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“GEORGE WASHINGTON’S” LAST DUEL

By Thomas Nelson Page

1891

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I.

Of all the places in the county “The Towers” was the favorite with the young people. There even before Margaret was installed the Major kept open house with his major domo and factotum “George Washington”; and when Margaret came from school, of course it was popular. Only one class of persons was excluded.

There were few people in the county who did not know of the Major’s antipathy to “old women,” as he called them. Years no more entered into his definition of this class than celibacy did into his idea of an “old

bachelor." The state of single blessedness continued in the female sex beyond the bloom of youth was in his eyes the sole basis of this unpardonable condition. He made certain concessions to the few individuals among his neighbors who had remained in the state of spinsterhood, because, as he declared, neighborliness was a greater virtue than consistency; but he drew the line at these few, and it was his boast that no old woman had ever been able to get into his Eden. "One of them," he used to say, "would close paradise just as readily now as Eve did six thousand years ago." Thus, although as Margaret grew up she had any other friends she desired to visit her as often as she chose, her wish being the supreme law at Rock Towers, she had never even thought of inviting one of the class against whom her uncle's ruddy face was so steadfastly set. The first time it ever occurred to her to invite any one among the proscribed was when she asked Rose Endicott to pay her a visit. Rose, she knew, was living with her old aunt, Miss Jemima Bridges, whom she had once met in R——, and she had some apprehension that in Miss Jemima's opinion, the condition of the South was so much like that of the Sandwich Islands that the old lady would not permit Rose to come without her personal escort. Accordingly, one evening after tea, when the Major was in a particularly gracious humor, and had told her several of his oldest and best stories, Margaret fell upon him unawares, and before he had recovered from the shock of the encounter, had captured his consent. Then, in order to secure the leverage of a dispatched invitation, she had immediately written Rose, asking her and her aunt to come and spend a month or two with her, and had without delay handed it to George Washington to deliver to Lazarus to give Luke to carry to the post-office. The next evening, therefore, when the Major, after twenty-four hours of serious apprehension, reopened the matter with a fixed determination to coax or buy her out of the notion, because, as he used to say, "women can't be *reasoned* out of a thing, sir, not having been reasoned in," Margaret was able to meet him with the announcement that it was "too late," as the letter had already been mailed.

Seated in one of the high-backed arm-chairs, with one white hand shading her laughing eyes from the light, and with her evening dress daintily spread out about her, Margaret was amused at the look of desperation on the old gentleman's ruddy face. He squared his round body before the fire, braced himself with his plump legs well apart, as if he were preparing to sustain the shock of a blow, and taking a deep inspiration, gave a loud and prolonged "Whew!"

This was too much for her.

Margaret rose, and, going up to him, took his arm and looked into his face cajolingly.

"Uncle, I was bound to have Rose, and Miss Jemima would not have let her come alone."

The tone was the low, almost plaintive key, the effectiveness of which Margaret knew so well.

"Not let her!" The Major faced her quickly. "Margaret, she is one of those *strong-minded* women!"

Margaret nodded brightly.

"I bet my horse she wears iron-gray curls, caught on the side of her head with tucking combs!"

"She does," declared Margaret, her eyes dancing.

"And has a long nose—red at the end."

"Uncle, you have seen her. I *know* you have seen her," asserted Margaret, laughing up at him. "You have her very picture."

The Major groaned, and vowed that he would never survive it, and that Margaret would go down to history as the slayer of her uncle.

"I have selected my place in the graveyard," he said, with a mournful shake of the head. "Put me close to the fence behind the raspberry thicket, where I shall be secure. Tell her there are snakes there."

"But, uncle, she is as good as gold," declared Margaret; "she is always doing good,—I believe she thinks it her mission to save the world."

The Major burst out, "That's part of this modern devilment of substituting humanitarianism for Christianity. Next thing they'll be wanting to abolish hell!"

The Major was so impressed with his peril that when Jeff, who had galloped over "for a little while," entered, announced with great ceremony by George Washington, he poured out all his apprehensions into his sympathetic ear, and it was only when he began to rally Jeff on the chance of his becoming a victim to Miss Endicott's charms, that Margaret interfered so far as to say, that Rose had any number of lovers, and one of them was "an awfully nice fellow, handsome and rich and all that." She wished "some one" would invite him down to pay a visit in the neighborhood, for she was "afraid Rose would find it dreadfully dull in the country." The Major announced that he would himself make love to her; but both Margaret and Jeff declared that Providence manifestly intended him for Miss Jemima. He then suggested that Miss Endicott's friend be invited to come with her, but Margaret did not think that would do.

"What is the name of this Paragon?" inquired Jeff.

Margaret gave his name. "Mr. Lawrence—Pickering Lawrence."

"Why, I know him, 'Pick Lawrence.' We were college-mates, class-mates. He used to be in love with somebody up at his home then; but I never identified her with your friend. We were great cronies at the University. He was going to be a lawyer; but I believe somebody died and he came into a fortune." This history did not appear to surprise Margaret as much as might have been expected, and she said nothing more about him.

About a week later Jeff took occasion to ride over to tea, and announced that his friend Mr. Lawrence had promised to run down and spend a few weeks with him. Margaret looked so pleased and dwelt so much on the alleged charms of the expected guest that Jeff, with a pang of jealousy, suddenly asserted that he "didn't think so much of Lawrence," that he was one of those fellows who always pretended to be very much in love with somebody, and was "always changing his clothes."

"That's what girls like," said Margaret, decisively; and this was all the thanks Jeff received.

II.

There was immense excitement at the Towers next day when the visitors were expected. The Major took twice his usual period to dress; George Washington with a view to steadying his nerves braced them so tight that he had great difficulty in maintaining his equipoise, and even Margaret herself was in a flutter quite unusual to one so self-possessed as she generally was. When, however, the carriage drove up to the door, the Major, with Margaret a little in advance, met the visitors at the steps in all the glory of new blue broadcloth and flowered velvet. Sir Charles Grandison could not have been more elegant, nor Sir Roger more gracious. Behind him yet grander stood George—George Washington—his master's fac-simile in ebony down to the bandanna handkerchief and the trick of waving the right hand in a flowing curve. It was perhaps this spectacle which saved the Major, for Miss Jemima was so overwhelmed by George Washington's portentous dignity that she exhibited sufficient humility to place the Major immediately at his ease, and from this time Miss Jemima was at a disadvantage, and the Major felt that he was master of the situation.

The old lady had never been in the South before except for a few days on the occasion when Margaret had met her and Rose Endicott at the hotel in R—, and she had then seen just enough to excite her inquisitiveness. Her natural curiosity was quite amazing. She was desperately bent on acquiring information, and whatever she heard she set down in a journal, so as soon as she became sufficiently acquainted with the Major she began to ply him with questions. Her seat at table was at the Major's right, and the questions which she put to him proved so embarrassing, that the old gentleman declared to Margaret that if that old woman knew as much as she wanted to know she would with her wisdom eclipse Solomon and destroy the value of the Scriptures. He finally hit upon an expedient. He either traversed every proposition she suggested, or else answered every inquiry with a statement which was simply astounding. She had therefore not been at the Towers a week before she was in the possession of facts furnished by the Major which might have staggered credulity itself.

One of the many entries in her journal was to the effect that, according to Major B—, it was the custom on many plantations to shoot a slave every year, on the ground that such a sacrifice was generally salutary; that it was an expiation of past derelictions and a deterrent from repetition. And she added this memorandum:

"The most extraordinary and revolting part of it all is that this barbarous custom, which might well have been supposed confined to Dahomey, is justified by such men as Major B— as a pious act." She inserted this query,

"Can it be true?"

If she did not wholly believe the Major, she did not altogether disbelieve him. She at least was firmly convinced that it was quite possible. She determined to inquire privately of George Washington.

She might have inquired of one of the numerous maids, whose useless presence embarrassed her; but the Major foreseeing that she might pursue her investigation in other directions, had informed her that the rite was guarded with the greatest care, and that it would be as much as any one's life were worth to divulge it. Miss Jemima, therefore, was too loyal to expose one of her own sex to such danger; so she was compelled to consult George Washington, whom she believed clever enough to take care of himself.

She accordingly watched several days for an opportunity to see him alone, but without success. In fact, though she was unaware of it, George Washington had conceived for her a most violent dislike, and carefully avoided her. He had observed with growing suspicion Miss Jemima's investigation of matters relating to the estate, and her persistent pursuit of knowledge at the table had confirmed him in his idea that she contemplated the capture of his master and himself.

Like his master, he had a natural antipathy to "old women," and as the Major's threat for years had varied between "setting him free next morning" and giving him "a mistress to make him walk straight," George Washington felt that prudence demanded some vigilance on his part.

One day, under cover of the hilarity incident to the presence at dinner of Jeff and of his guest, Mr. Lawrence, Miss Jemima had pushed her inquisition even further than usual. George Washington watched her with growing suspicion, his head thrown back and his eyes half closed, and so, when, just before dinner was over, he went into the hall to see about the fire, he, after his habit, took occasion to express his opinion of affairs to the sundry members of the family who looked down at him from their dim gilt frames on the wall.

"I ain't pleased wid de way things is gwine on heah at all," he declared, poking the fire viciously and addressing his remark more particularly to an old gentleman who in ruffles and red velvet sat with crossed legs in a high-backed chair just over the piano. "Heah me an' Marse Nat an' Miss Margaret been gittin' long all dese years easy an' peaceable, an' Marse Jeff been comin' over sociable all de time, an' d' ain' been no trouble nor nuttin' till now dat ole ooman what ax mo' questions 'n a thousan' folks kin answer got to come heah and set up to Marse Nat, an' talk to him so he cyarn hardly eat." He rose from his knees at the hearth, and looking the old gentleman over the piano squarely in the face, asserted, "She got her mine sot on bein' my mistis, dat's what 'tis!" This relieved him so that he returned to his occupation of "chunking" the fire, adding, "When women sets de mines on a thing, you jes' well gin up!"

So intent was he on relieving himself of the burden on his mind that he did not hear the door softly open, and did not know any one had entered until an enthusiastic voice behind him exclaimed:

"Oh! what a profound observation!" George Washington started in much confusion; for it was Miss Jemima, who had stolen away from the table to intercept him at his task of "fixing the fires." She had, however, heard only his concluding sentence, and she now advanced with a beaming smile intended to conciliate the old butler. George Washington gave the hearth a final and hasty sweep, and was retiring in a long detour around Miss Jemima when she accosted him.

"Uncle George."

"Marm." He stopped and half turned.

"What a charming old place you have here!"

George Washington cast his eye up towards the old gentleman in the high-backed chair, as much as to say,

"You see there? What did I tell you?" Then he said briefly:

"Yes, 'm."

"What is its extent? How many acres are there in it?"

George Washington positively started. He took in several of the family in his glance of warning.

"Well, I declare, marm, I don't know," he began; then it occurring to him that the honor of the family was somehow at stake and must be upheld, he added, "A leetle mo' 'n a hundred thousan', marm." His exactness was convincing. Miss Jemima threw up her hands:

"Prodigious! How many nee— how many persons of the African blood are there on this vast domain?" she inquired, getting nearer to her point.

George, observing how much she was impressed, eyed her with rising disdain:

"Does you mean niggers, m'm? 'Bout three thousan', mum."

Another exclamation of astonishment burst from the old lady's lips.

"If you will permit me to inquire, Uncle George, how old are you?"

"She warn see if I kin wuck—dat's what she's after," said George to himself, with a confidential look at a young gentleman in a hunting dress on the wall between two windows. Then he said:

"Well, I declare, mum, you got me dyah. I ixpec' I is mos ninety years ole, I reckon I'se ol'er 'n you is—I reckon I is."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Jemima with a little start as if she had pricked her finger with a needle.

"Marse Nat kin tell you," continued George; "if you don't know how ole you is, all you got to do is to ax him, an' he kin tell you—he got it all set down in a book—he kin tell how ole you is to a day."

"Dear, how frightful!" exclaimed Miss Jemima, just as the Major entered somewhat hastily.

"He's a gone coon," said George Washington through the crack of the door to the old gentleman in ruffles, as he pulled the door slowly to from the outside.

The Major had left the young people in the dining-room and had come to get a book to settle a disputed quotation. He had found the work and was trying to read it without the ignominy of putting on his glasses, when Miss Jemima accosted him.

"Major, your valet appears to be a very intelligent person."

The Major turned upon her.

"My 'valet'! Madam! I have no valet!"

"I mean your body servant, your butler"—explained Miss Jemima. "I have been much impressed by him."

"George!—George Washington?—you mean George Washington! No, madam, he has not a particle of intelligence.—He is grossly and densely stupid. I have never in fifty years been able to get an idea into his head."

"Oh, dear! and I thought him so clever! I was wondering how so intelligent a person, so well informed, could be a slave."

The Major faced about.

"George! George Washington a slave! Madam, you misapprehend the situation. *He* is no slave. I am the slave, not only of him but of three hundred more as arrogant and exacting as the Czar, and as lazy as the devil!"

Miss Jemima threw up her hands in astonishment, and the Major, who was on a favorite theme, proceeded:

"Why, madam, the very coat on my back belongs to that rascal George Washington, and I do not know when he may take a fancy to order me out of it. My soul is not my own. He drinks my whiskey, steals my tobacco, and takes my clothes before my face. As likely as not he will have on this very waistcoat before the week is out."

The Major stroked his well-filled velvet vest caressingly, as if he already felt the pangs of the approaching separation.

"Oh, dear! You amaze me," began Miss Jemima.

"Yes, madam, I should be amazed myself, except that I have stood it so long. Why, I had once an affair with an intimate and valued friend, Judge Carrington. You may have heard of him, a very distinguished man! and I was indiscreet enough to carry that rascal George Washington to the field, thinking, of course, that I ought to go like a gentleman, and although the affair was arranged after we had taken our positions, and I did not have the pleasure of shooting at him.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Miss Jemima. "*The pleasure of shooting at your friend!* Monstrous!"

"I say I did not have that pleasure," corrected the Major, blandly; "the affair was, as I stated, arranged without a shot; yet do you know? that rascal George Washington will not allow that it was so, and I understand he recounts with the most harrowing details the manner in which 'he and I,' as he terms it, shot my friend—murdered him."

Miss Jemima gave an "Ugh. Horrible! What depravity!" she said, almost under her breath.

The Major caught the words.

"Yes, madam, it is horrible to think of such depravity. Unquestionably he deserves death; but what can one do! The law, kept feeble by politicians, does not permit one to kill them, however worthless they are (he observed Miss Jemima's start.)—except, of course, by way of example, under certain peculiar circumstances, as I have stated to you." He bowed blandly.

Miss Jemima was speechless, so he pursued.

"I have sometimes been tempted to make a break for liberty, and have thought that if I could once get the rascal on the field, with my old pistols, I would settle with him which of us is the master."

"Do you mean that you would—would shoot him?" gasped Miss Jemima.

"Yes, madam, unless he should be too quick for me," replied the Major, blandly,— "or should order me from the field, which he probably would do."

The old lady turned and hastily left the room.

III.

Though Miss Jemima after this regarded the Major with renewed suspicion, and confided to her niece that she did not feel at all safe with him, the old gentleman was soon on the same terms with Rose that he was on with Margaret herself. He informed her that he was just twenty-five his "last grass," and that he never could, would, or should grow a year older. He notified Jeff and his friend Mr. Lawrence at the table that he regarded himself as a candidate for Miss Endicott's hand, and had "staked" the ground, and he informed her that as soon as he could bring himself to break an oath which he had made twenty years before, never to address another woman, he intended to propose to her. Rose, who had lingered at the table a moment behind the other ladies, assured the old fellow that he need fear no rival, and that if he could not muster courage to propose before she left, as it was leap-year, she would exercise her prerogative and propose herself. The Major, with his hand on his heart as he held the door open for her, vowed as Rose swept past him her fine eyes dancing, and her face dimpling with fun, that he was ready that moment to throw himself at her feet if it were not for the difficulty of getting up from his knees.

A little later in the afternoon Margaret was down among the rose-bushes, where Lawrence had joined her, after Rose had executed that inexplicable feminine manoeuvre of denying herself to oppose a lover's request.

Jeff was leaning against a pillar, pretending to talk to Rose, but listening more to the snatches of song in Margaret's rich voice, or to the laughter which floated up to them from the garden below.

Suddenly he said abruptly, "I believe that fellow Lawrence is in love with Margaret."

Rose insisted on knowing what ground he had for so peculiar an opinion, on which he incontinently charged his friend with being one of "those fellows who falls in love with every pretty girl on whom he lays his eyes," and declared that he had done nothing but hang around Margaret ever since he had come to the county.

What Rose might have replied to this unexpected attack on one whom she reserved for her own especial torture cannot be recorded, for the Major suddenly appeared around the verandah. Both the young people instinctively straightened up.

"Ah! you rascals! I catch you!" he cried, his face glowing with jollity. "Jeff, you'd better look out,—honey catches a heap of flies, and sticks mighty hard. Rose, don't show him any mercy,—kick him, trample on him."

"I am not honey," said Rose, with a captivating look out of her bright eyes.

"Yes, you are. If you are not you are the very rose from which it is distilled."

"Oh, how charming!" cried the young lady. "How I wish some woman could hear that said to me!"

"Don't give him credit before you hear all his proverb," said Jeff. "Do you know what he said in the dining-room?"

"Don't credit *him* at all," replied the Major. "Don't believe him—don't listen to him. He is green with envy at my success." And the old fellow shook with amusement.

"What did he say? Please tell me." She appealed to Jeff, and then as he was about to speak, seeing the Major preparing to run, she caught him. "No, you have to listen. Now tell me," to Jeff again.

"Well, he said honey caught lots of flies, and women lots of fools."

Rose fell back, and pointing her tapering finger at the Major, who, with mock humility, was watching her closely, declared that she would "never believe in him again." The old fellow met her with an unblushing denial of ever having made such a statement or held such traitorous sentiments, as it was, he maintained, a well established fact that flies never eat honey at all.

From this moment the Major conceived the idea that Jeff had been caught by his fair visitor. It had never occurred to him that any one could aspire to Margaret's hand. He had thought at one time that Jeff was in danger of falling a victim to the charms of the pretty daughter of an old friend and neighbor of his, and though it appeared rather a pity for a young fellow to fall in love "out of the State," yet the claims of hospitality, combined with the fact that rivalry with Mr. Lawrence, against whom, on account of his foppishness, he had conceived some prejudice, promised a delightful excitement, more than counterbalanced that objectionable feature. He therefore immediately constituted himself Jeff's ardent champion, and always spoke of the latter's guest as "that fellow Lawrence."

Accordingly, when, one afternoon, on his return from his ride, he found Jeff, who had ridden over to tea, lounging around alone, in a state of mind as miserable as a man should be who, having come with the expectation of basking in the sunshine of Beauty's smile, finds that Beauty is out horseback riding with a rival, he was impelled to give him aid, countenance, and advice. He immediately attacked him, therefore, on his forlorn and woebegone expression, and declared that at his age he would have long ago run the game to earth, and have carried her home across his saddle-bow.

"You are afraid, sir—afraid," he asserted, hotly. "I don't know what you fellows are coming to."

Jeff admitted the accusation. "He feared," he said, "that he could not get a girl to have him." He was looking rather red when the Major cut him short.

"'Fear,' sir! Fear catches kicks, not kisses. 'Not *get* a girl to have you!' Well, upon my soul! Why don't you run after her and bawl like a baby for her to stop, whilst you get down on your knees and—*get* her to have you!"

Jeff was too dejected to be stung even by this unexpected attack. He merely said, dolorously:

"Well, how the deuce can it be done?"

"*Make her, sir—make her,*" cried the Major. "Coerce her—compel her." The old fellow was in his element. He shook his grizzled head, and brought his hollowed hands together with sounding emphasis.

Jeff suggested that perhaps she might be impregnable, but the old fellow affirmed that no woman was this; that no fortress was too strong to be carried; that it all depended on the assailant and the vehemence of the assault; and if one did not succeed, another would. The young man brightened. His mentor, however, dashed his rising hopes by saying: "But mark this, sir, no coward can succeed. Women are rank cowards themselves, and they demand courage in their conquerors. Do you think a woman will marry a man who trembles before her? By Jove, sir! He must make her tremble!"

Jeff admitted dubiously that this sounded like wisdom. The Major burst out, "Wisdom, sir! It is the wisdom of Solomon, who had a thousand wives!"

From this time the Major constituted himself Jeff's ally, and was ready to take the field on his behalf against any and all comers. Therefore, when he came into the hall one day when Rose was at the piano, running her fingers idly over the keys, whilst Lawrence was leaning over her talking, he exclaimed:

"Hello! what treason's this? I'll tell Jeff. He was consulting me only yesterday about—"

Lawrence muttered an objurgation; but Rose wheeled around on the piano-stool and faced him.

—"Only yesterday about the best mode of winning—" He stopped tantalizingly.

"Of winning what? I am so interested." She rose and stood just before him with a cajoling air. The Major shut his mouth tight.

"I'm as dumb as an oyster. Do you think I would betray my friend's confidence—for nothing? I'm as silent as the oracle of Delphi."

Lawrence looked anxious, and Rose followed the old man closely.

"I'll pay you anything."

"I demand payment in coin that buys youth from age." He touched his lips, and catching Rose leaned slowly forward and kissed her.

"Now, tell me—what did he say? A bargain's a bargain," she laughed as Lawrence almost ground his teeth.

"Well, he said,—he said, let me see, what did he say?" paltered the Major. "He said he could not get a girl he loved to have him."

"Oh! did he say *that*?" She was so much interested that she just knew that Lawrence half stamped his foot.

"Yes, he said just that, and I told him—"

"Well,—what did you say?"

"Oh! I did not bargain to tell what *I* told *him*. I received payment only for betraying his confidence. If you drive a bargain I will drive one also."

Rose declared that he was the greatest old screw she ever knew, but she paid the price, and waited.

"Well?—"

"Well? Of course, I told him 'well.' I gave him the best advice a man ever received. A lawyer would have charged him five hundred dollars for it. I'm an oracle on heart-capture."

Rose laughingly declared she would have to consult him herself, and when the Major told her to consult only her mirror, gave him a courtesy and wished he would teach some young men of her acquaintance to make such speeches. The old fellow vowed, however, that they were unteachable; that he would as soon expect to teach young moles.

IV.

It was not more than a half hour after this when George Washington came in and found the Major standing before the long mirror, turning around and holding his coat back from his plump sides so as to obtain a fair view of his ample dimensions.

"George Washington," said he.

"Suh."

"I'm afraid I'm growing a little too stout."

George Washington walked around and looked at him with the critical gaze of a butcher appraising a fat ox.

"Oh! nor, suh, you aint, not to say *too* stout," he finally decided as the result of this inspection, "you jis gittin' sort o' potely. Hit's monsus becomin' to you."

"Do you think so?" The Major was manifestly flattered. "I was apprehensive that I might be growing a trifle fat,"—he turned carefully around before the mirror,— "and from a fat old man and a scrawny old woman, Heaven deliver us, George Washington!"

"Nor, suh, you ain' got a ounce too much meat on you," said George, reassuringly; "how much you weigh, Marse Nat, last time you was on de stilyards?" he inquired with wily interest.

The Major faced him.

"George Washington, the last time I weighed I tipped the beam at one hundred and forty-three pounds, and I had the waist of a girl."

He laid his fat hands with the finger tips touching on his round sides about where the long since reversed curves of the lamented waist once were, and gazed at George with comical melancholy.

"Dat's so," assented the latter, with wonted acquiescence. "I 'members hit well, suh, dat wuz when me and you wuz down in Gloucester tryin' to git up spunk to co'te Miss Ailsy Mann. Dat's mo'n thirty years ago."

The Major reflected. "It cannot be thirty years!—thir—ty—years," he mused.

"Yes, suh, an' better, too. 'Twuz befo' we fit de duil wid Judge Carrington. I know dat, 'cause dat's what we shoot him 'bout—'cause he co'te Miss Ailsy an' cut we out."

"Damn your memory! Thirty years! I could dance all night then—every night in the week—and now I can hardly mount my horse without getting the thumps."

George Washington, affected by his reminiscences, declared that he had heard one of the ladies saying, "just the other day," what "a fine portly gentleman" he was.

The Major brightened.

"Did you hear that? George Washington, if you tell me a lie I'll set you free!" It was his most terrible threat, used only on occasions of exceptional provocation.

George vowed that no reward could induce him to be guilty of such an enormity, and followed it up by so skilful an allusion to the progressing youth of his master that the latter swore he was right, and that he could dance better than he could at thirty, and to prove it executed, with extraordinary agility for a man who rode at twenty stone, a *pas seul* which made the floor rock and set the windows and ornaments to rattling as if there had been an earthquake. Suddenly, with a loud "Whew," he flung himself into an arm-chair, panting and perspiring. "It's you, sir," he gasped—"you put me up to it."

"Nor, suh; tain me, Marse Nat—I's tellin' you de truf," asserted George, moved to defend himself.

"You infernal old rascal, it is you," panted the Major, still mopping his face—"you have been running riot so long you need regulation—I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll marry and give you a mistress to manage you—yes, sir, I'll get married right away. I know the very woman for you—she'll make you walk chalk!"

For thirty years this had been his threat, so George was no more alarmed than he was at the promise of being sold, or turned loose upon the world as a free man. He therefore inquired solemnly,

"Marse Nat, le' me ax you one thing—you ain' thinkin' 'bout givin' me that ole one for a mistis is you?"

"What old one, fool?" The Major stopped panting. George Washington denoted the side of his head where Miss Jemima's thin curls nestled.

"Get out of this room. Tell Dilsy to pack your chest, I'll send you off to-morrow morning."

George Washington blinked with the gravity of a terrapin. It might have been obtuseness; or it might have been silent but exquisite enjoyment which lay beneath his black skin.

"George Washington," said the Major almost in a whisper, "what made you think that?"

It was to George Washington's undying credit that not a gleam flitted across his ebony countenance as he said solemnly,

"Marse Nat, I ain say I *think* nuttin—I jis ax you, Is you?—She been meckin mighty partic'lar quiration 'bout de plantation and how many niggers we got an' all an' I jis spicionate she got her eye sort o' set on you an' me, dat's all."

The Major bounced to his feet, and seizing his hat and gloves from the table, burst out of the room. A minute later he was shouting for his horse in a voice which might have been heard a mile.

V.

Jeff laid to heart the Major's wisdom; but when it came to acting upon it the difficulty arose. He often wondered why his tongue became tied and his throat grew dry when he was in Margaret's presence these days and even just thought of saying anything serious to her. He had known Margaret ever since she was a wee bit of a baby, and had often carried her in his arms when she was a little girl and even after she grew up to be "right big." He had thought frequently of late that he would be willing to die if he might but take her in his arms. It was, therefore, with no little disquietude that he observed what he considered his friend's growing fancy for her. By the time Lawrence had taken a few strolls in the garden and a horseback ride or two with her Jeff was satisfied that he was in love with her, and before a week was out he was consumed with jealousy. Margaret was not the girl to indulge in repining on account of her lover's unhappiness. If Jeff had had a finger-ache, or had a drop of sorrow but fallen in his cup her eyes would have softened and her face would have shown how fully she felt with him; but this—this was different. To wring his heart was a part of the business of her young ladyhood; it was a healthy process from which would come greater devotion and more loyal constancy. Then, it was so delightful to make one whom she liked as she did Jeff look so miserable. Perhaps some time she would reward him—after a long while, though. Thus, poor Jeff spent many a wretched hour cursing his fate and cursing Pick Lawrence. He thought he would create a diversion by paying desperate attention to Margaret's guest; but it resolved itself on the first opportunity into his opening his heart and confiding all his woes to her. In doing this he fell into the greatest contradiction, declaring one moment that no one suspected that he was in love with Margaret, and the next vowing that she had every reason to know he adored her, as he had been in love with her all her life. It was one afternoon in the drawing-room. Rose, with much sapience, assured him that no woman could have but one reason to know it. Jeff dolefully inquired what it was.

Rising and walking up to him she said in a mysterious whisper,—

"Tell her."

Jeff, after insisting that he had been telling her for years, lapsed into a declaration of helpless perplexity. "How can I tell her more than I have been telling her all along?" he groaned. Rose said she would show him.

She seated herself on the sofa, spread out her dress and placed him behind her.

"Now, do as I tell you—no, not so,—so;—now lean over,—put your arm—no, it is not necessary to touch me," as Jeff, with prompt apprehension, fell into the scheme, and declared that he was all right in a rehearsal, and that it was only in the real drama he failed. "Now say 'I love you.'" Jeff said it. They were in this attitude when the door opened suddenly and Margaret stood facing them, her large eyes opened wider than ever. She backed out and shut the door.

Jeff sprang up, his face very red.

Lawyers know that the actions of a man on being charged with a crime are by no means infallible evidence of his guilt,—but it is hard to satisfy juries of this fact. If the juries were composed of women perhaps it would be impossible.

The ocular demonstration of a man's arm around a girl's waist is difficult to explain on more than one hypothesis.

After this Margaret treated Jeff with a rigor which came near destroying the friendship of a lifetime; and Jeff became so desperate that inside of a week he had had his first quarrel with Lawrence, who had begun to pay very devoted attention to Margaret, and as that young man was in no mood to lay balm on a bruised wound, mischief might have been done had not the Major arrived opportunely on the scene just as the quarrel came to a white-heat. It was in the hall one morning. There had been a quarrel. Jeff had just demanded satisfaction; Lawrence had just promised to afford him this peculiar happiness, and they were both glaring at each other, when the Major sailed in at the door, ruddy and smiling, and laying his hat on the table and his riding-whip across it, declared that before he would stand such a gloomy atmosphere as that created by a man's glowering looks, when there was so much sunshine just lying around to be basked in, he would agree to be "eternally fried in his own fat."

"Why, I had expected at least two affairs before this," he said jovially, as he pulled off his gloves, "and I'll be hanged if I shan't have to court somebody myself to save the honor of the family."

Jeff with dignity informed him that an affair was then brewing, and Lawrence intimated that they were both interested, when the Major declared that he would "advise the young lady to discard both and accept a soberer and a wiser man." They announced that it was a more serious affair than he had in mind, and let fall a hint of what had occurred. The Major for a moment looked gravely from one to the other, and suggested mutual explanations and retractions; but when both young men insisted that they were quite determined, and proposed to have a meeting at once, he changed. He walked over to the window and looked out for a moment. Then turned and suddenly offered to represent both parties. Jeff averred that such a proceeding was outside of the Code; this the Major gravely admitted; but declared that the affair even to this point appeared not to have been conducted in entire conformity with that incomparable system of rules, and urged that as Mr. Lawrence was a stranger and as it was desirable to have the affair conducted with as much secrecy and dispatch as possible, it might be well for them to meet as soon as convenient, and he would attend rather as a witness than as a second. The young men assented to this, and the Major, now thoroughly in earnest, with much solemnity, offered the use of his pistols, which was accepted.

In the discussion which followed, the Major took the lead, and suggested sunset that afternoon as a suitable time, and the grass-plot between the garden and the graveyard as a convenient and secluded spot. This also was agreed to, though Lawrence's face wore a soberer expression than had before appeared upon it.

The Major's entire manner had changed; his levity had suddenly given place to a gravity most unusual to him, and instead of his wonted jollity his face wore an expression of the greatest seriousness. He, after a casual glance at Lawrence, suddenly insisted that it was necessary to exchange a cartel, and opening his secretary, with much pomp proceeded to write. "You see—if things were not regular it would be butchery," he explained, considerately, to Lawrence, who winced slightly at the word. "I don't want to see you murder each other," he went on in a slow comment as he wrote, "I wish you, since you are determined to shoot—each other—to do it like—gentlemen." He took a new sheet. Suddenly he began to shout,—

"George—George Washington." There was no answer, so as he wrote on he continued to shout at intervals, "George Washington!"

After a sufficient period had elapsed for a servant crossing the yard to call to another, who sent a third to summon George, and for that functionary to take a hasty potation from a decanter as he passed through the dining-room at his usual stately pace, he appeared at the door.

"Did you call, suh?" he inquired, with that additional dignity which bespoke his recourse to the sideboard as intelligibly as if he had brought the decanters in his hand. "Did I call!" cried the Major, without looking up. "Why don't you come when you hear me?"

George Washington steadied himself on his feet, and assumed an aggrieved expression.

"Do you suppose I can wait for you to drink all the whiskey in my sideboard? Are you getting deaf-drunk as well as blind-drunk?" he asked, still writing industriously.

George Washington gazed up at his old master in the picture on the wall, and shook his head sadly.

"Nor, suh, Marse Nat. You know I ain' drink none to git drunk. I is a member o' de church. I is full of de sperit."

The Major, as he blotted his paper, assured him that he knew he was much fuller of it than were his decanters, and George Washington was protesting further, when his master rose, and addressing Jeff as the challenger, began to read. He had prepared a formal cartel, and all the subsequent and consequential documents which appear necessary to a well-conducted and duly bloodthirsty meeting under the duello, and he read them with an impressiveness which was only equalled by the portentous dignity of George Washington. As he stood balancing himself, and took in the solemn significance of the matter, his whole air changed; he raised his head, struck a new attitude, and immediately assumed the position of one whose approval of the affair was of the utmost moment.

The Major stated that he was glad that they had decided to use the regular duelling pistols, not only as they were more convenient—he having a very fine, accurate pair—but as they were smooth bore and carried a

good, large ball, which made a clean, pretty hole, without tearing. "Now," he explained kindly to Lawrence, "the ball from one of these infernal rifled concerns goes gyrating and tearing its way through you, and makes an orifice like a *posthole*." He illustrated his meaning with a sweeping spiral motion of his clenched fist.

Lawrence grew a shade whiter, and wondered how Jeff felt and looked, whilst Jeff set his teeth more firmly as the Major added blandly that "no gentleman wanted to blow another to pieces like a Sepoy mutineer."

George Washington's bow of exaggerated acquiescence drew the Major's attention to him.

"George Washington, are my pistols clean?" he asked.

"Yes, suh, clean as yo' shut-front," replied George Washington, grandly.

"Well, clean them again."

"Yes, suh," and George was disappearing with ponderous dignity, when the Major called him, "George Washington."

"Yes, suh."

"Tell carpenter William to come to the porch. His services may be needed," he explained to Lawrence, "in case there should be a casualty, you know."

"Yes, suh." George Washington disappeared. A moment later he reopened the door.

"Marse Nat."

"Sir."

"Shall I send de overseer to dig de graves, suh?"

Lawrence could not help exclaiming, "Good——!" and then checked himself; and Jeff gave a perceptible start.

"I will attend to that," said the Major, and George Washington went out with an order from Jeff to take the box to the office.

The Major laid the notes on his desk and devoted himself to a brief eulogy on the beautiful symmetry of "the Code," illustrating his views by apt references to a number of instances in which its absolute impartiality had been established by the instant death of both parties. He had just suggested that perhaps the two young men might desire to make some final arrangements, when George Washington reappeared, drunker and more imposing than before. In place of his ordinary apparel he had substituted a yellowish velvet waistcoat and a blue coat with brass buttons, both of which were several sizes too large for him, as they had for several years been stretched over the Major's ample person. He carried a well-worn beaver hat in his hand, which he never donned except on extraordinary occasions.

"De pistils is ready, suh," he said, in a fine voice, which he always employed when he proposed to be peculiarly effective. His self-satisfaction was monumental.

"Where did you get that coat and waistcoat from, sir?" thundered the Major. "Who told you you might have them?"

George Washington was quite taken aback at the unexpectedness of the assault, and he shuffled one foot uneasily.

"Well, you see, suh," he began, vaguely, "I know you warn' never gwine to wear 'em no mo', and seein' dat dis was a very serious recasion, an' I wuz rip-ripresentin' Marse Jeff in a jewel, I thought I ought to reappear like a gent'man on dis recasion."

"You infernal rascal, didn't I tell you that the next time you took my clothes without asking my permission, I was going to shoot you?"

The Major faced his chair around with a jerk, but George Washington had in the interim recovered himself.

"Yes, suh, I remembers dat," he said, complacently, "but dat didn't have no recose to dese solemn recasions when I rip-riresents a gent'man in de Code."

"Yes, sir, it did, I had this especially in mind," declared the Major, unblushingly—"I gave you fair notice, and damn me! if I don't do it too before I'm done with you—I'd sell you to-morrow morning if it would not be a cheat on the man who was fool enough to buy you. My best coat and waistcoat!"—he looked affectionately at the garments.

George Washington evidently knew the way to soothe him—"Who ever heah de beat of dat!" he said in a tone of mild complaint, partly to the young men and partly to his old master in the ruffles and velvet over the piano, "Marse Nat, you reckon I ain' got no better manners 'n to teck you *bes*' coat and weskit! Dis heah coat and weskit niver did you no favor anyways—I hear Miss Marg'ret talkin' 'bout it de fust time you ever put 'em on. Dat's de reason I tuck 'em." Having found an excuse he was as voluble as a river—"I say to myself, I ain' gwine let my young marster wyar dem things no mo' roun' heah wid strange ladies an' gent'man stayin' in de house too,—an' I so consarned about it, I say, 'George Wash'n'n, you got to git dem things and wyar 'em yo'self to keep him f'om doin' it, dat's what you got to do,' I say, and dat's de reason I tuk 'em." He looked the picture of self-sacrifice.

But the Major burst forth on him: "Why, you lying rascal, that's three different reasons you have given in one breath for taking them." At which George Washington shook his woolly head with doleful self-abnegation.

"Just look at them!" cried the Major—"My favorite waistcoat! There is not a crack or a brack in them—They look as nice as they did the day they were bought!"

This was too much for George Washington. "Dat's the favor, suh, of de pussen what has I t 'em on," he said, bowing grandly; at which the Major, finding his ire giving way to amusement, drove him from the room, swearing that if he did not shoot him that evening he would set him free to-morrow morning.

VI.

As the afternoon had worn away, and whilst the two principals in the affair were arranging their matters, the Major had been taking every precaution to carry out the plan for the meeting. The effect of the approaching duel upon the old gentleman was somewhat remarkable. He was in unusually high spirits; his rosy countenance wore an expression of humorous content; and, from time to time as he bustled about, a smile flitted across his face, or a chuckle sounded from the depths of his satin stock. He fell in with Miss Jemima, and related to her a series of anecdotes respecting duelling and homicide generally, so lurid in their character that she groaned over the depravity of a region where such barbarity was practised; but when he solemnly informed her that he felt satisfied from the signs of the time that some one would be shot in the neighborhood before twenty-four hours were over, the old lady determined to return home next day.

It was not difficult to secure secrecy, as the Major had given directions that no one should be admitted to the garden.

For at least an hour before sunset he had been giving directions to George Washington which that dignitary would have found some difficulty in executing, even had he remained sober; but which, in his existing condition, was as impossible as for him to change the kinks in his hair. The Major had solemnly assured him that if he got drunk he would shoot him on the spot, and George Washington had as solemnly consented that he would gladly die if he should be found in this unprecedented condition. Immediately succeeding which, however, under the weight of the momentous matters submitted to him, he had, after his habit, sought aid and comfort of his old friends, the Major's decanters, and he was shortly in that condition when he felt that the entire universe depended upon him. He blacked his shoes at least twenty times, and marched back and forth in the yard with such portentous importance that the servants instinctively shrunk away from his august presence. One of the children, in their frolics, ran against him; George Washington simply said, "Git out my way," and without pausing in his gait or deigning to look at him, slapped him completely over.

A maid ventured to accost him jocularly to know why he was so finely dressed. George Washington overwhelmed her with a look of such infinite contempt and such withering scorn that all the other servants forthwith fell upon her for "interferin' in Unc' George Wash'n'ton's business." At last the Major entered the garden and bade George Washington follow him; and George Washington having paid his twentieth visit to the dining-room, and had a final interview with the liquor-case, and having polished up his old beaver anew, left the office by the side door, carrying under his arm a mahogany box about two feet long and one foot wide, partially covered with a large linen cloth. His beaver hat was cocked on the side of his head, with an air supposed to be impressive. He wore the Major's coat and flowered velvet waistcoat respecting which he had won so signal a victory in the morning, and he flaunted a large bandanna handkerchief, the ownership of which he had transferred still more recently. The Major's orders to George Washington were to convey the box to the garden in a secret manner, but George Washington was far too much impressed with the importance of the part he bore in the affair to lose the opportunity of impressing the other servants. Instead, therefore, of taking a by-path, he marched ostentatiously through the yard with a manner which effected his object, if not his master's, and which struck the entire circle of servants with inexpressible awe. However, after he gained the garden and reached a spot where he was no longer in danger of being observed by any one, he adopted a manner of the greatest secrecy, and proceeded to the place selected for the meeting with a degree of caution which could not have been greater had he been covertly stealing his way through a band of hostile Indians. The spot chosen for the meeting was a grass plot bounded on three sides by shrubbery and on the fourth by the wall of the little square within which had been laid to rest the mortal remains of some half dozen generations of the Burwells. Though the grass was green and the sky above was of the deep steely hue which the late afternoon brings; yet the thick shrubbery which secluded the place gave it an air of wildness, and the tops of the tall monuments gleaming white over the old wall against the dark cedars, added an impression of ghostliness which had long caused the locality to be generally avoided by the negroes from the time that the afternoon shadows began to lengthen.

George Washington, indeed, as he made his way stealthily down towards the rendezvous glanced behind him once or twice as if he were not at all certain that some impalpable pursuer were not following him, and he almost jumped out of his shoes when the Major, who had for ten minutes been pacing up and down the grass-plot in a fume of impatience, caught sight of him and suddenly shouted, "Why don't you come on, you—rascal?"

As soon as George Washington recognized that the voice was not supernatural, he recovered his courage and at once disarmed the Major, who, watch in hand, was demanding if he supposed he had nothing else to do than to wait for him all night, by falling into his vein and acquiescing in all that he said in abuse of the yet absent duellists, or at least of one of them.

He spoke in terms of the severest reprobation of Mr. Lawrence, declaring that he had never had a high opinion of his courage, or, indeed, of any quality which he possessed. He was, perhaps, not quite prepared to join in an attack on Jeff, of whose frequent benefactions he entertained a lively recollection amounting to gratitude, at least in the accepted French idea of that virtue, and as he had constituted himself Jeff's especial representative for this "solemn recasion," he felt a personal interest in defending him to some extent.

At last the Major ordered him to take out the weapons and some little time was spent in handling them, George Washington examining them with the air of a connoisseur. The Major asserted that he had never seen a prettier spot, and George Washington, immediately striking an attitude, echoed the sentiment. He was, indeed, so transported with its beauty that he declared it reminded him of the duel he and the Major fought with Judge Carrington, which he positively declared, was "a jewel like you been read about," and he ended with the emphatic assertion, "Ef dese gent'mens jes plump each urr like we did de Judge dat evelin!—" A wave of the hand completed the period.

The Major turned on him with a positive denial that he had ever even shot at the Judge, but George Washington unblushingly insisted that they had, and in fact had shot him twice. "We hit him fyah an' squar'." He levelled a pistol at a tree a few yards distant, and striking an attitude, squinted along the barrel with the

air of an old hand at the weapon.

The Major reiterated his statement and recalled the fact that, as he had told him and others a thousand times, they had shaken hands on the spot, which George Washington with easy adaptability admitted, but claimed that "ef he hadn't 'a'shook hands we'd 'a'shot him, sho! Dis here gent'man ain' gwine git off quite so easy," he declared, having already decided that Lawrence was to experience the deadly accuracy of his and Jeff's aim. He ended with an unexpected "Hie!" and gave a little lurch, which betrayed his condition, but immediately gathered himself together again.

The Major looked at him quizzically as he stood pistols in hand in all the grandeur of his assumed character. The shadow of disappointment at the non-appearance of the Juel-lists which had rested on his round face, passed away, and he suddenly asked him which way he thought they had better stand. George Washington twisted his head on one side and, after striking a deliberative attitude and looking the plat well over, gave his judgment.

"Ah—so," said the Major, and bade him step off ten paces.

George Washington cocked his hat considerably more to the side, and with a wave of his hand, caught from the Major, took ten little mincing steps; and without turning, glanced back over his shoulder and inquired, "Ain' dat mighty fur apart?"

The Major stated that it was necessary to give them some chance. And this appeared to satisfy him, for he admitted, "Yas, suh, dat's so, dee 'bleeged to have a chance," and immediately marked a point a yard or more short of that to which he had stepped.'

The Major then announced that he would load the pistols without waiting for the advent of the other gentlemen, as he "represented both of them."

This was too much for so accomplished an adept at the Code as George Washington, and he immediately asserted that such a thing was preposterous, asking with some scorn, as he strutted up and down, "Who ever heah o' one gent'man ripresentin' two in a jewel, Marse Nat?"

The Major bowed politely. "I was afraid it was a little incompatible," he said.

"Of cose it's incomfatible," said George Washington. "I ripresents one and you de t'urr. Dat's de way! I ripresents *Marse Jeff*. I know *he* ain' gwine fly de track. I done know him from a little lad. Dat urr gent'man I ain' know nuttin tall about. You ripresents him." He waved his hand in scorn.

"Ah!" said the Major, as he set laboriously about loading the pistols, handling the balls somewhat ostentatiously.

George Washington asserted, "I b'lieve I know mo' 'bout the Code 'n you does, Marse Nat."

The Major looked at him quizzically as he rammed the ball down hard. He was so skilful that George at length added condescendingly, "But I see you ain' forgit how to handle dose things."

The Major modestly admitted, as he put on a cap, that he used to be a pretty fair shot, and George Washington in an attitude as declarative of his pride in the occasion as his inebriated state admitted, was looking on with an expression of supreme complacency, when the Major levelled the weapon and sighted along its barrel. George Washington gave a jump which sent his cherished beaver bouncing twenty feet.

"Look out, Marse Nat! Don' handle dat thing so keerless, please, suh."

The Major explained that he was just trying its weight, and declared that it "came up beautifully;" to which George Washington after he had regained his damaged helmet assented with a somewhat unsteady voice. The Major looked at his watch and up at the trees, the tops of which were still brightened with the reflection from the sunset sky, and muttered an objurgation at the failure of the principals to appear, vowing that he never before knew of a similar case, and that at least he had not expected Jeff to fail to come to time. George Washington again proudly announced that he represented Jeff and that it was "that urr gent'man what had done fly de track, that urr gent'man what you ripre-sents, Marse Nat." He spoke with unveiled contempt.

The Major suddenly turned on him.

"George Washington!"

"Suh!" He faced him.

"If my principal fails to appear, I must take his place. The rule is, the second takes the place of his non-appearing principal."

"In cose dat's de rule," declared George Washington as if it were his own suggestion; "de secon' tecks de place o' de non-repearin' sprinciple, and dat's what mecks me say what I does, dat man is done run away, suh, dat's what's de motter wid him. He's jes' nat-chelly skeered. He couldn' face dem things, suh." He nodded towards the pistols, his thumbs stuck in the armholes of his flowered velvet vest. As the Major bowed George Washington continued with a hiccough, "He ain' like we gent'mens whar's ust to 'em an' don' mine 'em no mo' 'n pop-crackers."

"George Washington," said the Major, solemnly, with his eyes set on George Washington's velvet waistcoat, "take your choice of these pistols."

The old duellist made his choice with due deliberation. The Major indicated with a wave of his hand one of the spots which George had marked for the expected duellists. "Take your stand there, sir." George Washington marched grandly up and planted himself with overwhelming dignity, whilst the Major, with the other pistol in his hand, quietly took his stand at the other position, facing him.

"George," he said, "George Washington."

"Suh." George Washington was never so imposing.

"My principal, Mr. Pickering Lawrence, having failed to appear at the designated time and place to meet his engagement with Mr. Jefferson Lewis, I, as his second and representative, offer myself to take his place and assume any and all of his obligations."

George Washington bowed grandly.

"Yes, suh, of cose,—dat is accordin' to de Code," he said with solemnity befitting the occasion.

The Major proceeded.

"And your principal, Mr. Jefferson Lewis, having likewise failed to appear at the proper time, you take his place."

"Suh," ejaculated George Washington, in sudden astonishment, turning his head slightly as if he were not certain he had heard correctly, "Marse Nat, jis say dat agin, please, suh?"

The Major elevated his voice and advanced his pistol slightly.

"I say, your principal, Mr. Jefferson Lewis, having in like manner failed to put in his appearance at the time and place agreed on for the meeting, you as his representative take his place and assume all his obligations."

"Oh! nor, suh, I don't!" exclaimed George Washington, shaking his head so violently that the demoralized beaver fell off again and rolled around unheeded. "I ain' bargain for no sich thing as dat. Nor, suh!"

But the Major was obdurate.

"Yes, sir, you do. When you accept the position of second, you assume all the obligations attaching to that position, and——" the Major advanced his pistol—"I shall shoot at you."

George Washington took a step towards him. "Oh! goodness! Marse Nat, you ain' gwine do nuttin like dat, is you!" His jaw had fallen, and when the Major bowed with deep solemnity and replied, "Yes, sir, and you can shoot at me," he burst out.

"Marse Nat, I don' warn' shoot at you. What I warn' shoot at you for? I ain' got nuttin 'ginst you on de fatal uth. You been good master to me all my days an'——" The Major cut short this sincere tribute to his virtues, by saying: "Very well, you can shoot or not as you please. I shall aim at that waistcoat." He raised his pistol and partially closed one eye. George Washington dropped on his knees.

"Oh, Marse Nat, please, suh. What you want to shoot me for? Po' ole good-for-nuttin George Washington, whar ain' niver done you no harm" (the Major's eye glanced over his blue coat and flowered vest; George saw it), "but jes steal you' whiskey an' you' clo'es an'—Marse Nat, ef you le' me off dis time I oon niver steal no mo' o' you' clo'es, er you' whiskey, er nuttin. Marse Nat, you wouldn' shoot po' ole good-for-nuttin George Washington, whar fotch' up wid you?"

"Yes, sir, I would," declared the Major, sternly. "I am going to give the word, and——" he raised the pistol once more. George Washington began to creep toward him. "Oh, Lordy! Marse Nat, please, suh, don' pint dat thing at me dat away—hit's loaded! Oh, Lordy!" he shouted. The Major brandished his weapon fiercely.

"Stand up, sir, and stop that noise—one—two—three," he counted, but George Washington was flat on the ground.

"Oh, Marse Nat, please, suh, don't. I'se feared o' dem things." A sudden idea struck him. "Marse Nat, you is about to loss a mighty valuable nigger," he pleaded; but the Major simply shouted to him to stand up and not disgrace the gentleman he represented. George Washington seized on the word; it was his final hope.

"Marse Nat, I don't ripresent nobody, suh, nobody at all, suh. I ain' nuttin but a good-for-nuttin, wuthless nigger, whar bring de box down heah cuz you tole me to, suh, dat's all. An' I'll teek off you' coat an' weskit dis minit ef you'll jis le' me git up off de groun', suh." Jeff suddenly appeared. George lay spraddled out on the ground as flat as a field lark, but at Jeff's appearance, he sprang behind him. Jeff, in amazement, was inquiring the meaning of all the noise he had heard, when Lawrence appeared on the scene. The Major explained briefly.

"It was that redoubtable champion bellowing. As our principals failed to appear on time, he being-an upholder of the Code, suggested that we were bound to take the places respectively of those we represented ——"

"Nor, suh, I don' ripresent nobody," interrupted George Washington; but at a look from the Major he dodged again behind Jeff. The Major, with his eye on Lawrence, said:

"Well, gentlemen, let's to business. We have but a few minutes of daylight left. I presume you are ready?"

Both gentlemen bowed, and the Major proceeded to explain that he had loaded both pistols himself with precisely similar charges, and that they were identical in trigger, sight, drift, and weight, and had been tested on a number of occasions, when they had proved to be "excellent weapons and remarkably accurate in their fire." The young men bowed silently; but when he turned suddenly and called "George Washington," that individual nearly jumped out of his coat. The Major ordered him to measure ten paces, which, after first giving notice that he "didn't ripre-sent nobody," he proceeded to do, taking a dozen or more gigantic strides, and hastily retired again behind the safe bulwark of Jeff's back. As he stood there in his shrunken condition, he about as much resembled the pompous and arrogant duellist of a half-hour previous as a wet and bedraggled turkey does the strutting, gobbling cock of the flock. The Major, with an objurgation at him for stepping "as if he had on seven league boots," stepped off the distance himself, explaining to Lawrence that ten paces was about the best distance, as it was sufficiently distant to "avoid the unpleasantness of letting a gentleman feel that he was within touching distance," and yet "near enough to avoid useless mutilation."

Taking out a coin, he announced that he would toss up for the choice of position, or rather would make a "disinterested person" do so, and, holding out his hand, he called George Washington to toss it up. There was no response until the Major shouted, "George Washington, where are you—you rascal!"

"Heah me, suh," said George Washington, in a quavering voice, rising from the ground, where he had thrown himself to avoid any stray bullets, and coming slowly forward, with a pitiful, "Please, suh, don' p'int dat thing dis away."

The Major gave him the coin, with an order to toss it up, in a tone so sharp that it made him jump; and he began to turn it over nervously in his hand, which was raised a little above his shoulder. In his manipulation it slipped out of his hand and disappeared. George Washington in a dazed way looked in his hand, and then on the ground. "Hi! whar' hit?" he muttered, getting down on his knees and searching in the grass. "Dis heah place is evil-sperited."

The Major called to him to hurry up, but he was too intent on solving the problem of the mysterious disappearance of the quarter.

"I ain' niver like dis graveyard bein' right heah," he murmured. "Marse Nat, don' you have no mo' to do wid dis thing."

The Major's patience was giving out. "George Washington, you rascal!" he shouted, "do you think I can wait all night for you to pull up all the grass in the garden? Take the quarter out of your pocket, sir!"

"Tain' in my pocket, suh," quavered George Washington, feeling there instinctively, however, when the coin slipped down his sleeve into his hand again. This was too much for him. "Hi! befo' de king," he exclaimed, "how it git in my pocket? Oh, Marster! de devil is 'bout heah, sho'! Marse Nat, you fling it up, suh. I ain' nuttin but a po' sinful nigger. Oh, Lordy!" And handing over the quarter tremulously, George Washington flung himself flat on the ground and, as a sort of religious incantation, began to chant in a wild, quavering tone the funeral hymn:

"Hark! from the tombs a doleful sound."

The Major tossed up and posted the duellists, and with much solemnity handed them the pistols, which both the two young men received quietly. They were pale, but perfectly steady. The Major then asked them, "Gentlemen, are you ready?" whilst at the ominous sound George Washington's voice in tremulous falsetto, struck in,

*"Ye-ee-so-ons off meenn co-ome view-ew the-ee groun',
Wher-ere you-ou m-uss' shor-ort-ly lie."*

They announced themselves ready just as George Washington, looking up from the ground, where he, like the "so-ons off meenn," was lying, discovered that he was not more than thirty yards out of the line of aim, and with a muttered "Lordy!" began to crawl away.

There was a confused murmur from the direction of the path which led to the house, and the Major shouted, "Fire—one—two—three."

Both young men, facing each other and looking steadily in each other's eyes, with simultaneous action fired their pistols into the air.

At the report a series of shrieks rang out from the shrubbery towards the house, whilst George Washington gave a wild yell and began to kick like a wounded bull, bellowing that he was "killed—killed."

The Major had just walked up to the duellists, and, relieving them of their weapons, had with a comprehensive wave of the hand congratulated them on their courage and urged them to shake hands, which they were in the act of doing, when the shrubbery parted and Margaret, followed closely by Rose and by Miss Jemima panting behind, rushed in upon them, crying at the tops of their voices, "Stop! Stop!"

The two young ladies addressed themselves respectively to Jeff and Lawrence, and both were employing all their eloquence when Miss Jemima appeared. Her eye caught the prostrate form of George Washington, who lay flat on his face kicking and groaning at intervals. She pounced upon the Major with so much vehemence that he was almost carried away by the sudden onset.

"Oh! You wretch! What have you done?" she panted, scarcely able to articulate.

"Done, madam?" asked the Major, gravely.

"Yes; what have you done to *that* poor miserable creature—*there!*" She actually seized the Major and whirled him around with one hand, whilst with the other she pointed at the prostrate and now motionless George Washington.

"What have I been doing with him?"

"Yes, with *him*. Have you been carrying out your barbarous rite on his inoffensive person!" she gasped.

The Major's eye lit up.

"Yes, madam," he said, taking up one of the pistols, "and I rejoice that you are here to witness its successful termination. George Washington has been selected as the victim this year; his monstrous lies, his habitual drunken worthlessness, his roguery, culminating in the open theft to-day of my best coat and waistcoat, marked him naturally as the proper sacrifice. I had not the heart to cheat any one by selling him to him. I was therefore constrained to shoot him. He was, with his usual triflingness, not killed at the first fire, although he appears to be dead. I will now finish him by putting a ball into his back; observe the shot." He advanced, and cocking the pistol, "click—click," stuck it carefully in the middle of George Washington's fat back. Miss Jemima gave a piercing shriek and flung herself on the Major to seize the pistol; but she might have spared herself; for George Washington suddenly bounded from the ground and, with one glance at the levelled weapon, rushed crashing through the shrubbery, followed by the laughter of the young people, the shrieks of Miss Jemima, and the shouts of the Major for him to come back and let him kill him.

That evening, when Margaret, seated on the Major's knee, was rummaging in his vest pockets for any loose change which might be there (which by immemorial custom belonged to her), she suddenly pulled out two large, round bullets. The Major seized them; but it was too late. When, however, he finally obtained possession of them he presented them to Miss Jemima, and solemnly requested her to preserve them as mementoes of George Washington's miraculous escape.

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