

SONS TO FORTUNE

By
Vingie E. Roe

THE STORY TO DATE
Cymbaline, a mysterious beauty of Sacramento in the days just following the feverish fifties, operates the Calico Shroud, a gambling house which she inherited when her uncle, Tawney Jack, was unintentionally killed. Sancho, wild young son of John Mattison, wealthy rancher, is in love with Cymbaline. Sancho's mother is Carmen, a half Spanish, half Indian woman. Mattison, whose real name is Spurlock, had come from Missouri, where he left a wife and an infant son. That son, another John Spurlock, now a young evangelist, comes to Sacramento. Chief among Spurlock's feminine worshippers is Roselle Tarrant. Dan Haddon, banker, forces his attentions on Cymbaline. Sancho kills him, but is acquitted through Cymbaline's clever testimony. Spurlock publicly rebukes Cymbaline. She plans revenge. An epidemic strikes Sacramento. Cymbaline leads Spurlock to fall in love with her.

INSTALLMENT XI.

JOHN SPURLOCK knew in his anguished heart that he had not told Roselle half. He had not told her of those tiny hands that were so strangely soft, so maddeningly warm, upon his cheeks, nor of that scented mouth which drowned him in such awful floods of ecstasy that the shadowy world had swung like the chaos of creation all about him.

He had not told her he was like a drunken man, swaying as he walked, nor that he'd prayed for hours on his knees and never knew a word of what he'd said.

He had told her nothing of the real heart of his trouble, and was scourged with penitence toward her.

But he could not tell her. Something lay upon his spirit like a weight; a bar of steel was set before his lips. A snare encompassed him and he sank in deep waters of the soul.

And Cymbaline smoothed the wide skirts down from her narrow waist before her long pier glass, smiling inscrutably. There was a light in her face, too, but it was a cruel light, self-satisfied and grim. She slept that night as she had not slept for weeks, like a babe in its cradle, the silent laughter curving her unconscious lips in the darkness.

No one asked her what she had done to this strange and zealous preacher who had taken the town with his ardor, but it soon became apparent that she had done something, and that byordinary.

A great change came over his sermons. The thunders lessened, the condemnations ceased. Where he had flayed all sin and sinners, laid open the fiery pit to their shuddering eyes, he now held forth on the eleventh hour, played on the three tall crosses and that low voice in the dusk which promised, "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

He ceased to ride so often with Roselle, went less and less to the homes of his congregation. And he penetrated every gaming house, every saloon, every hive of the lost with his pleading texts, his promises of redemption.

HE came every night to the Calico Shroud, and now he stood inside the doorway, his big eyes fixed helplessly on the face of Cymbaline, his exhortations sometimes a trifle mixed, as if he could not recall just what he had meant to say. The girl, on these occasions, leaned back against the bar and smiled at him exactly like a cat watching the pinned-down struggles of a mouse.

Once she held out her hand toward him and said, "Come in." She did not add the "sir," as was her usual habit toward all men, that little flattering word which melted them alike from statesman to teamster, but made the two short words a light command—and John Spurlock walked uncertainly toward her.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Nothing," she said clearly, still leaning back against the bar.

"Nothing at all."

When the man had turned and gone, still in that dazed, uncertain manner, the players looked at each other covertly across the tables.

"She's got him," they said.

"She's going to make him eat dirt."

They knew now why she had gone to his tabernacle and sat so innocently under the lights of his pulpit, why she had taken her chastisement so calmly, and were delighted.

It was like a play set for their entertainment, and they began to watch its development in breathless eagerness.

What a girl she was! How far-seeing the sharp brain under the shining curls! How confident of her power!

She had been demeaned as she had never been in her life, and she had laid a plan for vengeance. These men adored the ground she walked on, singly and collectively; were of that era where to survive one must stand and fight, and they had winced at her seeming meekness under the lash, though they would have denied it.

Now to see her begin to vindicate herself, to strike back, to demand her pound of flesh, was to them a vindication of their own allegiance, and they were pleased to their boot heels.

And she struck back with a vengeance indeed, flung out the floating webs of her charm with a practiced hand, losing no time.

At his next appearance she beckoned him to her in the midst

of his text, breaking it in the middle, and he came, helplessly, it seemed, stood looking with hungry eyes at her little face with its soft red lips. To save his life he could not forget that kiss under the willows, nor the waves of physical weakness which assailed him at that memory.

"If you please," said Cymbaline, "my shoe lace has come unfastened. Will you tie it for me?"

And, lifting the wide flounces of her voluminous skirts a modest bit, she put forth one small foot in its laced black satin shoe.

True, the silken laces hung loose. She had left them so.

Helplessly, awkwardly the minister went down on his shabby knees and tied them up with trembling fingers.

Those tender hands, which had eased the dying on the field of battle, tying the shoe of a woman of the town!

It was, somehow, a dreadful sight, and many a man, beholding, moved restlessly on his feet, stirred in his chair.

"Thanks," said Cymbaline when he had done and risen. "You may go now."

HE went, and the word of this thing went with him—to the stores next day, to the homes, to the tabernacle.

Church men heard it in amazed silence; their wives gathered in whispering groups and, true to type, condemned him as bitterly as he had condemned Cymbaline. They did not know this girl's power, nor of that moment under the willows.

They only knew that something terrible had happened, that their prophet had rocked on his pedestal.

They flocked to hear him that night and judged him harshly for the hesitancy of his delivery, the bewilderment that seemed to make him grope amidst familiar phrases.

Roselle Tarrant was pale and silent, but she flanked him steadily, playing the little organ with a gallant firmness that sent its thin notes pealing through the great place, her voice in the hymns clear and high and piercingly sweet. There was in this girl the stuff of pioneers; she was a potential mother of soldiers. She took him home with her and never asked him a word about this thing which she had heard, but kissed him at the step with her firm young arms about his neck. And John Spurlock ached inside himself because her arms were Cymbaline's arms, her gentle lips were the flaming, hurting lips of that mysterious wanton by the river.

He gasped like one drowning, tore himself away and went, almost running, back to his austere quarters at the hotel.

He did not sleep that night, and the next day the Rev. Mr. Addison Best called on him, and when he left John Spurlock was more haggard than he had been before.

He had begun to pass under the red of life and did not know it as yet. He only knew that, firm in his faith and zealous in his work, he had done what seemed right and that somehow, in some inscrutable manner, he had blundered.

Something had happened to him. He had tried to save a young girl's soul, and the light was failing in his own.

He preached that night to a thinned congregation, wondering at the empty benches. He went out to his nightly rounds and found that he could not face the roaring, smoke-blue gambling halls, the roistering saloons. Something was gone from him; the strong spirit warred with the trembling flesh. So he passed the Alhambra, the Brunswick hall, the Indian Queen, and others, hesitating, trying to perform what he thought his duty, and failing utterly.

So he came at last to the Calico Shroud and stood for a long time in the shadows beyond the porch, listening to the high murmur of its playing crowds. And presently he

heard a soft, light step that came from the south, saw Cymbaline go up the steps, heard the tap of the cymbals above the bar, the roar of rising men. He shut his hands, wet his dry lips, tried to follow and could not. For the first time in his life he knew that he had failed his calling, that the memory of a woman's lips had betrayed him.

When, some thirty minutes later, the girl came down along the little path under the willows, she did not know that the most monstrous destruction of her destructive life stood not ten feet from her in the concealing shadows and stared at her with burning and bewildered eyes, its gaunt hands shut into fists, the knuckles white with pain.

It was the night that John Spurlock knew definitely something had gone wrong with his plan of life. It was in his brain, in his wildly beating heart. As terribly as the young John Mattison had been betrayed by moonlight in a Utah glade a quarter of a lifetime back, so this, his son, had been betrayed. Betrayed by life and circumstance and his own nature. But most of all by that remarkable power which had caused heartbreak, murder, and despair—Cymbaline.

He walked and struck his forehead with his doubled fists and wept hard tears of anguish on his bearded cheeks—and found his stumbling feet at the girl's door. He raised his shaking hand to knock—and fled with a wild flapping of his old blue coat.

HE spoke at random in his tabernacle the next night, made some vague excuse to Roselle Tarrant. Billy Drake, passing as the still thinner crowd emerged, saw the girl alone and stepped quickly beside her, offering his arm. He knew her well and with her gentle lips were the flaming, hurting lips of that mysterious wanton by the river.

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She knew also that this was but the opening wedge; that the ruin would be savagely complete.

This man—this bigot—who had scorned her offered gift—who had pointed his accusing finger at her in the street!

The soft lips closed in a firm line, the blue eyes darkened.

And John Spurlock, flinging his text from her doorway on a night a little later, halted at her up-raised hand.

"Come in," she said again, imperiously. "I would talk with you."

He strode toward her, his eyes on her face, and Cymbaline suddenly smiled.

"Why do you waste your time running from place to place," she asked clearly, "telling people what they don't want to hear?"

"It is what they should want to hear," he said hollowly.

"Bah!" said Cymbaline. "I don't. Come along."

And she turned to walk among her tables, after her nightly fashion.

For one second the man hesitated. Then, like those

dry leaves and bits of discarded paper which are drawn helplessly in the wake of a passing train, he fell in behind her, his eyes on the back of her little neck beyond the hanging curls, exactly as Sancho Mattison's had been that other tragic night.

And so it was that the crowds playing at the Calico Shroud beheld the amazing spectacle of the town's evangelist, its John the Baptist, trailing helplessly to heel for the town's most notorious woman.

She trailed him contemptuously and without a backward glance to this game and that and finally across the open space before the wide doors—to the doors themselves—and out.

And great floods of laughter followed her. Gargantuan laughter, ribald and uproarious. The gamblers stamped and beat their hard fists on the tables, as they had done in the courtroom that time.

"Cymbaline! Cymbaline!" they cried. "Called her a harlot, did he? Wouldn't take her gold! Reviled her in the streets! Man, man, but this is good! What a girl she is! Cymbaline! Our girl! The drinks, Curly! Drinks!"

"They're on the house," said Texas Joe quietly but clearly.

And while these roisterers shouted and drank at Cymbaline's coup, the girl herself walked steadily along the little path in the soft blue night. There was a little slim sickle of a moon low in the west, above Reed's orchard, and the wind along the river was faint and sweet with the first breath of spring, that scent of earth swelling with fecundity of timid new flowers among the winter's grass.

The Rev. John Spurlock stumbled with her, still a step behind. His lips were trembling in the soft, pale beard, his eyes bewildered. But the heart in him was thundering against his gaunt ribs, the stars, the paleness that was the river's breast, and the prideful small figure before him all blended together in his blurring vision. He saw the glint of starlight on her little head, on the shining curls, and he longed drunkenly to bathe

his face in their flowing gold, to press his starved lips to the fair temples. His eyes were strained, his lips apart. And they were at her house under the willows, the door was open, they were inside.

A gas jet, hooded deep in a rose-hued globe, burned above the low mantel; there were chairs of gilt and rose brocade, the settle with its velvet, its mahogany, and a tall gold harp with shining strings that stood across a corner. There were paintings in deep gold frames, flowers in vases of sparkling crystal, and firelight over all.

This house was the most luxurious in the town, where there was much luxury, and this man from the Missouri hills had never seen its like. His feet in their plain boots sank into the pile of carpets from France. Strange perfumes, sweet and priceless, hung in the warm air. And yet he saw nothing of all this consciously as he stood with his hat in his hands beside the closed door, for Cymbaline was throwing off her wrap, was standing forth like a siren in her rich blue gown.

She bade him sit down, and he sank on the edge of a golden chair,

the pupils of his gray eyes were dilated, his lips pale. He sat and looked at Cymbaline and was lost.

That something in his blood which could fall and fail was raising its hydra head.

"Cymbaline," he said thickly, "I have—have come to you—I've come—"

He did not finish what wild thing he had meant to say, for there was a murmur of talking men along the path, feet shuffled at the door, a harsh hand struck it.

"For the love of heaven, boy, come on away," someone said.

"Get to hell, senior. This is my business," a thin voice answered.

An imperious hand struck hard against the closed door, and the girl sprang up from the little table, her face flushed with sudden anger.

She flew across the floor and flung the door wide, her little head up.

"Gentlemen," she said furiously, "what outrage is this?"

Sancho Mattison stood on the step, his handsome face white as chalk, his eyes like dark pools of death. A crowd of men from the Calico Shroud pressed in behind him. Texas Joe looked over his shoulder with steady, watchful eyes.

"No outrage, Cymbaline," said Sancho, "and my apologies."

HE was stone sober, though he had been drinking all the afternoon at the Indian Queen.

"Then go—as you came!" she cried.

But Sancho Mattison, all Spanish and coldly polite, looked beyond her at that grotesque figure by the table.

"You, senior," he said, his nostrils flaring, "will oblige me by stepping out—at once."

"And why?" cried Cymbaline.

"Because," said the boy, looking at her now, "if you have so far lost yourself as to forgive this creature of the streets who has defamed you, I have not. Any man who does that answers to me. Come out, you. Or must I fetch you?"

He reached out an arm in its black velvet sleeve and swept the girl aside, his burning gaze on the man beyond.

Slowly the Rev. Spurlock laid down his little cup. Slowly he rose. With slow, long strides he came toward the door.

With one gaunt hand he caught Sancho Mattison's arm where it still held Cymbaline pressed back against the lintel and took it from her. The motion was sure and easy, with amazing power behind it.

Still holding the arm, he pushed Sancho backward off the step, reached for the door and closed it.

"Now," he said thickly, "what will you have?"

"This, senior!" hissed Sancho like a viper, and came for him, fighting. It was the same dash and spirit which had downed the red shirt that long past day on J street, but this time it was blind with fury, rushing and headlong.

John Spurlock had been a man of peace. All his life he had lived by it, walked in its ways.

Therefore he was unused to self-defense, slow in the uptake.

Now for the first time in that life, reeling from Sancho's onslaught, he flung away the past



"Come out, you. Or must I fetch you?"

and all it stood for and became as his first grand sire had been—a man stripped to the primitive and fighting—for a woman.

He gathered himself together, and when the boy charged again he struck a wall, a tall, thin wall of iron bone and muscle, leaped by the rigors of life, hardened by labor, taught by the bloody battles of that distant war.

The Rev. John Spurlock met Sancho Mattison and beat him half to death. He smashed his lips and closed his eyes and flailed him without mercy. He flung him to the earth and waited for him to rise in his blind fury and did it all over again, and when at last the boy did not rise, but lay in his blood, panting and unconscious, he dusted his hands together absently and walked swiftly from the scene. And no man stopped him.

No man laughed.

A terrible silence fell along the river.

THEN Texas Joe and Curly Duke lifted the long, limp form of Sancho and carried it away. Behind the closed door Cymbaline stood with her hand, palm out, across her open mouth.

They took young Mattison to the Waverly house and put him in a bed and sent for Dr. Barney. He was slow in coming to himself, and before he was conscious word of the affair had run like wildfire through the saloons and gaming halls. A crowd gathered before the hotel, talking, and Sancho's companions, chief among them Red Shirt, thronged the lobby.

"Who'd-a-thought it?" the men in the street wanted to know.

"Sancho's won his way every time before, and that preacher hammered him to pulp!"

And so it went, while the night passed and John Spurlock sat alone in his bare room in a far corner of the same hotel, his arms outstretched along the pine table it contained, his set face staring into the darkness. He was bare-headed and clad in the old blue uniform, for he had forgotten his outer coat and his hat. They lay on a chair in Cymbaline's firelit room beside the river.

The day came, and someone took Sancho, silent and sullen, home across the valley to the sanctuary of Santa Nita.

The older men shook their heads. "He'll come to a bad end yet," they opined, "if something don't happen to save him."

"There's only one thing that can save him," Mr. Low said quietly.

"What's that, F. F.?" they asked.

"The love of Cymbaline."

"And that is a thing which no one can foretell," Frank Tarrant said. Uneasy and concerned, the merchant had joined this group and that, gathering details of the astounding matter. He was heart-sick.

"No," replied Mr. Low, "the girl is a mystery. Whether she has ever loved or can ever love anyone except herself no man can say, but she has worked her vengeance on that evangelist."

HOW true his words were he did not fully know.

All that day no one saw John Spurlock.

He did not appear for his frugal meal at the hotel table.

The door of his room was fastened from the inside, and no sound issued from it.

As dusk drew on and it came time to light the gas jets in the tabernacle, Roselle Tarrant, her lips closed tightly and her trembling hands holding her hymn books, went to the familiar place. Mrs. Tarrant, outraged by what her husband had told her, but silenced by her daughter's face, walked with her. They stood beside the rough doors, which were still fastened, and were joined presently by this and that one of the faithful, old men mostly and gray-haired women, those tried and proven souls who had passed life's time of turmoil and were compassionate. But the hour came and passed and no gaunt, earnest figure flung wide the sacred portals, set the globes aglow.

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(To be continued.)

(Advertisement.)
POISONED KIDNEYS

To flush poisons and acid from kidneys and correct irritation of bladder so that you can stop "getting up nights" get a 85 cent package of Gold Medal Haarlem Oil Capsules and take as directed. Other symptoms of kidney and bladder weaknesses are: scant, burning or smarting passage—backache—leg cramps—puffy eyes.