

cision and fleetness of an arrow in the direction of her tree. But her feet were arrested, her limbs paralyzed, her very existence suspended, by the sound of a voice:

"Teresa!"

It was a voice that had rung in her ears for the last two years in all phases of intensity, passion, tenderness, and anger; a voice upon whose modulations, rude and unmusical though they were, her heart and soul had hung in transport or anguish. But it was a chime that had rung its last peal to her senses as she entered the Carquinez Woods, and for the last week had been as dead to her as a voice from the grave. It was the voice of her lover — Dick Curson!

CHAPTER V.

THE wind was blowing towards the stranger, so that he was nearly upon her when Teresa first took the alarm. He was a man over six feet in height, strongly built, with a slight tendency to a roundness of bulk which suggested reserved rather than impeded energy. His thick beard and moustache were closely cropped around a small and handsome mouth that lisped except when he was excited, but always kept fellowship with his blue eyes in a perpetual smile of half-cynical good-humor. His dress was superior to that of the locality; his general expression that of a man of the world, albeit a world of San Francisco, Sacramento, and Murderer's Bar. He advanced towards her with a laugh and an outstretched hand.

"*You* here!" she gasped, drawing back.

Apparently neither surprised nor mortified at this reception, he answered frankly, "Yeth. You did n't expect me, I know. But Doloreth showed me the letter you wrote her, and — well — here I am, ready to help you, with two men and a thpare horth waiting outside the woodth on the blind trail."

"You — *you* — here?" she only repeated.

— Curson shrugged his shoulders. "Yeth. Of courth you never expected to thee me again, and leatht of all *here*. I'll admit that; I'll thay I would n't if I'd been in your plathe. I'll go further, and thay you did n't want to thee me again — anywhere. But it all cometh to the thame thing; here I am; I read the letter you wrote Doloreth. I read how you were hiding here, under Dunn'th very nothe, with his whole pothe out, cavorting

round and barkin' up the wrong tree. I made up my mind to come down here with a few nathty friends of mine and cut you out under Dunn'th nothe, and run you over into Yuba — that 'th all."

"How dared she show you my letter — *you* of all men? How dared she ask *your* help?" continued Teresa, fiercely.

"But she did n't athk my help," he responded coolly. "D——d if I don't think she jutht calculated I'd be glad to know you were being hunted down and thtarving, that I might put Dunn on your track."

"You lie!" said Teresa, furiously; "she was my friend. A better friend than those who professed — *more*," she added, with a contemptuous drawing away of her skirt as if she feared Curson's contamination.

"All right. Thettle that with her when you go back," continued Curson philosophically. "We can talk of that on the way. The thing now ith to get up and get out of thethe woods. Come!"

Teresa's only reply was a gesture of scorn.

"I know all that," continued Curson half soothingly, "but they're waiting."

"Let them wait. I shall not go."

"What will you do?"

"Stay here — till the wolves eat me."

"Teresa, listen. D—— it all — Teresa! — Tita! see here," he said with sudden energy. "I swear to God it's all right. I'm willing to let by-gones be by-gones and take a new deal. You shall come back as if nothing had happened, and take your old place as before. I don't mind doing the square thing, all round. If that's what you mean, if that's all that stands in the way, why, look upon the thing as settled. There, Tita, old girl, come."

Careless or oblivious of her stony silence and starting

eyes, he attempted to take her hand. But she disengaged herself with a quick movement, drew back, and suddenly crouched like a wild animal about to spring. Curson folded his arms as she leaped to her feet; the little dagger she had drawn from her garter flashed menacingly in the air, but she stopped.

The man before her remained erect, impassive, and silent; the great trees around and beyond her remained erect, impassive, and silent; there was no sound in the dim aisles but the quick panting of her mad passion, no movement in the calm, motionless shadow but the trembling of her uplifted steel. Her arm bent and slowly sank, her fingers relaxed, the knife fell from her hand.

"That 'th quite enough for a thow," he said, with a return to his former cynical ease and a perceptible tone of relief in his voice. "It 'th the thame old Teretha. Well, then, if you won't go with me, go without me; take the led horth and cut away. Dick Athley and Petereth will follow you over the county line. If you want thome money, there it ith." He took a buckskin purse from his pocket. "If you won't take it from me" — he hesitated as she made no reply — "Athley 'th flush and ready to lend you thome."

She had not seemed to hear him, but had stooped in some embarrassment, picked up the knife and hastily hid it, then with averted face and nervous fingers was beginning to tear strips of loose bark from the nearest trunk.

"Well, what do you thay?"

"I don't want any money, and I shall stay here." She hesitated, looked around her, and then added, with an effort, "I suppose you meant well. Be it so! Let by-gones be by-gones. You said just now, 'It's the same old Teresa.' So she is, and seeing she's the same she's better here than anywhere else."

There was enough bitterness in her tone to call for Curson's half-perfunctory sympathy.

"That be d—d," he responded quickly. "Jutht thay you 'll come, Tita, and" —

She stopped his half-spoken sentence with a negative gesture. "You don't understand. I shall stay here."

"But even if they don't theeek you here, you can't live here forever. The friend that you wrote about who wath tho good to you, you know, can't keep you here alwayth; and are you thure you can alwayth trutht her?"

"It is n't a woman; it's a man." She stopped short, and colored to the line of her forehead. "Who said it was a woman?" she continued fiercely, as if to cover her confusion with a burst of gratuitous anger. "Is that another of your lies?"

Curson's lips, which for a moment had completely lost their smile, were now drawn together in a prolonged whistle. He gazed curiously at her gown, at her hat, at the bow of bright ribbon that tied her black hair, and said, "Ah!"

"A poor man who has kept my secret," she went on hurriedly — "a man as friendless and lonely as myself. Yes," disregarding Curson's cynical smile, "a man who has shared everything" —

"Naturally," suggested Curson.

"And turned himself out of his only shelter to give me a roof and covering," she continued mechanically, struggling with the new and horrible fancy that his words awakened.

"And thlept every night at Indian Thpring to save your reputation," said Curson. "Of courthe."

Teresa turned very white. Curson was prepared for an outburst of fury — perhaps even another attack. But the crushed and beaten woman only gazed at him with frightened and imploring eyes. "For God's sake, Dick, don't say that!"

The amiable cynic was staggered. His good-humor

and a certain chivalrous instinct he could not repress got the better of him. He shrugged his shoulders. "What I thay, and what you *do*, Teretha, need n't make us quarrel. I've no claim on you — I know it. Only" — a vivid sense of the ridiculous, powerful in men of his stamp, completed her victory — "only don't thay anything about my coming down here to cut you out from the — the — *the sheriff*." He gave utterance to a short but unaffected laugh, made a slight grimace, and turned to go.

Teresa did not join in his mirth. Awkward as it would have been if he had taken a severer view of the subject, she was mortified even amidst her fears and embarrassment at his levity. Just as she had become convinced that his jealousy had made her over-conscious, his apparent good-humored indifference gave that over-consciousness a guilty significance. Yet this was lost in her sudden alarm as her companion, looking up, uttered an exclamation, and placed his hand upon his revolver. With a sinking conviction that the climax had come, Teresa turned her eyes. From the dim aisles beyond, Low was approaching. The catastrophe seemed complete.

She had barely time to utter an imploring whisper: "In the name of God, not a word to him." But a change had already come over her companion. It was no longer a parley with a foolish woman; he had to deal with a man like himself. As Low's dark face and picturesque figure came nearer, Mr. Curson's proposed method of dealing with him was made audible.

"Ith it a mulatto or a Thircuth, or both?" he asked, with affected anxiety.

Low's Indian phlegm was impervious to such assault. He turned to Teresa, without apparently noticing her companion. "I turned back," he said quietly, "as soon as I knew there were strangers here; I thought you

might need me." She noticed for the first time that, in addition to his rifle, he carried a revolver and hunting-knife in his belt.

"Yeth," returned Curson, with an ineffectual attempt to imitate Low's phlegm; "but ath I did n't happen to be a sthranger to thith lady, perhaps it wath n't nethethary, particularly ath I had two friends"—

"Waiting at the edge of the wood with a led horse," interrupted Low, without addressing him, but apparently continuing his explanation to Teresa. But she turned to Low with feverish anxiety.

"That's so—he is an old friend"—she gave a quick, imploring glance at Curson—"an old friend who came to help me away—he is very kind," she stammered, turning alternately from the one to the other; "but I told him there was no hurry—at least to-day—that you—were—very good—too, and would hide me a little longer until your plan—you know *your* plan," she added, with a look of beseeching significance to Low—"could be tried." And then, with a helpless conviction that her excuses, motives, and emotions were equally and perfectly transparent to both men, she stopped in a tremble.

"Perhapth it 'th jutht ath well, then, that the gentleman came thraight here, and did n't tackle my two friendth whn he pathed them," observed Curson, half sarcastically.

"I have not passed your friends, nor have I been near them," said Low, looking at him for the first time, with the same exasperating calm, "or perhaps I should not be *here* or they *there*. I knew that one man entered the wood a few moments ago, and that two men and four horses remained outside."

"That's true," said Teresa to Curson excitedly—"that's true. He knows all. He can see without looking, hear without listening. He—he"—she stammered, colored, and stopped.

The two men had faced each other. Curson, after his first good-natured impulse, had retained no wish to regain Teresa, whom he felt he no longer loved, and yet who, for that very reason perhaps, had awakened his chivalrous instincts. Low, equally on his side, was altogether unconscious of any feeling which might grow into a passion, and prevent him from letting her go with another if for her own safety. They were both men of a certain taste and refinement. Yet, in spite of all this, some vague instinct of the baser male animal remained with them, and they were moved to a mutually aggressive attitude in the presence of the female.

One word more, and the opening chapter of a sylvan Iliad might have begun. But this modern Helen saw it coming, and arrested it with an inspiration of feminine genius. Without being observed, she disengaged her knife from her bosom and let it fall as if by accident. It struck the ground with the point of its keen blade, bounded and rolled between them. The two men started and looked at each other with a foolish air. Curson laughed.

"I reckon she can take care of herthelf," he said, extending his hand to Low. "I'm off. But if I'm wanted *she* 'll know where to find me." Low took the proffered hand, but neither of the two men looked at Teresa. The reserve of antagonism once broken, a few words of caution, advice, and encouragement passed between them, in apparent obliviousness of her presence or her personal responsibility. As Curson at last nodded a farewell to her, Low insisted upon accompanying him as far as the horses, and in another moment she was again alone.

She had saved a quarrel between them at the sacrifice of herself, for her vanity was still keen enough to feel that this exhibition of her old weakness had degraded

her in their eyes, and, worse, had lost the respect her late restraint had won from Low. They had treated her like a child or a crazy woman, perhaps even now were exchanging criticisms upon her—perhaps pitying her! Yet she had prevented a quarrel, a fight, possibly the death of either one or the other of these men who despised her, for none better knew than she the trivial beginning and desperate end of these encounters. Would they—would Low ever realize it, and forgive her? Her small, dark hands went up to her eyes and she sank upon the ground. She looked through tear-veiled lashes upon the mute and giant witnesses of her deceit and passion, and tried to draw, from their immovable calm, strength and consolation as before. But even they seemed to stand apart, reserved and forbidding.

When Low returned she hoped to gather from his eyes and manner what had passed between him and her former lover. But beyond a mere gentle abstraction at times he retained his usual calm. She was at last forced to allude to it herself with simulated recklessness.

"I suppose I did n't get a very good character from my last place?" she said, with a laugh.

"I don't understand you," he replied, in evident sincerity.

She bit her lip and was silent. But as they were returning home, she said gently, "I hope you were not angry with me for the lie I told when I spoke of 'your plan.' I could not give the real reason for not returning with—with—that man. But it's not all a lie. I have a plan—if you have n't. When you are ready to go to Sacramento to take your place, dress me as an Indian boy, paint my face, and let me go with you. You can leave me—there—you know."

"It's not a bad idea," he responded gravely. "We will see."

On the next day, and the next, the *rencontre* seemed to be forgotten. The herbarium was already filled with rare specimens. Teresa had even overcome her feminine repugnance to "bugs" and creeping things so far as to assist in his entomological collection. He had drawn from a sacred *cache* in the hollow of a tree the few worn textbooks from which he had studied.

"They seem very precious," she said, with a smile.

"Very," he replied gravely. "There was one with plates that the ants ate up, and it will be six months before I can afford to buy another."

Teresa glanced hurriedly over his well-worn buckskin suit, at his calico shirt with its pattern almost obliterated by countless washings, and became thoughtful.

"I suppose you could n't buy one at Indian Spring?" she said innocently.

For once Low was startled out of his phlegm. "Indian Spring!" he ejaculated; "perhaps not even in San Francisco. These came from the States."

"How did you get them?" persisted Teresa.

"I bought them for skins I got over the ridge."

"I did n't mean that—but no matter. Then you mean to sell that bearskin, don't you?" she added.

Low had, in fact, already sold it, the proceeds having been invested in a gold ring for Miss Nellie, which she scrupulously did not wear except in his presence. In his singular truthfulness he would have frankly confessed it to Teresa, but the secret was not his own. He contented himself with saying that he had disposed of it at Indian Spring. Teresa started, and communicated unconsciously some of her nervousness to her companion. They gazed in each other's eyes with a troubled expression.

"Do you think it was wise to sell that particular skin, which might be identified?" she asked timidly.

Low knitted his arched brows, but felt a strange sense

of relief. "Perhaps not," he said carelessly; "but it's too late now to mend matters."

That afternoon she wrote several letters, and tore them up. One, however, she retained, and handed it to Low to post at Indian Spring, whither he was going. She called his attention to the superscription being the same as the previous letter, and added, with affected gayety, "But if the answer is n't as prompt, perhaps it will be pleasanter than the last." Her quick feminine eye noticed a little excitement in his manner and a more studious attention to his dress. Only a few days before she would not have allowed this to pass without some mischievous allusion to his mysterious sweetheart; it troubled her greatly now to find that she could not bring herself to this household pleasantry, and that her lip trembled and her eye grew moist as he parted from her.

The afternoon passed slowly; he had said he might not return to supper until late, nevertheless a strange restlessness took possession of her as the day wore on. She put aside her work, the darning of his stockings, and rambled aimlessly through the woods. She had wandered she knew not how far, when she was suddenly seized with the same vague sense of a foreign presence which she had felt before. Could it be Curson again, with a word of warning? No! she knew it was not he; so subtle had her sense become that she even fancied that she detected in the invisible aura projected by the unknown no significance or relation to herself or Low, and felt no fear. Nevertheless she deemed it wisest to seek the protection of her sylvan bower, and hurried swiftly thither.

But not so quickly nor directly that she did not once or twice pause in her flight to examine the new-comer from behind a friendly trunk. He was a stranger—a young fellow with a brown mustache, wearing heavy Mexican spurs in his riding-boots, whose tinkling he apparently did not

care to conceal. He had perceived her, and was evidently pursuing her, but so awkwardly and timidly that she eluded him with ease. When she had reached the security of the hollow tree and had pulled the curtain of bark before the narrow opening, with her eye to the interstices, she waited his coming. He arrived breathlessly in the open space before the tree where the bear once lay; the dazed, bewildered, and half awed expression of his face, as he glanced around him and through the openings of the forest aisles, brought a faint smile to her saddened face. At last he called in a half embarrassed voice:

"Miss Nellie!"

The smile faded from Teresa's cheek. Who was "Miss Nellie"? She pressed her ear to the opening. "Miss Wynn!" the voice again called, but was lost in the echoless woods. Devoured with a new and gratuitous curiosity, in another moment Teresa felt she would have disclosed herself at any risk, but the stranger rose and began to retrace his steps. Long after his tinkling spurs were lost in the distance, Teresa remained like a statue, staring at the place where he had stood. Then she suddenly turned like a mad woman, glanced down at the gown she was wearing, tore it from her back as if it had been a polluted garment, and stamped upon it in a convulsion of rage. And then, with her beautiful bare arms clasped together over her head, she threw herself upon her couch in a tempest of tears.