

herself at your head," Mrs Savage said, her tone becoming vicious, "but I never thought you were one to be caught."

Just then the boat began to float out. There was a piece of rope nailed to the timbers almost in Mrs Savage's hand.

"Catch that rope and hold the boat in," Hecker said hastily. Mrs Savage reached for it as it was fast receding, and unconsciously arose; the boat shot from under her, and she went into the water.

The oars were on top of the dam. Hecker gave one look of disgust, and one exclamation that was by no means complimentary, and sprang over the side of the boat to her assistance. The long boots of the cavalry were wicks topped and reaching almost to his hips. The instant he struck the water these filled and dragged him under. But Hecker was a strong man with perfectly trained muscles and quickly recovered himself.

He reached Mrs Savage by a few strokes. The rope had broken short off in her hands, and she was ready to sink. Hecker supported her and attempted to swim with her toward the steep place where she had climbed down to the boat, but she was perfectly unmanageable. She threw her arms about his neck and almost dragged him under.

"Let go!" he shouted. "You will drown us both."

But the woman was in perfect frenzy of fear. Her long cloth riding skirt tangled his sodden heaviness about his legs, almost powerless already from the water filled boots. He forcibly pulled her arms from his neck, and catching the skirt tore it off, with the strength of despair.

Even then he felt that they were sinking, that horrible incubus of a woman pulling him down. He swore fairly in her face, and then remembering that the watchman was probably somewhere about, lifted his voice in a loud call for help. The cry went echoing through the rocks. "Help!" "Help!" and again, "Help!"

Neal had ridden up to the big verandah house where Featherly, assisted by an excellent Chinese cook, kept a bachelor establishment that was the delight of all his friends. Featherly was sitting on the verandah his stockinged feet lifted to the railing, and a siphon of soda and a bottle of brandy at his elbow.

Neal lost no time in joining him. "Good gracious!" Featherly exclaimed. "Where on earth did you drop from? I haven't seen you in an age. I heard yesterday that you were chained to Mrs Savage's chariot wheels. Do you know, Neal, it looks to me as though Mrs Savage was getting a little heavy for it to be any fun to draw her chariot."

"Fact is I never did find it any fun. But you get roped in sometimes. I'm entirely left to-day. Was allowed to resign without a single protest. Ronan has taken Mary Marcy off somewhere and Mrs Savage met Hecker back here and forgot my existence that minute. I'd serve 'em just right if I went off and let Hecker take her back home. There's no doubt he would enjoy it, but I feel sorry for Mrs Hecker."

"How is Hecker behaving himself?"
"Same old fashion. He can't settle down any more than he could settle up, if it were not for his wife's money."

"Is Ronan going to marry Miss Marcy?"

"It looks like it, and yet he hasn't a penny, and she hasn't a cent."

"Queer taste women have. They always seem to take to the black sheep."

"Ronan isn't as black as he is painted. He has the heart and grace of a gentleman. One is obliged to like Ronan. He is full of follies that he exaggerates himself, but they are clean follies. If Ronan had not spent his fortune he would be the best fellow on earth in the eyes of the world. His wild oats were not the seed-bearing variety. But say, I can't stay here all day. Get your horse and ride over to the dam with me. Maybe the two of us can induce Mrs Savage to let Hecker go home to his wife."

The two men reached the dam just in time to hear that hoarse cry for help.

Neal stopped his horse for an instant, listening intently. It came again. "Help!"

The men galloped on, and when the trail became too narrow they flung

themselves down and took to running. They were just in time to see the struggle in the water. Hecker, worn out, exasperated, drew back and gave Mrs Savage a blow that for an instant stunned her. He did not see the coming men, and it seemed their only possible chance of escape.

"Hold on," Neal cried. "We are here."

Featherly threw off his coat and shoes and in an instant was drawing Mrs Savage up out of the water. She recovered from the confusion of the blow almost at once, but Hecker had succeeded in giving her a concussion that would in a few minutes become a very black eye.

Mrs Savage did not know that yet. She stood shivering on the edge of the bank, skirtless, attired in very tight riding trousers, boots and a short basque, and a tall silk hat, which still remained tightly pinned to her hair, although knocked to one side in an extremely degage fashion, and very battered and wet. The curl was out of her hair and it hung in strings over her wet face. She was sobbing on the borderland of hysterics. The long skirt of her habit was wrapped tightly about Hecker's legs.

"Say, Hecker," Neal asked, "did you and Mrs Savage change clothes before you got into the water or afterwards?"

Hecker gave one glance at the figure before him and lost all sense of reason, delicacy or kind feeling and roared with laughter.

Mrs Savage gave him a look of utter astonishment and then, seeing only mirth in his face, and realising her helplessness, went into violent hysterics.

XVIII.

"We'll take Mellish along. I always like to have two men, merely for the look of the thing," Hecker said. "I think you might enjoy that ride down towards the Mexican line."

"Oh, I should," Nina replied. "I love any sort of outdoor sport. Do you know, Harry, I believe that was the reason I cared for you, you looked so sort of outdoorsy. You looked so honest and sincere, so different from the other men I knew. They were always hanging round talking about things they didn't know anything about. Now you—"

"I never talk about anything."
"Well, you really do not talk much. But you never pretend. You are just you. I could not stand it if you were not like that. I feel sure of you all the time."

Hecker laughed his easy laugh. That was the proper attitude for a wife to take of course. That was the point of view he wanted his wife to have toward him. Hecker had the variety of conscience which is never in the least disturbed until there is a prospect of being found out. He felt honest so long as his wife imagined him to be so. Hecker within himself had not the virtue of believing in his own lies. He laughed at himself for telling them and at the people who believed them.

"Well, come along now," he said. "Get into your habit and we will lie us down towards the border. I'll order the horses around."

Hecker had bought a thoroughbred Kentucky horse from a man in Tombstone who had brought two out in a fit of exultation over a lucky strike he had made in a mine, and was ready enough to sell them when the hoped-for vein proved to be only a "pocket."

While Hecker stood on his verandah, walking idly about, petting the horses, and wishing that he had a lump of sugar to give them, talking to Mellish about their harness, and giving expression in his whole big personality to the supreme content which possessed him, Adair came out of his house across the parade ground, flung himself upon his horse, and, looking neither to the right nor left, rode rapidly up the canyon.

"There goes an unsociable devil," Hecker thought to himself. "I cannot imagine what pleasure Adair finds in living."

He turned as his wife came out of the door, her short habit held up a trifle, showing her dainty boots with their patent leather toes, and the trimness of its make. Hecker never had seen so pretty and dainty a woman. The thought of her belonging to him impressed him. He was so like a child with a toy that was so fine he was almost afraid of it. It was a thing to show and enjoy the possession of with a swelling heart of exul-

lation, but never the thing to be quite easy with.

He looked down the row now, and was glad to see that there were so many people sitting out on their verandahs who would see them ride by. Mellish waited until Hecker had thrown his wife into her saddle and then he threw himself upon his horse and followed them. It was a continual enjoyment to him to see Mrs Hecker's manner towards her husband and every one else with whom they came in contact. It was the enjoyment of what was to him perfect acting. He had grown to admire Mrs Hecker as he had never admired any woman before. She appealed to the deceptive instinct which was his own strongest quality.

He looked at her now as she rode out of the fort, bowing with graciousness to the people on each side, and followed the smiles that were sent after her, even from the verandah where the Judd girls were standing. He thought how clever she must think herself; what daring recklessness must possess her soul at the risk she had taken.

"Talk of pluck!" Mellish said to himself. "There is more pluck in that woman than in a dozen men."

The immorality of her stand was as delightful to him as a tale of the boulevards. He became fond of her, as she seemed to move upon his own level. He would not have dreamed of

disturbing her by telling her that he knew her secret. He sometimes wondered to himself what she would do. Sometimes the savage that lurked within him came to the surface, and made him fancy how it would seem to have this woman in his power, and have her conscious of it.

They had ridden about five miles when they saw in the distance a little whirling dust cloud, that presently resolved itself into a Mexican boy ambling along upon a burro. He was sitting far back, and thrumming idly a badly strung guitar. He looked at Hecker as he passed him as though he had never seen him before, but Hecker half unconsciously drew up his own horse.

Mellish stopped the boy for an instant, and then the burro was turned, and with digging in of heels and cries was urged wildly back the way it had come. Mellish stopped, and alighting, drew up the buckles of the "culick" which held his saddle.

I wonder if anything is wrong with Mellish's outfit," Hecker said. "Sit still a moment, Nina, and I will go back and see."

Mellish was still bending over his saddle.

"What is it?"
Mellish handed out a small envelope whose strong perfume puffed up in Hecker's face. He tore it open impatiently, and then a smile went around the corners of his mouth.

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