

THE ONLY GIRL AT OVERLOOK

BY FRANKLIN FIFE, IN N. Y. HERALD.

CHAPTER I MARY WARRINER

Two names were used for the only girl at Overlook. In addressing her, the men of the place always said "Miss Warriner." In mentioning her they often said "Mary Mite." The reason for this distinctive difference was revealed by the sight of Miss Mary Warriner herself as she sat on a high stool behind a rude desk under a roughly boarded shelter, and with rapid fingers clicked the key of a telegraphic instrument. There was a pettish poise of quiet self-possession which would have been very impressive dignity in an older and bigger person, and which, although here limited by eighteen years and one hundred pounds, still made a demand for respectful treatment. Therefore the men when in her presence never felt like calling her anything else than "Miss Warriner." If she had been less like a stately damsel in miniature and more like such a child as she was in size only; if her employment had been something, not so near to science as that of telegraphy and not so far off from juvenile simplicity; if her brown hair had been loosely curled instead of closely coiled; and if her skirts had stopped at her ankles instead of reaching to her feet, then she might have been nicknamed "Mary Mite" within her own hearing, as she was beyond it by those who described her smallness in a soubriquet. There may have been a variance of opinion among those dwellers at Overlook who had made any estimate of her composure, but if there was one who believed that she merely assumed a reserve of manner because she was among two hundred men he had not yet tried his chances of exceptional acquaintance.

Overlook was crude and temporary. The inhabitants were making a roadbed for a new railway, at a spot where the job was extraordinary, requiring an uncommonly large proportion of brain the brawn in the work. Those who were mental laborers in the remarkable feat of engineering, or were at least bosses of the physical toll, were the ones who had errands at the telegraphic shed and for whom Mary sent and received messages over the wires. The isolated colony of workers was a hundred miles deep in a wilderness of mountain and forest, but not as many seconds instant, measured by the time necessary for electrical communication from the construction company's headquarters in a great city.

"Must you wait for an answer?" Mary said as she clicked the last word of a message. "It's an hour since your first telegram went, and they seem in no hurry to reply."

Poite indifference, and nothing else, was in her clear, gentle voice. There was neither boldness nor shyness in the eyes that opened wide and blue as she lifted them from the paper to the man whom she questioned. There was no more of a smile than of a frown on the mouth that worded the inquiry. She did not indicate the faintest interest as to whether he went or stayed, although she did suggest that he might as well go.

"I'd rather lounge here, if you don't mind," was Gerald Heath's answer.

Here the alertness of the placid girl was faintly shown by quick glance, but it was so faint that the subject of her wariness did not know his face was being scrutinized, and she was quickly convinced that she was not the cause of his remaining, for he said, "I'll tell you I'm anxious about the telegram and in a hurry to get it."

Gerald Heath had been lazily leaning against the makeshift desk of the telegrapher as he waited, and for pastime had whittled the smooth birch sapling that formed its outer edge. He had chipped and shaved after the manner of those to whom a sharp pocketknife and a piece of wood provide a solace. There had been no conversation except a few words concerning the message.

But now he heightened himself to six feet by standing erect, and took on the outlines of a magnificent physique. His proportions had not been realized before by the girl at the other side of the counter. She comprehended, too, that if his somewhat unkempt condition were changed to one which included a face cleaned of stubble beard, a suit of modish clothes to replace the half-worn corduroys, and the shine of a silk hat and polished boots at his now dusty extremities he would become a young gentleman whose disregard might be an appreciated slight.

That was the conclusion which she reached without any visible sign that her carefree eyes were conveying any sort of impression to her mind. As it was, he looked an unusually burly specimen of the men to whom isolation from city life had imparted an aspect of barbarians. Before he had uttered another word she realized that he was wholly engrossed in the matter of his telegrams and had no thought of the individuality of the listener. Not only was she not the thing that made him wait, but she might as well have been old, ugly or a man. If only she had ears to hear!

In was a summer afternoon, and the clear, balmy weather was seasonable. The removal of protective canvas had left the structure an open shed, over the front of which hung the boughs of the two trees against whose massive trunks it leaned. Gerald Heath reached up with both hands and held the foliage aside.

"Do you get an unobstructed view?" he said. "Now, I've helped lay out railroads through many a place where it was a shame to let trains go faster than a mile a day. I've surveyed routes that ought to provide special trains for passengers with eyes in their heads—trains with speed graduated between fifty miles an hour and sixty hours a mile. It's an outrage on nature and art that travellers should ever be whisked past Overlook without a good chance to see what we're looking at. That's why I wrote to the president of the company a month ago telling him how a slight deviation from the surveyed line would enable passengers to get what's in our view now. He asked how much the line would be lengthened by my plan. A hundred yards I answered. And I submitted a map showing how the tracks, after coming out from the tunnel, might make a small detour to this very spot, instead of going behind a mass of rocks that will completely hide this—and a comprehensive gesture of one arm followed his sweep of vision."

Places that get their names on impulse are apt to have appropriate ones. Camps of railway makers in a hitherto unbroken country are not often miscalled. An ensuing town on the same site may be unmeaningly named as a permanency, but the inspirations

Gerald looked like a man receiving a jury's verdict involving great pecuniary loss, if not one of personal condemnation, as he listened to the telegram.

"Zit ees whata I thoenk," remarked Ravelli, with insolent elation; "you ar-re-one-a fool; as z president he say?" Gerald was already angered by the dead patch. The taunting epithet was timed to excite him to fury, which he impulsively spent upon the more immediate provoker. He seized Ravelli by the throat, but without choking him, and almost instantly let him go, as though ashamed of having assailed a man of not more than half his own strength and nearly twice his age. With Italian quickness Ravelli grabbed Gerald's knife from the desk, against which he was flung. He would have used it, too, if self-defence had been necessary, but he saw that he was not to be further molested, and so he concealed the weapon under his arm, while Gerald strode away, unaware of his escape from a stab.

"He is a one bigg' bully," said Ravelli, with forced composure. "Eef a lady had-a not been here..."

"You tormented him," the girl interrupted. "I once saw the best natural mastiff in the world lose his temper and turn on you." She stopped before saying "cur," and added, instead: "If he was foolish you were not very wise to tease him."

"He is a what to you, zat you take-a hees part?"

"She bit her lips in resentment, but made no reply.

"Pare-hee is he one lover ouf you?" Still she would not reply to his impertinence. That angered him more than the severest rejoinder would have done.

"Ob, I am sure a'z it he see one suitor."

She gave way at length to his provocation, and yet without any violent words, for she simply said: "You are insulting, while he is at least reasonably polite—when he heeds me at all, which isn't often."

"Not a often? But some what closely he heed you. See zat?"

With an open palm he struck the place on the sapling where Gerald had whittled. The spot was on the outer edge, where Mary could not see it from her seat. She went round to the front of the primitively constructed desk or high counter to gratify her curiosity. There she saw that Gerald had carved a hand, her own hand, as she instantly perceived. The small and shapely member was reproduced in the fresh' pale wood with rare fidelity. She had unconsciously posed it while working the key of the telegraphic instrument under the jack knife sculptor's eyes, and there had been ample time for him to whittle a fair simile into the birch.

"He is almost as impudent as you are," she said, and turned to see how Ravelli took the comment.

But Ravelli had disappeared.

Then, being alone, she laid a hand of her own coquettishly alongside its wooden counterpart, and critically admired the like neatness.

"It was an unwarranted liberty," she said to herself, "but he did it very well."

The delicate fibre of the wood had favored the carver's purpose. The imitation hand bore a shade of flattery in the barley-tinted birch white and in the fire-grained satin smoothness that the keen blade had wrought, but this was not too much for more than a reasonable compliment. As to the modelling, that was sincerely accurate, and the fingers rested on the key precisely as Mary had seen them during many hours of many days. It is an excessively vain girl who admires herself as actually as she does a portrait and the telegrapher saw more beauty in the birch hand than she had ever observed in the live one. As she contemplated it, Ravelli returned noiselessly behind her. "I wish to say something," said he.

The Italian accent of Ravelli grated with unnatural harshness on Mary's ears, and if he had been an intruder upon her privacy instead of a man in a really public place she would not have been surprised into a deep flush. She snatched her hand away from its wooden counterpart and clasped it with its mate behind her as she leaned her shoulder against the carving to hide it.

"If you have a message to send," she said, "I can't get it on the wire too soon. It's within five minutes of the time to shut off."

"She started to go behind the desk. He stopped her with a touch upon her shoulder, and she shrank away reprovingly, although it was solely the man's earnestness that had made him do it.

"No, no. It ees not words for a zee wire zat I have a for you," he said. "I wish to tell to yourself something. Will you leavin?"

"Yes, if it is something that I ought to hear."

"Thees eez it. I am a more than I seem here—des-e-rent—so des-e-rent you would hardly know a me. In z place I am only a contractor for zee laborer. I am a com-mon as my gang in zee clothes—in a manner too, oh! But een on hour—een on minute—I could a convenience you zat I am a some-thing finer."

Mary did not know in her perfectly regained composure that she was so much puzzeled by the man's enigmatic talk. She said: "I don't see how it could be worth while, Mr. Ravelli."

"Oh, yes. I beg a pardon for zee contradic-tion—yes, it ees worth a while. Away from a here, Mary, I would a be so des-e-rent zat I love a me."

"Stop, Mr. Ravelli—stop!"

The command was positive, but it was not obeyed.

"I love a you," he began.

He caught her by one wrist as he began. She was utterly unresistant. If she had struggled or cried out he would have gone on with his voluble, excited declaration, but her placidity was incomprehensible to him.

"Mr. Ravelli," she began after a moment, "you understand English?"

"Perfectly, Miss Warriner."

"Well, here is plain English for you. I would the Italian if I could, so that you mightn't mistake me. You are to let go of my hand."

He did it.

"You are to go away instantly and never come here again, except on business. Go at once."

That he did not do.

"For what a did you come here, into one camp out men, eef—"

"If I didn't expect to be unsafe? I'll tell you. It was a mistake. Operator number Nine was ordered to this post. Number Nine had been a man, who had within a week been discharged, and his number given to me. By an oversight no alteration was

made in the record to show the sex of the new Number Nine. I couldn't afford to lose the work. Besides—"

"Well, a—besides—"

"Besides, I reasoned that every man at Overlook would protect me against all the other men, if—"

"Yes, eef—"

"Yes, if I cared absolutely nothing for any single one of them. Therefore I am not afraid. But you must not annoy me."

"Fairy dashed into the man's eye, into his reddened face, into the sudden tension of his rippled hands. The girl's contemptuous indifference hardened him. She saw this and was at once alarmed, for she realized that here was a reckless lover—one who heated dangerously where another would have chilled under disdain; but she maintained an unshaken voice as she said: "You may as well know, however, that I am amply protected. The night watchman ordered to include his combined office and residence of mine in every round he makes; so I sleep quite unconcernedly. In the daytime, too, I shall have defence, if it becomes necessary."

"Eph has been frightening you, Miss Warriner," he said.

Mary screamed again, but this time it was a low, musical little outcry of modesty. She had not observed Gerald's approach. She clutched the blanket closely around her white throat, which had been almost as much exposed as by an ordinary cut of frock, and drew under cover the gleaming wrists which had all day been bared to a greater extent by sleeves of handy working length. Then she reached out one taper arm and swung the sash around on its hinge, so its inner covering of muslin made a screen between her and the visitor. He did not apologize for his intrusion, and the pouted a little, on her safe side of the sash, at his failure to do so.

"I see it was Eph that alarmed you," he said. "What did he do?"

She told him and then asked: "Who is he, and what ails him?"

"He is a common laborer with an uncommon affliction," was the reply. "One day an excavation caved in and for an hour he was buried. Some timber made a little space around his head, but the rest of him was packed in earth. He had breathed the inclosed air two or three times over and was almost suffocated when we got him out. He was insensible. He never came back to his senses. He believes he is living at the rate of more than a year every hour. That is why he was in such a hurry with his imaginary message."

"Poor fellow!" came from the obverse side of the sash.

"Yes, poor fellow," the narrator assented.

"I understood his hallucination at once. When a man is suddenly placed in mortal peril his past life dashes before him. Half drowned man afterward tell of reviewing in a minute the events of years. It is a curious mental phenomenon. Well, this poor chap had that familiar experience, but with a singular sequence. The impression that all his lifetime before the accident happened in a brief time has remained in his disordered mind. He believes that his earthly existence is condensed—that future years as well as his past ones are compressed into days and his days into minutes. Nothing can disabuse him of this idea. Everything is to him ephemeral. That's why I named him Eph, short for ephemeral, you see. He doesn't remember his real name, and on the roll he had only a number. He has done his work well enough until within a few days; but now his malady seems to have turned to the worst. He has talked wildly of getting some physicians to check the speed of time with him, and it may have been that he wished to telegraph to this fancied expert."

"It is singular," Mary said, "and very sad."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

CHAPTER II THE NIGHT AND MARY WARRINER

The full moon looked for Mary Warriner's little house, that night as soon as a clearance of the sky permitted, and then beamed down on her abode effulgently. But it was eleven o'clock before the gusty wind blew the thick clouds aside and let the orb illuminate Overlook. Back of the shed in which the telegrapher worked by day was a structure in which she slept at night. It was built of slabs, with big growing trees to form its irregular corners, and their lowest limbs contributed the rafters, while striped bark and evergreen boughs made the roof. The foliage swayed above in the fitful wind and covered the cabin and the grass around it with commingling, separating, casping shadows of leaves, as though a multitude of little black demons were trying to get to the slumberer within. Their antics looked spiteful and angry at first, but as the wind lessened to a breeze, and as the moon seemed to mollify them they became frolicsome without malice, and at length, when the merest zephyr impelled their motions, they gambolled lazily, good humoredly above and around the couch of Mary Mite.

It was midnight when a man shot into the open space around the cabin like a missile. He ran first to the front of the structure, where a tarpaulin curtailed the shed for the night, and gazed for a moment blankly, at this indication that the hour was not one of business. Tremendous haste was denoted in his every step and gesture. He plucked twice at the canvas as though to pull it down. Then he started around to the single window of Mary's apartment, whose only door opened into the shed, and pounded with his knuckles on the ill-fitted sash, making it clatter loudly. Silence within followed this noise without.

"Hello! Wake up!" he cried. "Don't fool for a minute. Wake up!"

There was no response, and he skipped to and fro in his impatience. He was an ordinary shoveller and pounder, with nothing to distinguish him from the mass of manual laborers at Overlook, but unlike the usual man with an errand at the telegraph station, flourished a scrap of paper.

"I want to telegraph!" he shouted, and struck the window again. "Get up, quick! It's life and death!"

Mary Warriner was convinced that her services were urgently and properly required. She peeped warily out to inspect the man, estimated him to be merely a messenger, and then opened wide the sash, which swung literally on hinges. Her delicate face bore the same sort of calm that characterized it during business hours, but the moon shone on it now, the hair had got loose from the bondage of knot and pin, and for an outer garment she was carelessly wrapped in a white, feathery blanket. The man did not give her time to inquire what was wanted?

"You're the telegraph girl, ain't you?" he exclaimed. "Well, here's something to telegraph. It's in a hurry, hurry, hurry. Don't lose a minute!"

"It couldn't send it to-night," Mary said.

"You must."

"It isn't possible. There is nobody at the other end of the line to receive it. The wire is private, belongs to the railroad company—it isn't operated except in the day time. You'll have to wait until to-morrow."

"To-morrow I'll be hundred years old or else dead," the man almost wailed in despair.

"What?"

"It was only ten years old yesterday. To-night I'm sixty. To-morrow I'll be too late. Here—here send it to-night, Miss. Please send it to-night."

The mystified girl mechanically took the piece of paper which he thrust into her hands, but her eyes did not drop before they discovered the insanity in his face, and when they did rest upon the paper they saw a scrawl of hieroglyphics. It was plain that this midnight visitor was a maniac. Against Overlook's civil and sane men Mary had entrenched herself confidently behind her apathy, but with the round of the clock she had been beset by agreeable sentiment, by violent passion and now by irrational delusion. She screamed for help.

A watchman responded almost instantly to her call. He was a stalwart fellow, employed to guard the company's tools and machinery against mischief at night and his patrol, since Mary inhabited the cabin had brought him very frequently past the place. He chanced to have come almost there when he heard the outcry. Upon seeing the cause of the girl's fright he dropped all perturbation of his own and treated the incident as a matter of course. The lunatic wobbled like a drunken man about to collapse as he mumbled his request over and over again.

"Here now, Eph," the watchman said, with as much of courtesy as command. "You mustn't bother the young lady. Ain't you ashamed to scare her this way? Get right out of this."

What He Was Wanted For

Valet (ringing up the doctor at 11:30 p.m.)

Councillor M.—sends his compliments,

and desires you to come to him at once.

Doctor (on his way)—Good gracious!

What is the matter with him?

Valet—He wants a fourth hand for a rub-

ber of what.

Mrs. Stubb