought'n ter. Hit air an awful thing fer a woman ter come among ther men like this, but ther' air somethin' troublin' me, an' I shorely thought ye'ould he'p me see fair play."

The hearts of three men in the crowd stirred with the sudden import of impending things.

"Ye all know my pap?"—she looked back with sudden fear, though she knew him to be helpless with the liquor she had been at such pains to secure and hide so openly—"ye know him, an' when I tell ye he hev given me till Sat'd'y week ter choose between two men in this hyar crowd—two men I'd sooner die than be jined to—who know hit, too, an' yit won't let me go—two men who air the best shots in the slashlands—an' when I tell ye pap hev said as how I might fix hit ter suit myself—oh, gentle-min, ye'll see why I ber come!"

With unconscious intuition of the potency of appeal, she stretched out her hands toward them.

They were slow of wit, these men, but the sudden infusion of the dramatic element, so rare in their eventless lives, roused them instantly, as the cry of the cougar in the foothills on moonlight nights roused every trail-hound in the slashlands.

Her pale little face, so full of the horror of what she was doing, yet braced with the strength of one who has burned his bridges, quivered with suspense.

There was a moment's tense silence, then a man stepped forward and laid his hand gently on her shoulder.

"Ye want that they should shoot it off, Sue-Elle!" he asked.

The girl looked into his face with excited eyes.

"Shoot hit off, Bob-Jack," she said, with dry lips; "shoot hit off—an' if they miss—if they miss, oh, Bob-Jack, thar'll be a chanse fer me, an' I shall hold the mark. Ye'll he'p me, gentle-min?"

Quietly the ring stepped back, and pushed to the fore the two men who never missed.

The girl walked down the level stretch, past the bleached gray stakes.

Her limbs were trembling, and in her ears she could hear her own words, "a chanse fer me." In to the farthest limit

of the distance, where she stopped and turned half round.

She glanced back at the line where stood the two men who held her destiny, out over the crowd, where for a fleeting moment her eyes rested on a third face. Slowly lifting her hand, she placed between her lips an old silver dollar, its narrow edge toward the marksman.

There rose a hushed murmur from the gathering.

"My Gawd!"

It was the younger man, the smile gone from his face.

He dropped the butt of his rifle on the ground. The elder one stood ready, no weakness in his crafty eyes.

"Tom Denloe, ye'll shoot!" said Bob-Jack. "Sue-Elle shell hev her chanet."

There was a movement in the crowd as another man, his face as white as that poor little girl's out there, pushed quietly up behind the other two.

Denloe lifted his gun, stepped to the mark and drew a long, still sight. The sunlight glinted softly on the worn brown of the old barrel. Even the snarling hounds were still.

The strain of a finger, a flash of light, a man peering, shaken, through the smoke; a circle of bending, intense faces—and Sue-Elle standing unmoved with the thin coin still between her lips.

Denloe turned away.

Once more the clearing back, and a man on the line.

This time there was no quiver of nerves. Quiet, self-possessed, the mountaineer threw himself on the ground, and, resting his gun on his hand, glanced along the barrel.

The girl, waited, every string of her heart fastened to that tiny piece of silver.

It was almost here—the "chanet." One second—another—Ah! she could feel it now, the electric coming of that bullet which would hit the mark—Jake Powers could not miss!

Once more the straining of a hand—a flash—and just at that awful moment Sue-Elle felt the relaxing of the muscles along her chin. Had she done it right?

She felt the little rush of air across her upper lip, and instantly shut her teeth. She was blind and numb, but the dollar was still between her lips.

One second, and then a voice that thrilled her from head to foot, a voice shaken and hoarse, said:

"Steady, Sue-Elle!"

Once more—oh, could she stand there again, with the sunlight coming faintly through the darkness, and wait for the sig of that bullet?

This was more terrible than both the others, when she had waited for that which was worse than death—this, which was the fulfilment of life! She prayed silently for strength to help her. She knew dizzily that the man she loved with all her soul was looking along that shining length of steel, with her life and his own held in the points of his narrowed eyes.

Steady, he had said.

She would win now if she never moved again. Once more the electric moment—once more the straining hand. Oh, if he could only hurry! There was a last flash, a shock, a ring of metal on metal—and, with the autumn landscape circling round her, Sue-Elle leaned forward into the arms that gathered her up.

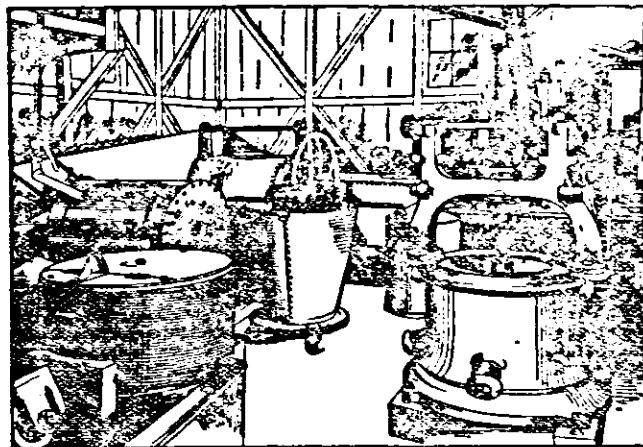
"Oh, Brit—Brit!" she said.

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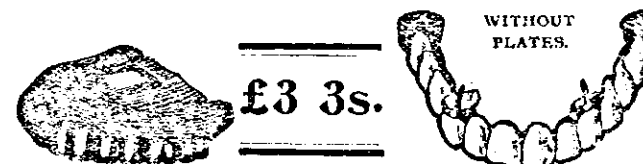
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