THE TRAIN FOR TARROW'S.

"CHANGE cars for Tarrow's Junction; all points north 'n' east."

The door flew open with a puff of smoke and chill air, and several passengers left the train. The first was a gentleman wearing a travelling-cap and ulster, and behind him came a dark-eyed lady, whose well-gowned figure was partly covered by a fur cape. She carried a book and a little bag, and he had a rifle in a cover.

"It is abominable that I did not think there might be a change in the schedule," he said, assisting her to the platform: "two hours in this beastly hole is no joke. I am very sorry, my dear."

"I am not," she said, brightly. "As we sent the luggage ahead yesterday, we shall simply enjoy everything as it comes along. All will be snug and ready for us this evening, and then you will have all the shooting you want, and I shall have you for a whole week. Just fancy!" She laughed delightedly.

"And in the mean while——" He paused to look for a cigar.

"In the mean while you go and smoke, and do as you please, and I shall study nature."

"Humph!" Her husband glanced doubtfully at the desolate, gray landscape as he struck a match.

"Human nature, I mean." She looked furtively at a figure following them. It was the figure of a small woman who, when they left the train, had stepped hesitatingly aside, as if accustomed to having others take the initiative. She was dressed in black, and there was a bunch of lilac flowers above her rather faded little face. She carried a green plaid shawl and a bag, and looked anxiously up and down the platform.

The lady paused in the door of the waiting-room and murmured to her husband,—

"She is expecting him."

"Whom?"

"*Him.* That is all I know. She has been brushing off her dress and settling her bonnet for miles, and her gloves are perfectly new."

Her husband laughed and threw the match away.

"I doubt if you find anything either tragic or romantic there. Very limited material, indeed. Well, I shall stroll about for a while."

She nodded and entered the waiting-room, and a few moments after the little woman followed her. The dark-eyed lady sat on one of the benches which stretched around the bare room. Her book was open, but her eyes scanned the dull, leafless landscape out of the opposite window. The other woman entered and seated herself across the room in a half-deprecating way, as if taking advantage of a luxury provided for some one else. She deposited the bag and shawl beside her, and crossed her black-gloved hands in her lap, only to unclasp them again to fold and unfold a clean pocket-handkerchief.

The lady bent her eyes upon her book, and there was utter silence,

save for the tapping of the telegraph in the office, which served only to intensify the stillness. Presently the dark eyes of the lady were again lifted to the other occupant. She, the little woman, was working on the fingers of her gloves, which were painfully new and difficult. Over her head, a flaming poster in blue and scarlet announced that Mademoiselle Veronica, the world-renowned Queen of Aerial Exploits, would walk a wire from the pinnacle of a certain tent of a certain circus on a certain May day of a year gone by. It was accompanied by a gorgeous picture of Mademoiselle in an impossible attitude and supernatural habiliments. As the lady mechanically scanned this poster her eyes met those of the little woman beneath it. They were blue eyes, and pretty, although not very young. They were pleading, too, and accompanied by a very delicate color which stole unexpectedly into her face.

"A little spinster, who has lived her life in one corner," thought the lady. At the instant the woman spoke.

"Could you tell me—I thought maybe you could tell me what time the next train for Tarrow's comes, ma'am?"

"I am sorry, but I cannot," was the answer; "but they can tell you at the office."

The little woman went to the office window and meekly repeated the inquiry.

"Not for an hour or more," she said, returning. It was said appealingly, and the lady closed her book and remarked,—

"Waiting is always trying."

The other clasped her black-gloved hands on her lap.

"Yes," she said, "it's mighty hard, to-day especially. I just came down from Tarrow's, and I thought there was a train going back that nearly met ours."

"Came down to go right back!" thought the lady, but aloud she said, "An hour will soon pass, and you will not be late getting home."

"Oh, I'm not going back home, ma'am. I mean——" The woman stopped, as if she had said too much, and the color suffused her face. She added, "I live at Tarrowsville, but I'm only going as far as the Junction,—me and a friend of mine."

"*He!*" thought the lady. Then, noticing the restlessness of the other, she again took pity upon her. "We are going on the Down East train for a few miles," she said,—"such a short distance that it seems scarcely worth waiting for."

"And *we* are going on the train for Tarrow's to meet the Northern Express," said the other, with an accent which did not escape her listener. There was an increased consciousness and color, which, being interpreted, said "the train for Paradise."

"Ah? You and your friend?" remarked the lady.

"Yes, 'm, me and my—friend."

Then there was a long silence, broken only by the tapping of the telegraph, and the lady again bent her eyes upon her book. Presently she became conscious of the gaze of the other occupant. The little woman evidently had something on her mind and wanted to get it off; yet she did not look like a voluble person.

"Unnerved at the prospect of travelling," thought the lady. "I wonder how it feels never to have been anywhere or to have seen anything." Aloud she said, pleasantly, "I suppose there is very little travel along here at this season?"

"I suppose so, 'm," said the other. "It has been a long time since I had any call to go this far from home, and it's mighty changed. I was going to ask you if you know how long it takes to get to Canada."

"Canada!" The lady paused in surprise. "Yes: it will take you about two days."

"I thought so, 'm. It's a mighty long ways." The woman spoke a little wistfully.

"Not with a pleasant companion," said the lady. At this the expression of the other changed. She grew wonderfully young and expectant. She looked down at her gloves, and then up, and, with an irrepressible burst of confidence, said, eagerly,—

"He's mighty pleasant. He always was; mighty companionable."

"That is nice," said the lady, gently, and then, with a strange feeling of interest in spite of herself, she found herself furtively studying this little spinster with the child-like face. The result of the scrutiny was this. She closed her book on one finger, and, settling herself comfortably, said, persuasively,—

"It is always pleasant to meet an old friend from whom you have been separated so long."

"Yes, 'm. 'Most thirteen years," said the woman. The lady's dark eyes lingered on hers in a way that may have been new to one who perhaps had led a solitary life, who perhaps had not reached far enough out of that life to mistrust sympathy, or who perhaps saw something in the dark eyes to which she was not accustomed, and which to her timid nature may have seemed the necessary hand held out for her reach. At any rate, she arose as if to cross the room, when the door opened, and she sat down again. A man entered, and, with a careless glance around, went to the office window. He was young, and evidently a preacher, and through the half-opened door the lady saw a horse standing tied.

"Any one been asking for me, Jacobs?" he said to the man at the office.

"No, sir."

"What time is the next train to Tarrow's due?"

"Schedule's changed, sir. Not due for an hour yet."

"Ah? Then I will return."

He went out and closed the door, and the lady marked that the woman opposite had shrunk back in her seat with head turned away as if she did not wish to be recognized. The minutes dragged by, and the little woman became more and more nervous and excited as they passed. At length she rose and walked to and fro, gazing out of the window. Her face was pink and her blue eyes were bright, and by and by, at the sound of an approaching train, she stood still with her hand upon her heart and no effort to conceal her excitement.

"Limited Express!" called the guard.

A moment later, a big, burly man, with a florid face, entered hur-

riedly and looked around. Then their eyes met. There was an instant of indecision, and he strode forward with hands outstretched. She met him half-way with a little cry:

"Oh, it's you! It's you!"

"Annie!"

The exclamation was simultaneous.

Then he held her hands and looked at her.

"And not a day older than when I left her, I swear!"

The woman's eyes were full of tears, and amid the united exclamations and whispers of both the lady discreetly bent her own upon her book. When she again looked up they were standing before Mademoiselle Veronica, and the man was saying,—

"I'll explain it all when once we are off. I couldn't arrange it any other way. You haven't talked about it?"

She shook her head, hanging on his words with the simplicity of a child.

"No: I did just as you told me."

He closed his watch with a snap.

"We haven't a minute to lose. You say he's been in here? Sure?"

She nodded.

"Then I'll go look him up." He abruptly left the room, and the lady, opposite, smiled in sympathy as she met the eager eyes of the woman, who was still standing.

"It's mighty strange to see him without a beard," she said, simply. "He's always worn one. But it's just the same to me."

The lady nodded comprehensively, and she continued,—

"You see, 'm, we kept company for ever so long——" She stopped as the door flew open and the big man bustled in, followed by the young preacher.

"It is very unusual, sir," he was saying. "When I received a note requesting me to meet a party here, I imagined it was an occasion of mourning. I——"

"Of course, of course," broke in the man, whose abrupt, nervous manner contrasted strangely with his burly appearance. "Of course it's an unusual case, sir; circumstances make it so. You, being a newcomer in these parts, don't know her, I reckon; but she's lived in this circuit all her life; and here's the special license." He handed the preacher a paper. "Now all we ask of you, sir, is to marry us right away, please." He paused, and wiped his brow as if under the stress of some great excitement.

The preacher examined the license and said, "This is quite right, sir. But have you witnesses?"

"Oh, by thunder!" The man whirled around, while the small woman clasped and unclasped her hands nervously. He turned towards the office, but it was closed, the clerk having gone to dinner. Then he strode over to the lady. "Madam, could you witness our marriage? It's asking a lot, but the train for Tarrow's comes in fifteen minutes. Maybe I can hunt up somebody else outside."

The lady rose, went across the room, and said to the little woman,—

"You would like me to?"

"Oh, ma'am, if you would be so good!" And, the blue eyes being more appealing than the words, the lady turned to the man, saying,—

"Then I will, with pleasure. Perhaps you can find my husband——" But the man had rushed out of the door. The young preacher was examining the license, while the lady, catching a breath of excitement from the unusual proceedings, drew the little woman aside and brushed off her gown and straightened her bonnet.

"I am glad I can help you," she said, with a sudden thrill akin to pity, as she met the child-like, expectant gaze of the other.

"Yes, 'm," said the woman. "He told me it had to be done this way. He's come so far, an's in such a hurry to get on to Canada, and we'll just make the northern train up at the Junction. He's got business waiting. You see, 'm, we kept company a good while before he went to Texas to live, and he always said he'd come sometime, when he could: so I just waited."

The last words were pathetic in their determination, and gave the lady listening a strange feeling of tenderness. At the moment her husband entered, accompanied by the man, who strode forward and stood beside the little woman, saying to the preacher,—

"Now, sir, right away, please."

Smiling at her husband's amazement, the lady whispered a few words in his ear.

"But are you sure——" he began.

"I'm sure of nothing," she murmured back, "except that the little creature has waited thirteen years to get married, and is ecstatically happy." She smiled up at him, and he nodded, and at a word from the preacher they drew near. A moment later the solemn words of the marriage service were uttered before the flaming poster of Mademoiselle Veronica:

"*I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment . . . ye do now confess it. . . .*"

In the slight pause following, the muffled sound of the telegraph was impertinent. A train dashed into the station, and the keen eyes of the lady marked that the man who was being married started and shook all over with a sudden tremor. Through the even tones of the preacher's voice broke the sudden loud tramping of feet and a harsh laugh. The door flew open.

"Here he is!"

"Aha!"

At the exclamations the man dropped the little woman's hand and threw his own outward, stopping the words on the preacher's lips.

"Wait!"

The word was a challenge, an appeal, a command, all in one. His face was ashen, and his eyes were fixed wildly, defiantly, upon two men who stood in the door-way, one of whom started forward and stopped short at sight of the strange group before him.

"Wait!"

"Too late for waitin' now. We've lost time enough already, owin' to your beard bein' gone.—Beg your pardon, sir"—this to the preacher,

who was dumb with amazement. The speaker made a gesture to the one behind him, and there was the sharp clanging of metal.

The man turned a livid face as they approached. "You've got me," he said, hoarsely. "Can't you stay back a minute? Don't you see *her*!"

He defiantly seized the hands of the little woman, who held his sleeve in dumb, piteous amazement. "Annie, don't you see? Don't you understand?" He uttered a sharp exclamation, half-a sob, under his breath. "I'd rather die right here than to have dragged you into it. I thought I was safe; I thought I could make it all up to you in a new life, and you need never have known——"

"I—don't—understand," she murmured.

He tried to speak, and failed. Then he said,—

"I hit a man down yonder. I didn't mean to kill him. It's easy to do it down there. I meant to do right by you,—I swear it——" He broke off with a groan and pushed her from him. "Go! go home, Annie, and try and forget it. Thank God you're not married!"

He wheeled around, but she caught his arm.

"Hurry up," said one of the officers. "Southern train's nearly due."

The little woman seemed to gather all her scattered force. She clung to his arm.

"I'd rather be," she said; "I'd rather!" He shook his head. At the instant a whistle sounded, and both men sprang forward. There was a sharp sound, a click, and he wheeled rapidly out between the two officers, without looking back, and the door slammed behind them.

The woman stood, white and still, while a train rushed into the station, stopped, and dashed out. Then she turned as if dazed, and sat down before the poster of Mademoiselle Veronica. The lady, who had stood helplessly by, motioned to her husband, who took a flask and tumbler from their bag, but the little woman put it aside with a gesture, and, leaning forward, spoke to the preacher.

"I'm sorry, sir; I can't take it quite in yet,—but he says he didn't mean to do it, sir, and if he says so, he didn't."

Then she leaned her head back against the poster and closed her eyes. The lady made a gesture to her husband, and he drew the young preacher out of the room.

Presently the woman opened her eyes.

"I guess my train's 'most due." She spoke mechanically.

"I wish we were going the same way," said the lady, gently taking her hand. "I am so sorry! so sorry!"

"Thank you, ma'am," said the little woman. "I'm used to being lonesome."

She opened her bag and took out a pair of thread gloves and began to draw off the kid ones with fingers that still shook.

"I reckon these'll do to go back in," she said. "The others were for the weddin'-journey."

Then she gathered up the green shawl and arose.

"Train for Tarrow's!" shouted the guard, putting his head in the

door. The clerk entered the office jauntily humming a tune, all unaware of the tragedy played while he ate his dinner, and the two women went out and crossed the platform together. As the train approached, the lady, who had laid a pitiful, caressing hand on the arm of the other, exclaimed,—

"Oh, can I do nothing for you?"

"No, 'm," said the little woman. She looked like one who had not quite awakened, but as she mounted the steps she turned a pale little face, out of which the last trace of youth and expectancy had vanished. "I'll just go back again," she added, and disappeared in the car.

The lady turned away, and met her husband on the platform. She clung to his arm without speaking, and her eyes were blind with tears as the train for Tarrow's rushed out of the station.

Virginia Woodward Cloud.