



AT THE TURN OF THE ROAD.

BY BELLE MCSE.

"Compan!" grunted John, the unbelieving. "That there quarrel ain't the patch up kind—don't you believe it. I'll wager you five to one them two parts company this night. You ain't never goin to convince me, Jerry, that there's a pair of turtledoves in this carriage. These fine folks don't fight fair anyhow. Why in thunder don't he light out with his fist and hit her straight between the eyes? That's the way our sort patch up their rows, only the patchin comes after."

Jerry winced and set his teeth hard as John pointed out this greswome path to peace. It was high time, he thought, to turn the discourse into pleasanter channels, but how could this be done, when open war was being waged within earshot and the family honor and dignity compromised before this fledgling of a footman? His young master's high pitched, excited voice betrayed utter forgetfulness of time and place, and there was no way to warn him.

With the energy of despair Jerry once more used the whip. Once more the horses sprang forward, rattling at a brisk pace through the quiet streets. The noise of their clattering hoofs was sufficient, Jerry found, to drown the voices, so he kept the animals up to speed, the winter wind whistling around them as they cut through it. Here was a respite then, and while he handled the reins with the skill of a master he was busy planning what to do next to divert John's mind from the occupants of the carriage. He might lash the horses into a furious gallop, but that would incur the danger of a runaway, the horses might stumble and fall on the slippery road, and it was hard on the poor things after their good night's work. No, it was best, after all, to keep to this even, ringing gait. It would give John all he could do to look after himself as they jolted over the cobblestones, for Jerry took good care that they did jolt. The young footman's slight figure swayed and bumped incessantly against the coachman's stalwart form.

But this sort of thing could not go on forever. The horses were panting as they pulled against Jerry's restraining hold. They were reaching the outskirts of the city. The Arnolds' fine old homestead was at least a mile beyond. There were no more cobblestones. The horses' hoofs struck soft on the country road. Jerry pulled in. There was no use going fast now. He would gain nothing by it, and John was quite breathless. He listened intently for some sound from the carriage. There was no talking, only a smothered sob now and then that cut the faithful fellow like a knife, but the silence was grateful for all that.

The road stretched out, a long, moonlit line before him, with pretty villas lying in the shadow on either hand. There was a turning somewhere in the distance which meant home, and home to Jerry's simple nature was a sacred place, the haven where quarreling and bickering dared not enter. All would be well when they reached home. At the turn of the road then.

"Jerry, stop the carriage." The voice was his master's. It struck him like a thunderbolt, but with his usual obedience he drew rein, sitting erect and almost passive as young Mr. Arnold sprang to the ground, slamming the carriage door behind him. His eyes were blazing with anger, his face pale with passion.

"Drive on," he said curtly. "I am not going home."

"Sir?" asked Jerry, upon whom the command fell like a dash of cold water, nearly taking away his breath. He knew John was listening with greedy interest, but for the life of him he could not utter another word.

"Drive on, I say," repeated the young

master imperiously, for Jerry looked unusually slow of comprehension. It was too cold a night to bandy words. "Without you, sir?" questioned Jerry incredulously.

"Certainly. I am going to walk." "It will be late when you get home, sir," said Jerry respectfully.

"I am not going home. I shall walk back to the city."



"We'll wait for you at the turn of the road."

ception sat apparently unmoved upon his box, though perfectly aware that John's elbow was digging persistently into his side.

"It's a freezin' night, sir," he began in his slow way, "and that coat of yours is only fit for the carriage. If you've left anything in the city, I'll see to it in the mornin'."

Young Mr. Arnold stamped his foot impatiently.

"Confound you, Jerry! Can't you do as I tell you? Drive Mrs. Arnold home directly. I'm going to tramp it. So be off."

Jerry tightened his slack rein preparatory to a start. He glanced at John. That functionary might have been carved in wood for all the sign he gave. He stooped slightly and his searching eyes looked straight into the angry ones just below him.

"It's a pity," he said. "You'd better change your mind, sir. The weather's horrid cold. You might"—

"Well, I won't," interrupted his master. "So drive on."

"Perhaps you'd be goin to walk as far as that little drug store we passed a while since, sir," went on Jerry imperturbably. "It's there they keep good cigars. If you're feelin a bit restless, you might have a smoke on your way back, and we'll wait for you at the turn of the road. I may as well give the horses a breathin spell anyhow."

"The devil you will! You trot them straight home. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir, but"—here Jerry's prerogative of old servitude stood him in good stead—"I must wait a bit to see if you don't come. You sometimes are real changeable, Mr. Winston. Miss Ethel now will be that worried if you should take a cold!"

Winston Arnold laughed. There was no mirth in the sound. It rang harshly out on the silent world. Then without a word he turned away abruptly and headed for the twinkling city in the distance.

Jerry touched his hat in his usual fashion, but the voice he sent after his master into the darkness was determined against all odds. "Remember, sir, that drug store is on the right hand side going back. We'll wait for you at the turn of the road." Then he touched his horses with the whip, and the carriage rolled smoothly onward.

John unbent before the wheels had made a dozen revolutions.

"Well, I never seen the beat of that for temper," he began. "P'raps you'll tell me, Jerry, he was funnin. It was the biggest bluff for fun I ever heard on—that's all I've got to say about it."

Jerry maintained a dignified silence. He knew John's last remark was a mere figure of speech. He had evidently a great deal more to say.

"Humph!" went on this worldly wise youth with a wag of his head. "I've seen his kind, many's the time—soft soap afore and brickbats after. My eye, but he was ragin when he tramped off. Maybe you think he's comin back. You're as innocent as the babe unborn, Jerry. Them great big fellers your size ain't much in secin through things. P'raps you're goin to stop at the crossroads and make a fool of yourself, besides freezin out the missus!"

Jerry smiled.

"Don't worry, young one; the missus won't freeze and I guess I know the master better than you do. I'm goin to wait. You can walk home if you want to. I ain't keepin you." There was a twinkle in Jerry's eye. He was a man of few words, but he usually hit straight in a controversy.

John looked at his immaculate top-boots and was silent on that head.

"See here, Jerry," he said, returning once more to the charge, "I bet you a five the master don't come home this night. I ain't got too much tin, but I'm that certain I don't see no risk."

"Done," said Jerry solemnly, and the situation in John's opinion having reached a climax there was nothing for it but to wait results.

They drove on in reflective silence the rest of the way. It was not far to the turn of the road. When they reached this objective point, Jerry headed his horses for home, but drew rein beneath some great, gaunt trees.

"You'd best get down, John, and walk about a bit; it'll unstiff your joints," said Jerry, with his professional air of command, "and you may as well look in at the carriage window and tell Mrs. Arnold that the master's just gone for a cigar and will be back directly. And lock sharp now. Don't you be mountin this box again till you see the light of that there cigar bobbin along the road. Mind what I tell you, Johnny." And Jerry looked very forbidding as he knitted his brows.

A grunt from John showed his distrust of the future, but he executed the orders of his superior to the very letter and tramped up and down, beating off the cold with his wary arms and stamping his booted feet, striking sparks from the frozen ground.

Jerry sat immovable, looking neither to the right nor to the left. This time of waiting was a crisis in his life, and he began to question if he had been wise to stake everything, even his professional reputation, upon the wayward humor of his young master. But then something had to be done. He could not submit to this eternal questioning on the part of his subordinate, a mere stable lad, who knew no better. Yet there was only one way to silence him, and that way this great hearted fellow in his simple instinct trusted to Providence.

The cold was biting and the wind whistled fiercely through the trees. The horses pawed impatiently, while the steady tramp, tramp of the young footman never relaxed for a single moment. Jerry listened for some sound from the carriage. His keen ear could occasionally catch a long drawn sigh, but that was all.

Suddenly there was a halt in John's rapid, measured strides. The interruption brought the blood to Jerry's heart. For the first time he looked behind him.

A shifting spark of light in the darkness told the tale. Nearer and nearer it came, dancing to the tune of a man's brisk walking.

John turned for the last time, just as a figure emerged from the shadow and hastened toward the carriage.

"All right, John," said the master cheerily. "Drive on, Jerry." He flung his cigar into the road, opened the carriage door and sprang in.

John mounted stolidly, Jerry cracked his whip, and off they started to the music of the horses' ringing hoofs.

John kept silence until the house loomed up in front.

"I'll pay that five, Jerry, with my next month's wages."

Then Jerry relaxed and laid a hand on the slight shoulder.

"Oh, keep your money," he said kindly. "I ain't for bettin on a sure thing; only hold your tongue next time and trust to your betters." With which sugar coated admonition Jerry drew up in his best style before the broad carriage step of the old homestead.

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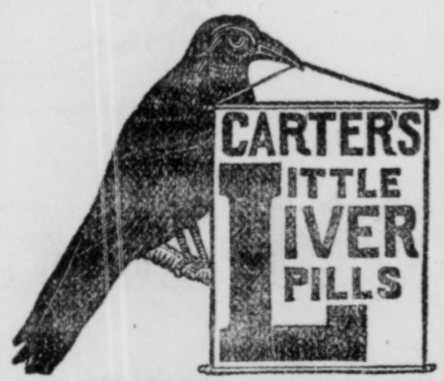
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