

his breast, "Can it be you ?" she said. He answered her with kisses. Dusky looked on in ecstasy.

"Knowed it was him," she said nodding her head to the pony. "Knowed he would come, and that 'twas just about time he was comin'. Nice romantic place to meet. Glad I thought about unbucklin' that strap. Ain't I The pony pricked up his ears, as

though he agreed that she was sharp. This is very wrong," she went on raising her voice and imitating Irma's tone-"to be out so far in such a lonely place a-kissin' a strange man." Irma laughed through her happy

'But he isn't a strange man, Dusky," he said. "He's my-my friend."
"Her betrothed husband, Wiss Dusky," said the handsome horseman.
"Bert Fontenoy by name."

"Oh! I know the name well enough. I heard it often when she was sick and out of her head." Then perhaps it was you, who-

She put her finger up to her lip and shook her head. They had forgotten the rain, until a rumble of thunder brought it to their

"Let's ride on," said Dusky drop-And I have found you, my darling -found you, never to lose you any more," said Bert, as they rode side by

How did you find me?" she aske 1. "How did you know ?" Not from any hint received from you, cruel love. You would never have given me a sign. You would have let me break my heart and wear my life

out searching for you." I thought you would care for another and be happier and please your

I have not cared for another. I have been miserable instead of happy, and as for pleasing my friends, I don't propose to sacrifice you and myself for all the friends and kin in the world." Dusky gave an ecstatic leap in the "Do you hear him? Ain't he spun-

ky?" she said, giving the pony a little kick in the side. The mustang backed his ears as though he did not approve of so much spunk. 'No, my darling I am here to stay," said Bert, "to stay until you go with

me as my wife.' How the words thrilled Irma's poor oppressed heart. She was happy. This was such a blissful, unexpected reaction from the desolate monotony of her life at the Grenadier. Once more, to hear words of tender cherishing, to meet the

light of passion-lit eyes, to feel the pressure of loving lips. Her repressed soul bloomed out like a flower to this sunburst of joy. She was radiant in the purple light of the stormy sun-But at the word "wife," a shadow darkened over her face. That word recalled her from her sweet, dizzy height of joy. She looked at him with

a sad solemnity in her dark eyes. Bert, you can not have forgotten that I told you I could never be your "But you love me; you have not denied it. I see it. I know it." Yes," she said sadly, "I love you."

"What, then, can separate us? Something in your past life? I know that it is no shameful secret. Then tell me what it is. No matter what it be, let me hear it and judge what right it has to be a barrier between you and me. Aimee, will you not trust my love and tell me what this is that

His candid, tender eyes, his tones of earnest, manly appeal, Irma could not resist them. One moment, she hest-tated; then she said suddenly: "Yes, I will tell you all. I will tell you to-night. You shall judge." "Thank you, my darling. And now, let us ride faster. I felt a splash of rain on my hand."

A white shower was roaring behind them. Dusky gave her pony's ear a sudden twist and he darted ahead. The other mustang broke into a gallop, which Bert's tired bay could hardly keep up with. The rain came upon them just as they reached the cabin. "Told you you'd get it!" yelled the barefoot girl from the front stoop where, mounted on a bench, she waved her sun-bonnet at them as they came up. "Stop, and come in; ma says

Dusky checked her pony. The little mustang reared back on his haunches, but the girl kept her seat and called

We will stop here and get under

shelter. It won't last long." There was quick dismounting and hurrying into the house, the horses having been fastened under one of the thick-leaved walnut-trees. The girl came to meet them with the shy boldcame to meet them with the shy boldness of a wild thing that has never been hunted. She looked at Irma with open-eyed admiration. "You're a leetle bit wet, marm. Come into this room where there's fire. I'll fling on a litud chunk and you kin dry off in three snaps of a snappin'-turkle." She led the way into a small, clean room where there were a bed with a gaudy "sun-flower" patch-work quilt upon it, some chairs, a red and blue chromo of Christ blessing little children over the mantel-piece, and under it a fire in the mud chimney-place and a bubbling pot hung over it, from which issued a fragrant steam. An old dame with snowy hair and bright black eyes sat by the fire with an troa spoon in her hand.

"Gran'ma's makin' some honey and ho'houn' candy for her cough. We unsits goin' to take out some of it to pull afore she puts the ho'houn' in. It's about done now, and I'h jes hif the pot off and take it to the kitchen; there's a fire in there. You uns take cheers and dry yarselfs. Gran'ma, come er long and git the ho'houn'. You kin come an' help us pull when you've done dried yerself," she added, nodding at Dusky, who nodded briskly back.

She had thrown the "litud chunk" on the fire, and soon a ruddy glow

ture of Irma in the corner with her dark-green riding habit and the masses of half-curling hair escaping from under her velvet cap.

The fire soon warmen The fire soon warmed them, and dried the superficial moisture from their clothes.

"Now, I'll leave you and look after that candy," Dusky said, rising and going to the door. "I reckon you won't grieve over my absence."

It grew unpleasantly warm by the fire, and Bert and Irma stepped out nre, and Bert and Irma stepped out upon a little side stoop, overhung with a vine of wild yellow jasmine, with some clusters of late blossoms perfuming the air. There was a rough bench there, but they did not notice its roughness as they sat upon it together.

They were happy—obliviously happy—as they sat there, with the vines and he wall of rain shutting them into a little world of perfume and semi-dark-"I can hardly realize that I have you with me again," he said, drawing her head to his shoulder, "that I hold

you here, and know that you are mine—that you have promised—"
She gently lifted her head and drew back a little from his encircling arm. "That I have promised you something that may divide us forever," she said. Her voice was firm, though a tremor ran through the tones. "Speak, if you must," he answered,

"but remember that nothing under heaven shall divide us now." Then, while the rain fell with monotonous throbbing on the low roof ever them, and the faint, sweet odor of the jasmine came on the damp, soft twilight air, Irma told the story of her strange life, its wrongs its repressions, the fatal deed which had marked her rebellion against the cruel sin done to her womanhood; her flight, her deception at Live Oaks, the persecution of Vane and the necessity that had made her bear it until it could be borne no longer, and she had been forced to flee from it as well as from the love she felt it would be wrong

She told her story simply, truly. She extenuated no fault or weakness. She concealed nothing. She could not see her lover's face. She could not guess the effect her story was having upon him. She could hear his breathing -deeper, quicker-as she went on.

More than once, when she told of the wrongs she had received from her father, from Vanhorn, from Vane, he uttered an exclamation of indignant anger, but there was no other expression-no word of tenderness or firmation. Irma noted this, and fancied that she knew what it signified. She ended her story with a brief recital of what had happened at the old Grenadier-her dismay at finding that she had returned so near the scene of her misfortune—that Dr. Prudhomme had known Solomon Vanhorn, and now had business transactions with his brother-that Vanhorn had been buried here. Then, she told of that night in the tower, of Dr. Prudhomme's an er and his threats, of her illness and of the possible discovery of her secret

When she ended, he did not speak or a little while. Her heart stood still. She was saving to herself: 'My doom will be known in an in-

He spoke at last. 'You must go away from here." he "You must go soon-immediately if possible. You must go to some other country for your peace's sake, for your life's sake.' "My life!" she said bitterly; "it is

not worth so much trouble to preserve If I had means. I have not the heart to go to a strange land-alone-He turned and caught her in his

"My darling, who said you must go alone? Did you dream, for one instant, that I would turn from you because of your misfortunes, your mistakes, that circumstances forced upon No, they bind me closer to you. They show me that you need love and protection-that you need me. And I am yours, my darling-yours more These arms are for your defense, this breast for your shelter, this heart to love you and believe in you, while life shall last. Now, will you refuse to say you are mine? No, Irma no longer shut her heart against the happiness that beat against it like a dove seeking shelter from the storm. But, presently, she lifted her head from his breast.

Your mother ?" she questioned. "We will not tell her this story. We will tell no one. We will go away at once to Central America. There I have some property that will yield us a sup-I will write to my mother and father. I love them, but my life belongs to you. We will be married before I go away. I have said I will not go away without you. We will be married at once-to-morrow. It is best, is t not, dearest? We will go across to the river-it is not far-and take the first boat going down. Then, ho! for Central America, for a new home, new sight in our new happiness." Hooray!" softly cried a voice be-

hind them. "Oh, excuse me," said Dusky, stepping out. "I couldn't help it. It was such a good speech. It is such good fortune for Irma. Only I wish—oh! I wish I might go with you and her. You shall go," Bert said. "You shall go if you want to. Your faithfulness

to her gives you a right to go with She dropped down upon her knees and covered his hand with kisses.
"There now," he said, laughing. "I'll find another way for you to show your gratitude. Can you get my bride ready

for me to-morrow night?' 'That I can," she answered promptly, springing to her feet. "But let me tell you," she went on, after a pause. "Don't marry her yonder at the old Grenadier. Don't let Doctor Prudhomme know about it."

"Why, Dusky?" "Oh, Irma won't tell you, because don't think she ever suspicioned it, but I've seen it; I know how love works. ain't been a-watchin' old Emile Prudnomme for nothin'."

"You don't mean he is in love with-'In love with Irma? Yes, I do. He has been starin' at her like a owl for some time, and this evenin' he squeezed out a French compliment and turned as red as a scorpi'n. He'd sting like one too, I'm afraid, if he thought she was goin' to marry somebody else. He thinks he's got her under his thumb -nobody to help her, no money and no friends, and he knows her secret, I'm afeard.'

You think so, Dusky ?" "I'm afeard so. You see I went to sleep when she was out of her mind. I ought to been scalped for it, but I did. And he was sittin by her, and when I woke, his face showed he had been somethin startlin." heard somethin' startlin'. And she was lyin' like the unbreathin' dead, though jus' as I woke up, I'd seen her lips movin'. Sence then, his mind's been all stirred up. He don't eat nor sleep, and he stares all the time at Irma. He's got somethin' or other in his head, and to beat him, I'd be secret about this. Marry right here, to-morrow night, and start off at once."

"You may be right, Dusky," Bert said, after a little reflection. "At any rate, it will do no harm to follow your advice. Irma, I will stay at this house to-night, and to-morrow I will ride to about done now, and I'll jes liff the pot off and take it to the kitchen; there's a fire in there. You uns take cheers and a magistrate. To-morrow night, you will come here with Dusky and we will be married. I know a priest who is to be trusted wholly. He lives in She had thrown the "litud chunk" on the fire, and soon a ruddy glow. The fire, and soon a ruddy glow. The fire, and soon a ruddy glow. The county town, and made a picture of the fire, and soon a ruddy glow. The county town, and made a picture of the fire, and soon a ruddy glow. The county town, and made a picture of the fire, and soon a ruddy glow. The county town and procure a marriage license and a magistrate. To-morrow night, I saw him in his coffin, and saw him his coffin, and saw him in his coffin, and saw him his coffin, and saw him in his coffin, and saw him his coffin, and saw him his coffin, and saw him in his coffin, and saw him busicd in that grave under the pine-trees on the bluff. He died in that grave under the pine-trees on the bluff. He died in that grave under the pine-trees on the bluff. He died in that same room in the tower that the second Mrs. Prudhomme died in. They are likely to the will marry in the tower that the pine-trees on the bluff. He died in that grave under the pine-trees on the bluff. He died in that grave under the pine-trees on the bluff. He died in that grave under the pine-trees on the bluff. He died in that grave under the pine-trees on the bluff. He died in that grave under the pine-trees on the bluff. He died in that grave under the pine-trees on the bluff. He died in that grave under the pine-trees on the bluff. He died in that grave under the pine-trees on the bluff. He died in that grave under the pine-trees on the bluff. He died in that grave under the pine-trees on the bluff. He died in that grave under the pine-trees on the bluff. He died in that grave under the pine-trees on the bluff.

stery there, Never mind. Those are minor matters. The great point is to take you away from here at once. You will come to-morrow night as early as you can? You will then give this little hand to my keeping?"

Her answer was breathed out

Her answer was breathed out against his lips. "Come, Miss Aimee," cried Dusky. "here is Francesca Antinella—she says that's her name, but her ma calls her Franky Nancy-here she is, with some Mayhaw cider, and it's mighty nice.
too. Drink a cup and let's go. The
rain is done and the clouds are clearing away. We've got a little bit of
daylight left, and we can make Jolet
and Patit for" and Petit fly."

CHAPTER XIX.

The rain was over, the skies were nearly clear, and the daylight had not wholly faded. They rode home briskly. Irma was so happy that she wondered at herself. The air was cool and fragrant, the woods romantically dim, the lover she had hardly dared hope to see again rode at her side, and there was a near, sweet prospect that she would soon meet him again, never to part from him any more. They would share the dangers and adventures of flight together, as they would share their after-life in a foreign land, far from this gloomy bayou region.

The old Grenadier loomed darkly up; then the house with its two lighted windows at the top, in the attic study of Dr. Prudhomme. Then other lights came in sight from the windows of Blanche's room on the first floor, above the open basement. At the foot of the straggling old

orchard, Dusky said to Bert : "Now you must say good-bye. It is not safe to go any further." "So be it," he answered. He turned "My darling," he said, putting her

hand to his lips, as he bent to her from his saddle, "I will not say good-bye; only good-night. To-morrow, at this hour-seven o'clock, I think it is-I will be here waiting for you. I will have horses, or a wheeled conveyance, if one is to be had. You will find me just there," pointing to a large pecan-tree that stood on the wood-side of the rcad. On the other side was a thicket of plum-bushes, and rank weeds growing up in the corners of the crooked

rail fence. As Bert spoke, there was a rustle in these bushes, as though from the in-voluntary movement of somebody concealed among them.
"Hist!" whispered Dusky. "Some

one has heard." A loud "Ba, ba!" followed by the out-leaping of a goat from the plum thicket, brought a smile of relief to the faces of all. "His goatship won't betray us," laughed Bert, waving his hand, as he rode away.

There was no one to be seen when they rode up in front of the house but old Nick, who grumbled ill-naturedly as he took the horses in charge. They ran into the house, and found tea ready to be served, and Blanche pouting at having been left so long

"But your father was to sit with you, dear," Irma said, soothingly. "It was his own proposition that I should ride sometimes for my health. He insisted on my going this afternoon, and the rain is to blame for our long We stopped for shelter, not stay. stay. We stopped for shelf-week. In the stay of the st gar, like your statutette of Jeanne d'Arc that you will have it I resemble? Where is Doctor Prudhomme?"

"He read to me from 'Paul and Virginia' about ten minutes, running all the sentences together, he was so absent-minded. Directly he bounced up, and away he went. I suppose he is up in that old study, poring over his beloved laboratory. I've rung for him three times, and I will ring again," she said, sharply pressing a little bell on the table beside her. Before its silvery note had ceased to vibrate, Dr. homme entered. "You were not in your study. Your

ceat is all wet from the leaves," Elanche said. 'I have been taking a little walk on the bayou," he answered, without looking up. His manner was flurried, and

a flush unusual to him stained his

sallow skin "What if he were in the thought Irma. "What if thicket ?" he overheard Bert? Would he really try to prevent my marriage? If he knows who I am, he might try to keep me from getting away. He could know only by what I may have said when I was unconscious. I have seen no one but the houshold since I came hereno one; not even the overseer, until I saw those people to-night. I can not think he knows anything. I will not imagine any evil that may befall to keep me from meeting Bert to-

morrow night." Still, she could not dispel the feeling that something would come to eclipse her prospect of happiness. It came at intervals the next day. grey, gloomy day it was ; Blanche was nervous and watchful. She seemed vaguely to suspect that some change was at hand.

"What is the matter with you?" she said, sharply, to Dusky. That little handmaid was in the seventh heaven of ecstasy and could hardly hide her xcitement. She flashed here and there, n her brown frock and linen neck apron, with the sleeves rolled up, showing her slim, sinewy arms. Irma found her ironing a little pile of collars, cuffs and handkerchiefs, which

she had washed and starched. "I've packed your valise full of clothes, Irma," she said. "There is just room for these little things. When Sir Hookbill Hawk" (her pet name for Dr. Prudhomme) "is taking his siesta, I'm going to carry the valise out by ack way, and hide it in the orchard-fence corner until we go." But your own clothes, Dusky, haven't you put up some of them,

"My clothes! bless you, they's all packed—all but what I'll take on my back. Short horse is soon curried. See there," kicking a bundle on the floor, tied up in a plaid handkerchief. "I can wear it for a bustle, and be in the style. Mighty few clothes does me. Put you-I jest declare it's a poor wardrobe for a bride to carry on her bridal journey!' "But I feel sure you have put up al-

most everything I have, Dusky.' "It's lucky we made up that silvergrey poplin that Blanche give you from the big trunk full of unmade stuffs her queer 'antie,' as she calls the last Mrs. Prudhomme, left when she died. I wouldn't have had you to marry in black. It's bad luck. I told you so that other time, when you wouldn't put on the white dress old Van—"

"Hush, Dusky" Irma interrupted, shuddering. "Don't recall that night. wish I could blot it from my brain

"I never will speak of it, nor him again—never, Irma. Forgive me."

"I know you didn't think; and I am not vexed. But, Dusky, we must speak his name again, for I want you to tell me once more something about him, and think well before you answer. I want you to tell me, Dusky, if you are certain that he is dead?"

"Solon Vanhorn? Why, I told you, Irma, I saw him in his coffin, and saw him buried in that grave under the pine-trees on the bluff. He died in that same room in the tower that the second Mrs. Prudhomme died in. They carried him to the tower because of Flanche. She was sick and nervous; she had heard about—about what hap-"I never will speak of it, nor

found out the half-mirdered man was dying in the same house with her it would have put her in a bad way."

"Who was with him when he died?"

"Nobody but Doctor Prudhomme and Vanhorn's brother, and old Niek; but the overseer came afterward, and when he went up in the tower, I followed him and creft into the room, and saw Solon a-lyir in his coffin, all yellow and shrunk and withered, with that red scar across—There! you are coverin' your face.

You would make me talk about it." me talk about it."

"It is nothing. Go on."

"Well Doctor Pruthomme saw me, and give me one of his black looks, and told me to go out. He sent the overseer to see about the grave. He shut the door, and fastened up the coffin, I reckon. It was all shut up when I saw it next time. The overwhen I saw it next that the seer and the two nigrers that dug the grave went and helpid old Nick bring it down from the ower. Vanhorn's brother and Doctor Irudhomme walked behind as mournes, though I didn't see nary a tear shed and they lowered him in the grave by the torchlight-it was night, so that Blanche wouldn't find out about it. They was goin' to take him up again ind carry him to the city, when the veather got cool, so they said, but he lies there yet. Irma, what makes you ask me about him again, and in that soletin sort of

I don't know. I strange fancy comes to me sometines. Dusky, that face up at the towr window; you said once, before I wer saw it, that you hoped I would ever see it, and you would not say why. But I knew why when I caught the first glimpse of it by the bright lightning-flash. It had It may have been facy-but it seem

me it had a lok of Solon Van-Did it so seem to you?" " Yes, Irma; and I'll tell you why. It is Solon Vanhorn ghost. It must be. It only comes in dark, stormy nights. The nights that ghosts ride "That is nonsense, pusky. You saw

it on stormy nights, because then the blew back old window-shutte. and there was lightning t show you the face at the window. There is a human being confined up there. I tell you I heard a cice, entreating, complaining, and Dotor Prudhomme scothing and threateing by turns. I know there is a human being imprisoned in that wretched eyrie. It is a thing that ought to be made known, and looked into. I fel I do wrong in concealing it. Many atime when I am far away, I shall thin of that wretched prisoner and of poor little Blanche."

"Oh, poor little Banche!" echoed Dusky, dropping the ion she had been industriously using, and wiping her eyes with her sleev. "I set and looked at her last night, after you had slipped your hand out of hers, and got away, at last, when you had sung to her and told her tales. She kept sighin' in her sleep, and reachin' out her hands, as if to catch us and hold feel, somehow, that we are goin away. I hate awful bad to leave her, but I

It is strange, but she seems to can't bear to part with you, Irma, and do want to get away from this place. Then I think I may be a help to you. If you get sik in that strange land, I could nurse you. I've got a little money, her round my neck in an old leather glove. It will help pay my way. Doctor Prudhmme has been mighty good to pay me every week, when we're gone, and that's what ought to be. The sters will be as good to her as anylody can. Irma, do go and lie down now. You don't look like a bride that soon to be. Try to get a nice nap, and be fresh for to-night."

But instead of lying down Irma went to walk. She wandered absent-mindedly along the bayon awhie. The cheer less sky and mosning vind were ill-calculated to raise her ipirits. What perverse desire of self-torture made her turn her steps in the direction of that clump of pines upon the ragged bluff under which was Silon Vanhorn's grave. The central and tallest pineree was dead-smitten by lightning. Its white trunk rose directly above the mound, marked only by a cypress headboard, on which was rudely let-

tered in Black: Solon Vanhorn, died July 10." "Died by my hand! can I ever forget it?" Irma thought. "How dare I be happy and forgetful when a human being lies here deprived of life by my

act !' She covered her face with her hands, and remained motionless. From his perch on one of the dead limbs overhead a vulture eyed her with his hideous head on one side. After a while there came a revulsion

of feeling. She lifted her white face from the hands that Iropped in her 'I will be happy," sle said. "It is

my right. I was cruely wronged. I have had wrong and repression all my life. I have a right to try and escape from it, and I will. I will henceforth live only in the future and for him. And I will be happy." She uttered the last sentence aloud,

as she rose to her feet and shook back her heavy, half loosened hair. The sound of her voice seemed to startle th vulture. He opened and shut his rusty wings, and utered a hoarse Irma looked up and saw him. A foreboding fell upon her like a shadow, but she repeated, defantly:

"I will be happy!" "Amen!" said a soft voice, halfmocking voice close to her. She turned, and saw Dr. Pruihomme. His sallow, sad face was touched with irony. "Amen!" he repeated, bowing to her with his half adriring, half satiric smile. Her heart sink. That smile, that tone of subtle simificance, seemed in the same chard with the vulture's

"I did not wish to intrude," Dr. Frudhomme said, in als soft, courteous way, speaking in French, a language which he always addressed Irma. "I was walking, and saw you here. I wanted to speak to fou, and came."
"We will not talk here," Irma said,

hastily.
"Why not?" he questioned, seating himself on the grave "It is too gloomy."

"It is too gloomy."

"Gloomy! because a few feet underneath lie the bones of a human unit—one of the innumerable animals that die and rot daily to give place to others. Why, the ground your little feet rest upon is male up of the dust of dead things better than the wretched carcass that moulders here. He had or dead things better than the wretched carcass that moulers here. He had no mind, no soul, nothing but a selfishly pampered body. Niggardly to every one else, he was indulgent to his god himself. He wanted to give himself all the good things of life—even to a beautiful young wife. He found such a one her—in this wilderness—a rare creature, unconscious of her worth. He bought her but she could not stand He bought her, but she could not stand her bargain. She stabbed him when he went to give her the bridegroom's kiss. He died of that fatal thrust—

kiss. He died of that fatal thrust-died, after lingering fever and wasting suffering. Mon Dieu! such suffering! It was terrible!"

He had his eyes fixed upon Irma. She braced herself against the rough pine-tree, and met his look resolutely.

"And the woman," she said, steadily.

"what became of her?"

He did not answer at once. He was linking and unlinking his slim fingers and looking down at them. He raised his eyes at length.

manage to elude pursuit and search? Is she hiding somewhere now—more beautiful than ever because of the mystery and sadness in her dark eyes? She must have a soul—this woman who could not endure wealth with grossness and age. Who blames her for that desparate thrust? Had he been intellectual now! A woman might bend to subtle, supreme intellect—even with grey hairs. Yet if she is alive, a doom hangs over her. A price is on her head. She must always feel like a hunted

Irma forced herself to bear his searching eye. She quietly tore a feathery golden-rod into bits while she looked at him and listened.

"She can never know what moment the pack may be upon her," he went on. "She should put the ocean between her and her hunters."

flush mounted to Irma's cheek, a soft half-smile to her lips. Her heart had whispered: "She will soon put the sea between her and her pursuers." Did he guess her thoughts? Did those strange, piercing eyes have the mind-reading faculty? She almost believed it when she noted his sudden change of countenance—the grim, hard, com-prehending look that came into his face. Could he know of her anticipated flight? She had half resolved to tell him, so opposed was her nature to any thing secret and underhand, but there was a subtle something in his look and

words that warned her secrecy would be best. His presence oppressed her. his eves made her uneasy. You had business with me ?" she said, stepping away from the tree she had been leaning against and gathering her light scarf about her.

"Yes, I had business. A consultation about Blanche—a portion of your salary I wished to pay you-andsomething else. But you were right. can not talk here. The place is gloomy. And that wretched buzzard in the dead pine—did you hear him croak awhile ago? I will beat him in his own dismal note and scare him far away."

He threw up his arms and uttered a cry in imitation of the bird's, but louder, hoarser. It was answered by some one who had just ridden up to the gate—a negro boy on Dr. Prudhomme's

horse. "It is Victor with the mail," he said. "I sent him to the office at break of day. He had made good speed." He went to meet the boy, rode toward him, and when near, held out a package. Dr. Prudhomme eagerly grasped it, and hastily tore it open. It contained newspapers, a pamphlet, and one letter. He broke the envelope without a word of apology and glanced over the page of writing. His face changed, his brow became corrugated with perplexed thought. He looked at

Irma. "Miss Brazeale," he said, "I have business of importance with you. Be so kind as to come to my study at five this afternoon. Irma bent her head and started to

walk on. "The 'Bayou Belle' is a-comin' up," she heard the negro boy say as he prepared to lead his horse to the stable. "She steamed up to the landin' as I was ridin' away.' Dr. Prudhomme started. His face grew a shade more sallow. He strode

hastily after Irma. "Let me change the hour of seeing you, Miss Brazeale," he said in a flurried way. "I have an engagement at an hour from now. At three, Miss Brazeale," lookine at his watch.

Irma walked away, wondering what his agitated manner and his change in the hour of his appointment might mean. The contents of the letter, the knowledge that the boat was so near, seemed to have moved him strangely. The "Bayou Belle" was one of the two small stern-wheel boats that plied the bayou, when it was high water, to bring up stores to the planters and to carry down their cotton to the city market. This was her first trip this season, the recent rains having made the bayou navigable.

Dr. Prudhomme's study was at the very top of the house. His sleeping-rom joined his daughter's on the first floor. His library was there-a small room curtained from the parlor; but his books of study and research, his chemical retort and other experimental apparatus were in his lofty attic perch. where he often stayed till midnight and later. Irma had never seen the interior of this room, before the door of which she stood waiting while the clock down-stairs struck three.

"You are prompt; I am very glad," Dr. Prudhomme said, opening the door wide enough to admit her, and then closing it and springing the latch behind her.

The room swam in a strange unreal light, shed through the pale, purpletinted glass of the dome windows overhead. The marble busts, the skulls, the framed parchments and anatomical pictures, looked weird in this light. And the doctor himself, in his purple dressing-gown and tinted, gold-rimmed glasses made a figure at once repellent

and strangely fascinating. He motioned Irma to a cushioned arm-chair beside the table, and sat down himself in another, opposite her.
His flute lay on the table. He took
it up, and let its gold mounting glitter
in the light.

"You remember it ?" he said to Irma. 'It gave the signal for you when I ran away with you-just one month He smiled a slight, half-sad smile.

'This reminds me that I owe you a nonth's salary," he went on. was part-a small part of my business with you."
He tendered her a little purse of soft illigator leather. Opening it, she saw three gold pieces—twnty dollars each. "This is more than I have a right to," she said.

He shook his head.

"Allow me to be the judge of this."
he answered. "It is poor competion for a woman like you to conto live in a wilderness and give brilliant talents to edifying a cripple child and charming a cross, stupid man. If you would stay with us—as I trust I may persuade you to do—"
He stopped and looked at Irma ex-

"You must not count upon me," she answered. "I wanted to say to you that I can not stay. I shall deeply regret to leave Blanche, but I must go."
"I expected it," he said low.
He laid the flute on the table, his delicate finger-tips still resting upon

Will you tell me when and why you eave us, Miss Brazeale ?" "Unfortunately, I can not. It is, however, through no fault of any one here that I go," she answered, feeling the blood rise to her brow under his He was silent a moment; then he

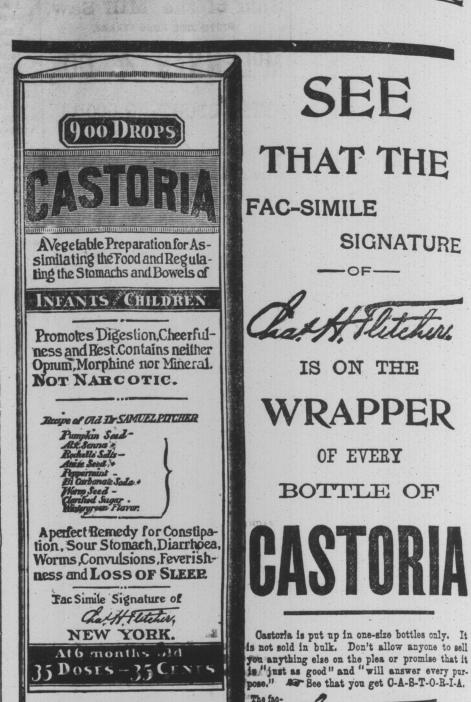
said:
"Is there no inducement that would make you stay?" He rose and walked about the room.

His repressed emotion was more than he could bear and keep quiet. He came close to her and bent down. "Not if you knew you would be fol-owed, torn from yur lover's arms, and dragged to a court of justice to answer a charge of murder?"

Irma half started from her seat, but she sank down again. White and inwardly trembling, she kept control

linking and unlinking his slim fingers and looking down at them. He raised his eyes at length.

"The woman," he repeated. "She disappeared. Did she drown herself? That I know you, Irma Weir—and that others know that you are in hid-



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