

BRUNHILDA

f

ORR'S ISLAND

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NICOLLS



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OF ORR'S ISLAND



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BY

WILLIAM JASPER NICOLLS

"But she was a soft landscape of mild earth,
Where all was Harmony, and Calm and Quiet,
Luxuriant, budding: cheerful * * * * *
I've seen your stormy Seas and stormy Women,
And plty Lovers rather more than Seamen."

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REFRAIN :

*“On the shores of Casco Bay,
Where the boats at anchor lay,
Don't you hear the wind a-callin',
Thro' the riggin', old and gray.
On the shores of Casco Bay,
Where the little white caps play,
And the sun sinks down in glory,
O'er the mountains, far away.”*

PART FIRST

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“ANY orders beyond Portland?” the old captain asked, as he stood erect before him.

Nelson looked up from the book on his lap, gazed absently over the hand rail and then along the smooth white deck of the *Phyllis*.

“None,” he answered.

“Casco Bay,” the weather-beaten old skipper explained, as he waved his hand towards the blue North.

“Yes,” he assented lazily—and resumed his reading.

The sharp old eyes — New England eyes — snapped impatiently.

“I was raised on one of them islands,” the skipper informed him.

It was the longest sentence he had spoken to Nelson since the *Phyllis* had slipped her moorings in New York Harbor—the longest purely

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conversational sentence; the next was on official matters.

“Shall we go there?”

Nelson closed the book, pulled out a jewelled case, and lit a cigarette.

“As you please—anywhere on the map,” he said.

Then he lay back, indolently, in a low steamer chair, under the deck awning, smoked his cigarette and contemplated the North, now fast changing to purple and gold.

For the Maine coast it was a remarkable view.

The *Phyllis* was silently cleaving the silken waters of the harbor, her sharp, aristocratic bow dividing the waters into little sprays of sparkling blue and green, which fell again with a gentle cadence into the quiet sea.

There, just over the port rail stretched the undulating shore of Portland, with glimpses of houses, through the tall masts of the heavily laden vessels that lay at anchor. At his right a lighthouse stood, round and solid as though it had grown from roots in the bottom of the sea.

Ahead of him was a lovely island dotted with

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picturesque cottages and smooth green lawns, and beyond that was another island, and more islands, fading into the yellowish red of an August sunset.

Probably his mind recalled, and then dwelt tenaciously on a scene he would much rather have forgotten.

The blue Adriatic—the Grand canal—the silken waters of the bay—the sunset—a Venetian love song—and—Anne.

“Jove,” he sighed under his breath—“But how it recalls every line, every feature.” Then he leaned forward, and with elbows on knees, he held his head between both hands and stared straight into the searching eyes of old Botts, the skipper.

“We’re a going down the Bay,” said the captain, tentatively.

The fact was obvious, still there was a question in the abstract, and the captain evidently wished an answer.

Nelson looked up, and mechanically reached for his cigarette case.

“I said anywhere on the map—the Bay is on the map, I believe?”

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"I guess it is," replied the skipper.

Then he shifted his weight onto the other leg and stared at his owner.

There was something on his mind, something of importance, evidently.

Nelson looked him squarely in the face and said, "Well?"

"It's a passenger—that is she wants to be."

"She?"—Nelson held the wax taper in suspension.

"It looks like she," said the old man, doggedly.

"No."

The match exploded like a toy pistol and a tiny wreath of smoke curled upwards.

Then there was a voice, round, flexible—a woman's voice. It came from somewhere astern.

"Ho!—Captain Botts!"

Nelson looked over the hand rail.

In a small white boat, feathering her oars and bending gracefully to each stroke, not over fifty feet away, was a young woman.

As she looked over her shoulder her eyes rested on Nelson.

II.

THEN a curious thing happend.

The owner of the *Phyllis* had thrown his cigarette into the water, and was on his feet, gesticulating vigorously.

“Captain Botts”—he commanded, “why don’t you stop—stop, I say—don’t you hear her calling to you?” And all for the sake of a woman.

A young woman with masses of fluffy hair glinting in the yellow afterglow like interwoven threads of golden sunshine. She wore no hat and her firm round arms were bare to the elbow.

The astonished captain shuffled forward, and at his heels followed Nelson.

About midships he stood abreast of the little white boat, and managed to catch the young woman’s eye.

Then he raised his laced cap, with the bow of an admiral.

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She nodded carelessly.

"May I come aboard?" she asked, in her musical voice. She had adroitly shipped her oars, and had caught the line thrown her by a young deck hand. The engine suddenly stopped its rhythmic pulsations, and the *Phyllis*, losing headway, was slowly drifting in the slightly undulating sea. Her face upturned to him showed warm and soft in the crimson haze overshadowing it; but clear and distinct shone the luminous dark blue eyes, and between half parted lips flashed her exquisitely white teeth.

Nelson hesitated not a moment.

"Certainly,—permit me." He clasped her strong, smooth hand and lifted her up the little ladder and onto the deck.

"Thanks"—she beamed, and then seated herself comfortably on a cushioned chair.

Captain Botts touched his cap with more deference than he had ever shown to Nelson.

"The boat?"—he said, nodding his head towards the little white craft that was nestling close to the side of the *Phyllis*.

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"Oh!—the boat?" she exclaimed. She pronounced it "bo-it" with a lingering cadence that went to Nelson's head. Then, settling back comfortably in the cushions:—

"We can leave it at Little Diamond."

The captain touched his cap and went forward.

In a few moments the *Phyllis* was again slowly steaming to the North—with a little white boat in tow.

Nelson stood by, with an amused expression on his bronzed face. He had marked with satisfaction the comprehensive "we," and also the captain's alacrity in obeying orders not given by himself. He drew up a chair not far from hers.

"Is it far?" he said, leisurely, as he gazed ahead into the blue and gold.

"Far?"—she looked at his handsome, good-natured face, critically.

"Little Diamond"—he explained.

"Oh!—just over there"—she pointed a tapering finger across the blue water to an island—the first as you go down the Bay.

"That!—why we're almost there."

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A light appeared for an instant in her eyes—the light that lies in woman's eyes—hidden, inscrutable.

There was a manifest tone of disappointment in his voice.

“And you leave us there?”

“Oh!—no, we leave the boat there,”—once more it was “bo-it,” and he tried to memorize her pronunciation.

Again she looked him over very carefully, and, apparently satisfied with the inspection, she began.

“You are Mr. Thomas?” she queried.

Nelson bowed.

“I'm so much obliged to you for stopping,” she went on. “I missed the *Aucocisco*.”

Nelson looked puzzled.

“The *Aucocisco* leaves Portland at five-ten, you know, and I would have been left over night,—then”—she yawned a trifle in the shade of her brown hand—“dear me!—I'm so tired—then you came along and—I knew Captain Botts.”

His disappointment changed to chagrin.

“Oh!—yes—Captain Botts,” he said absently.

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"I rowed over from Little Diamond," she continued. "I have friends living there."

Matters were still a little hazy, but her voice was delightful, and her eyes!

He had plenty of time—he thought. She could explain it to Captain Botts, and he would see that the skipper obeyed orders if—"Well—we'll see," he muttered. . . .

"I live on Orr's Island," she said, with a finality that made him pick up his book and hasten after the captain.

That intrepid sailor was carefully examining a government chart through a pair of large round spectacles.

"I know the course," he said apologetically, as Nelson touched his shoulder, "but I ain't taking chances on shifting buoys that the government's always changing—Eh!"

"How far is it to Orr's Island?" said Nelson. The captain looked over his spectacles and scratched the side of his grizzled head.

"Orr's Island?—about two hours—the way we're running."

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Nelson looked him in the eye—without a blush. “Make it three hours, and send the steward to me,” he ordered.

Then he dived into a state-room, pulled out a couple of soft, fleecy steamer rugs and went on deck.

She nestled in their bright colors and warm folds.

“Thank you so much,” she murmured.

III

CAPTAIN BOTTS—erect, sunburned, wrinkled, in a uniform with gold lace on his cuffs and cap,—stood by the wheel in the pilot house.

The mate could do very well in the open, but here in Casco Bay it was different. The channel took many devious turns to Orr's Island. At sight of Nelson, however, he turned over the wheel, to the mate and signalled the engineer "half speed." Then he said, "The Casino on Long Island is the mark—hanged if I wasn't going full speed," he added to himself.

Nelson motioned him to a seat forward, in the bow,—and offered a cigar.

"Fine evening," said the captain, suspiciously, as he swept a sulphurous match across the leg of his trousers.

"Yes—by the way,—er—who is—our passenger?"

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The captain puffed vigorously.

“Who is she?”

“Yes,—her name?”

“Oh—Hilda.”

“Hilda—, what?” he persisted. The captain's caution annoyed him.

“You mean her folks' name?” said the skipper, warily.

“Of course,—her family name.”

“She ain't got any family.”

The captain was wishing that he had his pipe. He was chewing and pulling at the unaccustomed cigar so strongly that the fire was running, unevenly, down its side.

“What is her other name?” asked Nelson.

“She was baptized Brunhilda,” explained the skipper. Then he lapsed into silence, profound, impenetrable.

Nelson held his knee in both hands and peered into the gloaming.

“Then it doesn't matter so much if we put back to Portland,” he observed, thoughtfully.

“You can't do that,” said the captain, jumping

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to his feet and tossing his cigar overboard. It described a fiery curve in the dusk, and fell into the water with a little hissing sound.

"The *Phyllis* is mine, I believe," said the other, calmly.

"But she must get home to-night."

There was resolve, determination, finality, in the old man's voice.

"Why?" he temporized.

"Hagan Gunther would never forgive me."

A light broke into the young man's consciousness. "What has he to do with it?" he inquired.

"He's her uncle—a fine man," the captain explained.

"Not as good a man as his brother," Nelson ventured.

"His brother?"

"Yes,—her father."

"Oh,—Etsel,—you knew Etsel?" said the skipper, innocently.

"I have heard of him," said Nelson, truthfully.

"Most everybody heard of him, time his boat went down—foolhardy," mused the captain.

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"Everyone lost," suggested Nelson.

"All 'cepting Hilda."

Then he had the story.

So he got on his feet and yawned, stretching his arms over his head.

"Of course, if we must take her home—why we—must," he said lazily.

The captain went back to the wheel.

"He's reasonable enough," he murmured, as he stuck the well-chewed stem of his pipe between his teeth. "Going away out of his course, just for Hilda,—blamed good-natured, that's a fact."

. . . .

Kind, good Nelson—stood for five minutes in the shadow of the cabin, mentally photographing every line of her lovely contour—from the top of her glorious head to the tip of her canvas shoe—just peeping from beneath the vari-colored rug.

"An orphan," he said as he gazed at her, unobserved. Then he drew in his breath, like one who is pleased in anticipation.

"Fatherless, motherless, sisterless, brotherless." Then he taxed his memory.

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“Brunhild?”—he asked himself, softly.

“Oh, yes,—I remember it:—Nibelungenlied.”

He repeated the verse:—

“Then spake the lord of Rhineland:

‘Straight will I hence to sea,

And seek the fiery Brunhild

Howe'er it go with me.

For love of the stern maiden

I'll frankly risk my life;

Ready am I to lose it,

If I win her not to wife.’ ”

IV

THE steward—he was from Nelson's club, and was on his vacation—drew up a small table and set down a tray of his own devising.

There was a cantaloupe, iced to delicious coolness. Tiny thin cups of clam broth, a broiled young chicken, and a dish—all his own—in which a stuffed raw tomato was the only outward and visible sign of an inward and delectable filling. A delicate little tart for dessert, and then came the coffee.

It was a dainty refecation.

She had scarcely tasted the dishes, and now she was sipping from her cup with hardly concealed indifference. His magnificence was apparently lost upon her, and his brilliant conversation died away in the ripples of the Bay. Overhead the moon emerged from behind a fleecy cloud, and its rays tipped the waters with a silvery radiance. In

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the distance a tinkling sound of bells aroused her from the awkward silence.

“The bell buoy,”—she said, leaning forward, her face animated, ungraciously,—“We’ll soon be there.”

“You are glad?” he inquired.

“Glad?”—There was a shade of humor, mischief, lurking in the depths of her eyes; she sat almost heedlessly, her hands in her lap, her hair loosely threatening to fall any moment, the blue sailor knot around her shoulders almost awry,—“Oh, yes.”

Clearly his disappointment and chagrin had changed to vexation.

“The *Phyllis* is not nearly so fine a boat as the—the—*Oakawisco*.”

She smiled, then laughed,—a rippling, merry impromptu,—aloud. She leaned back in her chair, her hands behind her head, her round bare arms free, natural.

“Why, the *Aucocisco* is only a passenger boat, for the islanders,—This is a yacht!”

She said it with almost a gasp of admiration.

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Her glance swept along the beautiful lines of the vessel. It should have satisfied him that the trouble was not with the *Phyllis*.

“Some passengers, perhaps,”—he suggested, “on the *Co-co-isco*—that’s the most infernal name,” he said, roughly.

It was probably dawning on him that it was just possible, in fact quite conceivable, that he, Nelson Thomas, rich, dilettante, was not the bewildering success with this island girl that he had imagined.

She answered frankly, carelessly, “Oh, I generally meet some friends among the passengers.” Then her hands fell into her lap, and her animation died away into the silence around them.

He was evidently angry when he called her “The most apathetic, indifferent—” That is what he said, under his breath, as he stumbled over a deck stool, on his way to the captain. The latter was puffing silently at his pipe, his eyes roving, dreamily, across the placid waters of the Bay—its surface reflecting the red, yellow and purple of the glowing skies. The bow cut scarcely a ripple as

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the *Phyllis* under half speed floated serenely to the North.

Nelson's brows gathered ominously. "What's the matter with the boat?" he inquired.

The captain glanced quickly fore and aft.

"Matter?" he repeated, "nothing, as I know."

"She's crawling along like a mud turtle," asserted the owner.

The skipper knocked the ashes from his pipe, pulled down his cap, and shut the little window in front of him.

"You want to go faster?" he suggested.

"We'll be out all night, if you don't do something," said Nelson, gloomily.

"You said awhile ago about making it in three hours," began the captain, in justification, as he signalled the engineer to "get ready." That young man was lying on his back, on the cushioned seat, beside the polished cylinders, looking through the window at the moon. He jumped as if a bee had stung him. "Get busy, Jake," he called to the fireman. Jake slid down the ladder, and opened wide the blower. . . .

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“Well,—three hours isn't all night,—is it?”—interrupted Nelson.

“It depends,” the skipper answered, vaguely. Then he peered into the gathering shades. “You want to go ahead quick?”—he emphasized.

“That's what she wants,” concluded Nelson, absently.

“She—”

The jingle bell was ringing “get there,” only a second before a column of black smoke curled upwards, in circling rings, from the funnel, and then flattened down to a long horizontal streak, as the *Phyllis* gained headway on her “full speed” for Orr's Island.

AFTERWARDS—in her room, from the window of which she could see the lights of the *Phyllis*, anchored in the harbor—Hilda wrote to her friend in Portland.

“I won my bet all right, and came down home on that yacht,”—then she wrote a lot of girlish adjectives.

“The supper was fine, I was awfully hungry, but managed to keep my appetite within lady-like limits—a real lady, you know, only nibbles the food, so I nibbled and sipped, while he—by the way, Grace, he is very good-looking, with dreamy eyes and such a sad expression on his face, I’m sure he must have had some dreadful disappointment. He seemed to get such gloomy fits—and then he wrapped me in lovely

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steamer rugs, the brightest colors—I must have looked like an Indian, and the *Phyllis* is just a dream—we could cross the ocean on her—so he said—and she is fitted up with everything. And so fast, we overtook the *Aucocisco*, and came in ahead. His name is Nelson Thomas, from New York, and is tall and dark with brown eyes, and I came down to Orr's Island with him all right, and won the bet—so you can send the gloves by mail, six and a quarter, tan, full length, and she's anchored out in the harbor now. Uncle Hagan says it's not very safe, but I guess Captain Botts knows where to lay, so maybe we'll meet again—and if so I'll write right away."

Then she walked to the post office and dropped the letter in the door box, so that it would go on the *Aucocisco*—leaving the Island at five o'clock the next morning.

VI

NELSON paced the deck, restlessly, back and forth, his hands behind his back, then in his pockets; his head bent low in thought, then upward to the moon for inspiration—when Captain Botts intercepted him.

“When do you think of leaving here?”

Nelson stopped, impatiently. “Would it be possible to stay in one place for—say an hour, or must we always move on?”

The skipper looked at the crooked brown legs of the old wharf, which the ebbing tide was slowly uncovering, and shook his head. “Not in this cove, I didn’t calculate to stay here over night.”

“No—” yawned Nelson, indifferently.

“Around Baileys,—in Mackerel Cove, we could lay snug enough,” the skipper suggested.

“Yes—” Nelson gazed absently into the silvery moonlight.

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“Just over there,” added the captain, inclining his head towards his left shoulder.

“All right—”

He resumed his absorbed pacing, back and forth and across the deck, and then stopping suddenly he ejaculated:—“She has the most uncommon eyes!”

“Eh?—” said the captain.

“You may put me ashore here,—and lay in—in—that fish cove,—until—until you hear from me.” He went into his cabin, changed his garments, and packing a small suit-case, he went ashore in the launch.

Walking to the hotel he engaged a room, and he threw a window wide open to enjoy the refreshing air and view. He discarded his cigarette case and drew forth an old fire-eaten, brier pipe.

“Now,—” he said to his heart, “let us reason together. In the first place, Nelson Thomas,—just what are you doing here, and how long are you going to remain? . . . Exactly,—you want to get away from society, the kind of society that you have known all your life. . . .

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Certainly,—to loaf around on the island, to forget that you own white shirts and black garments, to enjoy at your leisure the piney woods, the green grass, the sunny rocks, the shady walks, and—and—well,—say, Hilda. . . . Anne is all right, of course, in her own sphere.

“Anne is aristocratic, correct, rich and everything that goes with such advantageous circumstances. . . . A little artificial, frayed, dried, perhaps. But she has perfect features, is always faultlessly gowned. . . . A wonderful woman indeed.” . . .

Then he concluded: “I like Brunhilda better.”

In the morning he was up betimes, and after a hearty breakfast of coffee, rolls, and mackerel he stepped out into the cool bracing air of the early day. Throwing up his head he inhaled the delicious, soft, moist air of the sea, mingled with balsamic odors from the pines.

“A most delectable island,” he acknowledged. “Old Botts was right.”

His walk was along the main road that runs its winding course the whole length of the island. It

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was an enchanting walk, up hill and down, winding through groups of old trees, pines, birch, maples,—the underwood covered with ferns and mosses. Soft, velvety side paths branched out invitingly on either side, enticing, alluring.

Then at every hill-top were glimpses of the sea, rippling, rising and falling,—tiny white caps, far out, towards the horizon.

And the air,—the air was stimulating, bracing, with delicious odors, the delightful aroma of wood plants, and rich leaf mould.

As he branched from the rocky highway and turned into the grassy road, the overhanging boughs—bending low with the little crystals of dew—brushed his cheek, while his feet trod on a smooth, soft carpet of grass and moss. It was truly a delectable, a charming island, and Nelson walked the whole length of it, looking to the right and left of him, and peering into the open windows and doors of the little white cottages, but finding no sight of Hilda.

“I could ask where uncle Hagen lives, of course,” he said to himself a thousand times. “But I am

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not going to advertise my crassness to the entire island."

The next day it rained.

Then a northeaster set in, and it rained continuously, unceasingly, for two days. The blue and purple, the yellow and gold left the skies, and only a dull leaden gray hung low in the firmament. The days seemed to be weeks. There was nothing to mark their duration.

Nelson paced the narrow porch of the hotel until he was wet and chilled with penetrating mist. Then he went indoors and read the advertisements of an old magazine that he found lying on the table; until he grew desperate and went out again, and walked.

"Where in the world could that girl hide herself on this island?" he grumbled. "I have been all over it, and around everywhere." Suddenly an idea struck him; he looked grave.

"She must be ill." He said it seriously. Then he went back to the hotel, and decided that he would send word to Captain Botts. But while he was looking for a boatman the leaden drab of the

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sky became gray, and as he scanned the horizon it seemed to grow lighter, and then more transparent, until, finally, pale glimpses of blue appeared, half concealed by the light, feathery clouds now floating serenely out to sea.

As the afternoon sun shone through the yellow mist he saw coming towards him a fisherman. He was of medium height, muscular, alert, and had light blue eyes. He wore yellow oilskins, and over his shoulders he carried a pair of oars.

Nelson stopped him.

"I was looking for a man," he said, "to go out to my yacht."

The fisherman put the end of an oar on the ground and leaned on it.

"Where does she lay?" he asked.

"Over there in Mackerel Cove."

The man looked at the sky, at the sea, and then at the sun.

"All right," he assented.

"I want you to take this."

He stopped suddenly and gazed foolishly at two figures coming up from the landing.

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One was Captain Botts, the other was—Hilda. She advanced and spoke cordially.

“Hello, Herbert.”

The fisherman smiled. “Hello, Hilda.”

Then she turned to Nelson.

“Oh, Mr. Thomas,” she said, “we have had the loveliest time.” She was radiant.

“Yes,” said Nelson, with a rising inflection. He looked from the girl to the shamefaced captain, then to the fisherman, and back again.

“On the *Phyllis*,” she continued, joyously.

“The *Phyllis*,” he echoed.

“The loveliest boat,” she went on. “You should see it, Herbert.”

She turned to the fisherman.

“I am just going over to it now,” he replied. “Want to go along?”

Nelson interrupted. “You are not going now—I have changed my mind.”

The fisherman shouldered his oars. “Oh—all right; see you again.”

He nodded to Hilda and walked away, his strong figure square, erect.

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Nelson turned to the girl.

"I hope you enjoyed your visit?" he inquired.

"We looked for you," said the skipper.

Nelson colored a trifle. He seemed annoyed with the assurance.

"Where did you look?"

"Everywhere," answered the skipper, promptly.

"Each time that we called at the hotel they said that you were out walking," she ventured.

Again he looked in her eyes. No doubt he saw nothing but—truth.

"Probably," he commented. "I am very fond of walking."

"Yes," she grew interested. "And where did you walk?"

"Oh, round and round." He spoke with enthusiasm. "I love to walk."

"To the post office," she suggested.

"Yes, I called there for my letters."

The captain opened his mouth, said nothing, and shut it again. He seemed to be surprised. Perhaps he was wondering how they knew where to send his letters. Doubtless letters could be sent to

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“any place on the map”—if one knew where to address them.

“To the Back Shore?” she continued.

“Where all those rocks are?” he queried.

She nodded her head.

“Yes,—yes, indeed,—beautiful,” he beamed, fervently.

She eyed him suspiciously.

“To the bridge?” she intimated.

“Bridge,—up to the bridge?—several times, while they were sorting the mail in the post office. Exquisite view,” he went on, ardently.

Her face clouded.

“It’s six miles, up and back,” she said, soberly.

“So it is,” the captain corroborated.

“I was—rather tired,” he admitted.

The skipper sauntered over to the store to buy some tobacco.

She moved closer to him.

“I wanted so much to see the *Phyllis*—before—before—you leave.”

She looked up into his face.

“And Captain Botts said—”

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"I don't care what Captain Botts said," he interrupted, calmly.

"But you won't be angry—you are not offended," she urged.

He looked down at the upturned face, at her lips, half parted, at the symmetrical arch of her eyebrows.

"With you?"—he hastened.

"With Captain Botts," she persisted.

. . . .

Wherewith she said "good-bye," and then walked demurely away. And he gazed after her as she walked up the rocky road, and on up the hill, through the trees and beyond.

. . . .

Captain Botts sauntered back leisurely from the store.

"The ladies came," he said laconically.

"I'll go aboard," answered Nelson.

In the launch he faced the captain. "Who is that man—Herbert?"

"Captain Herbert Kenneth—best man in the Bay," he asserted, boldly.

VII

HILDA sat under an apple tree, and wrote a letter—holding the paper on a book in her lap. The wind had dropped around to the southwest and was blowing fresh and keen from the open sea. Under her feet were old, gray, moss-covered rocks. Between the rocks, gaining nourishment from the innumerable little springs of fresh water which abound on Orr's Island, was a luxuriant growth of wild plants,—of blueberries, and delicate ground pines. Overhead was an azure sky. She was writing—as she had promised—to her friend Grace in Portland.

“Captain Botts took me aboard the *Phyllis* again, I went all over it, but Mr. Thomas was very angry at Captain Botts, and it was not his fault at all for I just coaxed him until he took me. We hunted everywhere for Mr. Thomas to

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get his permission, but he was always out walking,—he says he is very fond of walking, and I believe it, for he passed our house at least a dozen times. I stood right in the window so he could see me, but he never looked at me, I wanted to bow and thank him for taking me aboard his yacht, but he just walked ahead so absent-minded, he must have had one of his gloomy fits. The gloves came all right, they are perfectly lovely and fit beautifully, I don't know how long the *Phyllis* is going to stay here, Captain Botts says he may stay over night or he may stay a year, he has been here a week already. It doesn't seem a week, does it.—”

A freckled-faced boy was coming up the road, whistling. In his hand he held a little bunch of cunners,—hanging limply by a string.

“Ho,—Tommie,” she called.

The boy stopped whistling and looked over the low stone wall.

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“Come here Tommie, I want you.”

He walked leisurely around by the gateway and came up the grassy walk under the trees.

“Where have you been, Tommie?”

The boy held up his string of fish for her inspection.

“Fishing,—over on Baileys,” he answered.

She examined each little fish, separately.

“That’s a big one,” she exclaimed. “And that—and that.”

Tommie turned them around slowly.

“Caught that one in Mackerel Cove,” he said proudly.

She marvelled,—and then he exclaimed.

“Oh, Hilda,—you ought to see the yacht over there. The *Phyllis*.”

“Yes,—” Hilda gazed into the distance and again sat down and wrote.

“He is still here, I wonder what he is waiting for.”

Then she folded the letter, addressed it and gave it to the boy with two pennies. “Take it down to the post office for me, Tommie.”

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The boy laid down his fish in the shade of a bush, and started down the lane.

She called after him before he had reached the gate. "Ho!—Tommye."

He turned around.

"You may pick blueberries here,—any time you want."

VIII

THE air was soft and balmy, the sky overhead like turquoise, barely a ripple ruffled the surface of the water, the little boats—held by their moorings—rode lightly, rising and falling gently, in Mackerel Cove. Over on the wharf a man in a long linen coat was industriously forking over a large pile of fish. As he picked them out on the fork's sharp tines he tossed them into a basket, and another weighed them on the scales. Basket after basket was filled from the shiny, slippery pile, and still it seemed to grow no less. Idly watching the two men at work lounged five or six of the natives, their eyes half closed, their muscles relaxed, as they leaned against the walls of the wharf, or sat on the boxes that encumbered it. There was nothing of importance to be done, nothing that could not be done to-morrow as well as to-day. The place was slumberous, drowsy, restful.

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Then breaking the stillness came a sharp whistle from the mouth of the cove.

The idlers opened their eyes; the man with the fork stopped for a moment his monotonous work; the man at the scales chalked his count, and the wharf took on an air of business as the *Aucocisco* steamed slowly alongside.

Across the gang-plank, holding their skirts tightly and sniffing at the pile of fish came two ladies. One was old, imperious, with white hair, and gray eyes, full of shrewdness, and of worldly wisdom. The other though younger, had much the same features, but there was more of curiosity than shrewdness in her dark eyes—more of knowledge than of wisdom.

Keeping carefully away from contact with his fish, the old lady addressed the man with the fork.

“Can you tell me,” she said, with the most modern accent, “where we can find a yacht called the *Phyllis*?”

“There she lays,” he motioned, abruptly.

She glanced in the direction indicated and saw the yacht anchored in the middle of the cove.

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"Gracious,—" she demanded. "How shall we ever get to it?"

"You might go in a boat," he suggested.

She looked at the little skiffs bobbing up and down on the undulating surface of the water, and shuddered.

"I'm sure that I should be dreadfully seasick," she confessed.

He reassured her. "Not to-day," he smiled. Then he stuck his fork into an unusually large fish and threw it into the basket. The man at the scales resumed his counting.

Then one of the idlers sauntered over to the ladies.

"I can take you over," he said confidently, "in my motor boat."

The elderly lady was about to interpose an objection, when the other intervened.

"That will do nicely," she agreed. . . .

On board the *Phyllis* the mate, the engineer, and fireman, were indulging in a little game of poker. The engineer held a bob-tailed flush, and in his exaltation his mind was full of the joy of winning.

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He nodded loftily towards the fireman whose luck all of the afternoon had been indifferent.

“Jake,—” he triumphed, as he fanned his cards. “What would you do if you had all the money you wanted?”

“I'd go back to New York,” he answered promptly.

The engineer threw down his cards and swept the chips into his pile.

“This is good enough for me,” he asserted. “If a man—”

The mate who was watching the motor boat as she left the wharf, saw it heading straight for the *Phyllis*.

“Chuck it,” he commanded, peremptorily. “Lady visitors.”

In a moment,—with the alacrity due to continual practice,—the cards disappeared with the engineer and fireman: and the mate, in uniform, stood at the rail as the motor boat puffed alongside.

“They want to go aboard,” the boatman explained.

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“Against orders,” answered the mate. “Owner and captain ashore.”

“Gracious,” the old lady gasped.

“Bill,” said the boatman to the mate, in a deep whisper, as the two came close together, “you better risk it,—if you want to hold your job.”

And the ladies went aboard.

IX

WHEN the yacht's launch hove in sight, around the point of the cove,—Bill shaded his eyes with a big hairy hand, from the slanting rays of the afternoon sun, and gave vent to a low whistle.

“I'll swear to Guinea,” he muttered, “if there ain't th' capt'n with another lady. Next thing th' boss will come along and the whole crew will get fired.”

As he helped Hilda over the side of the *Phyllis*, she fluttered to the deck, in her white gown, like a sea gull, lightly, gracefully. “Thank you,—mate,” she smiled. He reddened with pleasure.

X

AS Nelson was stepping into the launch to go aboard the *Phyllis*, the captain thumbed around in his vest pocket and, after some fruitless searching amongst numerous tightly folded bits of soiled paper, produced a carefully rolled little packet of brown paper, which he proceeded to disentangle from a mesh of knotted twine. Within the inner fold were two white visiting cards. These the skipper handed to Nelson with as much care as if they were precious bits of spun glass.

“The ladies,” he said, apologetic, though why he should apologize one can only surmise.

Nelson took the cards and read.

“Mrs. Ralph Thomas.”

“Miss Anne Conrad.”

Then he tore them into four pieces and—quietly dropped them overboard.

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There was silence for a few minutes,—nothing save the *pit-e, pit-e, pit-e, pit-e*, of the motor as the launch skimmed over the quiet waters of the harbor.

“Did, er—Miss Gunther meet the ladies?” Nelson asked.

“Hilda?”

“Yes.”

The captain bent his head low over the machinery. Apparently something had gone wrong.

“I think she did,” he nodded thoughtfully.

Nelson pondered.

Presumably he was still thinking of the meeting between Hilda and the two ladies who had come of their own volition to visit him on the yacht.

They seemed to have made themselves quite at home. They apologized for their intrusion, and said that they were on their way to Bar Harbor, but had heard of the *Phyllis* in Portland, and had run down to see him. They hoped that they had not interfered with any of his plans.

“She would come.” Anne complained as she sank into a chair beside the other.

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Nelson received them politely.

"We have been all over the yacht," said Mrs. Thomas. "It's wonderfully complete."

"I never saw so many books,—why they are everywhere. Do you read them all?" she marveled.

"I have read them all," he admitted.

"Fancy," sighed Anne, as she moved away, while Mrs. Thomas drew her chair a little closer to Nelson.

"I wanted to ask you," she began, "whether you had any particular reason for remaining here. We have awaited your return to Portland for over a week."

"No—very particular reason," he asserted boldly. His face shaded a deeper red than usual, but that might have been due to his invigorating walks on Orr's Island.

"Then why on earth do you stay in this dreadful place?" she exclaimed.

"Dreadful place," he echoed. His eyes lifted involuntarily to the blue sky and then dropped to the bluer sea. He sniffed the soft, delicious air and shook his head.

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"I regret, my dear aunt," he said, "that I don't quite agree with you. The place to me is simply delightful."

"Simply.—Phew! I can smell that pile of fish, even here," she shuddered.

"Some people sell one thing, some another, these people sell fish," he said politely.

"We thought it would be nice if you would take us to Bar Harbor," the old lady suggested.

"Oh, do," said Anne, who had rejoined them at the right moment.

Nelson placed his elbows on the arms of his chair, put the tips of his fingers together and appeared to think, deeply.

"I would like to—very much, but—"

"Well?" questioned Mrs. Thomas.

"My time is so fully occupied," he regretted. Tiny wrinkles appeared between her well-trained eyebrows. Her features lost their benign expression and appeared harsh and worldly. Her voice was almost raspy.

"Anne!" she called.

"Yes."

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"Tell Nelson what you heard in Portland."

"Oh—dear—it was nothing—nothing at all," she expostulated. Then she sauntered up the deck, to get a better view of the cove.

"I don't believe it," said the old lady as she lowered her voice, "but people are talking."

"Yes," by holding his teeth tightly shut, and inhaling deeply, he obtained a fairly satisfactory yawn. "People are always talking,—more or less," he commented.

Mrs. Thomas came about and went on the other tack. The wrinkles on her brow disappeared, she smiled and her manner was more genial.

"The subject is not always very entertaining either," she laughed. "Coming down from Newport we had several hours of an animated discussion of the question whether Count Schyroski ever wore the same suit of clothes twice. We grew quite excited over it."

"Think of it," he mused, as one who considered the matter too trivial for discussion. He yawned surreptitiously. Annoyed, vexed, Mrs. Thomas gathered her wits together for a final explanation.

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To have come all the way,—to have followed him for nothing!—to this poor, out of the way place. Her mind had been set on the trip, her plans all made for her nephew,—for Anne. And then his manner,—something entirely new in his tone of voice, his cool refusal, his indifference—she had observed his yawn—all proceeded from some cause, at present unknown to her.

Was it unknown to her?

“Nelson,” she said confidentially, “what do you find so charming about this fishy place?”

He smiled, good naturedly.

“Well,” he said, “there are lots of things.”

“For example—?” she demanded.

“Well,” he explained, “the air, the green grass, the simple life.”

She shrugged her shoulders. “There is plenty of air, I’ll admit; is it the air or the grass that so fully occupies your time?” She laughed a cultured staccato.

“Both,” he averred, solemnly.

“Nonsense,” she said, reproachfully, “how long are you going to stay?”

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"I haven't the least idea," he said truthfully.

She eyed him carefully, inquisitively.

"I knew it," she sighed. "It's a woman!"

"My dear aunt, it's always a woman," he answered, sententiously.

"But in this particular case, it might be a fisherman's daughter?" the old lady suggested.

"As you will," he temporized.

She straightened her back and turned impatiently in her seat. "Fishermen are such an ordinary class," she counselled.

"Saint Peter was a fisherman," he argued, "his opinion had great influence in the Christian Church. I should say that as joint-founder of the Church at Rome he was far from being ordinary."

"Oh,—Nelson, I mean,—her family," she contended. "You know perfectly well,—but you prefer to argue the matter."

"Whose family is under discussion?" he asked. And as he spoke he threw back his head, as a man who had no fear of man or woman. His indolent manner disappeared, and his question was brisk, abrupt. His large brown eyes, glowing with

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friendliness, gazed frankly into hers—they seemed to invite her confidence.

She met his gaze with equanimity.

“Miss Gunther’s,—” she said, calmly.

“A very charming young woman,” he asserted boldly.

She glanced forward, at Anne who was still viewing the prospect from the bow.

“But, as I said before, people are talking. One cannot be too careful,” she cautioned.

“The people be,—blamed,” he said.

“Still my dear Nelson, when a charming young woman rows a mile or so from shore in a small boat, alone, and you take her on board the *Phyllis*, and—and disappear for a week; what must they think?” she went on.

“They might think that it was time to leave me to my fate,” he suggested. She sniffed the air, and sighed in a way that indicated her opinion of the young woman in question, and continued.

“It will amount to a scandal if she continues to stay on the yacht.”

“Stay on the yacht,” he looked surprised.

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"I saw her here this afternoon," she insisted.

He laughed. "So you did, I'm glad that you met her."

"We did not meet her," she corrected, with much dignity, "we did not even speak to her."

"Then I'm sorry that you did not meet her, and that you did not have the good fortune to speak to her," he bowed urbanely.

A carefully modulated, perfectly correct laugh came from the direction of the bow,—and the swish of a lustrous petticoat.

"If you two are going to talk secrets all evening," interrupted Anne, "I am going to order a solitary cup of tea."

"We have finished," said Nelson, with determination, "and your suggestion is timely, I'll call the steward."

XI

IN the recesses of his cabin, Nelson indulged in the gentle stimulation produced by what the French call an aperatif, the English a pick-me-up, and the Americans a cocktail.

It was of the variety known as a Martini—made in his steward's most elaborate style—a real old fashioned Martini, the ingredients of which blend and intermix into one gratifying compound. At his club it was highly commended as an efficacious remedy for extreme cases of irritability.

As he balanced the thin empty glass between thumb and finger the wrinkles on his brow disappeared, his eyes grew brighter, and he began to take a more cheerful interest in the things about him. Amongst these objects was a little packet of letters that had accumulated at the Lafayette Hotel, in Portland—his last known address—and which the mate had brought with him, together

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with sundry other packages, the day before. Putting down his glass he carefully sorted over the little bundle; separating the delicately tinted, large square envelopes from the business ones with their brazen corner cards. The latter he set to one side, with a toss of impatience, and then went over the others more leisurely. One letter, embossed on its flap, engaged his attention.

“That’s from Lighthall,” he suddenly remembered, as the point of his knife slipped under the cover. “By George! I forgot all about him.”

It was awkward, complicated.

“Dear Nelson:” it commenced.

“If you really mean it I shall come, with great pleasure. Your letter reached me in Newport—beastly dull there, nothing doing at all excepting the stupid old fun of watching the antics of the sudden rich. Am writing this from N. Y. Just ran down for a day or so, to put up more margin. Market is on the toboggan slide. Will meet you in Portland, Lafayette, Aug. 10th.”

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Nelson looked over the top of the letter to a highly colored calendar, that hung on the panel above his desk.

“August the tenth,” he exclaimed, “why that’s to-day!”

He recalled the circumstances. He called to mind, reluctantly, the idle hour and fatuous mood in which he had written the letter, inviting Lighthall to share the monotony of his vacation on the *Phyllis*. Then, not having received an immediate answer, he had forgotten all about it. “August the tenth,” he repeated, “did I say the tenth?” He pulled the ends of his drooping mustache together, and meditated. Then his face grew brighter, and his manner indicated one whose mind was made up.

He sent for the captain.

“Botts,” he said hurriedly, “how far is it to Portland?”

The skipper’s glance included the empty glass, the owner’s genial face, and the view of the cove as seen through the cabin window.

“’Bout the same as it was comin’,” he replied wondering.

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“I mean how soon could we get there?” Nelson corrected.

“We could do it in an hour, easy,” affirmed the captain.

XII

MEANWHILE, Charlie Lighthall was wandering around the office rotunda of the Lafayette Hotel,—waiting for something to turn up. He was of a type that can be seen almost any day in the café of any urban club. Small, slightly stooping,—he wore a brown derby hat, a brown drooping mustache, a high standing collar, large loose-fitting, checked garments, light blue hose, and yellow shoes. In one hand he carried a pair of yellow dogskin gloves, and in the other he had a cane with an oversized bone handle. He looked weary as he smoked a large brown cigar, encased in a paper ring of red and gold. His patience was exhausted.

“I’ll wait until eight o’clock,” he said to himself, “and then it’s me for little old N. Y.—Ugh!” he complained, “think of a town of this size and not a drop to drink,” he was vexed.

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He glanced at the office clock, and settled himself near a window. As he smoked he became conscious of the fact that a man, dressed in very ordinary clothes, was watching him closely,—in fact was deliberately staring at him.

To emphasize his annoyance at the fellow's rudeness, he arose, turned his chair, and sat down again with his back to the curious stranger.

"Now,—confound you!" he muttered irritably, "gape and be—"

"Hello,—little feller," somebody said, just behind him, and he looked up to find the inquisitive stranger laughing in his face.

"Well, I'll be—Nelson!" he gasped.

"Right,—but not the first time. I fooled you all right, and anybody who can fool Charles Lyndhurst Lighthall,—why it will be simply a walk-over with—with—the Islanders."

Lighthall planted his cane behind him for a brace, looked up into his friend's beaming face and joined in the laugh.

"I'm sympathetic," he marvelled, "what's the game?"

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“And you are suddenly called to New York, this evening, on important business,” repeated Lighthall.

“Important business, that’s right. Tell her,—that is, hint to her, that you heard on the street that I was short of Amalgamated,—or any old thing.” Nelson suggested.

“And that you had to leave here on the Bar Harbor express, this—”

He glanced at the clock, and shook his head. “But you can’t do it.”

“Do what?” asked Nelson, fidgety.

“It’s eight o’clock, and the express leaves at eight five,” he sat back in his chair, stretched his legs, and yawned,—

“Oh that is immaterial.”

“Then you are not going to New York?”

“You can tell her—”

“I shall not,” said Lighthall bluntly.

The “little feller” sat up straight in his chair and returned Nelson’s stare.

“Not a deliberate lie, you know,” he explained. Nelson’s face reddened with anger.

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“Lie,” he repeated, “certainly not.”

There was an awkward silence.

Nelson saw his reflection in the plate glass opposite. His anger seemed to increase. Perhaps he was thinking that the sacrifice of his mustache was a small affair as compared to the rebuke just administered by—yes, that was probably the most humiliating thing of all—Charlie Lighthall! The butt for all the club. A man whom his friends never took seriously. He was paying quite a price for his fun. “Fun—nothing of the kind,” he retorted mentally, “I believe that I could lie and steal for Hilda.”

Then his glance softened as he turned to Lighthall. “A lie that does no one any harm, is classed differently I imagine.”

“A lie, is a lie,” his companion asserted doggedly. At the same time his thin nostrils dilated with pride. It was something to his credit to corner the big man in front of him. Nelson was known to quite a wide circle of readers for his admirable work called “Creative Crudities,” a sort of lament over the so-called mistakes of Providence—a book

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of keen subtleties ; and to find the author below his ideals, temporizing with the truth,—it gave him a feeling of self-exaltation.

Nelson smiled good-naturedly.

“All right,” he said, “call it what you please, but do me the favor to say to my aunt, that the yacht is at her disposal, to go where she pleases, and that you will accompany her and Miss Conrad.”

“And you won't go with us?” questioned the other suspiciously.

Nelson detected the equivocal expression on his face.

“I really must attend to a matter of very serious importance,” he said, apologetic. Then he arose, and Lighthall followed him to the door of the hotel.

“That carriage,” he said, pointing to one at the curb, “will take you to the wharf,—the launch is waiting there.”

Lighthall turned back.

“My baggage,” he said, advancing towards the office.

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Nelson overtook him.

"It is in the carriage,—and I took the liberty of settling your bill."

Lighthall protested.

"A mere trifle,—please." Nelson gripped his hand with unaccustomed fervor.

"Botts will see to everything," he reminded him. "You are really doing me a great favor. Good-bye."

"Confound it!" said Nelson desperately, "what an arrant fool am I becoming, anyway. Have I reached all these years to find myself the victim of love at first sight?"

He was seated in an easy chair in his room at the Lafayette, where the hum of the street rose and fell in the still night air. Beyond the city was the bay, its waters gleaming like burnished silver in the moon's rays, the air from its surface fanning his brow. Beneath his window, over the way, in the cool green of a little park, there was a perpetual tinkling of drops of water gently splashing in a tiny fountain. Nelson had a little table by his side, and he was trying to start the new book on a sub-

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ject that had been weaving—weaving, tormenting and troubling him for some time past.

But now he put down his pencil, and went over again the meeting with Hilda. As the picture developed, he saw the little white boat and its occupant, rising and falling on the silky surface of the water; and the glory of her hair. Then the coloring of the picture became more vivid, he could almost hear her voice, round, flexible,—a woman's voice. He observed now, with increasing interest, the suppleness of her figure, as her lithe body bent to the stroke of the oars,—and her eyes, looking straight into his. Luminous dark blue eyes, showing dreamily through the surrounding crimson haze. And her flashing white teeth. The picture vanished, and he found himself saying “bo—it” for boat.

Then he got up and examined his features in the mirror. His smooth face looked back at him from the glass. “Fool,—old fool,” he muttered scornfully. Then he went back to the window, and watched the movements of the people passing to and fro. And as he contemplated the peaceful

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scene, a feeling of quiet happiness, of content, began to grow within him, so that his heart grew tender, and he repeated the accusation, "fool,—old fool," in a friendly tone. And the feeling of quiet happiness grew and expanded into a sudden illumination of rare brightness. The starry night, the delicious smell of the sea, the voices of the night, the tinkling of the drops of water falling from the fountain, all seemed to take on a new,—a poignant sense, harmonious, blissful.

He sat down again and took up his pencil. He was resolved to carry out his original thought. "Creative Crudities," must be followed by something even more scholarly, more convincing, learned. But it must also be—Life.

His resolution to break away from his surroundings, to mingle with the simple Islanders, was no hastily formed plan,—so he argued to himself. He had shaved his mustache, cast aside his fine raiment, and donned an ordinary suit of ready-made clothes, so that he could be one of them, live with them, and study their habits. And then, he would write his book. He began to scribble on the pad,—in search

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of a title. "The Masses," he wrote. "That sounds well," he commented. "I could write about their work, their toil." Then his heart began singing, as he recalled the vision of a road up-hill and down, winding through forests of pines, and maples, of alluring by-paths, soft, green, mossy. Of overhanging boughs, of little white cottages buried deep in orchards.

"Nonsense," he complained, "I've had too much vacation. I must get to work."

He bent over the little table. He tried to concentrate his mind on the problem of Life. He worked hard over two or three fine phrases. Then he threw down his pencil and stared out of the window. . . .

It was there again,—the picture. Her deep blue eyes, laughing, teasing, indifferent. He could see them plainly, in the blithesome awakening that had come to him through the darkness.

Again he took his pad of paper, and began to write. Then he threw it impetuously across the room. "No," he said.

"Not to-night, not to-night."

XIII

THE next morning,—what a different feeling it brings to each individual life—Nelson awoke to a world that was the same, and yet, that was different. A flood of sunlight brightened every corner of his room, touching the old furniture, radiating from the mirror, freshening the faded curtains, harmonizing the tints and shadows on the wall, burnishing, gliding, beautifying every angle, every nook, of the apartment.

He awoke to the joy of life, to the wonderful beauty of the world, to the song that his heart was singing in chorus with the birds that were twittering outside of his window.

His watch on the little table at his bedside marked the early hour of six, as he arose and began his preparations for the day. Over in the corner, where he had thrown it the night before, he found his tablet, and he wondered—as he regarded the

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words that he had written—whether “The Masses” expressed the thoughts that were rioting through his brain. I imagine that such were his thoughts, for his face grew troubled as he read aloud:

“With the masses there is much of gloom, and misery, their work is constant, their pleasures few; they go about—”

Zip—he tore off that page and crumpled it in his hand.

“When they return at night to their comfortless homes their hearts are as lead, and their moods—”

Zip—zip—another, and another page followed the first, and behold—the pad was clean and new again, its smooth white surface ready for new impressions. . . .

In his outward appearance he had changed greatly. His mustache had been shaved and his hair cut so short that it revealed an incipient baldness on the back of his head. When he had added a pair of large spectacles—the glasses of which were plain and of no convexity—his best friends might have failed to recognize him. . . .

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He chose to go down to Orr's Island on the afternoon boat—the *Aucocisco*—because, well,—because there might be a chance of meeting Hilda.

Of course, even though such a coincidence occurred, she would not have known him in his disguise. So, one can only guess at his motives, which, however, were strong enough to keep Nelson idling around Portland all of that day in a kind of fool's paradise.

In half an hour he had deposited sundry checks in the bank, had obtained a small pocket check book, to be used in case of dire necessity, and then had walked down to the end of a wharf, from which point he could see the *Phyllis*, riding lazily at anchor in the harbor.

Overhead, a light breeze blew faintly in from the sea; long low schooners with three—four—five masts lay deep in the water, heavily burdened with coal from Southern mines. A large white steamer from Boston, crowded with passengers, swept majestically past him. Sail boats of infinite variety tacked, went about, and sailed away, only to return and repeat their manœuvres. Just beside

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him two men in a boat were cautiously sorting over a pile of lobsters,—looking for shorts. The air was full of the enticing odors that arise from wharves and shipping; the smell of tarred rope, of wooden boxes and barrels, of all the odoriferous smells that hang in a boy's memory and incite him to the folly of truancy.

The bay, in the glow of the early day, was blue as sapphire. In the distance was an island, and beyond that could be seen the dim outlines of other islands, and more islands—almost lost to view in the summer haze. . . .

From place to place he sauntered idly the long summer's day. Then he began to consult his watch, and each time that he looked at it he would examine sharply the movements of the second hand, to see whether it was really moving. From four o'clock until five, time dragged with the most exasperating slowness. From five o'clock until ten minutes after, the *Aucocisco* seemed to his impatient mind to be permanently built to the wharf.

A moment later she backed out slowly into the harbor. Standing on the after-deck, Nelson

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scanned the various craft, in search of the *Phyllis*. She was nowhere in view. Then he went forward and there was the yacht, just crossing the steamer's bow. He was so close to them that he could distinguish his aunt and Anne, on the deck,—apparently in close conversation with Lighthall. Probably the latter was telling the ladies how he, Nelson, had been called suddenly away—on business to New York—and his aunt was exchanging glances with Anne,—over Lighthall's head while she listened to his explanations. Then they would laugh and sail away.

“Good luck, good luck,” he muttered exultantly. Then he pushed up two steamer chairs close to the rail, and pulling his pipe from a side pocket he filled it leisurely, and, sitting down, he lazily put his feet on the other chair, and gave himself up to blissful anticipation.

The sun shone gently, through a haze of pinkish yellow. On the horizon, soft grey clouds edged with narrow bands of gold mingled with the blue of the sea—a mirror-like sea that reflected the colors of the sky in its translucent depths. Then

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gently, quietly, came to his ear the sound of music. Somewhere in the bow were a couple of musicians with a harp and violin. He listened as the strains wafted towards him on the light breeze, and remembering the words, he murmured them softly, keeping time to the music.

It was Schubert's—he searched his memory in the effort of recalling the last time that he had heard it; then he abandoned the effort.

It was never like this, no matter where he had heard it. He was content to sit and hum the words:

*“Midst the bright sheen of the mirror-like waters,
Swan-like is floating the wavering boat;
Gently along on those glittering waters,
Glideth our spirit, away like a boat.”*

The evening was settling calm and peacefully over the bay, and now the crafts of all kinds were sailing to anchor—gliding silently to their respective harbors. When the music had ceased a dark-featured man, his head bare, his hat in his hand, came to him for a contribution.

In his present mood he was generous.

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Crumpling up a dollar bill in his hand so as to avoid publicity, he dropped it in the hat. The expressive dark eyes of the man twinkled understandingly. Leaning over Nelson he said in a low tone, "The next, I play for you—yes." He nodded, and smiled confidentially. Then he went forward and whispered to his companion, to the man with the harp. There was much preliminary tuning, and then the popular melody arose in the air from Spenser's Opera:

*"Love, love, mystery of love,
Sweet gift sent from above;
Joy, joy, moment supreme,
When love unfolds its dream."*

He leaned forward in rapt attention. The spirit of the dreamy waltz was calling—calling to him alone amongst the crowd of passengers. The soul of the old violin was vibrating with the joy of life, it was telling him things, little promises of future possibilities, that thrilled his heart with blissful anticipation.

How it recalled a certain night,—a box in the theatre from which he could see a wide expanse of

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upturned faces—tense, happy, hopeful! How he had shrugged his shoulders, and smiled cynically! He glanced around the groups of passengers. Many of them were summer boarders, on their way to the several islands. He noticed their faces—pale and drawn, with the blight of the city upon them. Some were Islanders, returning with their purchases made in Portland. In front of him were two college boys—he knew by their conversation—dressed in rough, dirty corduroys, flannel shirts, and leather belts around their waists. They looked like cowboys. They were unwashed and unshaven, and their actions indicated a desire on their part to live up to their appearance. Nelson regarded them closely, with an eye for material in his forthcoming book, and then discarded them as counterfeits—not genuine. He surveyed the little group of people with good-natured tolerance. Each individual seemed to be bent on business, action, the restless energy of the masses. But surrounding them and enveloping them was the calm of the evening—of rest. And the delicious smell of the sea—cool, refreshing,

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that permeated his senses, and inspired his imagination—bringing back memories that were not memories, but imaginings, illusive images of the mind, that filled his heart with the pleasures of hope, and a longing for fulfillment Suddenly, with a bump against the piling of the wharf, the *Aucocisco* came to a standstill, and a voice recalled his wandering senses :

“All off for Orr’s Island.”

A little crowd of idlers had gathered on the wharf to await the arrival of the evening boat—it was one of the mild excitements of each day. He had just crossed the gang plank, when he noticed a face, upturned to the boat, in the full glare of a large lantern, within reach of his hand ; he brushed against her garments as he passed.

“Hilda,” he whispered to himself.

Then he walked up to the hotel and wrote his new name in the guest book :

“William Collins, Philadelphia.”

XIV

PERCHED up on the hillside, overlooking the rocks and the sea, in the shade of a young pine tree, where the air was always warm and soft, where the birds sang in the trees overhead, Hilda, dressed in white skirt and gray knit jacket, with a bunch of red berries pinned in her belt, was reading a letter from Grace.

“So you actually stopped the yacht, and made him take you aboard. Well, Hilda,—I could never have done such a thing—and all by yourself. John said it was ‘nervy,’—but he is a man. I sent the gloves right off, because I hate to owe anything, and am glad they suited you.

“Dear me, how romantic it was, I wonder if Mr. Thomas is married. Somehow I don’t believe that he is, but of

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course one can never tell. I often wish that we were rich and owned a yacht. Don't you? John is just the dearest husband, but he has to work so hard, and slave all day down in the bank, and in the evening he is so tired that we never go anywhere. But we are saving up to buy a motor boat, and when John gets his vacation next summer perhaps we are going to take a little cruise. John says that Mr. Thomas must be pretty rich judging by the size of the checks that he deposited in the bank. Don't say that I told you this, John gets so angry when I say anything about bank business,—well, good-bye.

“P. S.—I forgot to say that the *Phyllis* left here last evening for Bar Harbor—so John told me, perhaps you knew that, but I thought I would mention it.”

Hilda gazed off into the sea, with its rippling waves gently sliding up on the brown shelving

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rocks, its white caps off in the distance; over the islands, in and out,—and between which were white sails; down to the motor boats, darting busily up to one point, then to another,—the fishermen busy with their lobster pots. She picked a delicate blue wild flower, growing at her feet, and put it in the envelope, with the letter.

“The *Phyllis* in Bar Harbor,” she sighed. . . .

She arose and turned her face towards home—to the little white cottage on the hill.

“Well,—I must do my work.”

PART SECOND

I

“WELL,—Mr. Collins, how do you propose to study the masses on this tiny bit of God’s country?” Nelson reflected as he arose the next morning and surveyed the prospect from his open window.

It was beautiful as before; the quiet bay, the ever changing sea, the keen salt air, the incense from the pines were there; but—he was different.

To a man of his tastes and habits the step that he had taken was a long one in advance of anything that he had ever attempted. Until a few days ago—before a woman’s voice had hailed him from a little white boat, in Portland harbor—he had led a life more or less detached from ordinary people, and had taken a certain kind of pleasure in the fact that he could pursue his own fancy. He had money, his pictures, his clubs, a few congenial friends, his books, an artistic temperament,

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an eye for beauty, and a sense of humor; and with all this he had a well-developed literary faculty that enabled him to do some leisurely writing when he was in the mood. As he had grown older he had been writing more and reading less. He had become more meditative, more addicted to idle saunterings, and observation. From his books he had deduced a sort of philosophy which taught him to avoid the anticipation of the calamities that do not happen, and to live, as far as possible, in the present. He had had a wide experience in the world of society, a tarnished world that was sham and tinsel, with its ridiculous, pretentious, flummery. He had appraised women at what he thought they were worth, as a necessary part of the universal scheme, but not of an individual life. Yet a woman's voice had called to him alone on the water, and—behold a world that is green and fragrant, a real, sterling world, with an atmosphere that set at naught his philosophy, that took his mind from the present, to blissful anticipation of the future. In the light of a bright morning he was conscious that the step that he had taken

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was not without its ludicrous side. When he thought it over very judicially, he was obliged to confess to himself that this sudden enthusiasm of his to study the masses might evaporate into very superficial observations, unless Hilda could be made to take an interest in the subject, or at least be herself a subject, a type of the poor fisher folks whose wrongs he meant to set before the world in the best literary style. He argued, plausibly, that the honorarium that an indulgent publisher might pay for his services, had nothing to do with the case, as his fortune was ample for all his needs, and his motives were purely benevolent.

The ludicrous feature was the intense desire that he felt to meet her, to be with her, to hear her talk, to gaze into her eyes, to confess all that he had done—for her. He was not in love,—not this morning, but a comrade, a fellow-student, would help him wonderfully in the serious work for which he had temporarily cast aside his life of luxurious ease. But he must be careful. He must explain to her—without discovering himself—just enough of his plans to engage her interest.

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Therefore he must go and see her—at once. So he inquired the way to Hagen Gunther's cottage. It was not hard to find. Everyone on the island knew Captain Gunther. Everyone liked him.

He was called "old man Gunther," not because he was old, but because everyone felt the necessity of using some form of affection whenever they spoke of him. He was stout, rosy-cheeked, genial, with a pair of blue eyes that twinkled with an excess of good nature. As Nelson approached he was the first to speak.

"Fine morning."

"Delightful," said Nelson, with enthusiasm. "Are you Captain Gunther?"

"That's my name," he admitted.

Having made up his mind what he was to say he proceeded at once to business.

"Er,—have you any rooms to let—that is, one room?" He scanned the little cottage, wondering where, in its diminutive interior, a spare room could possibly be located. He felt the eyes of the captain upon him, carefully inspecting him from head to toe, in the covert, shrewd way that is

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habitual with seamen. The survey was evidently satisfactory.

“How long did you calculate to stay?” he questioned. Then a voice came clearly. “Uncle Hagen.” And he met her—face to face—as she suddenly appeared from the direction of the orchard.

He bowed as the captain said simply, “My niece Hilda.” Then he continued, “This gentleman wants to rent our spare room, Hilda; you can arrange that.” He had settled the matter as far as he was concerned, and he went whistling about his business.

As he made his bow he was conscious of the fact that she was looking him over with a critical eye; a trifle longer and more critically, perhaps, than the circumstances warranted. It made him uneasy, and he felt his heart thumping, and his face growing redder under her searching gaze. He had decided to disguise his voice, if necessary, but when he attempted it, the result was a sort of quavering falsetto that expired in his throat.

She stood smiling, unembarrassed; and then, ap-

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parently satisfied with her conclusions,—perhaps with just a slight tremor in her voice,—“How long would you like to stay?” she asked.

“Forever and—forever,” Nelson said to himself as he beheld her loveliness. His self-possession was returning. The calm way in which she had addressed him on the business in hand was reassuring. It was evident from her manner that she had no suspicion that he was other than a casual summer boarder.

He had made an excellent beginning.

“I am uncertain,” he answered her. “It all depends on you.”

For the instant he had forgotten all about his disguise, and had spoken his thoughts. Fortunately she laughed, a trilling, sprightly cadence.

“On me,—” she wondered.

“On you,” he went on steadily, his wits having returned, “your Uncle seems to have left the matter for you to arrange.”

“Oh—”

They stood for a few minutes in silence, beside the stone curbing of an old well; it was a sweep

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well, where the bucket was hung to the end of a long pole, by which it was lowered, and then drawn to the surface filled to the brim with delicious pure water, the same kind of a well that our forefathers dugged in the virgin rock, and walled up with clean stone linings; a well from which they drank deep draughts of limpid water, and thanked God for their blessings.

To be in her society was sufficient bliss; to feel the warm soft air, full of the pine-fragrance; to hear the birds singing overhead, and the buzzing of the insects.

It was Hilda who broke the silence.

“You may have the room as long as you wish,” she said thoughtfully.

“Thank you.” He accepted fervently. “I’ll pay a month in advance.”

“Oh—” she stopped, hesitated.

“Well?” he wondered.

“I forgot to mention the price,” she explained.

“Oh, never mind the price,” he reassured her.

“It’s five dollars a week,—without meals,” she informed him.

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“Without meals,” he repeated carelessly. “Who cares for meals, anyway?” he asked his exulting spirit. Were they not standing side by side, within touch of each other, conversing together, looking into each other's eyes?—

“The hotel is not far,” she suggested.

“Only a step,” he affirmed. “I can easily arrange for meals.”

He bowed, and was moving away.

“Oh—” exclaimed Hilda.

He turned expectantly.

“Your name,—” she reminded him.

“Name—? My name is Thomas—Collins.”

“Thomas Collins,” she repeated, slowly.

“William,” he corrected, “William Collins.” Then he pounded himself, mentally, for having so nearly forgotten his part.

“You will be here this—this evening?” she questioned.

“If convenient,—to—you,” he asked.

His heart was singing—singing, his temples throbbing with the quick pulsating joy of living. Never was the sky so blue, the grass so green, the

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air so keen and filled with ozone. Never was a little white cottage so artistic, in its setting of clinging vines and flowers. Never was a princess, in fame or fiction, who could compare with the demure maiden who stood before him.

“Quite convenient,” she said, flashing a smile into his eyes that near caused him giddiness: and she walked away, through the orchard, toward the pines.

II

NELSON'S study of the masses began the day following. He had Uncle Hagen marooned in an old splint-bottomed chair, in a shady place, behind the barn. The captain had done most of his chores about the place, finishing his afternoon tasks by carrying two large tin buckets of fresh water from the well to the kitchen. Nelson sat in a sailor's hammock that swung between two sturdy apple trees. As he swung slowly to and fro he could observe a graceful figure, enveloped in a voluminous apron, flitting back and forth, from one room to the other, in the cottage. The figure was doing her best to keep out of his sight, and attend to her household duties at the same time. The windows were wide open, and her efforts required some skilful manœuvres. . . .

"You can't make much—" asserted Nelson.

"I'm not what you might call rich," the cap-

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tain admitted. "But we don't have much use for money down here."

He pulled down the peak of his old canvas cap to shade his eyes from the slanting rays of the afternoon sun, and puffed at his pipe contentedly.

Nelson shifted his seat a little, to obtain a better view of the cottage windows, and lapsed into silence.

Uncle Hagen peered from under his cap, watching him. "Now, what might your business be?" he inquired, frankly.

"My business—?" "Oh—I write books—and things."

"Any money in it?" said the captain, swinging one leg over the other, and holding his elbow in the palm of his hand.

"Not much," Nelson confessed.

"Should think not, never suit me."
He turned his chair a little, and glanced at the boats in the bay. They had turned with the ebbing tide, and were pulling restlessly at their anchors.

"Now take fishing," he added, keeping his eye

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on the boats. "Of course, it's hard work, but when everything is going right, and a fair wind,—well, it suits me all right. There ain't anything better."

"There's not any money in fishing," Nelson suggested.

"Money?—no, I guess there ain't. But there's a living. Ain't anybody starving on this island, as I know of."

"Dangerous, and risky," persisted Nelson.

The captain smiled. "Sounds just like a story book—I always liked those tales of the dangers of the sea, and the almighty deep. Hilda has one with a boat up—up—where was it?—in the North Sea somewheres, with icebergs and monsters of the deep, and the ship on fire, and sinking fast with all on board." The captain waved the stem of his pipe in the direction of the blue North. "I always liked those tales, 'cause I never saw anything like it in my sea-faring,—must be grand, just for the experience," he mused.

"But you must have had some pretty tough experiences." Nelson contended.

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“Most of us have, before we reach fifty, but mine warn’t uncommon—just a little hustling around, lively, for a while, but more often just easy sailing.”

Apparently the fisherman’s mind reverted to the stories of the “almighty deep,” for between the puffs of his pipe he drawled, “Wonder—if the fellow—was ever there?”

“The fellow—?” queried Nelson.

“Um—the fellow that wrote all that windy stuff about the terrible storms, and the poor sailors out in the blinding mist ’nd snow, with their bare feet bleeding on the icy decks,—he must have had a grand experience.”

“Oh—” said Nelson, loftily. “an author does not have to experience everything that he writes.”

“No—”

“Oh—no,” explained Nelson. “Why some of the best books have been written about places that the authors have never seen.”

“How did they do it?” the captain demanded. “It isn’t in reason that a man can tell folks about a thing he’s never seen.” He settled back in his

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old splint rocker with the air of a man who had his own opinions, let others think as they chose.

“Well—” said Nelson, thoughtfully, “they use their imagination—”

“Just so,” interrupted the captain, “and a man’s imagination will often carry him a long way from the truth.”

“Well, I don’t know about that,” said the other, doubtfully. He abandoned the vantage point from which he could view the cottage, and stretched himself at full length on his back in the hammock. The soft air fanned his face as he swayed slowly back and forth, and the captain’s voice reached him at certain periods, in the intervals of which his mind was wondering—in a world of imagination.

“What a man imagines to-day often becomes the truth to-morrow,” he asserted.

“Like as not,” assented the captain. “It’s the unexpected thing that always happens, so they say, but my experience is that, if you keep thinking and thinking about something, it’s most sure to happen.”

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"You mean if you keep wishing and wishing for something," suggested Nelson.

"That's the idea," the captain affirmed.

"Oh, that's not imagination; that's suggestion. You simply wish for a thing so much that your mind begins to work out every conceivable idea that will lead to its attainment."

"Maybe so," nodded the captain. . . .

He smoked steadily for a few moments, and then he asked: "Been much on the water?"

"Oh, yes, quite often," replied Nelson.

"All the way across?"

"Across and around," he reflected.

"Around—the world?" The captain removed his pipe, and contemplated his companion with a look of mingled deference and respect. Then he reached over to the hammock and placed his hand on Nelson's arm. "Now honest," he demanded, "did you ever see anything like those monsters of the deep, a throwing the life boats fifty feet in the air, with the ship on fire, and icebergs crashing all around, and sailors with bleeding feet a clinging to the masts?"

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Nelson shook his head.

“No—I never saw anything like that,” he answered. “But, of course, such things might happen,” he added thoughtfully.

“Perhaps,” the captain admitted, “but you’ve been across and around, and so have I, and I’ve followed the sea since I was ten years old, and they never happened to us.”

“That’s so,” mused Nelson, as he watched the tiny spirals of smoke, curling upwards from the chimney of the snug white cottage.

III

I N his room that evening Nelson was wrapt in gay visions of unreal bliss, with a deliberate indulgence, that set at naught all of dear old Cowper's warning. He painted the illusive form, the kindling grace, the modest seeming eye, beneath whose beauteous beams, belying Heaven—but why should we linger over Cowper?

“As yet,” he muttered in gleesome mood, “as yet, she doesn't dream who I am.” He chuckled complacently, and drawing his chair closer to the window he allowed his eyes to rest on the splendor of the starry heavens—and lighted a cigarette. Away off on the horizon, just above a wide reach of dark restless water, the turret of a revolving light flashed, and was dark, flashed and was dark again. . . .

Lighting the kerosene lamp that stood on his table he picked up a book—as was his habit—to

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read a few pages before retiring for the night. It was not a mere coincidence that the slim volume happened to be Schopenhauer. He remembered that he had selected it, together with a few other works, to aid his researches in the preparation of his book.

The article that arrested his attention seemed to be an inspiration.

It was headed, "Sufferings of the World," and he read:

"But misfortune has its uses; for, as our bodily frame would burst asunder if the pressure of the atmosphere was removed, so, if the lives of men were relieved of all need, hardship and adversity; if everything in hand were successful, they would be so swollen with arrogance that, though they might not burst, they would present the spectacle of unbridled folly—nay, they would go mad. And I may say, further, that a certain amount of care or pain or trouble is necessary for every man at all times. A ship without ballast is unstable and will not go straight.

"Certain it is that work, worry, labor and trou-

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ble, form the lot of almost all men their whole life long. But if all wishes were fulfilled as soon as they arose, how would men occupy their lives? What would they do with their time? If the world were a paradise of luxury and ease, a land flowing with milk and honey, where every Jack obtained his Jill at once and without any difficulty, men would either die of boredom or hang themselves; or there would be wars, massacres, and murders; so that in the end mankind would inflict more suffering on itself than it has now to accept at the hands of Nature."

"Hm,—” Nelson laid aside the book and took up his pad. He chewed the end of his pencil, knitted his brows and contemplated the picture of "A Storm at Sea" that hung on the wall. Then he frowned, laid down his pad, and again took up his book. Turning over the leaves, as a man will do when the part that he has read is distasteful, his eyes chanced on the following:

"For as lions are provided with claws and teeth, and elephants and boars with tusks, bulls with horns, and the cuttle fish with its cloud of inky

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fluid, so Nature has equipped woman, for her defence and protection, with the arts of dissimulation; and all the power which Nature has conferred upon man in the shape of physical strength and reason, has been bestowed upon women in this form. Hence, dissimulation is innate in woman, and almost as much a quality of the stupid as of the clever. It is as natural for them to make use of it on every occasion as it is for those animals to employ their means of defence when they are attacked; they have a feeling that in doing so they are only within their rights.

“Therefore, a woman who is perfectly truthful and not given to dissimulation is, perhaps, an impossibility, and for this very reason they are so quick at seeing through dissimulation in others that it is not a wise thing to attempt it with them.”

“Balderdash,—you old pessimist,” he exclaimed as he closed the book. Then, between visions of Hilda, the twinkling stars, the flashing light-house, and the voices of the night, his senses grew weaker. He fell asleep. . . .

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In her room adjoining—with only a thin plaster partition between—sat Hilda, her head bent low, intently engaged in writing an answer to her friend Grace's last communication. I shall not disclose all that was in that letter—even a heroine is entitled to some privacy—but only certain parts that seem to elucidate subsequent events.

. . . . “and, Oh—Grace, what do you think? I had made up my mind to forget all about the yacht—and its owner, when I came back to the house, and there I saw a strange man talking to Uncle Hagen. He had his back to me, but I heard him ask the man how long he was going to stay, so that I knew that he was a summer boarder, and I didn't want any boarders, so I called out to Uncle Hagen, and then the man turned around, and who do you think it was? You never can guess, so you musn't tell anyone, not even John, and please do burn this letter right away. I was so surprised that I just stood and

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stared at him, then when he spoke, his voice sounded so funny, just like a squeak. . . . he said his name was Collins, but I knew right away that he was Mr. Thomas. . . . his mustache was shaved, and he was dressed sort of queer, but he wore the same big gold seal on his watch chain, and a very curious ring that I would know amongst a thousand now, remember, Grace, what we promised at school about telling secrets. If you tell John he says he is writing a book, and he wants me to help him,—me—. I am really curious to see what he is going to do next.”

She put her head out of the window and noticed that there was no light coming from the adjoining room. Then she slipped a shawl over her head to protect herself from the heavy dew—which on the Islands is almost akin to rain—and stole softly down the narrow stairs, and out onto the road. There was no light, save that which shown dimly

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from the stars, but she found no difficulty in making her way along the narrow pathway, leading from the cottage to the highway, and thence to the corner store that contained the post office.

It was very late,—after midnight. She realized that fact after she turned her steps homeward. The light of the stars seemed to be unusually dim. A fog was coming up from the sea, which made every well-known object unfamiliar. She glanced hurriedly behind her, imagining that she heard footsteps. She was certain that she saw a figure of a man following her. Her heart beat violently as she quickened her steps, and noted that the man was walking even faster and would soon overtake her. Hilda was brave, but this was an hour and a circumstance when a woman forgets all that she ever knew about bravery. She was frightened as he came closer and touched her arm. Instinctively she gathered up her skirts and was about to fly, when a rough, strong hand closed around her wrist, and the man said: “Hilda—my but you’re skeery.”

She was fluttering and struggling to free her-

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self from his grasp, like a captured wild bird. She wanted to scream.

“Let me go, Herbert,” she gasped, “you frightened me nearly to death.” She spoke crossly, perversely. “Let me go, I say—Herbert Kenneth if you don't let me go I'll—never speak to you, never.”

His hold loosened slowly, and he felt the soft warm hand slip through his fingers. He was suddenly conscious that she had never used that tone of voice when speaking to him before, never. Then, as quickly, he recalled trifles light as air, little nothings when considered singly, but collectively becoming apparent, evident.

“What's the matter with you, anyway?” he said abruptly.

Intuitively she read his thoughts, and understood his question. At another time she might have given him an answer that would have sufficed him for sometime to come, but at present she only said: “I was scared, Herbert.” Then she permitted him to again find her hand in the darkness, and to have it for a moment in his own. “Good-

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night, Herbert," she said in a low tone—they were almost at the cottage—"it's awfully late." She moved away, into the mist.

"Good-night," he muttered, looking after her.

IV

A PERFECT day was closing in a dying glory of gorgeous color. The birds had ceased their chatter, and the busy bees their work. The fisher folk on Orr's Island were sitting on their little porches, or on the steps of their cottages, enjoying the cool of the evening.

As Nelson walked slowly up the path which led from the main road to the cottage, he turned around occasionally to see the wonderful colors of the after-glow. And as he viewed the changing tints, from red to yellow, and from yellow to pink and pale greens, and then a blending of them together, Hilda's voice came to him from somewhere amongst the trees.

"A lovely sunset," she said.

"Magnificent," he replied, as he threw away his cigarette, and approached her.

"But much more beautiful from the hill—Sun-

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set Hill, we call it." She was dressed in cool white, with a light knitted scarf about her shoulders—a vision of simplicity. She extended her arm, and indicated the direction, "just up the road, not very far." His eyes rested on the round, sun-burned arm, and remained there.

"I could never find it—alone, I'm sure," he declared.

She smiled, lightly.

"Perhaps Uncle Hagen would go with you," she suggested.

"I would much prefer you," he asserted, boldly. "Now," he said to himself, "we'll see whether my lady follows suit, or trumps the trick."

A mischievous light gleamed in her eyes. Apparently she chose to follow suit. "Oh—if you would—" she said, and together they walked slowly up the road towards Sunset Hill.

Arriving at the top, the glory of the flaming heavens, now red, now yellow, now purple, now a blending of all the colors, softening, fading slowly, almost imperceptibly, held them in rapt silence and admiration. At their feet was the shimmering

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waves reflecting the wondrous glow of the skies. Beyond was the long, low, dark line of an island. Beyond the island, faintly traced against the crimson horizon, were the outlines of a range of mountains, on the other side of which, he said to himself, must lay the happy valley—"wide and fruitful . . . filled with verdure and fertility, where the banks of the brooks were diversified with flowers; where every blast shook spices from the rocks, and every month dropped fruits upon the ground . . . where the blessings of nature were collected, and its evils extracted and excluded."

When he read books that pleased him, his mind retained whole paragraphs of the parts which more particularly suited his mood, and when that mood returned to him, so did the thoughts that went with it.

Half unconsciously he was quoting aloud from *Rasselas*.

Hilda stood smiling as Nelson went on with his rhapsody.

Then she shook her head meditatively.

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"There is no such place," she sighed.

"But such as it is," he argued, "one must be happy with such surroundings as these."

She shook her head again.

"Locality hasn't much to do with happiness," she remarked; "it's in the mind."

He regarded her with some amazement—this island maid. His face assumed a quizzical expression. "You are quoting from Horace—'you traverse the world in search of happiness, which is within the reach of every man; a contented mind confers it on all.'" He was glad to show his familiarity with the quotation.

"I have never read Horace," she replied, simply, "but I often think that many people could be much happier if they would only try."

They were sitting on an old log, close together. "I want to be happier," he said, as he looked into the depths of her blue eyes. "How shall I try?"

She returned his gaze fearlessly.

"Well, things might look better to you if you would not look at them through those ugly spectacles," she asserted boldly. There was an ex-

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pression of amusement in her eyes. A suppressed inclination to laugh.

“Oh—if that’s all,” he answered, and removed them. “What else?”

“W-c-l-l, try to be natural, to be yourself.” She regarded him with an admixture of mirth and curiosity—the curiosity of a woman to see how far a man will go in his overweening foolishness. While he, good simple man—“That’s easy,” he admitted. “I find it more difficult to try to be some other person.” He chuckled inwardly.

“Don’t try,” she said, tersely.

Meanwhile the gray of the evening was enveloping, and mingling with the red of the after-glow, softening and subduing the brilliant colors of the sunset. Hilda sat with one elbow on her knee, her chin resting in the hollow of her hand, gazing at the far distant mountains, now fading into the twilight.

“—The most beautiful eyes, the dearest little dimple, the whitest teeth, the fairest skin, and the most musical voice,” said Nelson, silently, as he watched her.

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“By the way,” she said, as if the thought had just entered her mind, “do you know a gentleman by the name of Thomas?”

Nelson opened his mouth, emitted a dry coughing sound, gasped, and looked intently out to sea.

“Thomas—Thomas.” He shook his head, hesitated, and put on his spectacles. “It’s not an uncommon name,” he remarked, thoughtfully. “What—what—Thomas?”

Her lips curved in a tantalizing smile. Her eyes were watching mirthfully, curiously.

“Nelson Thomas—” she said.

“Nelson Thomas,” he repeated, very slowly. He was engaged in the preliminary known in the vernacular as “sparring for time.” His method was not altogether bad, but it lacked originality.

“He’s from New York,” she said, “and he owns a yacht called the *Phyllis*.”

“Oh, the *Phyllis*,” said Nelson. “I have seen the yacht—often, in fact. Have you ever seen it?”

“Oh, yes. I’ve been aboard of her,—twice. She’s the dearest boat—”

“Say that again,” he interrupted.

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"Say what?"

"That last word."

"Oh—, you mean bo-it." She repeated the word with the lingering cadence that made him foolish. He moved closer to her; and as his eyes met hers he was seized with a sudden impulse to put his arm around her, to confess there and then to—

Then the madness passed, and he became sane.

"I know Nelson Thomas," he assented.

"Oh—you know Mr. Thomas?" said Hilda, with enthusiasm.

"Like a brother," said Nelson, soberly. "I have known him for many years."

"Really—, Oh, I'm so anxious to know more about him. What kind of a man is he?"

"Peculiar—," said Nelson, shaking his head knowingly.

"Peculiar—?" she repeated.

"Gets an idea into his head, and then he forgets everything else."

"Forgets—?" she asked.

"Well—ignores everything and everybody else until he gets what he wants."

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Her eye lids veiled the depths of her gaze for an instant.

“Poor man,” she commented, in pity.

“Why poor man?” he inquired.

“Oh—he’s so sure to meet with disappointment,” she replied.

Again her chin dropped into the palm of her hand, and her eyes smiled pensively at the fading sunset.

“Perhaps—,” he mused, doubting.

Above them the stars were appearing dimly in the cloudless sky. The air was warm, and filled with the freshness of a light breeze, that blew faintly from the pines. At their feet was the bay, over which was slowly creeping a light grey mist—a thin, transparent mist, through which could be seen the shimmer of the water.

“Tell me some more about Mr. Thomas,” she urged. “Is he married?”

She said it on the spur of the moment. She would have given much to recall it. What would he think of her hereafter, if—

He bent over her, and tried to look into her

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downcast eyes. He was probably wondering if, by any chance, she had penetrated his disguise.

"No—he is not married," he replied, slowly.

Hilda smiled mockingly.

"I suppose the idea never came into his head."

"Why—?" he asked, abruptly.

"Oh—because you said that when he got an idea in his head he ignored everything—until—until he got what he wanted."

Nelson glanced quickly at the demure eyes of the maiden—wide-open, inscrutable, blue eyes. They returned his glance, frankly.

"She knows—nothing," he said to himself.

"And you said—," Nelson reflected, "that he was sure to be disappointed. With such an ending, he probably thought it useless to entertain such an idea."

"Absurd—," she laughed. "How could he possibly know what I said?"

"The fact is—," Nelson pondered, "he has had the idea thrown at his head, unceasingly, for some time. He has had what you might call a chance to marry, but he has neglected it."

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“So—,” she mused, “the poor man has been so annoyed by the attentions of—of women, that he really can't consider the matter—as worthy of pursuit.” She laughed.

“That might apply to the attentions of some women,” he corrected, gently smiling, “but he has confessed to me that there is one woman whose indifference is causing him the greatest sorrow of his life.”

“One woman,” she repeated. “Dear me—I wonder what kind of a paragon she must be?”

She spoke indifferently—as a woman will of another. But none the less I am certain that she was consumed with curiosity, for she added, “What kind of a woman is she? Have you ever seen her?”

“I have seen her,” he said, nodding thoughtfully. “She is very beautiful—the loveliest woman on this isl—earth. She has masses of fluffy hair that glints and sparkles in the sun like the gold stone. Her eyes are dark—very dark blue. Her teeth are white—pearly white; and when she smiles her lips curve over them in the most bewitching—the most tantalizing way. She has a

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perfect complexion of such texture that it shows a varied shade of pink to rosy red with her every thought. I am as much in love with her as is Thomas. I see her bewitching personality permeating this whole island by day, and at night I dream of her until morning."

"Goodness—!" exclaimed Hilda. "She must be a wonder."

She smiled into his eyes, innocently. Was it possible that she did not even guess?

"Miss Gunther—Hilda—," he began, "surely you know—" He was bending over her. He reached out his arms to embrace her.

"Oh—! Mr. Collins—don't—please—"

She fluttered for an instant—struggling to free herself—and was gone.

THE next day Hilda was not visible. Nor the next day. Nor the day after that; and so Nelson had ample time to think the matter over. And the more that he argued the subject, the more convinced he became in his mind, that he had not succeeded very well in the little plan that had seemed to be so plausible.

He had added to his somewhat extensive experience with women, but somehow he was conscious that the way of this island maid was distinctly different from the others whom he had met. I am not sure that he had not hastened the denouement in the firm conviction that nothing more was necessary to win her.

The first day he had passed in a feverish anticipation of meeting her at any moment, and he had prepared a series of pleasing arguments that would explain his motives, and all would be well.

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The second day he spent in revising his anticipated discourse, touching it up, here and there, with numerous fair-spoken sentences that seemed to be well-nigh irresistible. The third day he forgot all about his imaginary conversation, and he fell into a fit of despondency, the like of which he had never before felt.

Then he tried his philosophy.

He walked from one end of the island to the other. He penetrated the inmost recesses of the pines, and finding a secluded spot, he would lie down on the soft thick moss from where he could see the blue sky, the bluer sea, and the islands exquisitely sketched on its surface. There was the illimitable ocean peacefully undulating in the light haze of a mid-summer day. There was a little sail boat at his command. He had only to cast off the line that held it bobbing up and down at the old wharf—and he could drift or sail from one bay to another, from one island to another, heedlessly, aimlessly—the only way to sail. And he had the village, with its corner cross-roads, and funny little stores, where he could buy things for

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a few pennies:—a lead pencil for one cent; a writing pad for the same amount; a shaving mirror, in a twisted metal frame, for five cents. He smiled to himself as he made the purchases. Then he went down to the rickety wharf, and sitting down, with his pad and pencil, he swung his legs over a string piece and began to write.

But for all that he wrote, this student of the masses might as well have been fishing with the two boys, who were busy with lines over the stern of a boat, just beneath him. The grassy walks, and secluded pines; the blue sea and the islands; the gently heaving ocean; the village life; the little sail boat. They were nothing more than a frame, from which had been taken the picture—of Hilda.

“Hang ‘The Masses’—!” he exclaimed. Then he looked down at the boys. “Say, bub—” he called. And the quickest one looked up first—and jumped to his feet.

“Want a quarter—?” He held it over the boys’ heads for a moment, and then let it fall. It missed the four little out stretched hands, hit the side of

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the boat, and glancing off, dropped into the water. There was a scramble, a dropping of fish lines, a scuffle in which all the rules of floatage were set at naught, and then two little boys, in scant clothing, were wriggling around under the water—like a pair of tadpoles.

“Je—ru—salem—!” said Nelson, as he regarded the result of his generous offer.

Then he looked for the boys, anxiously. One had come up spluttering to the surface, and was swimming to sea—! The other was probably under the boat that was floating bottom up.

There was not a moment to lose.

He slipped off his coat, hat, and low shoes, and dived after him.

It was hard work to pull the lad from under the boat, to take him in one arm, and then swim out in the bay after the other boy.

The latter was a lusty swimmer, but he had lost his head, and was swimming in the wrong direction.

“Here—sonny—here—!” Nelson called, encouragingly, as he saw the little tow head in front of him. Then he renewed his efforts to overtake him.

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It was a short race, between an experienced athlete and a scared boy—and the athlete won. . . . The piling was covered with a greenish slime, so that he could not draw himself up.

He told the boys to hold fast to him, as he began to swim towards the shore, but they were dazed and badly frightened, and he was afraid that they would slip from his back, so he turned over and sat the youngsters astride of his chest, where he could see them.

“Now,—hang on, you little duffers,” he laughed, soothingly.

And so, by laughing, and thereby encouraging the boys, they took heart, and hung to the big man, who, with his hands beneath him, was slowly paddling towards land.

As the tide carried them again towards the wharf a man came running with a boat hook in one hand and a bight of rope in the other. He leaned over the edge of the wharf, and hooked one of the lads off Nelson's chest; then he hooked the other. Then he dropped an end of the rope to Nelson, and quickly hauled him onto the wharf.

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“Well done, mate,”—he said, approvingly—“but for you, these little fellers would have drowned.” He held the boys, by the nape of their necks, one at the end of each arm, where they hung dripping and shaking like two puppies. Then the man took a second admiring glance at the life-saver as he turned around,—shoeless, hatless, coatless—coughing up the salt water.

“But for me they wouldn’t have up—upset—” Nelson drawled, good-naturedly. Then he returned the astonished gaze of his host—Captain Gunther.

The boys shook themselves, adjusted their scanty blue shirts and jumpers—and looked around expectantly. Nelson laughed.

“You want the money—?” he suggested.

“I spoke first—” said the alert one, quickly. He was a bright, sharp featured lad, with snapping blue eyes, and an oldish kind of a face. The other had wide, wondering brown eyes, a wavering mouth, and curling hair. He hung back, apparently willing to take what was left.

“I spoke—second—” he said, hesitatingly.

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“Have you ever noticed—” said Nelson, with the same nonchalance to his condition and surroundings, as though he stood on the deck of the *Phyllis*,—“how often there is one—in a family—who always speaks first; is ever brisk, lively, nimble to catch the falling fruit?”

“So there is—” answered the captain, as he finished coiling the rope.

“I have often wondered,” Nelson went on, deliberately, “when they advanced in life, whether they really obtained more happiness than the others. I never could step lively, captain—never.”

Then he turned to the boys.

“So you did, sonny,” he said, judicially—as he noted the wistful eyes of the other. “Run along, and get my clothes on the end of the wharf—my purse is in my coat pocket.”

Then he slipped a hand into the clammy recesses of his wet, clinging trousers, and fished out a coin—the largest in the collection.

“Here, bub—take this and skip—run—vamose,” he admonished the wistful-eyed one, as he

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pointed up the hill. The boy started, and turned back—twisting the coin round and round in his hand.

“Please, mister—” he asked, “is this mine—to keep?”

“Sure—” Nelson nodded affirmatively.

“Thanks, mister—” The boy put the coin in his pocket. Then he might have walked straight home, handed the money to his mother, and said:—
“Here, mother, is fifty cents that a kind-hearted gentleman gave me for saving my life. Give it to the good, kind minister, to send to the poor little boys in Africa.”

He might have done that,—but he did not. He went to a store—the farthest away from his home—and bought the jack-knife that his soul had craved, ever since he had been able to see it, in the showcase on top of the counter. Then he bought a bag of peanuts, a sour ball—warranted to last for half an hour, and a mouth organ. He spent the rest of the afternoon on the sunny side of a rock—drying his clothes—filled with supreme happiness. . . .

VI

THEY walked back to the cottage where Nelson procured dry clothing.

When he reappeared downstairs, the captain took an observation, which included the cardinal points of the compass. Then he lowered his voice to barely a whisper. "A little drop of—the real thing would keep you from catching cold after that ducking?" he suggested.

"Sure—" Nelson agreed promptly, "but where on this benighted coast of Maine is one to procure it?"

Captain Gunther grew even more mysterious. "Follow me—" he said, with the air of a pirate king. He tiptoed into the cottage, with Nelson following close on his heels. "Lucky thing—" he whispered, "Hilda ain't here."

"She would object?" inquired Nelson. His heart thumped furiously at her name. His eyes

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roved over the little kitchen, with its strip of clean rag carpet on the floor, and the spotless dimity curtains in the windows. He felt a sense of irritation as the old man opened the cupboard doors and exposed to view the rows of common blue china—shining in their cleanliness—carefully arranged on scalloped, clean white paper. The shining black cooking stove, with the neatly arranged utensils; the little table, with its bright red cover; the low splint rocking chair, beside an open window—above the sill of which a cluster of sweet peas nodded and swayed gently in the light summer air—Hilda's.

“Oh—I don't know as she would just object,” said the captain as he reached to an upper self for two little tumblers. He handed one to Nelson, and then selected a small pitcher from the little stock of blue china.

“You see it's this way with her—” he explained. “Etsel—that's her father you know, never could touch it without getting foolish—and just natur'ly she's afraid of it.”

“Afraid of what?” asked Nelson.

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"Whiskey," replied the captain, with abated breath, as he took out his keys and unlocked a closet in the chimney.

He fumbled around and drew forth a curious looking, narrow-necked bottle. It was covered with odd looking characters—grinning faces of uncouth monsters. A queer looking bottle. It was brown-colored, flat, and emitted an odor when the cork was removed the like of which Nelson had never smelled before.

"Came from New York," said the captain as he slowly filled the two little tumblers, replaced the cork, and then hid the bottle carefully away in the locker.

"Now for a chaser," he said jocosely, as he started towards the well. I am not certain whether he winked at Nelson, but his manner was that of an old toper, a convivial old fellow who loved his daily dram above everything on earth. Whereas Uncle Hagen was the most temperate man—a man who had the best reputation on the island for sobriety.

He lowered the sweep, and drew up a bucket of

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fresh water. Then he filled the pitcher, and started back again to the cottage. Nelson followed the old man who walked stealthily ahead, alert and cautious as an Indian.

“Now we can talk—” he said as he put the pitcher down on the kitchen table, and drew up a chair, “there ain’t nobody around.”

“Your health—” Nelson sipped prudently from his small tumbler.

“Same to you—” Uncle Hagen swallowed the contents of his tumbler at a gulp, and reached for the pitcher. The “chaser” of cold water followed the whiskey with a velocity and volume which must have quenched the fiery stuff instanter.

“Feels good—don’t it?” said the captain approvingly, and then opening and closing his mouth with a loud resounding smack.

“Feels warm—” said Nelson doubtfully.

“Pity some folks can’t take it without going too far—now there was Etzel, Hilda’s father.” The old man stretched out his legs and dropping his chin to his chest, he reached an arm across the table, and balanced the empty tumbler in the palm

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of his large, powerful hand. "Etzel never could touch a drop—without going crazy."

He gazed out of the open window, his blue eyes fixed in a dreamy stare from under his shaggy brows. "Etzel was younger than me—about ten years."

"He was a sailor?" asked Nelson.

"Best in the town of Harpswell—wasn't a man could touch him—wasn't anything could beat him—'cepting this."

He held the tumbler upside down. A few drops of whiskey fell on the red tablecloth, making dark splotches on its surface. He heaved a deep sigh, and was silent.

"I heard that he died—was drowned," said Nelson softly.

Uncle Hagen drew in his legs, bent over and looked into Nelson's eyes.

"He drowned himself—and his wife."

"Committed sui—" Nelson turned quickly.

The captain's hand went up warningly.

"Not a bit of it," he exclaimed. "No suiciding in our family—they're too fond of living. He just

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run his boat up on the rocks, over on the back shore, and—" He paused, and passed his hand over his forehead in a weary sort of way. Nelson saw lines in his face that had hitherto escaped him.

"Missed the channel?" suggested Nelson. The captain nodded. "Out of his course a hundred yards—a course he could of run with his eyes shut, day or night. Most any boy in the village could. But Etzel—well Etzel wasn't himself that day."

He buried his head deep in the hollow of his two large hands. Then an idea seemed to strike him, for he suddenly arose, and walked to the chimney closet,—when he returned, carrying the curious looking bottle with him. In a moment he had emptied its contents through the open window.

"By the jumping hornspoon—" he vowed with much solemnity, as he held the bottle upside down, high over his head, "if I ever touch a drop of the rotten stuff again—may I be drowned too."

Then he carefully corked the empty bottle and put it on one of the shelves in the cupboard. There is not much that goes to waste on Orr's Island.

. . . .

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And all the time Nelson was asking himself the tormenting question—what has become of Hilda? He could easily have asked Uncle Hagen, but somehow the opportunity that he wanted never came. A guilty consciousness that perhaps the old man was familiar with the occurrence at Sunset Hill, and that Hilda may have confided in him—or intimated,—or—something. He could not bring himself to the point of a direct inquiry. So he was startled when the captain began—“Hilda never knew the whole truth—about her father. Soon as she was old enough I sent her away to a big boarding school—Hilda has a fine education,” he added proudly.

A little wooden-cased clock, on a shelf between the windows, went *tick-tack-tick-tack*. There was no other sound.

Uncle Hagen slowly filled his pipe from a little tin box of cut plug. Then he broke off a sulphur match from a block, and lit it with a sweep across the leg of his trousers. “That’s where she met Grace—” he mumbled,— between puffs. “In Portland.”

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“Grace?” Nelson looked interested.

“Um—Grace Donald. Where she’s visiting.”

“Visiting?” Nelson’s interest increased.

“Um—she married John Donald—works in the bank,” he said it half impatiently—as if he considered the matter of too little importance to need any further explanation.

VII

NELSON arose early—very early, and gazed out into the orchard.

The sun was just appearing in a preliminary blaze of golden yellow, the air was delightful, and keen with the salt smell of the sea. The trees were filled with chirping birds, happy, lively—intensely alive with the joy of the morning.

But what a difference—what a difference—! Hilda gone—without a word, without a message.

He heard the captain moving around below, getting his breakfast.

“She ought to be at home, taking care of that poor old man,” he muttered. “The least she could do, to pay him back for all his care of her. Ungrateful, that’s what it is.”

The penetrating smell of burning pine wood, mingled with the aroma of boiling coffee, floated upward from the kitchen.

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“Visiting her friend in Portland. What do you think of that?” He spoke with a rising inflection, bitterly. He glanced around the room, at the scanty furniture, the grotesque pattern of cheap wallpaper, at the lurid picture of “A Storm at Sea,” at the pile of manuscript on his writing table. He picked up the sheets, one after the other, and read them carelessly.

“‘The Masses’ be—”

There was a loud thump on his door, then another. It sounded as though the door had been struck by a club. Nelson strode across the room and opened it wide. He was angry, irritable.

Captain Gunther, rosy-cheeked, genial, beaming with good nature, stood in the narrow hall.

“Heard you moving,” he smiled, “and thought you might like a bite of breakfast?” He noticed Nelson’s angry frown, and his manner became apologetic.

“Perhaps I’m too early for you?” he added.

Nelson’s brow cleared at the sight of the kindly blue eyes. “Not a bit—not a bit,” he answered cordially. “I’ll be down in five minutes.”

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In less than that time he had torn the manuscript into small pieces, and had thrown them into the vari-colored paper basket. "Somehow I seem to be all wrong about the masses," he mused, thoughtfully.

Then he went down to breakfast.

Uncle Hagen with his coat off, his face fiery red, was fussing over the stove.

"I have the coffee all right," he nodded as Nelson entered the kitchen. "And the corn bread is in the oven, but I'm just a little particular about the fish—fresh mackerel. Ain't been out the water half an hour—kind of tender." He held the pan up over the glowing coals, with one hand and moved a little can of boiling water with the other. "If you'll hand me those eggs," he said, pointing to a bowl on the table. Nelson dipped, obediently, into the bowl and handed the captain two eggs. There was something very cosy—very appetizing about the clean coarse cloth on the table, the nodding sweet peas at the window, the warmth and cheerfulness of the little kitchen.

"Just a mite of bacon," murmured the captain

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as he put two thin slices in the pan. "Now then its ready—such as it is." He placed a chair for Nelson at one side of the table.

"Simply delicious," said Nelson, approvingly, as he sat down to breakfast. . . .

"I'll be leaving to-day," he informed the captain, shamefacedly.

"So—" Uncle Hagen held his fork poised over a tempting piece of the fresh mackerel. "Things don't suit?"

There was surprise, and a shade of vexation in his voice.

"Everything suits, captain—everything," he assured him, "but I must get back to work." Nelson assumed the harrassed look of a business man whose vacation days are numbered.

Uncle Hagen looked at him over his cup of coffee. "Writing books?" he suggested.

"Yes, and—other things."

"Hilda will be disappointed," said the old man, slowly. "When did you calculate to start?"

"When does the next boat leave?" asked Nelson.

"I was thinking," said Uncle Hagen, ignoring

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the question, "that maybe you'd like to go along in the boat—my boat. I'm going up to Portland this morning with a mess of lobsters."

"Indeed I should—" replied Nelson promptly. A radiant glimmer of hope overspread his face. "I should like nothing better." Uncle Hagen arose and began to clear the table. "We might call and see Hilda—at Grace's, and you could say good-bye," he added innocently.

"Yes—I could say good-bye," repeated Nelson dubiously. "When are you going?"

"Soon as I stow away these things, and clean up the galley,—'bout half an hour."

Outside, the yellow of the sunrise had turned to crimson, and then the sun had appeared above the pines, in all the splendor of an August day.

Nelson expanded his lungs with deep inhalations of the delicious air. He whistled in answer to the chirping birds. He hummed snatches of songs, as he moved blithely around his room, packing his bag. His heart was joyous, harmonious.

After all the weary waiting and suspense; after all the inaction, the anxious surmises and imagin-

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ings of the past long hours and days, there had come to him a certainty,—he was going to see Hilda. That was enough happiness for the present. Further than that he gave the matter but little thought. His spirit was tranquil, tuneful.

The captain called up the stairs:

“You can come whenever you are ready. Lock the door and put the key under the step.”

Then he shouldered a pair of oars, and started down the “shore privilege” path which led to the cove. . . .

Nelson locked the front door, put the key under a corner of the stone step, and followed the captain down the path. At a bend in the lane, that hid Uncle Hagen from sight, he turned around to take a last view of the cottage. It's clean white front shone clear and distinct, embowered in the surrounding vivid greens.

If a little house could look wistfully after him, that little house was full of thought.

“I know—I know,” he said, as he waved his hand in farewell. “It was no fault of yours,—good-bye—good-bye.”

VIII

“AS near as I can remember,” said Uncle Hagen doubtfully, as he and Nelson wandered along one of the streets of Portland, “the house lays north-northwest, about half an hour’s run from the landing.” He peered up one side of the street and then the other. “It’s kind of clipper built, with a bridge for’ard and a quarter deck aft—the cabin’s painted white with green blinds.”

“There it is,” said Nelson, almost as soon as he had heard the graphic description. He pointed across the street to a neat-looking, modern house, that had a porch in front, and a second story piazza in the rear. It was of frame construction, painted white, with green shutters.

“So it is,” assented the captain, slowly. “Blamed if we didn’t nearly run it down.”

They crossed the street, and Uncle Hagen was about to pound on the door with one of his sledge

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hammer blows, when Nelson caught his arm. "Hold up,—captain, here's the button." He pressed it with his thumb and a tidy looking maid appeared.

"Good morning," said Uncle Hagen, with cordial-hearted effusiveness, "we called to see the ladies."

The well-trained little domestic looked at the men suspiciously.

"The ladies are not at home," she said brusquely. She was about to shut the door. "Pardon," said Nelson quietly, "this gentleman wishes to see his niece, Miss Gunther, when will she return?"

There was something about his manner, his poise and gentle assurance, that caused her to suddenly change her conclusions.

Here was no book agent.

"The ladies have gone to New York," she answered politely.

"New York," they repeated in chorus.

"Did she leave any word for me—Hilda," inquired the captain, anxiously.

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"For her uncle—Miss Gunther's uncle—Captain Hagen Gunther?" explained Nelson.

"Of Orr's Island?—oh—yes," her face brightened. She stepped back into the hall and took a letter from the table. "I was just going to take it to the box."

It was from Hilda.

The captain took the letter, turned it over and over several times, and began a fruitless fumble for his spectacles.

Nelson waited impatiently.

"I know I haven't them, because I never carry them away from home," he remarked finally. Then he put the letter carefully away in an inner pocket, and turned back, down the front steps.

Nelson followed him.

"Good morning—" said the captain to the maid, as he removed his cap and made a sweeping bow, "my respects to Mr. Donald." Nelson was all agog with suppressed expectation. "Perhaps I could read it for you," he suggested.

"Perhaps you could—" answered the captain. "Let's get some place."

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They walked down to the hotel, and in a quiet corner of the lobby Nelson read:

Dear Uncle Hagen:

There is not much to write about, or I would have written you before this. I never knew Portland could be so dull. Grace is awfully nice, but every place seems so hot and stuffy—it makes me feel irritable and disagreeable all the time. John says we need a change, so he got excursion tickets on the boat to New York for Grace and me. We leave this evening. I don't know when we will return.

Good-bye.

Hilda.

“Poor little girl,” said the captain. “She isn't feeling well—I can tell that right away.”

Nelson handed him the letter, and stared gloomily through the window.

“Rather risky—” he remarked, calamitously—“I should say, for those two girls to go travelling all alone.”

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“Risky—? Oh not very. The *Morning Star* is an able boat,” answered the captain, cheerfully. “It isn’t like railroads, you know, where everything is running on the same course—sure to foul something. Now with the boat it’s different. Her course lays pretty well out to sea, where she has plenty of room—clear of most everything—’cepting when she gets into the Sound,” he added thoughtfully. “It is kind of crowded in Long Island Sound, that’s a fact.”

“I wasn’t thinking of that,” said Nelson, still lowering; “it’s the risk—”

“What risk?” interrupted Uncle Hagen, with marked anxiety.

“Those two girls, all alone—in—in New York,” Nelson surmised.

A light broke in on the captain. He laughed reassuringly.

“Don’t worry about that pair, Hilda can take care of herself anywhere—so can Grace. We folks learn to care for ourselves at an early age—we have to—we can’t afford otherwise.” He uncrossed his legs, and arose from his chair. He ex-

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tended a hand to Nelson. "Come back when you can—always glad to see you," he added cordially.

Nelson retained the strong, honest hand in a firm grip. The ties were loosening that had held him to the islands. He was loath to see old man Gunther depart. He had formed a genuine friendship for the captain—a friendship that had its origin and being in the admiration he had for his invincible honesty—his gentle unselfishness—his courage. Apart from that, he was Hilda's uncle and only remaining relative. He shook his hand warmly, affectionately. "Drop me a line, captain, if you get up that race,—I might want to enter a boat."

"Would you now—sure I will—where shall I write you?" his eyes glistened.

First of all, and before everything, the captain loved a boat race.

Nelson tore a leaf from his note book and wrote: "William Collins, The Luxmore, New York."

Uncle Hagen stuffed the bit of paper in his vest pocket.

"I'll let you know—good-bye."

IX

AT the same hour—it may have been at the same moment when Nelson was bidding Uncle Hagen good-bye—Hilda and her friend Grace were comfortably seated on the upper deck of the *Morning Star*, en route for New York. The skies were clear, the wind astern, and the gentle swell of the ocean only contributed to a delightful sense of undulation—restless, disquieting to some—enjoyable to those who love the sea. As the steamer clove her way steadily through the light waves her prow cut great furrows in the blue water, that rose and fell in curving, splashing beauty.

“Well, Hilda, as I said before, the man is in love with you—dead in love. Now what are you going to do about it?” demanded Grace Donald.

“How do you know?” asked Hilda.

“How do I know!” repeated Grace, with some

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little show of impatience. Remember that Grace and her friend Hilda had spent most of the night talking it over, in the close intimacy of their state room. "Don't be so foolish, Hilda."

Hilda looked offended.

"What can I do?" she said.

"Do!" Young Mrs. Donald sat up straight in her deck chair, compressed her lips—full red lips—and gazed sternly out to sea. Her countenance was severe, steadfast.

Hilda dropped her chin into her hands, her elbows on her knees, and stared into the horizon. She was evidently perturbed, disquieted.

"Grace, you don't know—everything," she said, in a feeble, troubled voice.

"No—not everything. Only the things that you told me," returned Grace. "But if you want to lose the chance of your lifetime. A chance—!" Mrs. Grace Donald's pretty mouth seemed to frame a comprehensive whistle. "Well—just keep running away from him every chance that you get and—" Again she compressed her lips, and gazed out to sea.

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"You are angry," Hilda murmured, plaintively.

"Angry? No,—but when a man like that asks you to marry him—"

"He didn't ask me—" interrupted Hilda.

"Oh—well, if he didn't exactly ask you, he will, all the same—if you give him another chance," continued Grace.

"Absurd," said Hilda, positively. "You really are wrong. Mr. Thomas and I are mere friends,—why I have known him only a few weeks."

"Really—" scoffed Grace. "But a mere friend of the other sex, who makes love to you the moment he sees you, and who follows you to your home, insinuates himself into the family, takes long walks with you, assumes a disguise that is intended to deceive everyone but you; a friend who puts his arm around you, and kiss—"

"He did not!" interrupted Hilda, indignantly, her face flushing.

"Oh—well. He tried to—what's the difference?" asked the wise young matron.

"The difference is between the act and the intention," laughed Hilda.

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“Sure—he showed his intentions, right along. That’s what I’ve been saying,” agreed Mrs. Donald.

Hilda resolved.

“I did not tell you everything, Grace,” she said; “but I happen to know that Mr. Thomas is in love with another woman—really. . . . He told me that he had had a chance to marry—but—” She looked down to the deck, avoiding her companion’s curious stare.

“Did he, indeed?—and what else did he say—about marriage.” Grace assumed an attitude of receptive interest. “For a mere friend he certainly was very—very confiding.”

“He said that he had neglected the chance.”

Hilda spoke ingenuously.

Grace laughed—a hearty, good-natured laugh, full of merriment. “So—and why did he neglect it?” she asked.

Hilda changed her position, and moved closer to her friend. Her face was a study of fugitive lights and shades, as they passed, and repassed across her expressive countenance.

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"Oh—you old quiz—" Hilda remonstrated.

"He said he was in love with another woman," she added.

"Did he happen to mention her name?" enquired Grace.

Hilda shook her head. "He did not tell me her name. But he said that she was very beautiful—with light hair and blue eyes, and—oh, yes—he said that she had white teeth."

"Wonderful—" commented Grace. "What a sight she would be with black teeth?"

Hilda's lips curved into a faint little moue—it was hardly a pout.

"I won't tell you any more," she affirmed.

"Oh—yes, please go on. She had light hair, blue eyes, white teeth,—and when she pouts her lips curve over them in the most charming manner. She has a lovely complexion, that is getting redder and redder every moment—and she lives with the dearest old uncle, on Orr's Island. Gracious! What is the matter?"

"Goodness!" exclaimed Hilda. Evidently a sudden, embarrassing thought had entered her

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mind. She stared intently out to sea, her hands clasped tightly, her head bent forward—her mind recalling every word, every action of that evening on Sunset Hill.

“What is it Hilda?” enquired her friend anxiously.

Hilda laughed unmusically.

“Oh—I hope not—” she said; “and yet it does seem to be me—that is that he meant me. Oh Grace,—do you really think that he was describing me?”

“You—! No indeed. The idea,” she said ironically. “I don’t think that he gave you a thought.”

“You don’t understand, Grace,” she went on.

“I mean, do you think that he thought, that I thought—”

“Whew!” Grace pursed her mouth into a mocking whistle. “Now then—which thought was it?”

Hilda stamped her foot impatiently on the deck. “Grace Donald—do you suppose that he knew—that I knew—”

She stopped, and blushed furiously.

“Silly.—Why of course he did.”

PART THIRD

I

NELSON THOMAS was thinking—but that's another story. His mind did not dwell long on the subject, but went back, and over and over again to the one thing of all others that could interest him.

One would think that he had satisfied himself that his pursuit of Hilda was futile, his efforts unavailing. She had fled from him without a word; she had not even mentioned his name in her letter to Uncle Hagen; she had gone on an aimless excursion to New York, without a moment's thought of the abject loneliness that she ought to have known would be his portion.

He paced up and down the office of the hotel; he sat down to read the papers; he wrote several letters, one long one to Hilda—and tore them up, one by one as they were finished. He telegraphed to his aunt that he would join them at Bar Harbor,

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and withdrew the message while the patient operator was checking up the number of words that it contained. He smoked cigarettes, cigars and his pipe, until his tongue became blistered and his head dizzy. Try as he would there was nothing that he could do, nothing worth while doing—he was hot, feverish, impatient. “By George!” he thundered to his inner consciousness, “I must see her again—I must—I shall.”

And then—having made up his mind—he went over carefully, all the connecting links, from Uncle Hagen to Hilda; from Hilda to Mrs. Donald; from Mrs. Donald to her husband—John! . . . John Donald. Of course. He remembered when the captain had told him that Grace's husband worked in the bank. He remembered that a Mr. Donald was the paying teller in his own bank of deposit in Portland. He would go down town at once, and draw some money. Incidentally he would make John's acquaintance. It was a reasonable conclusion that John would know his wife's address in New York. That was pure logic.

So he called on John Donald. . . .

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Several hours later he was seated in the smoking compartment of the New York sleeper. As he lit his cigar his eyes roved carelessly—through the veil of smoke—at his fellow passengers. He saw first of all a conspicuous pair of yellow shoes, then a brown suit, then a drooping mustache, then the weary face of Charlie Lighthall.

“By—Jove, Nelson—” was his amiable greeting as he crossed over and sat down beside him. . . .

“And the ladies?” enquired Nelson.

“They are in the car ahead—going to New York, for some shopping. Then it’s a party at your aunt’s place in the country.”

“Um—” Nelson smoked steadily.

“They were wondering what had become of you?”

“Um—” He went on smoking.

As the night advanced the other occupants of the compartment retired to their berths. Lighthall selected a large brown cigar, encased in a bright red band, and became confidential.

“I’m awfully glad, that we happened to meet—,” he began, with marked hesitancy.

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Nelson eyed him suspiciously.

“How much is it, Charlie?” he asked cheerfully. “I know my aunt is a perfect terror in bridge—I should have warned you.” He reached for his pocket cheque book. Lighthall laughed. “It’s not so bad as that.” He shifted uneasily on the leather cushions. “It’s about—about—Miss Conrad.”

“Oh—” Nelson stretched out his legs, and yawned comfortably. “What’s she been up to?”

“She—I—that is—we are engaged,” announced Lighthall solemnly.

“W-h--a---t?” exclaimed Nelson, with a rising, and increasing tone of voice. He suddenly sat up straight, and stared at his companion. “You don’t mean it?”

“Fact—,” said Lighthall, nodding his head.

“We fixed it up on the *Phyllis*.”

“Well—! Of all the supernal luck.”

He felt like shouting his approval.

“Yes—I was rather lucky,” drawled Lighthall complacently.”

II

IN an apartment house, in New York—on West End Avenue, above One Hundred and Fifteenth Street, there is a cozy little suite of rooms occupied by Mrs. Henry Wyse and her son Edward. Mrs. Wyse is of medium stature, and stands as erect as she did when she was eighteen years old. She has a perfectly proportioned plump little figure, clear regular features, snapping, and twinkling brown eyes, and lovely gray hair brushed back from her forehead a la Madam la Marchioness de Pompadour. When Mrs. Wyse smiles, which is practically all the time—and don't misunderstand me by imagining her as wearing one of those irritating and false set of mirthful wrinkles—her eyes beam with a healthy good-nature, her lips part with a half uttered blessing, and her whole countenance radiates such a glow of honest living, that one leaves her presence the better for having seen her.

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The suite contained a dining room, a sitting room, two bed rooms, and a kitchen. There is another alleged bed room, near the kitchen—but the assertion is only one of the optimistic fictions of Mrs. Wyse, when she has visitors. This closet is called the spare room, and is always occupied by Mrs. Wyse herself, when by chance her visitors should remain with her over a night.

The principal furnishings of the rooms consist of several old pieces of such undoubted respectability, brought from her old home, in Philadelphia, that one can easily surmise the environments in which Mrs. Wyse spent her childhood.

These old bits of furniture are arranged in the narrow spaces of the apartments with such consummate, artistic effect, that the circumscribed limitations of the walls are lost. One sinks into the nearest, comfortable chair—out of the cosmopolitan hurly-burly—with a sigh of restful content. In these rooms are no repinings, no regrets for what might have been, no longing for what has been; on the contrary the mistress of this miniature home faces her daily life with a keen enjoyment of the

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present, and a delightful anticipation of the future. Sufficient happiness, to her, that her son Edward—her first born—is now adding a modicum each month, to the slender purse that assisted him through the Columbia Law School.

Mrs. Wyse is embroidering. The heavily shaded lamp on the centre table sheds a light upon her white hands, and shining needle, as she deftly follows the intricacies of the pattern. The rest of the room is shrouded in a cool subdued light that permits the windows to be open, and to admit a light breeze from the river.

The fugitive zephyr gently stirs the thin curtains that frame a picture of the dining room. The table is set for dinner, and the candles—in old glass candle-sticks of unquestioned antiquity—shed a soft light from their shaded yellow flames. The little maid in the kitchen,—who comes each morning and departs in the evening,—is putting the final touches to the concomitants of a well cooked meal, when a bell rings in the narrow hall.

In a moment Mrs. Wyse has opened the door. In another moment she is struggling in the united

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and then alternating embraces of her daughter, Grace Donald, and of her school friend, Hilda Gunther. . . .

The dialogue that immediately followed the entrance of the two girls is beyond my powers of recording—because they all spoke at once. To differentiate between the three would be impossible. The entrance of Edward only added to the universal buzzing, and it was only after his departure, in the evening, that some coherent idea could be had of the conversation that ensued.

Mrs. Wyse, sitting on the sofa, with her daughter Grace on one side of her, and Hilda on the other—heard the whole story.

“Nelson Thomas?” she said reflectively. “Ah—I have it—”

Then she began :

“He must be the son of Nelson Thomas, of the old dry goods firm of Thomas & Conrad. They were wholesale merchants, on Market Street, Philadelphia, from as far back as I can remember. He made a fortune, and retired. Then he moved to New York so that his wife might have a larger

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field for her social ambitions. She was a Miss Collins, and your new friend," she said, turning to Hilda, "took the name of his grandfather, on his mother's side, when he changed his name to William Collins, of Philadelphia. There were two brothers by the name of Thomas in the firm. The aunt you speak of must be the widow of his father's brother. And Miss Conrad is probably the daughter of the other partner. There—," she laughed, "I've told you all that I know about them."

III

THE following morning a party of four sat down to breakfast in a fashionable cafe on Fifth Avenue. They had endured all the discomforts of a hot night on a sleeping car; the hour was unusually early, the waiters were tired and listless, and the smell of mops, soap, and cigarette smoke permeated the air. Outside, the dust hung in suspension between the glaring walls of the houses, like a thin veil through which the red sun shone warm and sullen. Three members of the party made scarcely an effort to hide the evident fact that a discordant note interrupted the harmony of their conversation.

Strange to say, the jarring impression was produced by the contrariety of qualities whereby the happiness of one irritated the others.

Nelson Thomas was in a mood so jubilant, so hilarious, that it vexed his aunt almost beyond en-

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durance. "You seem to be very—in fact unusually happy," she said to him crossly. "I should think that you would miss the air, the green grass, and the—what is it?—the simple life, of Mackerel Cove. Dear me—New York is bad enough in September, under any condition, but to arrive on the hottest day of the year—I can't understand your cheerfulness."

"It is beastly hot, you know," observed Lighthall, with much originality, while Miss Conrad looked at Nelson reproachfully.

"It will not be so bad in the country," she said pacifically. "You will go with us of course."

"Of course," said his aunt decisively, while Nelson searched his mind for an excuse that would be at least convincing. His aunt's house party, usually the first week in September, was an annual event which heretofore he had accepted with a lesser indifference than characterized his other engagements. In his life the seasons came and went with monotonous regularity. There was the usual round of festivities in New York, in the winter months. Palm Beach and perhaps the Bermudas

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in the early raw spring. The Northern waters, with his yacht, or a trip to Europe; Aix or Carlsbad, for his health, in the summer. All these were of minor importance—events that could be changed, sojourns that could be lengthened, shortened, or postponed indefinitely, or given up altogether, according to his own fancy—but his aunt's house party in the early autumn was an event that admitted of no declination. When, therefore, she said "of course," he knew that nothing less than his doctor's certificate of serious illness would be accepted by her as an excuse for declining her invitation.

Of course he was familiar with his aunt's cherished plans. He knew of her ambition to unite the accumulated fortunes of the surviving descendants of the old house of Thomas & Conrad. In a leisurely way he had considered the plan as possible, and even as probable. Anne Conrad's image faultlessly gowned, well-bred, handsome, had haunted him for years. It was Anne who had been to him a friend, good comrade, companion. It was Anne, he confessed to himself, with a shade of irri-

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tation, who had encouraged him to write his book—who had whetted his appetite for the feast of literature. It was Anne who had just said “of course,” and which his aunt had echoed decisively. It was Anne who was looking into his eyes for his answer.

All this happened in much less time than it has taken to relate. In fact there was no time at all for Nelson to consider his answer, according to the inexorable laws of good breeding. So he acquiesced in their decision, and motioned to the waiter to bring him the bill. . . .

Somehow, the beauty of the country appeared to Nelson as it had never appeared before. As the carriage, with its rubber tires, rolled smoothly, noiselessly along the perfectly surfaced roads, the air seemed to freshen as the heat of the day gave way to the soft warmth of the early evening. A little further, and they had turned from the main road into a narrow lane that led to “The Oaks.”

On both sides of the lane were tall hedges of uncropped privet. Over the top of the hedges he could see on one side an orchard full of fruit-laden

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trees. On the other side the ground sloped abruptly to a cool, green meadow, through which—winding leisurely, in and out of the tall grass—flowed a stream of limpid beauty. Nearer the house the lane curved under the grateful umbra of several large oak trees. In the sunny places the grasshoppers jumped wildly ahead of the horses with a sharp “*tchk.*” On a limb of one of the oak trees an importunate robin was wildly calling to its mate, “*dear-ee, dear-ee,*” as if its little heart was bursting with anxious tenderness.

They sat side by side, touching each other, silently. Often, I don't know how many times, they had taken the drive together. To-day, somehow, it was all different. To Nelson had come the joy of loving. To Anne had come an irritating sense of loss.

These two sat silently side by side, while Lighthall and Mrs. Thomas on the opposite seat were conversing about airy nothings.

“What a delightful place,” said Nelson fervently as the carriage stopped under the spreading branches of a large tree, in front of the old house.

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Curious, how the building should take on such an air of picturesque beauty. On other occasions it had been nothing more to him than a rather stupid, lonely place in the country; a place where he was always certain of meeting Anne. He knew that his aunt arranged such matters according to her match-making proclivities. He had accepted the arrangements as a part of her entertainment, to be enjoyed or ignored as the humor possessed him. There was the old part, very old for this country, probably two hundred years, built of stone from a nearby quarry. The walls were of immense thickness, and were pierced with small square windows; they had been coated with plaster of a drab color that was almost covered with a luxuriant ivy. A long low building containing the halls connected the old with the newer portions. The latter was modern-looking, with numberless bay windows, long and low, in harmony with the general plan of remodeling, and designated by the architect as colonial.

Projecting from the front veranda was a brick terrace that had been designed for a tea terrace.

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A large linden tree extended its limbs overhead; mats of woven grass were laid on the bricks; there were rustic chairs of curiously contrived bent wood, and small tables holding jardinières of feathery ferns.

It was Nelson's favorite place to smoke his after dinner cigar. The others had retired, and he imagined that he would be alone. As he stepped from the veranda a figure in white arose from one of the most secluded chairs.

"Pardon—" He stepped to one side as Anne advanced into the moonlight. "Don't go." She hesitated and sat down.

"I wasn't going," she said, calmly. "I thought it probable that you would come here." She drew a chair into the moonlight in front of her—so that she could watch his expression. "Sit there, please." He laughed, and lit his cigar. "It's time for little girls to be in bed—but just this once you may sit up ten minutes longer," he said jokingly.

She drew herself up. He was familiar with the action. He knew that her mood was not in harmony with his jest. Under other circumstances he

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would have known just how to sooth her evident displeasure. He had never really loved her. But, they had grown up together, and propinquity had woven and interwoven much of their thoughts and actions. She was intelligent, thoroughly educated, and companionable. Her unconcealed admiration of his budding talents; her modest suggestions, had spurred him on to renewed efforts, at times when he most needed such incentives. He had played, studied, quarrelled, travelled with Anne for so long a time that he had grown accustomed to her.

That was all.

He knew that she was irritable, sensitive.

“I want to ask your advice—your opinion. Promise me that you will give me your honest, your candid opinion.” She said it very slowly, very deliberately; herself in the shadow, her eyes intently fixed on his face, showing clearly in the moonlight.

“I will always be honest with you, Anne,” he answered with equal deliberation. Men are not supposed to have the delicate insight necessary to fathom a woman's mind; but Nelson knew, to a cer-

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tainty, her question before she asked it. The struggle had already commenced in his mind, between his ideal sense of right, and what is commonly called right by the majority of so-called good people. On the latter side were visions of a young woman with masses of golden hair glinting and sparkling in the glow of an August afternoon—and a little white “bo-it.”

“You know that Mr. Lighthall has asked me to marry him?” Her eyes never left his face for an instant.

“I know it—yes,” he answered. “Now comes the crux,” he whispered to his soul. “If I get over this and retain my self respect there is hope.”

“What would you advise me to do?”

“Honest?” said Nelson.

“Honest,” repeated Anne.

He hesitated for the merest, wavering part of an instant. No man is perfect.

“Anne,” he said quietly, his soft brown eyes glowing kindly, affectionately. “I would not consider his proposal for a moment.” Then he stood up, and for a pretense turned his back to her, as

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he threw his cigar far over the terrace. Before he turned, a pair of cool, white arms encircled his neck, and the slightest touch of velvety lips brushed his cheek. "Thank you Nelson," she murmured in his ear. "Good night."

And yet—

IV

NELSON, in dressing gown and slippers, was suffering the apathetical feeling that, unfortunately, generally follows the performance of highly virtuous actions. His conscience approved so fully that it left him without any of the stimulating thoughts that excite the mind. He had saved Anne from a marriage with Lighthall—a contingency which had first appeared to him as supernal luck—for the best of reasons:—that she was too good for him. Then he had written a short explanatory note to Hilda,—also in the practice of duty—in which he informed her that he and William Collins were one and the same individual. Both of which, he no doubt assured himself, were morally blameless, commendable actions—and in accord with his ideals. To be sure, the probable results of his strict performance of duty seemed to indicate a balance greatly to his taste. Hilda would no doubt regard Nelson Thomas, the million-

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aire, with more favor than she had accorded William Collins, the casual summer boarder.

Regarding Anne—?

Well—

He was enduring the approval of his conscience, when a servant entered his room with a pot of coffee. On the tray was the morning paper, and Hilda's answer. It was not very long:

Dear Mr. Thomas:

I knew it all the time.

Sincerely,

Brunhilda Gunther.

V

THE Luxmore was one of the most exuberant of the luxurious hotels in a city where extravagance in hostelries is the rule. It was furnished with a lavish expenditure that far exceeded all previous attempts in public house fittings. What it lacked in taste was made up in glittering folderols that were positively bewildering. In order that each individual predilection of its cosmopolitan guests should be satisfied, nearly every apartment in its vast interior was after a different design—ranging from the mediæval to the present day.

In the coffee room of the sumptuous pile Nelson sat comfortably, recalling preceding events. For an hour, probably longer, he had been wandering restlessly around the public rooms of the hotel—from the Chinese to the Spanish reception rooms, across to the French alcove, and then to the

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Dutch café—thinking—thinking of the insignificant little note which he carried close to his heart, in an inner pocket. It was not much of a note to cause all the commotion that was agitating his mind; it was a very flippant, pert sort of a note, but it was remarkable how tenderly he regarded it. As he roamed through the polychromatic halls and recesses, he would stop in each shaded retreat, and stealthily draw forth the envelope that contained a message of but half a dozen words. Then, under cover of his hand, he would press the bit of paper to his lips—and imagine that he could detect the perfume of pine balsam. This was all preliminary, in a measure,—an expression of happiness in the receipt of a letter from Hilda—a letter written in her own hand; a message direct from her to him. He read it over and over—a great many times, for the pure joy of it, and then, like a man, he sat down comfortably in the café to reason the matter to a logical conclusion.

And before long the half dozen words began to assume proportions, the possibilities of which set his pulses to throbbing with a rapidity that caught

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his breath. For, if she knew it all the time—and there were her own words for it—then she knew all the time that he was Nelson Thomas, masquerading as William Collins—?

The thought caused him a variety of emotions, ranging from hope to deepest despair. But through it all there were pictures—faintly outlined, then more graphic in detail—passing before his mind's eye like a panorama: the old well in the orchard: the little white cottage embowered in green, with the winding path leading to the main road: the walk along the road to Sunset Hill—and the glowing skies.

There were more intimate memories of a small room, from the windows of which he could see the mottled sunshine, that shone through the leaves of the swaying, clustering vines—and the birds, calling, chirping, twittering with ecstasy: and the kitchen, with its clean white floor, the rows of blue china on the cupboard shelves; and the low rocking chair, beside an open window—the slender branches of sweet peas were nodding their heads just above the sill. That was her own corner.

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These were her everyday surroundings; the things that she touched with her hands, and brushed with her garments. They encompassed her: invested her: belonged to her alone. . . .

The air in the café was hot, uncomfortable. The red rugs on the floor, the glittering paint and ornaments, seemed to absorb and radiate the latent heat of the day. In the street the long line of buildings on either side appeared to be dried, baked to an ashy grayness. Perspiring men and women jostled, crowded, and tried to avoid contact with each other at the same time. In a dogged, erratic way they made their way homeward, in the hot and dusty evening. . . .

Nelson called a hansom at the door, and drove to his club. It was necessary to consider certain matters from a new point of view—the position into which Hilda's note had placed him. The club, in the summer time, was not a cheerful place to be in. The rugs had all been removed from the floors; the furniture shrouded in linen covers; the pictures covered with netting; the café was deserted; and the incessant buzzing of the electric

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fans only increased the general feeling of unrest and confusion. Although contrary to the rules, the windows of the first floor were raised, to obtain some relief from the oppressive heat. He drew a chair close to one of the open windows, took the note from his pocket, and in the semi-darkness he tried to read between the lines.

“So you knew it all the time—?” he said, in an undertone, as he suddenly sat up and gazed into the corner of the room.

One could imagine Hilda sitting in the low chair, opposite. Hilda, with the deep blue eyes, laughing, mocking. Hilda consenting, yielding. Hilda defiant, contumacious—that was the mischief of it—he did not know which Hilda he was talking to.

“You knew it when I engaged the room—?” he whispered; and the recollection made him smile. “By the way—,” she had asked, “do you know a gentleman by the name of Thomas?” That was Hilda the mirthful. “I am so anxious to know more about him.” He recalled her interested expression—her eagerness. He brought his clenched

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hand down with a thump on the arm of his chair. "And you never suspected—anything—?" Then, "What kind of a man is he—?" There was a dainty morsel, indeed. "What kind of a man is he, anyhow—?" He repeated the question, half aloud, and glared into the dark corner of the room. Apparently, there was no comfort coming from that direction. "He's so sure to meet with disappointment." It came from somewhere in the seclusion of his memory—like a warning premonition of future events. He tried to recall more cheerful recollections. His mind reverted to the confession of love—he had described her, minutely—he had made her in the name of his friend Thomas. And she had gone away and left him—!

That must have been Hilda the defiant, the contumacious.

Again he took the little note from his inner pocket, and read:—"I knew it, all the time."

. . . .

He sat for sometime, in the dim light of the shaded electrolier, indolently gazing through the open window at the constant stream of people,

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passing to and fro, on the street. Here was a group of shop girls, weary, aching from the confinement of close, ill ventilated stores, hurrying past to homes that were even more depressing. There was a man—his eyes hid behind colored spectacles—walking slowly—very slowly—an inch at a time, in order to keep moving—lustily singing, “Nearer my God to Thee;” while a woman companion, her arm linked in his, was jingling a few pennies in a small tin cup.

There were the masses, passing in review before him. He could see them, hear them—almost touch them, but—

I regret to say, that this student of Life paid them scant attention. He did not even notice the increasing oppressiveness of the air; the dead calm, in which not the slightest breath or motion of the heavy atmosphere could be felt. He was trying to arrive at some conclusion. At the same time, the air was becoming even more heavy, more suffocating, and, although the streets were ablaze with electric lights, there was a darker background overhead; a sombre, unreal blackness, that seemed

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to come closer to the rim of artificial light, ominous, threatening.

Suddenly there was a loud clap of thunder, deafening—following instantly a flash of lightning, hardly noticed in the confusion of electric lights. Then down the street came a furious blast of wind—warm; laden with the dust, whirling bits of paper, and the dried debris of the avenue; tearing some of the weather-worn awnings; making the signs creak and swing; banging the doors; threatening the large plate-glass windows of the shops; blowing hats from the heads of unwary pedestrians, high in the air; upsetting, twisting, knocking about nearly everything that happened to be in its blinding, dust-laden, rubbishy path. Then came the rain.

Nelson closed the window, and stood watching the storm. It was exciting, to see the wild hurry-scurry of the street; the frantic rush for shelter; the numerous urgent pursuits of errant hats; the universal stampede of the outdoor population. The rain came down in pelting, sweeping torrents. The thunder crackled, and fulminated with terrific

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detonations. The gutters ran full to the curb with little rivers of swirling, dirty water. And just at the time when he had finally decided that he would call on Hilda, at Mrs Wyse's apartments—on West End Avenue, above One Hundred and Fifteenth Street.

“I will call and—and explain,” he had decided, just as the storm broke. “I don't care what anybody says—or thinks. I shall call on her, and speak to her—speak to her. Do you hear me—?”

He nodded defiantly, to nobody—in the corner—and then he walked slowly upstairs to dinner.

. . . .

After dinner it was still raining, and the storm seemed to increase as the night advanced. “I can't possibly get there to-night,” Nelson concluded, dolefully. . . .

The following evening—after an interminable day—he stepped into a hansom with an impatience, an eager elasticity,—elatedly; that was not in accord with his spirit. That craven part of him was suggesting all sorts of difficulties, all manner of discouragements. He was consuming—smok-

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ing—one cigarette after the other, his faculties tense, whirling in anticipation of meeting Hilda. And he imagined that he could hear her voice:—

“Try to be yourself—”

“Do you know Mr. Thomas—?”

“What kind of a man is he—?”

“I'm so anxious to know more about him—”

“Poor man. He's so sure to be disappointed—”

So sure to be disappointed.

The words sounded in his ears like the tolling of a bell over his departed hopes, as the hansom stopped in front of a very plain, modest-looking building, in which were Mrs. Wyse's apartments.

It was not necessary to go beyond the desk of the flippant young woman, who presided over the office in the first floor hall, to learn his fate.

“I can send up your card to Mrs. Wyse,” she said, in answer to his inquiry, “but Mrs. Donald and Miss Gunther left for Portland this afternoon.”

She smiled, flirtingly, in his face as she held her hand poised over the call bell. She was evidently impressed.

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He stood, staring vacantly into her pale grey eyes; he noticed the excess of powder on her nose; the artificial pencilling of her brows; the unnatural red of her lips, and the enormity of her expanded hair. There are moments when the mind records objects like a sensitized film. . . .

. . . . "No—no, thank you—never mind," he stammered, as he recovered his card. . . .

"The Luxmore—," he directed the driver.

"Take your time—there's no hurry."

VI

THE evening papers contained harrowing details of the storm that had raged with unusual fury all along the Atlantic coast, on the previous night; sailing vessels had been lost, steamers driven ashore, seaside resorts inundated. Nelson Thomas, seated at a little table in the roof-garden of the Luxmore, read the accounts carelessly indifferent. In his mind the damage to shipping, and to the entire coast line, was of minor importance when compared to the thought that the storm was responsible for the delay that caused him to miss seeing Hilda. "If I had only known that she was going—so soon," he sighed, "I would have waded up there—storm or no storm."

He emptied the contents of a miniature decanter into a large tumbler, nearly filled with crushed ice; then he filled the tumbler from a siphon-bottle. His excuse for this unusual indulgence must

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have been the keen disappointment under which he was laboring, for Nelson was not, in any sense of the term, a drinking man. In fact, the taste of the whiskey recalled, with a ludicrous association, the last time that he had taken a drink with old man Gunther. He could see the captain fumbling around in the old locker, in his search for the curious looking bottle—and the odor—! “Phew—!” Somehow there did not seem to be much difference between the smell of the brown-colored, flat bottle, and the dainty little decanter within reach of his hand. He pushed the tumbler from him with a disgusted expression that did not escape the attention of the lynx-eyed waiter.

“Perhaps you would like another blend—?” he inquired.

“No—no, thank you. You may bring me a small pot of coffee,” Nelson replied. Then he began another study of Hilda’s well-worn, laconic note. . . .

“By thunder—!” he exclaimed, irritably, “she’s as obscure and ambiguous as the Delphic priestess.”

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He paid his check. Then he began an aimless walk around the garden. It was beginning to fill with men and women—coming from the various dinner and theatre parties of the can't-get-away population of the great city. The men were in evening costumes, and the ladies were gowned in shimmering light creations, in which pink and white predominated. A line of electric lamps, of large opalescent globes, defined the edges of the roof. Within these lamps were rows of potted evergreen trees, which served as screens;—and there were pergolas covered with growing vines, under which were seats, and little round tables; and fountains, splashing amid groups of ferns; and cunningly contrived wooden arches, and structures—of the gingerbread variety—for the modern Babylonians to walk through; to laugh, and flirt in; to drink, and to be merry.

Nelson passed through the crowd, to the rear of the garden. Here, where the light from the lamps was not so glaring, he contemplated, through an opening in the evergreens, the marvelous view beneath him. At his feet was the city—the living,

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dormant,—strange thing. Irregular patches of glimmering light in the dark walls of the buildings indicated the windows, behind which were the restless in-door part of the population. Long stretches of dazzling brilliancy marked the lines of the streets. Beyond the city was the river—gleaming in the rays of the moon like a broad band of silver. Dark, floating objects, pierced with innumerable pin-holes of twinkling light, moved silently to and fro. Beyond the river was another rim of dotted light, and beyond that the mist of the night faded into the majesty of the heavens.

Nelson stood gazing at the mass of buildings, sombre, gloomy; then at the splendor of the firmament.

He was wrapt in silent meditation.

Then, as he stood there he was suddenly called to the realities of life, to the exigencies of the hour, by hearing his assumed name called. Looking back, he saw a bell boy, salver in hand, on which was a letter. It was a plain, cheap-looking envelope, addressed in a bold, round hand, and con-

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spicuously displayed in the corner was the injunction: "Important—deliver at once."

Nelson took the letter, and opened it with no small amount of curiosity.

It began:—

MR. WILLIAM COLLINS.

Respected Friend:—

The boat race will come off in about ten days. You said that you might like to enter a boat, so I write you in time to do so. Maybe you had better come down to Orr's Island and talk it over. I have a pretty able boat myself, but Captain Herbert Kenneth's *Pearl* is the slickest thing that ever came into this harbor. He's likely to win out—unless, perhaps, you have something better. That's why I write to you.

Your friend—

HAGEN GUNTHER.

Nelson looked again at the envelope, and smiled at the address:—"William Collins, The Luxmore," Then he put it in his pocket, with the

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note from Hilda. "If she knew it all the time," he concluded, "Uncle Hagen didn't."

The throngs of people were passing, and repassing—just as before. The tired musicians were playing, "Love Me and the World is Mine,"—in response to the third clamorous encore from the noisy parties at the small round tables. The men were just as boisterous, the women as artificial. But the letter from Orr's Island had changed the whole thing for Nelson. They all seemed to be more friendly—more human. He passed them, on his way to the elevator, with a smile on his face that some of the pink and white habitues of the garden accepted as personal attentions—and smiled back. In his heart was courage, hope, a confident to-morrow.

"Bully, old Captain Hagen—," he muttered, exultantly. "We'll make Herbert Kenneth think that his boat is going backwards—!"

VII

CHARLIE LIGHTHALL was not a bad sort of a man. His progress thus far, down life's mighty river, had not been marked by any serious accident, or by any of the calamities that seem to beset the man of action. Figuratively, he sat quietly in the middle of his pleasure boat, and allowed the current to carry him where it ran. It usually ran around all the rocks, and carried his boat with it. He had never been obliged to get out and push. To be sure, he was alone in his little boat; and sometimes he felt like jumping overboard—even at the risk of breaking his neck—from mere loneliness. That was when he saw the mermaids beckoning to him from the rocks. Now, without any propulsion from him, his boat was out of the current, and was wildly careening in troubled waters. What was the matter with him? What had happened to cause such a com-

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motion in his usually uneventful life? He had come to the club, much perplexed in mind, to think the thing to a conclusion. But the thing refused to be concluded. It stayed with him, clung to him, possessed him, with a tenacity of purpose that seemed to make his past, aimless existence a mere shell, a bauble that had been suddenly broken at the touch of a finger. "By—Jove—! It's ridiculous. Here, waiter—" He touched the small call bell on the table in front of him. "Bring me a ricky—and a mild Vencedora."

He lit the cigar, and emitted circling rings of smoke between each sentence.

"What ever possessed you, anyhow—?"

"What kind of an old fossil rhabdosteus are you, anyway—?"

"Why in the dickens did you go on that infernal yacht—?"

"Why didn't you let well enough alone—?"

"Now, how do you feel—?"

Then he would relapse into profound reflection, and go over in his mind all the circumstances leading up to the moment when he had asked Miss

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Conrad a most embarrassing question. A proposal which she had received decorously; in fact, with the greatest propriety of conduct. He recalled how she had been seated—faultlessly gowned, her gloved hands at the proper angle, her head slightly inclined, in a listening attitude, her eyes downcast, modestly. He remembered that he was seated all of a dozen feet away from her—as he should have been—and how fearful he was lest she should jump up and embrace him, or do something equally foolish—you know. One never can tell how a girl will act under such circumstances. How, instead, she had not exhibited any emotion whatever, but had lowered her head a little more, so that her hat covered her eyes, and—that was all. That was all, but—confound it—! What was he to do now—? This beautiful, unapproachable woman would never come any closer. He never could get her into a corner. Ever since that fateful day on the yacht he had just trailed along after her, like a—like a poodle—Yes, by Jove—! like a poodle! He pushed back his chair angrily, and glared up into the beaming face of—Nelson Thomas.

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The latter dropped into the chair, on the opposite side of the table.

“Why, Lighthall—old man, what’s the matter?” he exclaimed. “You look all obfuscated.”

He touched the call bell. “Let me get you an old-fashioned Martini—finest thing in the world for that tired feeling—irrigates the barren regions of the brain—”

He rang again, and the waiter approached.

“Send the head waiter here—”

The man disappeared.

“Only man in the club who knows how to make it—,” he explained. “Now—what’s the trouble with Charles Lyndhurst Lighthall?”

“Oh—nothing much,” said the other wearily. He puffed vigorously at his cigar. Then a thought seemed to strike him. “You don’t know where I could buy a thrashing machine—?” he inquired.

“A what—?”

“Something that could lick a man into shape who didn’t know when he was well off,” he added, gloomily.

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Nelson looked him over with the manner of a skilled diagnostician.

"That sounds like remorse—and you engaged," he said, reproachfully.

"Engaged,—nothing—," blurted Lighthall.

Nelson's conscience smote him as he scanned his companion's perturbed countenance. He thought of his virtuous advice to Anne Conrad that night on the tea terrace. And he wondered whether he had not been a trifle unjust to—Lighthall.

"But you told me—," he began.

"Well—forget it—," snapped Lighthall. "I must have been drunk, or crazy—on that blamed yacht of yours, to run my neck into any such noose."

"Oh—you've had a lover's quarrel," said Nelson, soothingly. He was trying to think of some way by which he could recall that good advice to Anne—for which he now felt somewhat ashamed. "After you're married—"

"Married—!" interrupted Lighthall. "Now listen, Nelson. I am not going to marry Miss Conrad, if I can avoid it—honorably."

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A glimmer of light was beginning to dawn in the mind of Nelson.

"Then you have changed your plans—?" he hazarded. "How about the other party—how about Anne—?"

"That's all that's worrying me," said Lighthall, bluntly. "At the risk of being thought a conceited ass, do you think that she would care—very much if—if—well, if it could be arranged otherwise?"

Nelson rubbed his chin, thoughtfully. He felt much relief in the turn of affairs that exonerated him from the consequences of—as he imagined—his advice to Anne.

"I don't know just how much her feelings are involved," he mused.

"Oh—hang her feelings—!" exclaimed Lighthall, desperately. "I never was really engaged, you know," he added, hopefully.

"Oh—then you were never really engaged."

"I—er—suggested, that is, proposed marriage to Miss Conrad. . . . But she—er—she never seemed to take me seriously," complained Lighthall. "She never answered me."

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"Smart girl—Anne," remarked Nelson, absently. "There may be more intelligent young women than Anne,—but I haven't seen them."

"Oh — she's intelligent enough," Lighthall agreed. "It isn't Anne—it's me."

"Yes—?"

"I should have known better than to get into such a hole," he asseverated.

"Perhaps you exaggerate the difficulty," said Nelson, consolingly. "As you say, she may never take you seriously."

"But suppose she does—?" suggested Lighthall. "Really, Nelson, I don't believe that I care much about marrying. This experience with Miss Conrad has sort of cured me of the notion."

"Anne—is a very superior woman," said Nelson, dreamily. "She reasons well—oh, I've known Anne since she was so high." He held a hand, outstretched about three feet from the floor. "You can just leave it to her," he added, confidently.

"I suppose that would be best," assented Lighthall, with unsettled vagueness.

VIII

HILDA received Nelson's letter, written to her from the Oaks, with a fluttering nervousness that did not escape the notice of Mrs. Wyse. But that delightful woman—putting two and two together—did not comment on the pearl gray envelope, stamped with a seal in wax, and addressed in a remarkably bold masculine hand. She simply called her daughter Grace's attention to some details of housekeeping that would require their presence in the kitchen. And Hilda was left alone in her bedroom.

For some few moments after they had left her Hilda sat still, the unopened letter in her hand, and her eyes fixed in a fit of retrospection. Then she rose and looked at her reflection in the broad mirror over the chiffonier. It was well worth her attention. There were two dark blue eyes, gleaming at her with a furtive look in them that made

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her uneasy. And her cheeks were red—a flaming red. She turned from the mirror with an impatient stamp of her foot. Through the open window the view was through a narrow alley, between tall houses. At the end of the alley was a section of the North River; and on this square bit of blue moved back and forth the various river craft—as seen in moving picture exhibitions. But I doubt if Hilda saw any of the pictures. Her eyes were on the blue sky. Perhaps the letter, unopened in her hand, recalled a beautiful yacht steaming slowly to the North—in Portland harbor. It may be that she saw a bronzed face, in which was set a pair of honest brown eyes, gazing down at her from over the hand rail. Possibly she imagined that she felt the grasp of a strong hand—a firmer grasp, perhaps, than was really necessary—that had lifted her up the ladder and onto the deck of the *Phyllis*. And the supper—? How hard she had tried to appear indifferent to his advances! And his very evident displeasure. There may have been a memory of certain conversations, in the tangle of which came vividly:—

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“I want to be happier—,” he said. “How shall I try—?”

“Gets an idea into his head—then he forgets everything else—”

“Ignores everybody . . . until he gets what he wants—”

“And you said—that he was sure to be disappointed—”

She turned quickly, abruptly to the mirror. “Did I say that—?” she asked her reflection—aloud. The blushing face looked half ashamed.

“There is one woman whose indifference is causing him the greatest sorrow of his life—” The lovely face looked almost sad. No doubt she recalled his plea:—

“Miss Gunther—Hilda—surely you know—?”

. . . Was there anything Delphian—anything ambiguous in the answer she hastened to write to Nelson—the little note that he kept in his pocket, close to his heart—?

“I knew it all the time.”

IX

BAR HARBOR was putting up the shutters, and counting the receipts of an unusually good season. Vanity Fair had opened early, and closed late. The numerous pleasure-seekers, coming with plethoric purses early in the summer, had left a generous portion of their money before their departure in September, and a golden after-glow seemed to permeate the place.

In the harbor the numerous yachts had, one by one, drifted into the Southern current—into the stream of departing guests. On board the yacht *Phyllis*—riding lazily at anchor—there was manifest a spirit of inactiveness amounting to torpidity. The mate, the engineer, and the fireman had played so many games of poker, and with so many turns of fortune, that it was a matter of much uncertainty as to whom belonged their wages at the approaching pay-day. Judging from appear-

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ances, the fireman had experienced more than his share of bad luck; for his face wore an expression of absolute indifference to his surroundings, that was in marked contrast to the lively interest in things that distinguished the actions of the engineer. The latter was gazing into the hazy calm of the September afternoon, apparently oblivious of the fact that he was dealing the long-suffering fireman a poker hand of more than ordinary barrenness—it made Jake groan aloud—when he remarked: “I wonder where we are going next—?”

“T’ hell—!” said Jake, explosively, as he vainly searched his hand for even one little “pair”—and they all laughed.

“Tain’t as bad as that,” said the mate, who put up his “ante” with each deal, but never risked a bet. “There’s something in the wind all right—and the wind is blowing South.” He spoke with his pipe in his mouth, and all the while gazing fixedly at his cards. His manner indicated that he could tell more if he chose, but that he was not going to be hurried.

“It’s me for New York,” said Jake—“that’s as

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far South as I go." The mate looked at him scornfully. "City rat—that's what you are." Then he added mysteriously—"suppose now it was Havana,—or Porto Rico?"

"And get blowed up—like the Maine—!" retorted Jake. "They say them Japanese are regular devils—no, sir-e-e."

"Japanese—?" The mate could not express his mean opinion of the fireman's geography. So he just bit harder on the stem of his pipe, and kept a lookout for Captain Botts. There were certain indications that the owner was expected aboard before many moons, and it behooved them to be ready. The steward was responsible for the information that the captain had received a telegram from New York, before he had gone ashore.

So, in a measure, they were prepared for a peculiar low whistle, that came from a hand, who was stowed away on the upper deck. . . .

"That's him—," said the mate, sententiously.

"Chuck it—and git—!"

There was a hasty settling of accounts with Joe, the engineer—and banker. A rapid sweeping up

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of the chips. A quick resumption of coats, collars, and caps and everything was in order as the launch containing the owner and captain came alongside. . . .

An hour later Nelson and the captain were talking things over in the cabin.

“That’s a good hard-working crew—,” said the former, commendingly.

“Well—the’re—not so good that it hurts,” commented the captain. “Off and on, the’re ’bout an average.” He slapped a persistent mosquito into sudden death—and began to fill his pipe.

“How would they do for a Southern cruise—later on?” Nelson inquired.

“Oh—they’d be all right—all except Jake, the fireman.”

“What’s the matter with him?”

“Well, he has a sweetheart in New York, and the’re always writing back and forth. He never goes more than one cruise—” The old skipper pulled a sulphurous match across the leg of his trousers, and screwed up his face as the fumes filled his eyes and nostrils. “I doubt if you could

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get him past New York harbor without deserting—he'd try to swim ashore."

Nelson, leaning back on the leather cushions, suddenly felt a warm sympathy for the long, lean white-faced individual, who, heretofore, had been to him nothing more than a sort of automatic stoker—something that worked along with the rest of the machinery—and stopping when the engineer shut off steam. Jake, with a sweetheart—? Jake risking his life to be with her—to see her—!

"I'll see Jake about that myself," he said to the captain. Then suddenly:—

"What kind of boats do they have down at Orr's Island?" he questioned.

"Boats—!" The honest skipper held his pipe in suspension, his mouth open. What was this erratic owner of his driving at now—? "Boats—? Well, most every kind, from a catboat to Kenneth's *Pearl*."

"That's the one," Nelson explained. "Do you know of any boat of its class that could beat her—in a race?" He sat up and tapped impatiently with his knuckles on the wooden arm of his chair.

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The captain was not very quick in his mental process; but, when an idea came along pushing everything before it, crowding out every other thought, he managed to see it—and sometimes to grasp it. He smiled at the marked anxiety in Nelson's action. "There's plenty in her class that could beat the *Pearl*," he affirmed, resuming his gravity. "There was one here, a week ago—a thirty-foot—designed by Herreshoff. . . . If she was handled right—" He gazed thoughtfully into the bowl of his pipe. "In my opinion it's the man who handles the boat, more than the craft itself—" He paused for a moment, and looked hard at Nelson. "Had you thought of sailing her yourself—?"

"That's my intention," asserted Nelson, promptly.

"I thought as much—," nodded the skipper, approvingly. He had grasped the idea, and had taken firm hold of it. "She was built for a racer, and defeated some smart boats, when her owner thought that she was too good for that work—"

"Too good for racing—?" interrupted Nelson.

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“Well—you see, the *Irene* is equally good in a breeze of six or twenty-six miles—it’s all the same to her,” explained the captain. “And the owner just nat’cherly kept her for his own use.”

“Seems to me that’s the kind we want,” approved Nelson. “A good able boat that will come handy for any kind of service. Is she for sale—?” Down somewhere, in the inner recesses of his heart, a thought was causing it to expand with a sudden access of joy,—how Uncle Hagen would like to own a boat like that.

“He might sell her—so he told the mate, if he gets his price,” answered the captain.

“Where is she now—?” asked Nelson, as he nervously took out his watch. The trifling matter of buying a thirty-foot yacht might be done before dinner.

“She left here for New York—she’s about reached there now,” calculated the captain—on his fingers.

Again Nelson consulted his timepiece.

For a brief moment he sat in a nerveless state of indecision. It seemed to be so utterly foolish,

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so extraordinary. He imagined that his wiser self was laughing at him, jeeringly. Was asking him why he did not go straight to her—by the next train, and demand—yes, demand her answer to his proposal. Just insist—she's sure to—to— Then his wiser self faded away, and the deep blue eyes were looking into his, mocking, defiant.

He raised his eyes to meet the captain's.

“How soon could we get under way—?” he asked. . . .

There was no question that the old man felt prouder of answering. He was in a continual state of preparedness.

“In half an hour—if you wish.”

“All right—,” assented Nelson, cheerfully, “we'll start for New York as soon as you are ready.” . . .

Jake, the fireman, received the news by wireless telegraphy—and the way that he coaxed that fire into a sudden white heat was a wonder. And all the time that he was shoveling, and sweeping, and watching the steam gauge, he was humming: “I on-ly know I love you—” out of tune, and off

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the key—until he happened to glance up and saw the owner looking at him.

He was holding something in his outstretched hand, and beckoned Jake to come to the window. “Give her that—” he said, in an undertone, “when we get to New York.”

Jake, wondering, took the little brown envelope between the tips of a black thumb and finger. Then he opened the sealed flap and counted—in brand new bills—well—he counted considerably more than his pay.

PART FOURTH.

I

BEHOLD, Nelson again on board of the little steamer *Aucocisco*, en route for Orr's Island.

A peculiar man, and one who, having made up his mind what he wants, will never give up trying until he gets it. He had made up his mind on one subject: that he loved Hilda with every desire that was in him. She was a blessing—a benediction. Her sudden appearance into his life had given him grace and virtue—a new life in which her spirit murmured in his ears, in which the witchery of her presence was ever before his eyes.

The old life was barren, fruitless. It now seemed to him to have been without aim or ambition. A tiresome existence of fuss and feathers, of tinsel and gilding—frayed and somewhat soiled.

From now on he was possessed of but one idea: to be with her, to love her, to win her if he could, but—to love her forever. And all this had come

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to him in so short a time that he smiled at the recollection. "But it is not the love of days and weeks," he reflected. "My heart has been crying for her all these years. My soul has prayed for her from the beginning. Now I know—now I know—"

He drew up a chair to the place—he tried to imagine that it was the identical spot—where he had sat on his first trip to the island. Then he lighted his pipe and surveyed the surroundings, and the few passengers who were coming aboard. He was not impatient, or restless. His life was ahead of him—his new life—and he was surprised to find that the boat had left her moorings and was backing out slowly into the harbor.

There was a snap of cold in the air that betokened the advent of autumn. The sea was restlessly tossing and splashing around the bow of the steamer, under the disturbing influence of an adverse wind and tide. As the boat advanced into the more open sea—emerging from the shelter of the harbor—the wind blew strong and cold. The little group of passengers hurried to the protec-

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tion of the cabin, leaving Nelson alone on the deck. He buttoned his overcoat more closely under his chin and walked forward to the bow, where he could more thoroughly enjoy the keen, rough breeze and the tumultuous waves. He might have been alone on the vessel. No summer boarders now joined their laughter with the rippling of the summer seas. They had all departed, like birds of passage, for the Southland. Only those islanders whose necessities required them to make the trip were aboard the *Aucocisco*, and these were in the seclusion of the cabin. There was no music; no dreamy waltzes in the air; no sound save the sharp whistling of the wind across the bare decks and projecting upper works of the steamer. . . .

He shrugged his shoulders, and paced up and down the deck with a quickened stride. Things, somehow, were standing forth—sharp, distinct. The sea had a sinister, a darker hue. The blue and gold of the skies had given way to the white and gray. “This is the season of early fall,” he said to himself, thoughtfully. “What becomes of these islanders in the winter—?”

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A vision of storms and terrible cold; of blinding sleet and hail; of tempestuous gales whirling in wild fury across the shores of the beautiful islands against the frail wooden walls of a little white cottage at the end of a lane. He imagined that he could see Hilda, cowering, sinking with fear into her chair by the window, as the fierce storm rattled the light sashes. And only Uncle Hagen to protect her. "By Jove—! she must feel—lonely," he said, compassionately. . . . He went over and stood under the lee of the funnel, as a protection from the increasing cold. A chill was creeping over him, and he had a feeling that if he relaxed the grip of his jaw his teeth would chatter—then he sought the warmth of the cabin, and found himself admiring the good sense of the islanders, who had gone there first, and who had secured the best seats. When the boat arrived at Orr's Island it was quite dark. Nelson, loitering in the rear, saw the few passengers disappear into the night—at about the same moment of his discovery that the hotel at the landing had evidently been closed for the season. Impatiently he

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pounded and rattled the doors, and then, forming a sudden resolution, he went back to the boat. He had decided to return to Portland, and then to come back in the morning. But the influence that controlled him, having landed him safely on Orr's Island, seemed loath to have him depart. The *Aucocisco* had made her last trip for the day. To make matters more disagreeable, a drizzling rain and fog had followed in the wake of the cold east wind, and the clouds had settled in a dense blackness that was most depressing. As he stood, damp and shivering, in the middle of the road, he could hear the monotonous lapping of the sea, as it rushed in and out among the stones of the beach. Behind him rose the island, dark and gloomy. Instinctively, he turned his steps towards the nearest light—a twinkling ray from the window of a nearby cottage. His hand was on the gate of the low fence in front of the house, when his mood changed. “No—I'm going back to my old room, in Captain Gunther's cottage,” he muttered. “Rath-er unconventional—that's a fact,—but—well, somehow—”

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He faced the misty rain, the enveloping fog, and tramped sturdily along the road to Hagen Gunther's cottage. The darkness was so dense that he kept to the road more by instinct than vision. Occasionally his foot scraped sharply along a projecting stone; then he would suddenly step into a pool of mud, or spongy moss. Several times he wandered off the road, and found himself plunging into gulleys, or running against the low hanging branches of trees. Once his courage failed him, and he half resolved to sit down somewhere and wait until morning. Altogether he was in a half ludicrous and altogether uncomfortable situation. How his club friends would laugh if they knew of his predicament—? Or Anne—? Anne, with her fine sarcasm, and her keen sense of humor. "Nevertheless," he protested, after another hour of stumbling along the main road, "I propose to get there, if it takes all night."

Was it the main road—?

He had a dim foreboding that somewhere he had deviated from the highway, and that things were less familiar.

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Was that the sea—?

The sound was surely growing fainter, more distant. He stood still and listened. The silence was so profound, so intense, that he could hear the circulation of his blood ringing in his ears. So far as any signs of human habitation went, he was alone on the island. . . .

There was nothing to do but to turn back; to stop at the first house he came to, and to ask for a night's lodging. But when he faced around there was no light to be seen. Only darkness, impenetrable.

Again he thought that he heard the sea; but it was only the sound of the water—trickling from the overburdened trees.

His exertions had warmed him; had started his circulation so that he was no longer chilly. He felt for his pipe, and soon had a glowing nose-warmer, that solaced his perturbed spirit.

“I'm here, anyway—,” he said, philosophically, as he sat down on a boulder. “I might have fallen off the island.” . . .

Having exhausted his resources, and having

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resigned himself to a condition of moralizing inactivity, the inevitable happened—and the fog moved out to sea.

In a few moments a white glow appeared, growing brighter and more distinct; and a few stars. Then came the full silvery light of the moon.

Nelson arose and beheld with astonishment the marvelous change in his surroundings. The sky was ablaze with light, and the stars seemed like great jewels, set in an overhanging dome. Beneath his feet, stretching like a carpet covered with glittering crystals, the grass-grown hillside fell abruptly to the edge of the bay. A bay that was shimmering and reflecting the heavens like a mirror. A bay with a mysterious island edging its outer circumference. It might have been Alcina's Isle. And each dark tree standing silently in the night may have been her lovers, silenced into everlasting repose by her enchantments.

He turned, and behold—! there was a broad expanse of pine-covered hill, and vale: and a vista of sheltered coves, indenting the shores. And wide reaches of water, shining in the moon's rays like

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molten silver: within an encircling blue horizon. And white caps, leaping, dancing. And there, afar off, was the light-house, that flashed and was dark, flashed and was dark again.

Impulsively he retraced his path up the hill and regained the main road. There, not more than half a mile away, he could plainly see Hagen Gunther's cottage. In the window a cheerful, steady light shone like a beacon.

Nelson, the peculiar—the singular young man, stood for quite a long time peering into the night towards the cottage.

Then he refilled his pipe; went back to his boulder on the hillside, and sat for sometime gazing at the moon. . . .

Perhaps he was comparing himself to a certain Astolpho—son of Otho—who was carried on the back of a whale to Alcina's Isle, and who was turned into a myrtle by Alcina—when she tired of him. He might have been wondering whether Melissa—in the form of Anne—would take the trouble to disenchant him. Or, perhaps like Astolpho, he could see in the moon the wasted hours of his life;

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the broken vows and resolutions; the fruitless efforts; his good intentions, prayers and tears. It may be that Selene, the full moon, forgets these things when she kisses Endymion, the sunset. Possibly—being in love—she hides these wasted things of earth when she kisses Endymion during the night on Sunset Hill.

II

“WHAT are you reading—Hilda?”

Captain Gunther laid down his paper, and looked over his spectacles at the wealth of bronze hair that was shining like gold under the shaded evening lamp. Her head bent low over a book that was open in her lap. She took it up carelessly and examined its cover, as though she had forgotten the title. “This—?” She looked at it more closely. “It’s called Creative Crudities.”

“Oh—” The old man looked wise, as was his habit whenever he attempted to keep the pace with his educated niece. “Who’s it by—?” he ventured, casually.

“Who’s it by—” she repeated, dreamily.

Again she raised the book to her face and carefully scanned the cover. “It’s by Thomas,” she informed him.

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"Thomas—Thomas who—?" persisted the captain. He had finished his paper, and he was ready for any kind of conversation.

She looked up a trifle impatiently.

"Oh—Uncle Hagen—it's not Thomas anybody. That's his last name. He's Nelson Thomas."

"Never heard of him—" said the captain, promptly. "What's it about—?" Whenever her uncle would show any interest in her books, it had always been Hilda's custom to read aloud—but now she was strangely silent. "I don't think that you would care for it—exactly," she smiled.

"Try me—" answered the old man, as he removed his spectacles, leaned his head on the back of his chair, and stretched his legs in front of him.

A mischievous light was in her eyes as she took up the book. "Well—it's about Creation—the creation of man, you know."

The captain nodded intelligently. "Of course—I understand that all right. That's why he calls it Creation Crickyties."

She permitted that to pass, and began reading: "It's rather disconcerting to the believer in the

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Divine origin of man, to learn that he is descended from a hairy, tailed quadruped, a habitant of the primeval forests in the oldest of the old worlds. From the quad—” She caught a glimpse of her uncle’s face as she turned a page, and it nearly finished her reading.

“The what—?” he exclaimed.

He had drawn in his feet and was bending forward with both elbows resting on the arms of his chair.

“From the quad—” she went on. “Dear me—what a word—quadrumana.”

“What’s a quadroon Anna—?” queried the captain. “Maybe he means—mulatto—?”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” replied Hilda, doubtfully. “Where was I—?” she ran her finger carefully down the page. “Oh—yes, here it is.” She resumed her reading: “And that the quadrumana, with the higher mammals—”

“You mean animals—” corrected the captain.

“It says—mammals.” Hilda affirmed. “Mammals are descended from an old marsupial animal—”

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“I told you it was animal,” interrupted the old man proudly. He rocked back and forth, as Hilda went on:—“And these in turn come from some amphibious creature—”

He threw back his head and seemed to tax his memory. “Amphibious?—” he interrupted, “let me think a moment.”

Hilda stopped reading.

“Well, what’s the difficulty?” she asked.

“Oh—I was just thinking that an amphibious creature means—means—er—both ways—?”

“Yes—?”

He got up and went to a little shelf that hung in a corner of the room. Here from amongst an odd collection of worn books he drew forth a dictionary. He turned over the well-thumbed pages—“Here it is—Amphibious, having the faculty of living in two elements, air and water.” He closed the book. “And these in turn are descended from some fish-like animal—” resumed Hilda. Then she thought she heard footsteps approaching the cottage. She stopped and listened. It must have been the wind. She shivered a little.

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“How cold it is getting. Suppose we start the fire—?” she suggested.

There was a wide, stone fireplace; and a pair of iron dogs, across which was laid a few logs of satiny white birch. Underneath was stuffed some paper, and a few pine cones.

“It is kind of chilly—” assented the captain, as he broke off a sulphur match from a block, on the mantle. “I’ll light it—and also my pipe.” He filled an old briar-wood from an earthen jar of tobacco and—striking the match—he lit his pipe first and then the paper under the logs.

“The smoke won’t bother you—Hilda,” he apologized. “When the fire begins to draw.” The flames were leaping and crackling around the logs as the skipper pulled his chair closer.

After he drew in each mouthful of smoke, he would make an ostentatious—and entirely unnecessary—effort to blow it up the chimney. Hilda watched his performance with a loving smile. The rugged face—in which the deepest wrinkles lay about the kindly blue eyes—shone dim and soft, in the fitful glow of the firelight.

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"You know that I love the smell of tobacco," she assured him. And then—impulsively, she arose, went to him, and putting an arm around his broad, sturdy shoulders, she kissed his old weather-beaten cheek.

She felt the patient goodness of the man; the sudden premonition of loss, should anything happen to him, and a feeling of gratitude for all that he had done for her—"You just smoke as much as you please—Uncle Hagen," she said, tenderly.

Creative Crudities slipped from her lap with a noisy crash to the floor. He picked it up and handed it to her.

"What came ahead of the fish-like animal?" he asked her, as she resumed her seat and opened the book.

She skipped over two or three pages,—read a few lines, skipped some more pages, and closed the volume. "It doesn't say—" she replied, with a little sleepy yawn. Then she leaned over and dropping her chin in her hands, her elbows on her knees, she stared into the cheerful fire. . . .

For some moments they sat watching the flicker-

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ing blaze—neither caring to talk. Then the captain broke the silence.

“Where did you get that book—?” he asked. The tone of his voice indicated the measure of his disapproval.

“I bought it in New York—” she replied, still staring into the fire. It must have been the reflection from the hot embers that made her cheeks burn.

“Well—’t ain’t much—” the old man criticized. “I don’t have any trouble in classing men from monkeys, snake-birds, and devil fish. A man can think about his past and be sorry—or glad, but mostly sorry. Then a man can hope for better things to come. And he has a conscience—a mighty lively one sometimes. And he can talk, and read, and think about things. And a man can pray. Did you ever hear of a monkey, snake-bird, or devil fish that could do all that—?”

Hilda shook her head positively.

“No—indeed.”

The captain smoked, contemplatively. Then he spoke as though he had been thinking aloud:—

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“Anyway,—” he said conclusively, “if God could make a monkey—or a bird; a fish, a snake, or an oyster—He surely could make a man, at the same time—?” He glanced with undisguised resentment at the book on Hilda’s lap. “It’s creating life—that’s what it is; that’s the miracle; that’s what they can’t explain or figure out.” Again his eyes rested on the little volume.

“What’s the use of talking that way—?” he growled. . . .

Then, he began to nod.

She sat by the fire for a long time—so quietly that Uncle Hagen, missing the sound of her voice, went fast asleep. Then, she arose, and throwing a cape over her shoulders, she walked softly to the front door and opened it gently, very gently—and stepped out into the glorious moonlight. It was nearly ten o’clock. The air was cool, refreshing. A light breeze laden with the softness of the sea, was whispering in the apple trees in the orchard; the faint murmur of the waves splashing against the rocks in a near-by cove, reached her ears; there was no sound from the sleeping village.

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She walked slowly down the lane, thinking, wondering, deciding that it was all a dream. And it still seemed to be a dream as she saw the object of her thoughts coming towards her. Strange to say, she was not surprised—nor frightened, for it was all happening just as she had imagined that it would happen. And his face was so full of love—so kind and appealing. She was not afraid—on the contrary she felt that she was quickening her steps to meet him.

He took her hand—

“Hilda—”

“Oh—?” she said, and then she vainly tried to dispel the dream, to be conventional. She had been perfectly sure that it was going to happen, just as it was happening. She had made up her mind what she would say to him, and yet, somehow, he had found her unprepared.

“Hilda—” he said simply, “I love you.”

She knew what he was going to say, and yet she gasped—held her breath. She had been so sure of herself; she had been so certain of her duty, of what she should say to him. And here she was

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trembling—with her heart dancing in ecstasy. She turned towards the cottage—away from him.

“Mr. Thomas—” she said, almost inaudibly.

He seized her cape—her arm.

“Hilda—I love you. Don't go—will you marry me—?” He retained his hold of her. He was afraid that she would again run away from him. “Don't—” she said, drawing away, gently. “Please—don't—touch me.” After all the careful thought and preparation to find herself so weak when the moment had arrived. But—the joy, the happiness that had come to her—! But she must obey her conscience.

“Hilda—?” There was a volume of entreaty, remonstrance, almost despair in his voice.

“No—no, I can't—” she whispered. “I must go back to the house—Uncle Hagen will miss me—”

“I'll go back with you—” he said with determination. “I'll tell the captain—myself.”

“No—no,” she said, hurriedly. “It isn't that—”

“Then what is it?” he demanded.

“Now—now is the time,” she thought. But her voice trembled, miserably.

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"Ask Miss Conrad," she said, faintly.

A great light dawned on him. There was only the moon and the stars visible to his eyes, but a mental illumination lighted his mind so that the moon and the stars seemed to dance together in one maze of bewildering glory.

"Is that all—?" he said, jubilantly.

His heart was singing in triumph.

"Isn't that enough—?"

She had performed her duty; her conscience was at rest. The thought that had oppressed her ever since she had seen Anne, on board of the *Phyllis*—and Captain Botts may have said something, too—was now spoken.

"Hilda—look here." He moved closer to her and looked straight into her eyes.

"Do you care for me—at all—?"

"I,—gracious—!" her eyes chanced to glance towards the cottage, and there was Uncle Hagen—his head and shoulders framed in an open window—looking right and left.

"Do you—?" repeated Nelson, obstinately.

"Oh—I must go—" she pleaded.

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“Do you—?” he insisted.

She saw her uncle close the window and then re-appear at the open door.

He was coming towards them—down the lane.

“Yes—oh, go. Please go—”

Nelson caught the outstretched hand—for the smallest part of a second—and kissed it. “Go—hurry,—” she whispered.

There was a flutter of a skirt, as Hilda disappeared into the shrubbery that bordered the lane.

Then Nelson turned and walked, deliberately up the lane, towards the cottage.

“Why—hello—! Collins—” said the captain, cordially. “Where did you come from—?”

“Straight from New York—” chirped Nelson, with gladsome gaiety. Yes—she certainly said “yes”—there was no doubt of it.

“Came down to show you fellows how to sail a boat—” he continued merrily. I am positive that she said—“yes.”

“Oh—you did—” laughed the captain, good naturedly. “Got your boat with you—?”

He peered around, curiously. “What’s that—?”

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He listened intently. "Thought I saw something moving through the bushes—" he explained. "Guess I'm getting to see double at night—"

"The boat will be here on time—" Nelson assured him. "She's a wonder—"

"So—you don't tell me—"

The captain was chuckling and rubbing his hands. "Come right in and tell me about her—" he turned, and was walking towards the cottage. Then he stopped abruptly.

"Where's your grip—?"

"My grip—?" Nelson looked foolishly around on the ground.

"Oh—there it is—under that tree—"

He felt that some explanation was necessary to account for that vagrant bag—lying by the wayside—but there was none forthcoming.

"Just threw it overboard, to lighten ship—?" suggested the old man.

Nelson went back and picked up the small leather bag that he had carried all through his foggy wanderings. There was a twinkle in the captain's eyes as he watched him. He seemed to be in his

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most jovial mood as they walked along together. Perhaps he was rejoicing in the anticipation of a good boat race—? It may be that he was not so unobservant as Hilda believed. Or conceivably a man can hear things when he is supposed to be asleep—?

They were just on the threshold of the house when he turned to Nelson with the question: "Say—do you talk much to yourself—?"

"I—?" Nelson felt himself getting uncomfortably warm. How much did this innocent looking old skipper know—? .

"Sometimes I do—" he answered slowly, "when I haven't anyone better to talk to—"

The captain nodded his head.

"That accounts for it—" he said as though he had solved a mystery, "I thought I heard two persons talking—but it must have been only you."

Then he ushered Nelson into the cosy little sitting-room. A few charred sticks were still glowing in the fireplace. The well-worn chairs looked comfortable—there was a hospitable smell of tobacco in the air.

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"Sit right down—" insisted the captain, as he pushed his own rocker nearer the hearth.

"You're going to stay with us—of course."

"I'm afraid that I shall inconvenience—"

"Inconvenience—nobody," the captain interrupted him, "I'll call Hilda."

III

HILDA had slipped through the orchard and into the back door of the cottage before the men arrived. In response to her uncle's call she had tripped down the stairs and into the sitting-room with an outstretched hand of welcome for Mr. Collins.

"He wants his same room, Hilda," the captain informed her, "and I don't believe he's had a mouthful for supper—"

"Really captain—" Nelson protested.

"Got lost in the fog—and nearly fell off the island—" continued the captain.

"I'm not a particle hungry—" interjected Nelson, as he saw Hilda moving towards the kitchen.

"Been ever since seven o'clock getting up here from the landing," the old man informed her.

Hilda tried to appear interested.

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“Broke down in the lane, and threw over his baggage—” he laughed.

Hilda looked puzzled.

“Coming along with the current, when I saw him and towed him in—”

She permitted her eyes to rest in his, with an intelligence that set his heart to throbbing wildly. Then she arose—

“Your room is ready—whenever you wish to retire. Good-night—Mr. Collins.”

The fire burned low—there was only a few pieces of burnt wood, spangled with fitful sparks of fire—and still, old man Gunther sat, with his head buried deep in the palms of his brawny hands.

I venture to say, that he was recalling an incident in his life, an incident that gave him nearly two years of happiness—and then a life in which there was nothing left but its memory. As he sat brooding over the dying embers of the little wood fire, buried in thought, he could see the image of a tall, straight, eager young man—with ruddy cheeks and laughing blue eyes. And, near by was another vision, of a maid—a girl scarcely broke

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from school—with mirthful hazel eyes, under long, drooping lashes. A maid with hair of chestnut brown; with a mouth red-lipped, and full of lurking gravity. A maid with the tall lithe form, and poise of an Indian Princess. Then, this vision of a maid faded away; leaving the young man alone—just as she had left him years before.

I doubt not that he recalled the sudden agony of loss that had come upon him, with such overwhelming sorrow, that even now—after all the intervening years—the memory of her had become a grief so sacred, that it lay buried in his heart—deep in its most secret recesses—a blessed thing; a religion. . . .

I imagine that he was thinking of the day when his ship had sailed out of Portland Harbor, bound on a trading cruise around the world—she was three years making the voyage. And during all that time a pair of hazel eyes had haunted his vision, and blurred his senses; so that in the streets of Hong-Kong, off the coast of Australia, or in the lonely watches of the night, he could think of but little else. . . .

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And then had come to him the sorrow of others—the wonderful panacea for a grief laden soul—and the comforting of the homeless little orphan, Brunhilda—his brother Etzel's only child. . . .

The fire was out—there was nothing but a few sticks of charred wood and ashes—and still “old man Gunther” sat by the hearth, with his head buried deep in the palms of his brawny hands.

IV

“**B**UT last night you said ‘yes’ ”—, Nelson remonstrated.

“Oh—that wasn’t fair,” answered Hilda.

“I did not want Uncle Hagen to know—”

“Well, he knows now,” he asserted.

A shade of annoyance, anxiety, passed over Hilda’s face.

“What do you mean—?”

“I told him—last night,” he affirmed.

“You told him—what?” I am sure that she was thinking more of the captain that moment than of herself.

“I told him that I had asked you to marry me,” he said, boldly.

“Oh—,” she exclaimed. “Poor Uncle Hagen!—”

His heart jumped, he caught his breath.

“Why—poor Uncle Hagen—?” he reassured her.

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"He'll miss you of course, but—"

"Oh—I wasn't thinking of that—," she corrected gently, smiling. There was mischief lurking in her blue eyes. "I was thinking of the pity it was to raise his hopes—for nothing."

"Then you did not mean—what you said," he muttered vexedly. They were walking down the main road to the village. As they reached a commanding elevation in the road they could see in the distance the blue ocean, with its white-capped waves, gleaming under the bright morning sun. And on the other side were the cedars and evergreens, with a touch of scarlet here and there—denoting the approaching autumn.

And there were spots of yellow in the green of the fields—where bunches of goldenrod were growing.

When they turned off the main road, to the post office, they came in sight of the little cove, and there, riding lightly at anchor, was Captain Herbert Kenneth's boat the *Pearl*—the "slickest" thirty footer in Casco Bay. She stopped suddenly and faced Nelson. Her eyes held a curious expression.

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“Under certain conditions—,” she said, thoughtfully,—“I might—consider—”

“Name them—,” said Nelson, with determination.

“Uncle Hagen told me that you were going to enter a boat in the race—next week—?”

“Sure—,” he vowed.

“Well—” She paused, and blushed furiously.

“Well—” He watched her—in silence.

“What is the name of—of your boat—?”

“Bo-it,” Nelson repeated, under his breath, and smiled.

“The *Irene*—,” he said, aloud.

She turned her head away, and gazed at the *Pearl*, gently tugging at her moorings—then at the sea beyond.

“The *Pearl* is a very fast boat—,” she ventured, dreamily.

“Oh—there are others—,” he replied, briskly.

There was a marked shade of annoyance in his manner as he surveyed the graceful lines of the sloop.

“Uncle Hagen thinks that she will win the

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race—?” she said, with malice afterthought. But her eyes were cast down—so that he could not see them.

“The captain has not seen the *Irene*,—so his opinion is only the merest guess,” he contended.

“Then you think that the *Irene* will win—?” Now, she was looking straight into his eyes, and her eyes were dancing, dancing.

“Oh—one is never sure,—of course, there are so many things that might happen—,” he answered, carelessly. Then he tried to change the subject. “But what are the certain conditions, under which you suggested that you might consider my—my—”

“Oh—yes—!” she exclaimed, with sudden animation. “But first, I wanted to know whether you thought—that is, which boat—” She stopped in some confusion.

“I hope that you are not risking anything on the result,” he said solemnly— “There is nothing so uncertain as a boat race; and besides, betting is a vicious practice, and one that—”

He broke into a laugh as he saw her deep blue

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eyes grow round, and open wide. For the moment he had adopted the style in which he usually addressed Anne.

“Oh—you are joking—?”

She closed her curved lips tightly, and a tiny wrinkle—dimple—appeared between her low, straight brows.

“I was thinking of risking—something,” she remarked, slowly. . . .

“But, the conditions—?” he reminded her, a trifle impatiently. Oh—! if he could only take her in his arms, and carry her off—as they did in the olden times—away from the island, away from everybody, to a lodge in some vast wilderness; to a secure fastness, in the heart of a primeval forest—!

“Oh—the conditions—” she repeated, with an exasperating show of absent-mindedness. “I am afraid that they involve a certain amount of chance—a wager,—a practice that is— What did you say—? Oh—yes, vicious.”

They were walking around the head of the cove, and up the sloping shore path, to the pines that fringed the rocks.

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It may have been chance, it may have been intention; or it may have been the result of two minds thinking the same thoughts, that directed their footsteps to a secluded shady nook overlooking the sea.

One could scarcely imagine a more beautiful spot. It was as if the hand of Nature had cunningly contrived an apartment, in mock imitation of the puny efforts of man—in his habitations. There was a floor, of solid rock, covered an inch deep with a soft dry moss of variegated colors; it yielded to the pressure of a foot like the deepest plush carpet. The walls of this nature room consisted of thick-leaved pines, and cedars, closely matted, and intermingling in glossy greens—an impenetrable screen, that grew from the crevices in the rock to a height of a dozen feet. For a ceiling there were overhanging limbs of larger trees, gracefully outlined against an azure sky. In front, without any intervening obstacle, was the glorious prospect of the ocean; a view made more satisfying to the senses by a light, salt-laden breeze that blew gently towards the land.

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Hilda sat on a moss-covered ledge of rock, that fitted this charming retreat, like a tufted couch—covered with Oriental draperies. “A perfect day—,” she said casually.

Nelson stood facing the sea, and was expanding his lungs with its delicious breath. “A perfect day—but,” he sat down beside her on the mossy ledge. “You have not answered me,” he persisted.

Her eyes narrowed in a dreamy reverie, as she scanned the farthest horizon,—where the pale blue sky just touched the deeper blue of the water. Perhaps she was thinking of her future, and of the great world that lay beyond the horizon, beyond the outermost islands that dotted her vision. How many times in this very spot had she built her castle—? Her turreted structure of silver, and gold, of glittering stones; and the surrounding gardens of flowers and foliage, the like of which she had never seen, but only imagined. In the gardens were fountains of sparkling water, and mirror lakes on which were white swans that came and fed from her hand. And when she had finished her castle, she had placed—as lord over it all—a

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princely youth, tall and dark, with kindly brown eyes. Yes—she was sure that he was tall and dark, and that he had gentle brown eyes. And, when he had gone on his knees before her, and had asked her to become his own little wife, she had answered—with becoming modesty. When—*piff*—! Away went her castle, like the down of a thistle, and she was back again, in the little white cottage—with Uncle Hagen.

She must have been thinking of him, for she asked Nelson:—

“What did my uncle say, when—when you told him—?”

“Say—?” He came slowly out of his reverie.

“He said that—” He paused for a moment, and smiled, at the recollection.

“Well—?” She held her face slightly averted.

“You know that the captain never wastes words—?” he explained.

She nodded her head—bending low, before him. She had never appeared, to him, more beautiful.

“He said—” Nelson continued slowly, “that if you loved me, and—if I loved you, that was

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enough. He said that there was nothing else worth considering."

"Oh—but there is—" she interrupted, laughing.

"Yes—what is it—?"

"Well—there are the conditions, you know."

She was still laughing at his evident impatience.

"Please name them—" he implored.

She settled herself, comfortably, on the ledge, leaned back, folded her hands, and half closing her eyes she watched him through her dark lashes.

"Well—in the first place—" she began, very deliberately, "the *Irene* must win the race."

"Oh—!" he sighed his relief. "She'll win all right."

"Then—if the *Irene* should win—" She paused with even more deliberation.

"Then—" She stopped, and hung her head.

"Well—?" He moved closer to her, on the moss-covered ledge. He tried to catch her veiled, downcast eyes.

"I might, consider—"

V

THE village post office was a square, two-storied, frame building, the first floor room of which was a combination of post office and country store. There was a counter running around two sides of the room, and on the shelves, behind it, was a motley collection of merchandise that included everything from a stick of candy to a suit of clothes.

Tacked to the wall was a notice of reward for the arrest and conviction of a defaulting government official; side by side with a notice which stated that the Bishop would preach on a certain date—long past. On the counter was another warning—politely worded—intimating that gentlemen would not use the counter as a settee.

Before leaving New York, Nelson had instructed the clerk at the Luxmore to forward his letters, under cover, to William Collins. So, when he en-

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quired at the post office he was handed a bulky envelope enclosing several letters. Among them was one from Lighthall. It was long, and closely written, and Nelson decided, after glancing at the signature, to go down on the end of the wharf and read it leisurely.

As the letter explains certain events that happened, I have decided to transcribe its contents. It read:—

Dear Nelson:

I am sorry that I did not see you before I came back to the "Oaks" as I wanted to tell you of a curious happening by which I accidentally heard of your little affair with a beautiful island maid. Miss Conrad knows about it also—but that comes later. You are aware, no doubt, that in my serious days I studied law, was admitted to the bar, and have had the honor of paying half the expenses of an office, in which my partner does all the work. Well—I happened to be there the other day, and

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overheard a young fellow in our employ, by the name of Wyse, relating a very circumstantial account of a certain millionaire, named Nelson Thomas, who was masquerading on Orr's Island under the assumed name of William Collins. I gathered further that the young lady in the case is a fisherman's daughter by the name of Brunhilda—I've forgotten her last name, but she is a great friend of our young man's sister.

I thought that the story was interesting enough to tell to Miss Conrad—but somehow she seems to take the matter seriously—says she hopes that you won't make a fool of yourself—her own words—and insists that I should use my influence with you in the matter. So—this letter is the result; because I promised that I would write, and also because she seems to have taken a sudden, and renewed interest in our—my proposal.

I am depending on your advice, to

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leave it to her, but—do you think it is safe—? She might accept—unexpectedly. By the way, your aunt was not in the humor to appreciate the story, either. She made some slighting remarks about Mackerel Cove—which I did not understand. When are you coming up—? We have quite a bunch of new arrivals. It's warm for golf—but it must be hot in New York. Shake it, and come up—You think it is all right, do you—? To leave it to her.

Yours,

Lighthall.

VI

THERE was another letter, written about this time, a letter which I have read, but the contents of which, seem to me, are so personal, that I hesitate about giving it publicity. It was from Hilda to her friend Grace—in Portland.

I will make a few excerpts:—

“You were right. He came to Orr’s Island almost as soon as I did. . . . and the funniest thing, I knew that he was coming—almost to the minute—and went out to meet him, at ten o’clock at night!—I know that you will be dreadfully shocked. . . . yes I have loved him all my life . . . ever since the beginning . . . laugh if you must, but for heaven’s sake don’t show this to John. Burn it. . . .

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Herbert worries me, he is so stupid, and just won't see—he bragged so about his boat that I got angry and told him that Mr. Collins could beat him. My but he was excited. . . . If he can, I'm done—he said. So Nelson is going to beat him. . . . Oh—Grace I am so happy—”

Lovingly,

Hilda.

VII

AN east wind blew, and fitful drops of rain splashed against the cottage windows; it promised to be a dismal day.

Nelson threw down his book, and wandered, aimlessly, around the sitting room, peering through the panes at the dull low skies; the sea had lost its sparkling action, and lay motionless, sullen, under the drifting mist and clouds.

“If it would only clear—” he said, dolefully. And then—“what’s keeping her, anyway—?” he asked himself, for the fourth—or was it the fortieth time, as he opened the front door, looked down the lane, and closed it again.

He paced back and forth, in increasing impatience. He went to the fireplace, and gazed long and curiously at the bony protuberance of a sword fish, that hung on the wall, embalmed in a glass covered, velvet lined, casket. He examined,

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with unconscious minuteness, the Hindo idol that was squatting on the mantel in juxtaposition with a short-skirted maiden—of Dresden china. He went to the captain's little shelf of books, and took out aimlessly: "Plutarchs Lives"—"Keith's Prophecies"—"The Pearl of Orr's Island"—and an old copy of "The Mariners Guide," and shoved them back into place, with an air of peevishness.

Then he threw open the door, and again looked down the lane.

"Ah—"

Hilda was coming.

She had a bundle under each arm, and the wind was blowing stray locks of hair about her face, and reddening her glowing cheeks to a most bewitching crimson.

Nelson stood in the open doorway in silent admiration of the supple lines of her lithe, pliant, young body; as she bent her head, against the wind, with determined resistance.

"What a time I've had—" she said, breathless with her rapid walk. "I had to go all the way to The Point—and the wind was so rough—"

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She deposited her bundles on the nearest chair, and smiled at him, radiantly, through a misty filigree of golden, stray, locks.

“That need not have taken you two months—” he said complainingly.

Hilda removed her hat, and jabbed a long, dirk-like pin clear through it.

“Two months—?” She looked puzzled.

He took out his watch, and covered its face.

“Well—you left here, one morning, at nine o'clock, and now it's—it's—”

“Ten-thirty,” she finished. “I can see the clock in the kitchen.”

“Ten-thirty—?” repeated Nelson—as one casting doubt on another's statement. “Well—that would be exactly seven weeks; six days; twenty-three and one-half hours, since you left me.

A light gleamed in her eyes, a light that turned his head. “Gracious—!” she laughed, merrily. “Has it been as long as that—?”

“Every moment,” he asserted, solemnly.

“And what have you been doing all that time—?” she inquired, gaily.

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There was an air of briskness, of animation, about her as she moved around the little room; picking up this, arranging that; and all the time carrying on the conversation.

She was full of verve, spirit, life.

His eyes followed her with increasing admiration. He moved to her side—hoping to take her unawares—as she picked up her bundles. “If you can stand still—a moment, I’ll tell you—” he said, while his eyes devoured her.

She, dextrously, put the table between them.

“You’ll have no dinner—” she informed him, “if I wait much longer.”

“I don’t want any dinner,” said he. “I have dinner every day, but—your Uncle Hagen isn’t always out fishing—”

Her face clouded with anxiety, as she glanced through the window at the gray, drifting clouds.

“He should not have gone to-day,” she said.

“I mean that we are not always alone,” he enlightened her.

“Oh—” She was edging towards the kitchen with her bundles.

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“And I have been hunting up your pedigree,” he said, as she disappeared. “I want to read it to you.”

He picked up the volume that he had been reading, and followed her into the kitchen. Hilda's kitchen—with an air about it, that rainy morning, that was most enticing. The kettle was simmering cheerfully on a stove that was polished to a reflecting blackness; cherry segments of brightness—from the live coals within—shone through the half-opened lids, and were mirrored on the white ceiling. The little clock on the mantle was ticking, sociably.

Then, there was Hilda—still clinging to her bundles, laughing at him, as he appeared in the doorway.

“Oh—you can't come here—” she remonstrated.

“I am here—” he affirmed, conclusively, as he sat down, comfortably, on a chair near the window.

“But—how am I to work—?” she chided. . . . And all the time she was doing things; opening drafts in the stove; straightening the white dimity curtains; opening her bundles; flitting around,

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and hovering over him, with that inexpressible charm, that ineffable tenderness that belongs to women—some women—alone.

“Oh—I can read to you while you are working,” he said, as he opened his book and began:—

“One time there was much talk at Brattahlid, to the effect that Wineland the Good should be explored, for it was said that country must be possessed of many goodly qualities. And so it came to pass that Karlsefni and Snorri fitted out their ship, for the purpose of going in search of that country in the spring. They had in all one hundred and sixty men, when they sailed to the western settlement. They sailed southward along the land for a long time, and came to a cape; the land lay upon the starboard; there were long strands and sandy banks there. They rowed to the land. Then the country became indented with bays, and they steered their ships into a bay.

“It was when Leif was with King Olaf Tryggvason, and he bade him proclaim Christianity to Greenland, that the king gave him two Gaels; the man's name was Haki, and the woman's, Hakia.

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The king advised Leif to have recourse to these people, if they should stand in need of fleetness, for they were swifter than deer.

“Eric and Leif had tendered Karlsefni the services of this couple.

“Now when they had sailed past Wonderstrands, they put the Gaels ashore, and directed them to run to the southward, and investigate the nature of the country, and return again before the end of the third half day. Karlsefni and his companions cast anchor, and lay there during their absence; and when they came again, one of them carried a bunch of grapes, and the other an ear of new sown wheat. They went on board the ship, whereupon Karlsefni and his followers held on their way, until they came to where the coast was indented with bays.

“They stood into the bay with their ships.”

Nelson stopped for a moment, as if to emphasize what followed:—

“There was an island out in the mouth of the bay, about which there were strong currents. This they called Orr's Island, because they—”

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"Nonsense—" interrupted Hilda.

"Oh—you were listening—?" he said.

"You seemed to be so busy about everything else. I thought perhaps you were not paying attention to my story of the Norsemen.

He seemed to be so earnest, so serious in his remarks, that she gave him more attention. She sat down on her low rocker, beside the other window, and dropped her chin into her hands.

"Why do you suppose that I am a descendant of those Norsemen—?" she inquired.

"Well—your appearance—and then your family names. Gunther is an old Norse name—it's in the Nibelungenlied—so is Brunhild, and Hagen; and your father's name, Etzel—oh, I'm sure of it." He put down his book, and stared at her fixedly. "Then there is a certain facial mark that is peculiar to all of your ancestors," he added.

Her curiosity was aroused.

"Yes—and what may that be—?"

He arose and went to her. "If you will turn your face a little more towards the light," he said, in a very matter-of-fact way, "I'll look for it."

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She turned, half smiling, and faced the window. He watched the effect of the full white light of the sunless sky upon her face, with its encircling halo of golden hair. He bent over her and carefully examined every line of her features.

"It is usually under the point of the chin," he said gravely. "If you could lift it a trifle more—?" He bent lower.

Up tilted the soft, rounded chin.

"There—," he said, and—

. . . .

A man's temptation is the measure of his strength. Her trusting eyes were resting in his. A smile was lurking in the corners of her mouth. He inhaled the fragrance of her hair. He held her chin in his hand, and kissed her lips, her cheeks, her eyes, almost before she was aware of his intentions. . . .

When Captain Gunther returned from his fishing, several minutes later, he found Hilda alone in the kitchen. Her cheeks were scarlet, and her wealth of hair looked as though it was about to fall over her shoulders.

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He peered into the sitting room, and saw Nelson busily engaged over his book, apparently oblivious to his surroundings.

“He seems kind of lonesome—,” Uncle Hagen remarked in an undertone to Hilda. “You had better take him out for a walk—or cheer him up a bit.”

VIII

HILDA was seated in her favorite nook, overlooking the sea. The day was bright, and the sun's rays were soft and warm. Overhead, in the spreading branches of the trees, there was a slight rustling noise that attracted her attention; looking up she saw the bright eyes of a chipmunk peering at her curiously. As she moved incautiously, to obtain a better view of the little fellow, he took a sudden fright and scampered off in a wild, chattering panic. She watched him darting from limb to limb of the interlacing branches, until he was lost to sight.

“Why, chippie—you foolish fellow—,” she chided; “to treat an old friend like that—?” She stepped lightly on the velvety moss, with one hand extended, and uttered a peculiar little chirp. But chippie was gone for the day. . . .

There were birds, yellow and black; and some

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were red and blue, twittering, singing, flying from tree to tree; and the bank sloping below her feet was alive with grasshoppers, irresponsible things, jumping up in the air and landing, aimlessly, anywhere—for the mere fun of it.

And the air was ineffably pure and delicious, and fresh with the smell of moist leaf mould, mingled with the aromatic pines. Hilda was in a dreamy state of mind, thinking over the rapid march of events that had come upon her, and that had changed the current of her life in so short a time. She remembered the years of her childhood, passed in happy contentment on her beautiful island, and she experienced a strange sense of foreboding—of unhappiness—in the thought that this love, that had come to her unsought, unbidden, might mean the loss of many things—of the dear island. She gazed wistfully out to sea, and she thought, with a tremor of uneasiness, of the great world beyond her vision, a world of which she knew so little.

. . . .

And she thought of Uncle Hagen. What would become of him—? Who would keep his little house

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in order, and prepare his meals; he was getting old, although he would not admit it; who would read to him, care for him—?

And the winter evenings were so long. She started from her reverie resolved, determined.

“Oh—I cannot, I must not leave him.”

And then, as she scanned the horizon, a white sail glided around the point of a distant island; a tiny patch of white against a background of blues and greens. As it came closer in shore her practised eye discovered that it was a sloop of marvelously proportioned beauty; a boat that skimmed the sea like a water fowl. It glided, rose and fell, and glittered in the sun-tipped waves like a thing of joyous life. She watched with keen interest its circling flight, its graceful poise, as it swept along a straight course; how close it could point into the wind, how ably it was handled. And then—she held her breath as she saw the gracile craft heading recklessly for the ragged ledge that she knew lay half submerged just ahead—!

She craned her neck in the effort to look over the rocks in front of her.

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The boat was under full headway, her broad sail filling in a freshening breeze, astern. Hilda saw a man at the tiller; his head and neck bare, his face upturned towards her. He must be a stranger, and one who did not know that there was no channel, excepting at extreme high tide, between that jutting, visible rock and the mainland. Then, as the boat seemed to fly towards the rock, with its careless skipper staring at the shore, she sprang to the edge of the water and waved her handkerchief. And as the boat came on—nearer—nearer, she lifted up her clear, young voice:—

“About—about—g-o—a-b-o-u-t—!”

She shouted, she screamed, she gesticulated and waved her hands, furiously.

The man at the tiller laughed, waved his hand, nodded his head,—

Then—just as the moment had arrived when she felt that the next would reveal a quivering mass of wreckage, of broken mast and entangling rigging—at that very instant of time, the laughing stranger eased his sail and came about with the rock on his port-side—not a dozen yards away.

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Oh—it was masterly. It was finely done; and with such adroitness, such skill, such confidence in his ability, such a laughing assurance, that Hilda—drawing a long breath—stood thrilled with surprise and admiration. And she clapped her hands, like a child, and waved frantically after the receding boat, as she saw the name in distinct black letters across the stern:

IRENE

Then she recognized in the handsome laughing skipper the person of Nelson Thomas.

IX

UNCLE HAGEN was mending his nets. From where he had cast them he could see the cove and much of the sea beyond. From time to time he would stop his work and look out over the water, until his eye caught a white sail that was flying hither and yon over its surface. Then a peculiar smile would play over his features as he bent his head and resumed his work.

Up the lane came Herbert Kenneth and Hilda. The latter quickly disappeared into the cottage, and Herbert sauntered over to the field where the captain was working. Throwing himself lazily on the grass beside the nets, he picked up a bit of wood and began whittling with his knife.

“Well—Herbert,” said the old man, without stopping his work, “what did you get—?”

“Cod—” said Herbert shortly.

“All—?”

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“Mostly.”

“The're running pretty good,” said Uncle Hagen, cheerfully.

“Fair—”

Uncle Hagen tied a knot in the twine and looked up. Herbert was not a man to talk, but there was usually more in him than single words. As he glanced at the other's face he noticed that it wore an angry, an irritable expression. He also noticed that Herbert was watching the white sail as it flitted back and forth on the sparkling water. There was something about that particular white sail that distinguished it from all others.

“His boat—” said Herbert, while his eyes roved restlessly from the cottage to the sea and back.

“Mr. Collins' boat—the *Irene*—” assented Uncle Hagen carelessly.

Herbert threw away the stick and closed his knife with a loud snap. “Who is this Collins—anyway?” He looked over in the direction of the cottage, with something akin to a scowl on his face.

“Oh—he's an innocent kind of man,” said Uncle Hagen, kindly.

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"He's hangin' around a good deal since—since he first come," said Herbert.

"Its a free country—" remarked Uncle Hagen, as he twisted his twine in and out of the meshes.

"T'aint nothing but a skimming dish—" said Herbert as his eyes followed the white sail on the horizon.

"She points up pretty close, nevertheless—" said Uncle Hagen, as he paused for a while in his work. "I should say that she'd be good in any kind of weather."

"Good as the *Lucy*—?" inquired Herbert.

It was a home thrust: the *Lucy* was Uncle Hagen's boat. He had never been known to admit that there was any thirty-footer afloat that was the equal to the *Lucy*.

"There ain't nothing can touch the *Lucy*," asserted the captain, confidently.

"Exceptin' the *Pearl*—" argued Herbert.

"Excepting nothin' "—retorted the captain.

Uncle Hagen tossed over the net, stretched it out, examined it closely, and all the time he was humming a tune or whistling.

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Herbert sat in silence. Off shore the wind was freshening, and the little white caps were gleaming in the sun. The ledge at his feet was a mass of color—of grays and greens, with bright dabs of scarlet. His eye rested indifferently on its exquisite beauty. “What does he do for a livin’, anyway—?” he asked.

“I don’t just exactly know—” answered the captain slowly. “He writes books for one thing—”

“Ump!—A writer, eh—” There was condensed pity in his expression. “I once had an aunt that done writing—”

Uncle Hagen thought for a moment. “Yes—I remember Henrietta—”

“Well—she never made a cent by it—” Herbert affirmed.

“That’s right—” assented Uncle Hagen. “But there are some—”

“Well—who, now—just mention them—” Herbert demanded.

The captain studied for a while: “I was reading about them the other evening, in ‘Facts for the Curious’—” He paused.

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Herbert made an impatient movement. "Well go ahead—" he insisted.

The captain was nettled.

"Well there was Shakespeare; he got twenty-five dollars for writing 'Hamlet.' And Milton got thirty dollars for 'Paradise Lost.'"

Herbert looked as though he did not believe it, smiling incredulously. He waved his hand in scorn "That's two—," he finally agreed. "What's that—"

The captain cudgelled his brains. "There's another one too—if I could only remember—Goldberg—Goldsmith—that's the man."

"Well—what did he make—?" said Herbert.

The captain reflected.

"Three hundred dollars—it was, for 'The Vicar of Wakefield.'"

"Three hundred—?"

The captain nodded his head. "Yep—'nd it's worth it too—Did you ever read it Herbert?"

"No—" said Herbert, indifferently. "What is a vick-er?"

The captain assumed a lofty air.

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“A vicar is a kind of a preacher. He had an uncommon run of bad luck—for himself and family, and more particularly his daughter; she was always in trouble. He was just like a man tryin’ to sail a leaky boat, in a rough sea, and rotten riggin’—ther’ was nothin’ he could take hold of.”

“Drowned—?” said Herbert, absently.

The captain shook his head. “No—he made port all right—it comes out all right in the end.” Again he turned the net.

“How big a book is it—?” asked Herbert, as he helped the captain to unravel the tangles. He was becoming interested.

“The captain enclosed a space with his hands. “So big—about as big as a second reader,” he said.

“And he made three hundred dollars on it—?” Herbert repeated.

“Yep—That’s straight.”

The captain nodded, affirmatively.

Herbert jerked his head sidewise towards the cottage. “Is he a doin’ any writing now—?” His

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tone of voice was not nearly so contemptuous as before.

“Yes—he’s writing a book now—”

“What’s it called—?”

“I don’t just know the name of it,” answered the captain, thoughtfully. “Hilda knows—I think it’s something like ‘The Mashers—’.”

“Humph—!” Herbert grunted his disapproval of the title. “What does he think he’ll get for that—?”

The captain was absorbed in contemplation of a large hole in his net. “Must have been a sword-fish—went through there,” he muttered. He whistled a bar or two of an old Baptist hymn and came back naturally—without any undue haste—to the subject of the conversation. “I dunno as he told me that—” he said.

Herbert looked to the south, and his practiced eye located the *Irene* heading out to sea. He got on his feet, stretched his large muscles, yawned, and sauntered over to the cottage. The idea had occurred to him that it was a good opportunity to talk to Hilda.

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He found her busily engaged in her kitchen ; so engrossed in her work that, apparently, she did not observe him as he stood in the doorway.

He heaved a sigh.

“Gracious—!” she exclaimed, with an unusual show of alarm, “you scared me dreadfully.” She turned her back to him and went about her work.

He sidled into the room—without an invitation—and sat on the edge of a chair near the table. He kept his hat on his head, and wore a confident smile on his broad face as his eyes followed her around the room. “I’m always a scarin’ you lately,” he complained. “What makes you so skeery—?”

She shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

“Oh—nothing that I know of—” she said.

He sat and stared at her for several minutes without saying a word. Then he began:

“Hilda—” Again he lapsed into silence. She wanted to talk—to say something—but there was absolutely nothing in common between them; she had nothing to say. “I’ve about made up my mind to get married,” he finally told her. Then

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he paused to note the effect of his important decision.

“Yes—” The rising inflection in her voice indicated more surprise than interest.

“And who do you think she is—?” He stared into her eyes, with an expression on his face that made her shiver.

“She—?” If Uncle Hagen would only come.

“Um—” He crossed his legs and held his knee in his clasped hands. And all the time he followed her movements with a hungry look as though he wanted to eat her.

“I haven't an idea—” she said.

“Oh—you haven't an idea,” he repeated. And he tried to mimic the tones of her sweet voice with most distressing playfulness.

There was another long silence.

“Her last name begins with a G—” he insinuated, encouragingly.

She thought that she must scream at the top of her lungs if he went on much longer. She knew exactly the estimation in which he held himself. For years he had been the recipient of undisguised

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admiration from the women of Orr's Island—a large majority of them—with the result that he regarded himself as practically invincible.

She busied herself more industriously than before. . . .

“G-u-n-t-h-e-r.” He spelled the name slowly, leering at her between each letter. “Now do you know—?”

By a peculiar inconsistency of his nature it was Hilda, who had never given him any encouragement, whom he most admired. Her friendly manner towards him had been maintained for a long time because of her indifference. It was Hilda, who cared nothing for him, whom he liked the best of all.

“I guess you knew all the time—,” he said, tenderly, as he arose from his chair. “You were just lettin’ on about bein’ so skeered—?” He was advancing towards her, with an evident intention of purpose that alarmed her. . . .

And Uncle Hagen, out in the field, singing hymn tunes over his nets. . . .

“I’m a goin’ to kiss you—right now,” he in-

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formed her. He raised his heavy muscular arms and attempted to catch her as she passed him. She evaded him.

“Herbert—!” she commanded, desperately, “don’t dare—!” She stamped her foot; her eyes blazed. Then the door slammed in his face with a loud bang, shutting from his ardent gaze a fleeting vision of checked-gingham loveliness. . . .

Out on the ledge, Uncle Hagen was passing the twine in and out, and across the hole in his net—where a swordfish must have gone through. And as he worked he hummed:

“From Greenland’s i-see moun-tin’—

From In-jus cor-rell stra-and,

Where Afr-ricks sun-ee—”

When Hilda suddenly appeared.

Her face was flushed; her hair dishevelled, and she was breathless from running.

He looked at her critically.

“Mouse in the kitchen—?” he queried.

“No—o—” She sat down beside him, with a little sigh of relief. “I just ran over to ask what time we’ll have dinner.”

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“You ran pretty hard, too—didn’t you—?” He looked at her face, and then towards the sea. “Collins has made the turn—,” he remarked, casually. “Guess we might as well wait for him.” He pulled out a heavy, open-faced, silver watch. “Why, it’s only eleven o’clock—,” he informed her. “Ain’t you hurrying things a little—?”

Apparently she did not hear him, for she made no reply, but sat with her eyes fastened on the white sail that was approaching the land.

“Do you think he will win—?” she asked, dreamily.

Uncle Hagen regarded her affectionately, his good-natured face beaming with intelligence. “I think he will—,” he assured her.

X

A GREAT deal of talk about the boat race at Orr's Island had resulted in but few entries.

The season was nearly over, and most of the summer fleet had departed for Southern waters, or had gone out of commission. A few Portland skippers—nursing old rivalries with the islanders—having first announced their willingness to try conclusions with the challenging boats, had all withdrawn from the contest.

So that there remained on the morning of the race—a morning that dawned bright and favorable—but three boats that were ready and eager to make the course.

These were the *Lucy*, owned by Captain Hagen Gunther; the *Pearl*, belonging to Captain Herbert Kenneth, and the *Irene*—a sort of mystery boat that had arrived off Prince's Point in the night, and had been claimed the following morning by

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Mr. William Collins—old man Gunther's summer boarder.

Of the respective sailing qualities of the *Pearl* and *Lucy* there was nothing new to be said. These boats had long been rivals, and the village was about equally divided with their enthusiastic defenders. They had frequently raced, and with varying results. Sometimes the *Pearl*, with a load of lobsters, would get to Portland ahead of the *Lucy*; and then the latter would arrive at the market, and have the lobsters disposed of before the *Pearl* had reached the dock. But the beaten captain always had so many plausible reasons for his defeat that the consensus of opinions was still about evenly divided. It was, therefore, a matter of considerable interest, this bright September morning, as to which of the boats would win. This interest had increased when the *Irene* had arrived, and when it became known that she would be sailed by the owner.

Small boats, of all kinds and description, but principally motor boats, flitted around the harbor as the time drew nigh for the race. Light clouds

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were scudding across the sky, and there was a fresh northeast wind blowing that made the white-caps dance on the surface of the sea.

The course that had been agreed upon was triangular—a rock or small island marking each corner—and measured, roughly, a trifle over twenty miles.

When the big motor boat, the *Neptune*, left the dock about ten o'clock, with the committee, consisting of old Abner Brown, Eben Hartsell and Jeff Burlap,—all old sea captains—on board, the wind was freshening considerably; and many dubious remarks were made by the spectators, as they saw the big sail carried by the frail-looking *Irene*. Each racing boat was manned by a skipper and mate; and Nelson had for his companion a broad-shouldered, weather-beaten fellow, who wore a striking resemblance to Bill—the mate of the yacht *Phyllis*. It is possible that it was Bill, as the *Phyllis* was—but, that's another matter, and one that will evolve later.

In Nelson's case there was a great deal more at stake than the mere gratification of beating his

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opponents. Hilda had insisted that he must win the race, if he expected to receive a favorable reply to his offer of marriage: and he was determined to win or—well—there was no alternative. He must win. Hilda had insisted.

In Herbert's circumstances there existed, also, a compelling reason why the *Pearl* must come in ahead. In reply to his insistent assertions that Collins knew nothing about sailing, and that the *Irene* was only a play boat, she had retorted in such unmistakable terms, that he knew a defeat for the *Pearl* meant a slim chance for him in his hope of winning her favor.

In Captain Hagen Gunther's mind there was his deeply rooted conviction that the *Lucy* could beat anything in her class—if she was properly handled: and he intended to prove it.

As the racing boats were manœuvering for position the preparatory signal was given to start in fifteen minutes. At the expiration of that time the three boats came to the line as the start was given.

The *Pearl* led across, with the *Lucy* next, and

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the *Irene* last; all heading out to sea. Nelson tacked as soon as he was sure of the start, and began looking around for the breeze that he remembered was almost sure to follow a certain course off shore.

The *Pearl* and the *Lucy*, ignoring such particulars, kept close together on a straight course.

That Nelson was right about the off-shore breeze was proved as the *Irene*, on her next tack, came on ahead, crossing the bows of the other boats. She was soon showing the way to the first mark, where she turned three minutes ahead of the *Pearl*, and five minutes ahead of the *Lucy*. As she turned the mark the sea was heavy, and the strong north-east wind was shifting to easterly.

Nelson glanced aloft, and then along the deck of the *Irene* with as much nonchalance and indifference, as though he and the mate were taking a pleasure sail, with a clam bake in prospect.

“If there was any money on this race,” he remarked, quietly, to the mate, “I’d be ashamed to take it. Will you please observe the way she carries herself—!”

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The mate grinned approvingly.

"She's a bird—that's a fact," he agreed. Then he glanced aft, carelessly. "If them backstays don't pull thro' th' deck—," he added. . . .

On the second leg of the course the *Pearl* gained considerably, and Captain Kenneth made a desperate effort to force a way between the *Irene* and the mark.

He was risking a bad foul.

But, on board the *Irene* the mate only chewed his tobacco more vigorously, and kept an eye on the backstays—where the strains of the rig concentrated. He had implicit faith in his skipper—he was not so sure of that eyebolt.

Nelson almost laughed aloud as he watched the *Pearl*—then he swept around the mark with the *Irene* tipping the waves like a great sea gull.

"What do you think of that—?" exclaimed Nelson, indignantly, as the *Pearl*—without altering her course a point—kept steadily on her way, determined, evidently, to cross the bow of the *Irene*.

The boats were so close together that Nelson

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could see the white face of Kenneth, tense, drawn with a desperate look of dogged resolution, that indicated a man who was determined to have his way at any cost.

As the boats flew along their converging routes, drawing rapidly more closely together, Nelson could see the square set jaw of Captain Kenneth outlined against the bulging white sail of the *Pearl*; and his heart quickened with nervous excitement as the truth suddenly became manifest, that he was taking chances with a man who was beside himself with rage. A man who would deliberately foul the *Irene* if she came in his way—!

The mate glanced quickly at the *Pearl*; at her bulk, as she loomed closer; at her great sail, and massiveness, as compared with the buoyant lightness of the *Irene*—and then at his particular concern, the stay bolts. He measured with a practiced eye the blue water between the boats, and nodded approvingly as he caught the flaming dark eyes of his skipper.

“You can do it—,” he said, understandingly. But—he kicked off his shoes, and took another

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hole in the buckle of his belt—he was ready for the crash.

It was a reckless chance, a wild daring without thought or reason, that prompted Nelson to meet his rival on his own terms; to continue his course and cross the bow of the *Pearl*—or to foul her.

Perhaps he did think—? Peradventure he also reasoned with himself as he recalled Hilda, leaning comfortably on the mossy ledge; her hands folded; her half closed eyes watching him through her dark lashes. He may have heard her voice singing in his ears:—“The *Irene* must win the race—?” His brown eyes opened wider, with eager courage, as he held his boat straight on her course. The easterly wind was blowing half a gale. The great spread of white canvas bellied firm and stiff as a board, with rigging taut as fiddle strings. The two skippers, sitting grimly in their boats, drew together like knights of old as they charged with lances set. Or, like Indians, in their war canoes. Neither shouted a warning; neither altered his course a hair's breadth.

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There was not fifty feet between them—not ten feet. Another second, and—

The mate dropped to his full length along the deck motionless.

Nelson held his breath. . . .

Like the flight of an arrow the *Irene* flew across the bow of the *Pearl*. The mate raised his head to get a better view of the boat as she passed astern. Then he pulled on his shoes.

“Never touched us—,” he commented.

On the last leg the work was all to windward, and the *Irene* made a great gain—pointing up so close to the wind as to make the mate's broad face a study in smiles.

“She's a bird—that's a fact—,” he repeated.

The mate was a man of few words.

When the *Irene* crossed the line the *Lucy* was fifteen minutes astern—and the *Pearl* still later.

XI

EARLY the following morning a messenger handed Nelson a belated telegram, forwarded from New York, that had arrived the previous day. He opened the envelope, and read the following message:—

“Anne has accepted.

LIGHTHALL.”

He tore it into bits, and then gazed, reflectively, from his bedroom window. . . .

A quarter of an hour later he had not changed his position. Possibly he was trying to fathom a woman’s mind, or, perchance, he was attempting to understand her motives. Or, probably—

XII

“AND now that the conditions have all been complied with—,” said Nelson, airily, “will you kindly say what time will suit your Highness to go aboard the *Phyllis*—?”

“Oh—we would first have to be married—,” said Hilda, innocently.

At which he laughed aloud, and laughed again, until the glow deepened on her cheeks, and her lips began to pout.

“I don’t know what I could have said to have caused you so much—joy,” she demanded.

He stopped, suddenly, and tried his best to appear indifferent. But—the gladness, ecstasy, rapture of the moment, made his heart jump by leaps and bounds.

“Well—?” she insisted.

“Oh—I was thinking of old Botts—,” he explained, unmeaningly.

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“Captain Botts—?”

She elevated her eyebrows, and looked mystified.

“I was wondering what he will say, when he hears—,” he went on, trivially.

“Dear old Captain Botts—,” she commented, “if he hadn’t stopped the *Phyllis* for me that day—”

“Pardon—,” interrupted Nelson, promptly, “it was I—”

But she ignored him.

“If he hadn’t stopped—,” she repeated, “you would not be here.” . . .

“But your book—?” she reminded him, as one by one he overcome her objections. “How about ‘The Masses—?’ ”

They were sitting on the old log, on Sunset Hill. The sun was sinking behind the purple mountains, far away. The calm of the evening was silently enveloping the view. Over the water suddenly appeared a flash of light—then disappeared. Further out to sea burned another light, clear, steady. A gentle breeze, full of odoriferous smells from the trees, fanned their faces.

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"I have been thinking about 'The Masses,' " he replied, soberly. "I have abandoned the idea—"

Her brow clouded. "But you are not going to give up your work—"

"No—" His eyes followed the glory of the setting sun, as revealed in the heavens.

"No—but my work will be along different lines—"

They sat silently contemplating the changing colors of the sky. And, strange to say, each knew the other's thoughts.

"I want to write a book—" He paused, and drew in a long breath of the sea-laden air. "Oh—Hilda, if I could only write—"

"I know—," she said, smiling. . . .

When they returned to the cottage, Uncle Hagen was fussing around the fireplace with a lot of dry kindling wood.

"It gets cold soon as the sun goes down," he remarked, with a rebuke in his voice. "Young people never think of that—"

He lighted a match, and applied it to the whisp of paper under the wood. "Now, Mr. Collins—"

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"Captain Gunther—that is not my name—," said Nelson, calmly.

The captain held the match until it burned his fingers—and dropped it. Then he slowly straightened his back, and looked at Hilda. That young woman was absorbed in contemplation of the Hindo idol, on the mantel piece. A light dawned in the old man's mind. "Oh—I see, that's your—your name, when you write books—" He appealed to Hilda. "What do you call it—?"

"A nom de plume—?" she suggested.

"That's it—a nomdyplume." He struck another match, and lighted the paper.

Nelson laughed, and shook his head.

"No—Captain Gunther, my name is Nelson Thomas."

The captain extended his hand, cordially. "I'm pleased to meet you." Then he arranged the logs carefully over the blaze, while his mind kept harking back. Nelson Thomas— "Now I've got it—," he said abruptly. "You're the man that wrote— What was it, Hilda—?"

"You can sail a boat—all right: I'll vouch for

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that," said the old man later, as he stretched his legs before the blaze. "The way you made that *Irene* dance around me and Herbert was a sight." Hilda had retired, and the two men were discussing the boat race, over their pipes.

"Well—I was sorry to go ahead of the *Lucy*," said Nelson, "but I had to beat the *Pearl*."

There was a twinkle in the captain's eye.

"Had your order—eh—?"

A look of intelligence passed between them.

Then the captain arose, and went into the kitchen. "There's a drop left—enough for two," he said in a loud whisper. . . .

XIII

IN Portland Harbor the *Phyllis* was gently rising and falling with the motion of the sea.

An insistent light breeze from the south just ruffled the placid waters of the bay. An amber haze intervened between the blue of the sky and water.

Amidships, at the door of the engine room, Bill, the mate, was describing to Joe, the engineer, and to Jake, the fireman, the boat race at Orr's Island.

"Here's the way it was—," he explained, as he laid a match, a pipe, and a plug of tobacco on the cushioned seat beside him. "This here plug is the *Pearl*—and following astern was old Gunther's boat, the *Lucy*; and here we was—" He laid the match ahead of the pipe and plug. "I was a watchin' the backstays, for I thinks to myself that if ther's any trouble, that's where it will be—and

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the Boss, he was layin' back, comfortable like, when along comes that plug—the *Pearl*, a tryin' to crowd in between us and the mark—”

“Gee—!” said Jake, bellicosely, “I'd a rammed her.”

“You would—!” said the mate, contemptuously. “A match a rammin' a plug—?”

The illustration was so conclusive that Jake immediately subsided into a state of embarrassed silence.

The mate regarded him compassionately, for a few moments, and continued: “As I was a sayin', the *Irene*—”

He broke off, suddenly, and stared over the rail towards Little Diamond. “And here she comes a skippin'—,” he concluded.

When the *Irene* drew alongside, Hilda was at the wheel, with Uncle Hagen for her mate. Nelson and Mrs. Grace Donald were useful—as live ballast. As the boat came about under the lee of the *Phyllis* Captain Gunther regarded his niece with open-eyed admiration. “You're improvin' all the time—,” he commended. . . .

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The amber-colored haze grew deeper, darker. The lights of Portland twinkled, one by one, through the gathering shades of evening. The moon hung low above the irregular sky line of the buildings, transforming their ordinary proportions into mystery structures of towers and palaces. And the air was still soft and balmy with the last breath of summer. . . .

Hilda sat on a low chair snugly enfolded in a soft, bright-colored rug, as the *Phyllis* steamed slowly out to sea. By her side, within reach of her hand, lounged Nelson.

Captain Botts, erect, sunburned, embarrassed, raised his cap, and bowed stiffly.

“Any orders—?” he inquired.

Nelson laughed, contentedly, and nodded towards Hilda.

“Ask the owner—,” he replied.





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