THE FELLOW IN GREASY JEANS.

Whew! How the drivers hammer!
We are late by an hour or more;
We sway and swerve on the ringing curve,
And the bridges reel and roar.

Look how the engine lurches—
And out of its window crawls
With gray eyes wed to the track ahead,
A fellow in greasy jeans.

Scarcely looks like the fellow
To trust with so grave a care—
In that grimy face 'twere hard to trace
The metal that should be there.

Faster we roar, and faster—
The hand at the throttle shows
Steady enough, if the face is rough—
And the landscape melts and flows.

Into the cut—and horror!
There death has the right of way!
The whistle wakes to a shriek for brakes,
And what does his swift brain say?

Jump, for Moll and the babies,
And for dear life's love supreme!
Jump from the doom of a crunching tomb
And the hell of the howling steam!

Stay, for the hero's duty,
The trust of a hundred lives!
Stay, for the sake of the hearts would break,
And for others' babes and wives!

He stays! with white teeth gritting,
And with hands that snatch amain,
The monster reels on reversing wheels,
And the air brake chokes the train.

We are safe with our scratches—
There's only the engine wrecked,
And the engineer? Oh, well, I fear
That's only what all expect.

And in the torn steel's chaos
I read what our life ordains,
And shivering, pause—for you cinder was
The fellow in greasy jeans!

—Charles P. Lummis in Frank Leslie's.

COL. BOB JARVIS.

We were sojourning between Anaheim and the sea.

There was a sunshiny dullness about the place, like the smiles of a vapid woman. The bit of vineyard surrounding our whitewashed cabin was an emerald set in the dull golden brown plain. Before the door an artesian well glittered in the sun like an inverted crystal bowl. Esculapius called the spot Pezzan, and gradually I came to think the well a fountain and the sunburned waste about us a stretch of yellow sand.

When I walked to the field of whispering corn behind the house and through the straggling vines to the edge of the vineyard in front, I came back to where my invalid sat beneath the feathery acacias, dreaming in happy lonesomeness.

"Did you ever see such ethereal stillness?" I asked.

Esculapius took his cigar from his lips.

"It may be, my misfortune. I hope not my fault, but I do not remember to have seen stillness of any sort."

Esculapius has but one shortcoming. He is not a poet. I never wound him by appearing to notice this defect, so I sat down and made no reply.

"You think it is still," he went on in a mannish, instructive way, "but in fact there are a thousand sounds. At night when it is really quiet you will hear the roar of the ocean ten miles away. Hark!"

Our host was singing far down in the corn. He was a minister, a deep toned Methodist brimming over with vocal piety.

Nearer the great white throne.
Nearer the jasper sea,

came to us in slow, rich cadences.

The fern like branches above us stirred softly against the blue. Little aromatic whiffs came from the grove of pale eucalyptus trees near the house. Esculapius diluted the intoxicating air with tobacco smoke and remained sane, but as for me the sunshine went to my head, and whirled there like some eastern drug.

"My love," I said wildly, "if we stay here very long and nothing happens, I shall do something rash."

The next morning a huge derrick frowned in the door yard, and a picturesque group of workmen lounged under the acacias. The well had ceased to flow.

Esculapius called me to a corner of the piazza.

"Something has happened," he said; "the well has stopped. I thought it might relieve your feelings."

I looked at him with profound compassion.

Then I took a pitcher and went down the walk to the disglorified well. The musical drip on the pebbles was hushed; the charm of our oasis had departed. In its place stood a length of rusty pipe full of standing water. Some bits of maidenhair I had placed in reach of the cool spray yesterday were already withered in the sun. I took the gourd from its notch in the willows sadly. Some one had been before me and carved "Ichabod" on its handle. I filled my pitcher and turned to go. A tall form separated itself from the group of workmen and came gallantly forward.

"Madam," said a rich, hearty voice, "if you'll just allow me, I'll tackle that pitcher and tote it in for you. Jarvis is my name, Col. Bob Jarvis, well borer. We struck a ten inch flow down at Scranton's last week and rather knocked the bottom out of things around here."

"But the pitcher isn't at all heavy, Col. Jarvis."

"Oh, never mind that; anything's too heavy for a lady. That's my sentiments. You see, I'm a ladies' man—born and brought up to it. Nursed my mother and two aunts and a grandmother through consumption, and never let one of 'em lift a finger. 'Robert,' my mother used to say, in her thin, sickly voice, 'Robert, be true to God and the women;' and, by godfrey, I mean to be!"

I relinquished the pitcher instantly. Esculapius was right: something had happened. The well was gone, but in its place I had found something a thousand times more refreshing. When my husband returned he found me sitting breathless under the acacias.

"Hush!" I said, with upraised finger; "listen!"

Our host and the colonel were talking at the well.

"We've had glorious meetings this week, over at Gospel Swamp, Jarvis," the minister was saying. "I looked for you every night. If you could just come over and hear the singing, and have some of the good brothers and sisters pray with you, don't you think"——

"Why, God bless your soul, man," interrupted the colonel, "don't you know I'm religious? I'm with you right along—as to first principles, that is; but, you see, I can't quite go the Methodist doctrine. I was raised a Presbyterian, you know—regular black and blue Calvinist—and what a fellow takes in with his mother's milk sticks by him. I'm attached to the old ideas—infant damnation, and total depravity, and infernal punishment, and the interference of the saints. You fellows over at the Swamp are loose! Why, by the way, my mother used to say to me in her delicate, squeaky voice: 'Robert, beware of Methodists. They're loose, my son, loose as a bag of bones.' No, indeed, I wouldn't want you to think me indifferent to religion. Religion's my forte. Why, by and by I mean to start a Presbyterian church right here under your nose."

"I'm glad of it," responded the good minister warmly; "you've no idea how glad I am, Jarvis."

"Why, man alive! that church is in my mind day and night. I want to get about forty good, pious Presbyterian families to settle round here, and I'll bore wells for 'em, and talk up the church business between times. You saw me carrying that lady's pitcher for her this morning, didn't you? Well, by the way, that was a religious move entirely. I took her man for a Presbyterian preacher the minute I struck the ranch; maybe it's poor health gives him that cadaverous look, but you can't most always tell. More likely it's religion."

Esculapius retreated in wild disorder and did not appear again until supper time. When that meal was finished Col. Jarvis followed me to the piazza.

"If it ain't presuming, madam," he said confidentially, "I'd like to ask your advice. I take it you're from the city, now."

"Yes," I answered, with preternatural gravity; "what makes you think so?"

"Well, I knew it by your gait, mostly. A woman that's raised in the country walks as if she was used to havin' the road to herself; city women are generally good steppers. But that ain't the point. I'm engaged to be married!"

My composure under this announcement was grand.

"Engaged to be married!" I said. "Let me congratulate you, colonel. May I hope to see the fortunate young lady?"

"That depends. You see, I'm in a row—the biggest kind of a row, by a good deal; and I thought you might give me a lift. She's a 'Frisco lady, you know; one of your regular high-flyers—black eyes, bangs, no end o' spirit. You see, she was visitin' over at Los Nietos, and we made it up, and when she went back to 'Frisco I thought I'd send her a ring; so I bought this," fumbling in his pocket and producing the most astounding combination of red glass and pinchbeck, "and, by godfrey, she sent it back to me! Now, I don't see anything wrong about that ring; do you?"

"It is certainly a little—well, peculiar, at least, for an engagement ring; perhaps she would like something a trifle less showy. Ladies have a great many whims about jewelry, you know."

"Exactly. That is just what I reflected. So I went and bought this" (triumphantly displaying a narrow gold band). "Now, that's what I call gentteel; don't you? Well, if you'll believe it, she sent that back too, by—return mail. I wish I'd fetched you the letter she wrote; if it wasn't the spiciest piece of literature I ever read by—anybody. 'She'd have me understand she wasn't a barmaid nor a Quaker, and if I didn't know what was due to a lady in her position I'd better find out before I aspired to her hand,' etc. Oh, I tell you, she's grit; no end o' mettle. So you see I've struck a bowlder, and I gets me bad, because I meant to see the parson through with his well here, and then go on to 'Frisco and get married. Now if you'll help me through, and get me into sand and gravel again, and your man decides to settle in these parts, I'll guarantee you a number one well, good even two inch flow, and no expense but pipe and boardin' hands. I'll do it by—some means."

"Oh, no, colonel," I said, struggling with a laugh. "I couldn't allow that. It gives me great pleasure to advise you, only it is a very delicate matter, you know, and—really"—I was casting about wildly for an inspiration—"wouldn't it be better to go on to the city, as you intended, and ask the lady to go with you and exercise her own taste in selecting a ring?"

My companion took a step backward, folded his arms, and looked at me admiringly.

"Well, if it don't beat all how a woman walks through a millstone! Now, that's what I call neat. Why, God bless you, madam, I've been boring in at that thing for a week steady, night and day, by—myself, and making no headway. It makes me think of my mother. 'Robert,' she used to say—and she had a very small, trembly voice—'Robert, a woman's little finger weighs more than a man's whole carcass,' and she was right. I'll be—destroyed is she wasn't right!"

Esculapius laughed rather unnecessarily when I repeated this conversation to him.

"I am willing to allow that it is funny," I said, "but, after all, there is a rude pathos in the man, an untutored chivalry. Nearly every man loves and reverences woman. It is old fashioned, I know, but it has a breezy sweetness of its own, like the lavender and rosemary of our grandmothers; don't you think so?"

There was no reply. I imagine that Esculapius is sensible at times of his want of ideality, and feels a delicacy in conversing with me. So I went on musingly:

"With such natures love is an instinct; and it is to instinct, after all, that we must look for everything that is fresh and poetic in humanity. We have all made this sacrifice to culture—a sacrifice of force to expression. Isn't it so, my love?"

Still no reply.

"I like to picture to myself the affection of which such a man is capable—for no doubt he loves this girl of whom he speaks; not of course as you—as you ought to love me, but with a rude, wild sincerity, a sort of rugged grandeur. Imagine him betrayed by her. A man of the world might grow white about the lips and sick at heart, but he would find relief in cynicism and bitter words. This man would act some wild, strange act of vengeance. The cultured nature is a honeycomb, his is a solid mass, and masses give us our most picturesque effects. Don't you think so, my dear?"

And still no reply.

"Esculapius."

"Well, my love."

"Isn't it barbarous of you not to answer when I speak to you?"

"Possibly; at least, it has that appearance; but there are mitigating circumstances, my dear. I was asleep."

* * * * * *

"Two weeks later the colonel brought his wife to call upon me. She was a showy, loud voiced blonde, resplendently overdressed. At the first opportunity her husband motioned me aside.

"Isn't she about the gayest piece of calico you ever saw?" he asked, with proud confidence. "Doesn't she lay over anything around here by a large majority?"

"She is certainly a very striking woman," I said, gravely, "and one who does you great credit. But I am a little surprised, colonel. No doubt it was a mistake, but I got the impression in some way that the lady was a brunette."

The colonel's countenance fell.

"Now, look here," he said, after a little reflection, "I don't mind telling you, because you're up to city ways and you'll understand. The fact is, this isn't the one. You see, I went on to 'Frisco as you advised, and planked down a check for $300 the moment I got there. 'Now,' said I, 'Bob Jarvis, don't do things by halves; just you take that money, my girl, and get yourself a ring that's equal to the occasion.' I don't care if it's a cluster of solitary diamonds as big as a section of well pipe!' Now, I call that square; don't you? Well, God bless your soul, madam, if she didn't take that money and slip out with another fellow! Some white livered city sneak—beggin' your husband's pardon—who'd been hangin' around for a year or more. Of course I was stuck when I heard of it. It was this one told me. She's her sister. I could see that she felt bad about it. 'It was a nasty, dirty trick,' she said, and I'll be—demoralized if I don't think so myself, and said so at the time; but, after all, it turned out a lucky thing for me. Now, look at that, will you?"

I followed his gaze of admiring fondness to where Mrs. Jarvis was bridling and simpering under Esculapius' compliments.

"Isn't she a nosegay? But don't you be jealous, madam; she's just wrapped up in me. And constant," he added, shaking his head reflectively, "why, bless your soul, she's as constant as sin."

When I told Esculapius of this he sighed deeply.

"What's the matter?" I asked, with some anxiety.

He threw back his head and sent a little dreamy cloud of smoke up through the acacias.

"I was thinking," he said pensively, "what a 'wild, strange act of vengeance' it was."—Margaret Collier Graham in Argonaut.

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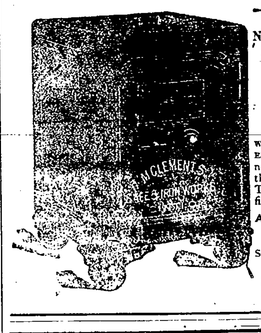

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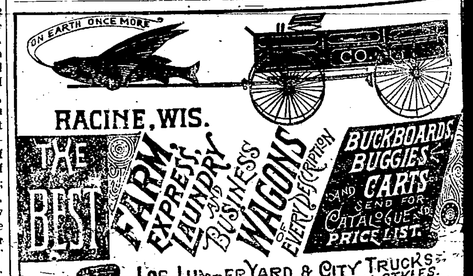

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