



The DAY of the DUEL

ON THE BAYOU ROAD

(A TRUE STORY)



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FELIX saw her first at early morning as she rode at furious gallop up the Bayou road. He drew aside, not because there was lack of space for both, but from quick admiration and the wish to follow every movement of the graceful, faintly poised figure. She had her mount well in hand and swept by at top speed. The boy had a vision of flushed cheek and parted lips, a sidelong flash of eye, and she was gone.

Yet not gone. A silk scarf that had added a last piquant touch to the picture fluttered from her shoulders to the ground a second later. She did not notice. With a shout Felix dug his spurs and dashed after her, stooping from his saddle in full career and catching up the scarf neatly. She had drawn rein at his cry and was waiting for him when he cantered up with his prize. Gallantly, with the ease and grace of his Spanish blood, he threw his mustang back to a sudden halt before her, removed his hat and offered the scarf. She thanked him and accepted it, smiling without embarrassment, wheeled her horse deftly and was off again. He stayed to watch as long as she was in sight.

He was on the road next morning, and at the same hour she passed again. He saluted and she acknowledged his greeting with a pleasant nod. So it was the next day, and the next. Finally there was a morning when she came at a walk and he ventured to speak timidly. She was a little startled, but they rode on together for half a mile. Acquaintance was made. Felix held himself well named.

He called her the mignonette girl, for no particular reason except that he could compare her with nothing for charm and daintiness save the scent of the little flower. She was very young, not more than seventeen, he thought; but he found her free from awkwardness or affectation. Never had the darker, richer beauty of his own race thrilled him as did this frank, blue-eyed, supple-wristed equestrienne. He came to think that the day began and ended with the few moments he was with her along the Bayou road. For her part she was reserved, yet took open pleasure in his company.

So their romance had its growth in sweet morning rides under the arch of the rising sun. They came, met and parted like the figures in some quaint idyl of an older century. He knew her only as Evelyn Courcy. She told him little of her home life. He was content not to seek it. The daily rendezvous on the road was enough for them both as yet.

The elder brother of Felix, Michael de Armas, was a notary and attorney in high esteem with the French and Spanish population of New Orleans. Member of a family that could trace a distinguished line through early settlers back to the Castilian nobility, he had yielded nothing in habits or way of life to the newer civilization of the republic. He knew little English, read none at all, mingled only with his old friends and sought rather pathetically to keep all else at a distance. Yet there was in his attitude no resentment against the changes he saw about him. He was a mild man, even tempered, quiet, inoffensive. If he did not understand more modern thought and methods it was merely because they did not interest him. He prospered among those who had known him and did not look beyond.

He found no fault with Felix in that the boy took kindly to the strange, fresh, vigorous tide that had swept upon the city from the northward. Perhaps he saw that while he himself could well end his life as one almost foreign to the country, the younger De Armas must grow up an American.

Fought Too Well.

As the traditional counselor for many of the most prominent families of old New Orleans Michael became engaged in litigation concerning the recovery of ancient estates. Boundaries had been loosely fixed and kept under original holders, and in the new order of things a stricter definition of lines and limits led to many a bitter dispute. Several of those who held themselves wronged placed their cases in the hands of De Armas, and the aged attorney fought a good fight for his clients, with Felix as English associate. He fought too good a fight. In the course of it he excited the active enmity of the counter claimants, who found him a sturdy foe. His opponents had influence, the ear of the authorities and, incidentally, a hold on a section of the daily press.

One of the newspapers of New Orleans was owned and edited by Hamilton Jackson, a Georgian. He had a ready and a barbed pen, which had drawn him into more than one quarrel during his five years in New Orleans, and in deadly combat he had proved himself a man of high personal courage. For the rest he was vindictive in pursuit of those he chose to attack and nourished a strong dislike of the original aristocracy of the French and Spanish days.

This was the aid that the counter claimants drew upon. They presented the case to him as one in which the pride and greed of the old families had spurred them into open contempt and resistance of the new authority. He promised that he would attend to the matter in due course.

A week later Felix de Armas, glancing over the day's issue of Jackson's paper, came upon the following:

"Certain proprietors of old estates in the city have offered annoying and presumptuous interference with the orderly settlement of boundary lines incident to a form of government quite opposed to the lax favoritism which they would prefer. It appears that their opposition is being led by one Michael de Armas, a man wholly discredited in the eyes of the bar, a miserable shyster who has fallen upon this opportunity like some unclean bird of prey. From all information the claims set forward by De Armas would be merely laughable if they were not accorded the weight that a free system allows to any litigant."

"De Armas has presented his case with all the



HE BENT FORWARD FROM HIS SADDLE AND PRESSED THE HAND, GLOVED THOUGH IT WAS, TO HIS LIPS.

pompousness and absurdity that would obtain under a benighted despotism. His clients have sacrificed what little hope they might have had in choosing so utterly worthless a representative."

The young man read this insolent attack with rage and horror. The cold blooded wantonness and deliberate falsehood of the thing were stupefying. That one should call his brother—the gentlest, most courteous, most honorable of men—a shyster, an unclean bird, was unthinkable. And yet here it was in print paper and type for all to read. He knew the explanation. The counter claimants had enlisted Jackson and had induced him to cast vile aspersions upon the character of the elder De Armas in the hope that he would be withdrawn from the case by his clients. But the recklessness, the cruelty, the maliciousness of a man who could put such libels into circulation could only proceed from personal venom and a tainted character.

Felix said nothing of the matter to Michael, who, as he well knew, could not read the slander for himself. He gave specific instructions to the aged housekeeper that should any of their friends call they must be carefully warned against communicating the terrible news to the attorney. Meanwhile the fact that Michael was hard at work with preparation of his case and would be held closely to it for several days gave liberty to his design. With the copy of the offending newspaper in his pocket he hurried to the office in which it was published and sent in word that Felix de Armas would like to see Mr. Hamilton Jackson. He was admitted.

No Explanation Needed.

The editor sat at a small, battered desk heaped high with papers. He was writing busily and did not look up at the young man's entrance. Jackson was a tall man, remarkably thin, "built with a square," as some one had ventured to say of him. His countenance was smooth shaven, showing lines and angles in sharp consonance with his features and person. De Armas stood stiffly, waiting with what patience he could muster and stifling the anger that swelled within him.

"Well, sir?" said Jackson, after a pause, continuing his work.

"I fear, Mr. Jackson, that you are laboring under some misapprehension."

"Don't give yourself any uneasiness, Mr. De Armas; I am under no misapprehension."

"But you will permit me?"

"No, sir, I will not permit you to explain a word."

Jackson cast upon his visitor an eye that was as cold and soulless as a gleam from polished steel, an eye from which spirits of less resolution were wont to quail. Felix returned the glance with scorn and high resolution.

"I was going to say, you will permit?"

"And I say I will permit nothing of the kind." Jackson brought a corded hand down upon the edge of the desk to lend emphasis to his threatening tone. De Armas went white. His nerves, drawn to a tense pitch by his grievance, were like to snap under the insulting tactics of the editor.

"I was going to say that you will accord me the satisfaction one gentleman has a right to demand of another," he thundered. "I can hardly include you in that category, but I hope I can count upon you for the act."

Jackson towered to his feet, blazing with wrath.

"Yes, sir, you can have your satisfaction. The

sooner the better, you impudent whelp. Bring on your whole tribe if you like."

Felix was not sure that he would be able to get away from the place without attempting bodily harm upon the man if he remained to hear more. He received Jackson's words with a gesture of scorn and contempt.

"A friend of mine will call to make the arrangements immediately," he murmured, and left the office.

Felix sought out Pierre Levois to act for him as second, a man skilled in the procedure of the duello and the survivor of many meetings on the field of

THE COMMON SEWING NEEDLE.

WAS so accustomed to seeing the little steel sewing needle in everyday use that we accept its presence as a matter of course, quite as if it grew on a tree like an apple.

It is true that needles have always been used, but not always in their present form. In times when skins of animals were worn for clothing the needle was made of fishbone, bone or ivory, without an eye and of goodly size and strength, in order to pierce the skins easily.

Since the latter part of the fourteenth century steel needles have been made. Various are the kinds and sizes which are now required for everyday use by a world of people for sewing by hand, by machine, for packing, upholstery and leather work, wonderful needles for surgical purposes and many others.

The material used in the manufacture of the needle consists of fine steel wire, which is supplied in coils. These coils are cut with powerful shears into lengths each sufficient for two needles.

Several thousand of these lengths are placed together in a bundle, heated to red heat and then quickly straightened by pressure and rolling.

These straightened lengths are then pointed at both ends on a revolving grindstone. A grinder will point as many as one hundred thousand needles in a day, while machinery invented for the same purpose will point three times as many as a skilled workman.

Next comes the eyeing of the needles. You will remember that each length of wire referred to is sufficient for two needles. At the centre of each length, therefore, is stamped the grooved and rounded impression of two needle heads, end to end, and then perforated by steel punches.

Through the double eye holes thus formed (of, say, one hundred needles at a time) is threaded fine wire, giving an appearance of a two edged comb. The needles are held rigid and then broken apart with comparative ease between the eyebolts.

The needles are next hardened and tempered by being subjected to red heat, plunged into an oil bath, reheated again and gradually cooled.

After this they must be scoured and polished by friction combined with soft soap, oil and emery powder. Washing, drying and more polishing follow—in fact, there seems to be no end to the polishing and finishing processes—but when the work is finally completed the needles are as near perfection as modern machinery and human skill can make them.

Yet we buy them for four cents a paper, at the rate of about six for one cent.

honor. Levois had seen the slanderous article in Jackson's paper and under took to make terms that would mean the chance of sure satisfaction.

"If he attempts to take advantage of you or seeks to evade the proper degree of risk I will strike him and make him challenge me myself," fumed Levois, departing on his errand. He returned some hours later to report the agreement. The combatants were to meet as soon as might be after dawn the next day, with pistols, at ten paces. Felix was well content. He was no stranger to the use of firearms and the distance would at least make it probable that one or both of the participants would suffer severely.

The edge of his anger dulled by the prospect of settling the injury placed upon his beloved brother, Felix turned his thoughts to other matters. What would the mignonette girl think of him? On the morrow he would be absent from their tryst for the first time since he had met her. At the very moment when she awaited him on the road he would be in peril of his life, seeking that of another. The chances were at best even that he would never canter by her side along that road. He would have wished to send her some message, some excuse for his failure to be at the place, but he did not know where she lived. He regretted the obsession of happiness that had held him so closely to the charm and mystery of their brief meetings. But there was no way to reach her. He must appear recreant until either by his own word or through the news of his death she should know that he had not forgotten.

Off to the Duel.

It had scarcely lightened in the east next morning when Felix aroused himself from a restless sleep and joined Levois on horse at the corner of the street. A field near the army barracks had been chosen for the scene of the duel. It was well shielded from observation by trees and hedges that offered further protection from the rising sun. They were first on the ground, and Levois thought to give his young principal some last instructions and advice. He found, however, that Felix had entered into that strange, seeming apathy of mind and perfect inflexibility of muscle best fit a man for the mental and physical strain of combat. Levois was surprised and encouraged. The boy would do well, he felt. He refrained from interfering with the control that his principal had drawn about himself and left him standing alone while he began a preliminary measuring of the distance.

Jackson appeared some minutes later with his second, a man whom Levois and Felix recognized as one of the opponents of his brother in the land suits. The editor's thin, upright form was tightly buttoned in a close fitting coat, his face was set and menacing. There was more than a vestige of truth in the report that he prepared himself for combat as a warrior for his part with deliberate eye to unsettling his adversary's courage by direful mien and sinister appearance. Levois knew Jackson's reputation and smiled as he saw this shallow preparation. It would have no more impression than a heathen amulet upon the state of mind with which Felix had hedged himself.

Jackson had brought his own duelling pistols and remained at his end of the ground in dread and threatening pose, while he sent his second forward to offer Felix the choice. The boy allowed Levois to make the selection and took the weapon after it was loaded without removing his stern gaze from his enemy. Slowly he moved forward to the spot that Levois indicated. Jackson also advanced. The two

faced each other at ten paces, pistol arms lowered and eyes fixed.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" asked Jackson's second.

"Ready," they replied.

"Fire! One!"

The shots rang out at the same fraction of a second. The bursting cloud of smoke hid each from the other for a space. Felix retained his position. Jackson's bullet had grazed his temple, shearing a lock of hair in passage. As the intervening air cleared the boy saw that his own aim had been better. Jackson had fallen forward; the two seconds were running toward him. A moment later they turned him over. He was dead, instantly killed. The bullet from his opponent's weapon had struck him in the centre of the forehead.

Felix was hardly conscious that he had taken part in what had passed when he came to himself a moment later. It was as if he had waked from a vague dream to find it reality. His youth and inexperience in affairs of death might have made that waking painful, but he felt no emotion other than relief that he had vindicated his brother and cleared the family name. Under the accepted view of the time, in prevailing traditions of right and wrong, he had played the honorable gentleman. Levois led him from the field triumphantly.

Hoping There Is Time.

Out on the highway again Felix looked toward the east with sudden interest. It was late, but there might yet be time to reach the rendezvous if he rode swiftly. He parted hurriedly from his surprised second and with whip and spur dashed upon a circuitous route toward the Bayou road. He found the mignonette girl riding slowly toward the city. She watched his headlong approach with the smile that he had come to look upon as holding all of light and hope for him.

"Come, Master Chevalier," she said as he drew up. "Is this your hour for early riding? Where now is your admiration for the first flush of dawn that I have heard you rant so nobly of?"

"What matter?" he responded, bowing, hat in hand. "If the sun will stand still upon the road and wait for me I lose nothing."

"At least your tongue is not tardy," she retorted.

She turned back and they rode on together. In reaction from the sombre business of the preceding hour Felix threw himself with an ardor he had never before ventured toward his goal. He was tender, brilliant, devoted, halting not at all for her mockery, but pressing to the declaration he was determined to make ere they parted that day. She checked him neatly, her face aglow with happiness and merriment, time after time, but he would not be denied. He caught a softer depth in her glance and returned to the attack with persistent insistence. He would win the mignonette girl now, bringing their idyl to its flower on the spot where first it had sprung to life.

In throwing out the parallels of his investment he asked that he might know where her home was or something of her family. She fenced with him here for some minutes, but finally capitulated with a little sigh.

"I cannot laugh with you in this, Felix," she said. "Had I father, mother or brothers I might jest about them. But I have none of these."

"At least then you have some protector?" said Felix in astonishment. "Is it some more distant relative?" She shook her head.

"But there must be some one."

"Yes, there is one. And he is very dear to me. I was adopted when I was a child, Felix. So far as a man may be a father and still no father he has been that to me. I wish that you might know him," she added, turning impulsively to her companion.

"I have every reason to believe that I shall know him," answered Felix complacently. "If he has been good to you he shall also be my father, for I have none. What is his name?"

"He is Hamilton Jackson, the editor."

She did not notice his silence until some minutes later, when she turned to him with a question. The look she saw upon his face frightened her as nothing she had ever seen before.

"Felix," she cried in terror, "what is wrong?"

His voice sounded far away to his own ears as he answered after a pause with an effort of which he had not thought himself capable:

"It is nothing—a passing weakness. It will leave me in a moment."

She watched him, wide eyed, and her agitation gave him the strength he needed. In a flash it came to him that the hour was his and hers. Their idyl was crushed with its blossom still unfolded, but nothing should keep from him or blur the memory of this last ride. He would have the fragrance at least.

Wondering at himself, he made some sadly presently and in a moment had calmed her. Once more his laugh rang out along the Bayou road. He renewed his wooing where he had left it, carrying no further toward the end he had planned, but taking the same blithesome, earnest tone. Again she was on her guard, and again they played the game of the ages, man and maid.

They reached the point where she had always parted from him. If she knew with the woman's intuition that he had drawn back from the purpose he met her with that day she gave no sign as she held out her gloved hand smiling. He could not be banal, he could not be mean. There was nothing he might say to prepare her. Yet one thing he did. He bent forward from his saddle and pressed the hand, gloved though it was, to his lips. Then he swept off his hat and drew his mustang aside.

"Goodby," she cried gayly.

"Adieu," he answered.