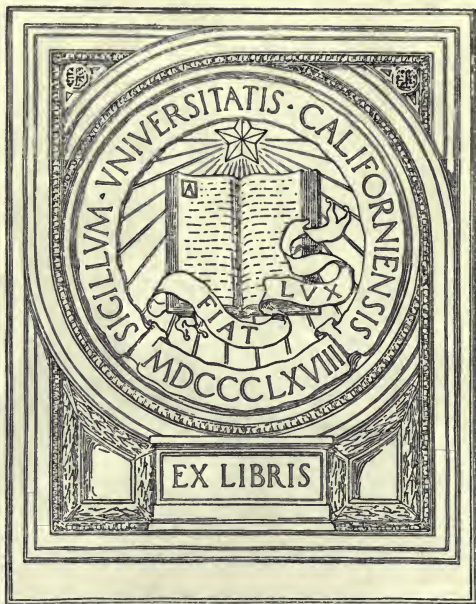


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J. BRECKENRIDGE ELLIS



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SOMETHING ELSE



She was standing by the blue-and-gold vase, . . . her eyes bright with the sparkle of the outside world, as she had brought its frosty brilliance into the sombre studio

[Chapter VII]

SOMETHING ELSE

A Novel

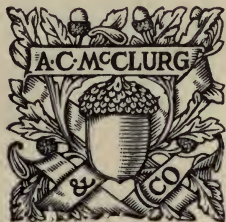
BY

J. Breckenridge Ellis

Author of "The Dread and Fear of Kings,"
"The Holland Wolves," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BY ERNEST L. BLUMENSCHIN



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TO MY MOTHER

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SOMETHING ELSE

CHAPTER I

MYSTERY OF IRVING PAYNE

WITH the roar of the city all about him, Irving Payne heard nothing. Five distinct lines of vehicles moved in parallels of contrary motion between the western limits of City Hall Park and the massive buildings across Broadway. This unpremeditated unity of scenic effect was broken by ceaseless cabs, hansoms, runabouts, and pedestrians, as they penetrated the lines of progress and overflowed the waste places; but Irving Payne saw only the open letter in his hand. Perhaps he did not see even the letter, though his eyes appeared intent upon the cramped feminine handwriting. He had read the words so many times that he knew them by heart; he was thinking, now, rather of their consequences than of their message:

“If you care to learn anything regarding your parentage,”—so the letter ran,—“it will give me pleasure to enlighten you at any time. I am, I imagine, the only person living who knew both your father and your mother.”

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The signature read, "Mrs. Sadie Wyse." The address was one of those "places" in old Greenwich Village, where the tangled streets, despairing of ever being straightened out, give it up, and come to a stop.

The mind of the young man was not unlike one of those unambitious thoroughfares. It had, as it were, come to a stop, but without having reached a place of repose. To be twenty-one, and never to have had the slightest idea what one's father or mother was, or is; then, suddenly to be offered the information "at any time,"—that was the case of Irving Payne.

He was not sure that he cared to know, at this late day. In truth, he dreaded the revelation. Of course, he had had his long period of craving for knowledge, but that was in his boyhood. Even at that time he felt sure that his craving could never be satisfied, and this conviction had done much to reconcile him to lifelong mystery. Thus far he had lived without the love or the aid of those who owed him both affection and protection. If they were living, he would rather not meet them now; if they were dead—well, had they not always been dead to him?

On the other hand, Irving did not underestimate the importance of the fact that some one possessed the knowledge that had always been withheld from him. This Mrs. Sadie Wyse, of whom he had never heard until the receipt of her letter—she, it appeared, held the key to the mystery. In a way, it seemed to put him in the power of an absolute stranger. As he stood leaning against the fence near the Nathan Hale monu-

Mystery of Irving Payne

ment his attitude did not speak of irresolution, but of uneasiness. If such an emotion be left in the wreck-heap of the old psychology, Irving felt something like a faint presentiment of evil. Of course he must go to this Mrs. Sadie Wyse; but he would put off the interview as long as possible.

At last, as if roused from profound slumber, Irving started, thrust the letter impatiently into his pocket, and mechanically looked up at the bronze statue, which seemed to say, "I am ready to meet my fate, are you?"

The gravity deepened on the young man's finely-moulded features. He stared beyond the leafless trees toward the imposing buildings that cut the skyline to the entrance of Brooklyn Bridge. Nearer at hand, the City Hall extended its marble wings, as if to catch the winter sunlight in all its bright promise. The companion marble of the Court House received, also, that promise of warmth and invigorating life, which it would take months to redeem. Turning his glance toward Broadway, Irving instinctively drew himself up, as if girding the loins of his spirit for the fray. The roar, which had been smothered to a distant hum under the burden of his subconsciousness, suddenly penetrated to his senses, causing his blood to tingle.

He felt himself called out into that current of manifold activity. The heavy grinding of overladen trucks, the discords of laboriously drawn drays, the lighter dash of hacks and carriages, the beat of an army's footsteps, the harsh blasts from automobiles, the clashing of innumerable voices, as they called, whistled,

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commanded, cursed, and jested,— all appealed to Irving Payne. He delighted in the badinage that descended from dizzy seats above pyramids of moving boxes and barrels; in the whining of the pushcart vendors; in the odors of fruits and flowers, as they were wafted from the sidewalk-stands. His heart responded with that buoyant joyousness which formed the dominant tone in his character. His attention was centred upon no particular phase of the tumultuous street. It was life that appealed to him—all manifestations of it, all agents. The goal was nothing, as yet; scarcely the direction mattered; the movement was all.

Irving felt an instinctive desire to lose himself in the eager tide, to let himself be borne unresistingly past the postoffice toward old Trinity, or beyond Park Row toward the upper city—what matter? His place in the city-scheme was definitely fixed. On the morrow he was to enter upon his labors as clerk in a downtown railroad office. He had nothing to do until to-morrow, except to find a cheap lodging-house. It was the serious face of Nathan Hale that reminded him once more of that mysterious letter, and of the unknown Mrs. Sadie Wyse.

“Oh, yes,” he said, speaking aloud to the statue, in answer to the expression of the bronze face, “it’s easy enough to be a hero, in the time of revolution!”

A voice spoke at his ear: “The time of revolution is now.”

Irving turned without displeasure. The intrusion of

Mystery of Irving Payne

a stranger was just punishment for his folly of speaking aloud.

The man who had accosted him was a singular fellow, dressed decently enough, and fairly respectable as to hair and beard, yet producing the impression of one who has been, as it were, caught up and cleaned and clothed for an especial occasion.

This man of middle-age, finding he had Irving's attention, pursed his lips, between which an excellent cigar was held unlighted, and added, impressively, "Sir, this is, I repeat, the time of revolution." He waved his arm like an orator. But, as if he found it tiresome to maintain so lofty an attitude, he immediately cast to the winds his air of prophet, and said, genially, "I am glad to meet you once more, my friend."

"Once more?" echoed Irving, vaguely, as he fixed upon him that cold look of suspicion born of many dealings with one's kind. "Then we have met before the revolution?"

There was upon the man's large and rather red face a look of lazy good-nature, mingled, as it appeared, with something like instinctive liking, which Irving found by no means unpleasant. From his whole person emanated an atmosphere of worldly content, difficult to describe, but immediately perceptible — a humanness, let us say, as if higher spiritual qualities, once possessed, had not failed to mellow and sweeten what, in a lower order of man, would have been mere baseness.

"About a week ago," said the man, confidentially, but

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without offence in his intimacy, "you were over at Tompkins Square. So was I. Do you remember that particular disreputable individual who sold you some lead pencils? Well, I am that man."

Irving laughed. "These clothes have made you a new creature!" he exclaimed, with a sort of *camaraderie* that astonished himself. Could this man really have been evolved from the tramp whose miserable rags had prompted a purchase of undesired pencils? That tramp had interested him as an example of the law of degeneracy. The present form was not sufficiently remote from its chrysalis state, to have lost all semblance of the grub. But this remarkable cleanness of person and carefulness of attire suggested a future in which wings might unfold—a future in which cleanliness would not be remarkable, and clothes would not fit so ill.

"Ah," said the man, with pensive gravity, "I am not a new creature, but a very old one, to-day—older than the tramp you saw at Tompkins Square. I am a sort of second folio; the original edition is lost, I assure you." He gave a short laugh, half bitter, half careless. A shadow passed over the light of his habitual satisfaction, and, as if to conceal the seriousness evoked by far-distant images of his youth, he turned away to light the cigar, saying, banteringly, "As my old enemy Horace used to observe, "*Lenit albescens animos capillus.*"

A voice interposed sharply: "You no lighta dat cigarro!" A dark, round-faced loungeur, who had been

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watching from the corner of the bare grassplot, came forward excitedly. His sparkling black eyes narrowed to menacing slits, exactly midway between the brim of his derby and the straight, thin extension of his mustache.

The match, whose tiny flame had been dangerously near the end of the cigar, fell upon the sidewalk. The middle-aged man winked ruefully at Irving.

"I getta de clo'es for you," the Italian continued, indignantly. "I standa good for dem. I lenda de fine cigarro, de twenty-five-cent cigarro, so you be de manna, so you looka de high, de gran', de Fo' Hundred, de toppla-notcha. An' den you lighta dat cigarro; yet it is not yo' cigarro, it is mine-a, it is in de stock."

"Well, well, Agostino," said the other, impatiently, "I forgot the cigar was only borrowed. You see," he added, grinning at Irving, "I'm to be Queen of the May only for a few hours. Every penny I could realize from the lowly, but unconfining, business of pencil selling, has gone to rent this air of gentility. My good friend, Agostino, has pledged the Jew to keep me in sight till the suit is safe, once more, in Hester Street. The cigar, you understand, is still on the market. You will keep me in sight, Agostino, will you not?"

"You mighta right," said Agostino, showing no sense of humor.

Irving Payne, true to his characteristic of taking keen interest in all persons or scenes that touched his life, regarded the Italian's sinister face with artistic satisfaction, at the same time moving to the other side

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of the slightly gray mendicant, to insure his pockets. For the less Irving had in his pockets, the more carefully he guarded them.

“Have you invested your earnings,” Irving inquired, cheerfully, “in order to make an impression upon the park-sparrows?”

The other gave Irving a curious look. “Are you at leisure?” he inquired, losing a good deal of his lazy drawl. “Will you let me show you the sequel to a strange history in my past? You’ll not have far to go — just to the Court House. Of course, you have heard of Mrs. J. S. Vandever — the Fifth Avenue lady who spends such quantities of her husband’s money on pink teas, and on charities of a darker color?”

Of course, everybody had heard of the Vandevers. But it puzzled the young man to hear the name on the lips of this derelict of society.

“Very good. J. S. Vandever is her second husband, you understand,” remarked the man, casually. “I was the first.”

Irving stared. If the other was ever in earnest, he was now. After all, there were in this drifted wreck unmistakable remains of culture, even of grace. His language was that of a gentleman, and the devastations of many a drinking-bout had left dulled, but not extinguished, the sparks of humor and good sense.

“She divorced me twenty-odd years ago,” he continued, with a humorous look toward Agostino, perhaps fearing that the Italian would again assert his lordship by some preposterous act of tyranny. “I did n’t make

Mystery of Irving Payne

any fight. Don't you think she ought to appreciate that? And to-day — yes, in an hour — I shall sue for divorce from this same lady, who has for years been Mrs. Vandever. She ought to do as she was done by, eh? But this is not a do-as-done-by world," he added, shaking his head, "so I'm afraid she'll oppose." His look grew serious. "Yet she has had her revenge. What more does she want?"

"I never heard of such a divorce suit," observed Irving, who might have thought the other jesting, but for the final words. "Why divorce her? Are n't you two sufficiently separated, without a legal barricade? J. S. Vandever ought to be fence enough between you!"

"Oh, there's a reason," returned the man, carelessly. "Would you like to see it through? Time for me to stretch my legs."

"Come on," Agostino called. "I have put fine pant' on dose leg'—you getta dat divorce alla right, sure, O. K."

"I'll come, too," said Irving, not surprised at his interest in the case, since everything smacking of life interested him, but wondering that his attention should be so absorbingly engaged. Here was an opportunity to banish Mrs. Sadie Wyse from his mind by supplying it with vivid impressions. Still, this disreputable stranger, this waif who offered no resistance to the insults of a sinister Italian — what was his power by virtue of which he had won from Irving not only interest, but a feeling of liking?

As they rounded the City Hall, Irving spoke, in order

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to rouse his companion from a fit of abstraction. "You referred to a revolution."

The man shook himself, and the shadow fled from his face. "You mistake; I said *the* revolution. Look at this beautiful building. The architect who fashioned that marble pile from his brain-figments, was paid six dollars a day. Mark it well: six dollars. And what are six dollars? A night on Coney Island, a supper at the Plaza — are these things worth a day of one's life? Now we approach our Court House; you see? — a ten-million-dollar monument of graft, for the sittings of justice. The City Hall is honest, but it was built a century ago. Who is honest nowadays? Therefore — the revolution."

Agostino had paused at the basement corner of the City Hall. Above his head the marble gleamed; but about him was the dark-hued background of the lower wall. From under the shabby derby, sparkled the brigand eyes; below was the thin mustache, extended, at either end, to a single hair. There was an effect of boyishness in the rounded chin; the olive cheeks were plump; but the thin lips were crafty.

Irving's companion touched him upon the arm. "You ought to hear me at Union Square," he remarked, with a grimace. "I win great applause. But I am more eloquent when shabbily dressed. Rags have *entrée* to the heart, when starched linen is kept in the antechamber. I'm too fine, now, to make anybody howl. Between you and me, I'm an agitator."

Irving jerked his thumb backward toward Agostino,

Mystery of Irving Payne

saying, "Yonder, I suppose, is a future captain of your revolution."

Another grimace. "When he is, let us be colonels! But of course I am in earnest, young man. At least—I do not mean to say that *I* am in earnest, but the cause is an earnest one. I am in earnest about nothing, nothing in all the universe, except—Come! my divorce!"

They found the court room filled with well-dressed men and women. There were some two hundred divorce cases on the court calendar. No one had come to defend a suit, but many against whom suits had been brought had come to hear what the plaintiffs would say about them.

"What an abnormal curiosity," whispered Irving's companion, as they found their seats. "As if they did not know how bad they were, they've come to hear themselves abused." Suddenly he plucked the young man's sleeve. "Ah, there she is!" was the somewhat agitated whisper.

Irving's attention was directed toward two women, apparently of refinement and social importance, who sat apart from other onlookers. They were strikingly unlike, yet some indefinable touch marked them as dwellers in a common sphere. One had a heavy jaw, a challenging eye, and an unsympathetic mouth, suggesting one who makes a hobby of sports, particularly of racing. The other showed a marked irregularity of features,—depressions before the lower outline of the face was reached, a sinking-in between underlip and

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chin, a broad dimple in the chin, an undulation caused by the temples rising in slight curves from the black eyebrows, and below all, sloping waves of satin skin for the contour of the neck. The eyebrows were unusually heavy. Large, soft, black eyes looked forth with haunting melancholy, seeming to shed a tender glow of womanliness over each little hollow of cheek, chin, neck, and mouth. It was one of those faces that seem to speak; that sometimes speak most eloquently when lips are mute. Those lips were full, and curved with exquisite grace; they borrowed, from a certain habitual tilting back of the head, an added effect of sensitiveness.

Irving whispered, "Which was your wife: the lady off horseback, or the other?"

The response was faintly given: "The other."

Irving's companion had evidently surrendered himself to memories of the past. His accustomed indifference to all save ease of living was gone. No doubt, the sight of her who had once been his wife caused him to think of what he himself had been.

The reply surprised Irving. He would much rather it had been she of the insolent gaze and square jaw.

The eyes of the speaking face — luminous orbs of Mrs. Vandever were suddenly intent upon the man at Irving's side. The coming of the lawyer had doubtless signalled him out. Could she have known him in that promiscuous audience, him who sat with eyes upon the floor, with roughened hands slightly twitching, with

Mystery of Irving Payne

shoulders bent forward? Some twenty years ago, had he not met her gaze with eyes clear and unafraid? At that time he was her husband.

Was it curiosity, only, that had brought her to the court room to see the partner of her girlhood's dance of dreams? Or did she, in spite of the fact that she had long been the wife of another, still cherish, in the hidden chambers of her illusions, a picture of this man, like the retouched outlines of a fading photograph? Irving watched her intently; but though she looked steadily over intervening benches with up-tilted chin, and downward gaze, he could not interpret the language of that vivid face. It seemed not so much to be speaking in an unknown tongue, as to be speaking of an unknown life — a life far beyond the shallows in which Irving Payne had thus far sought sunbeams of momentary happiness.

The lawyer touched the arm of the slightly gray plaintiff. At the same time, Mrs. Vandever and her companion rose to depart.

"We cannot reach your case, to-day," the lawyer said. "However, it won't be opposed." He returned to his table.

"So ends your chapter," Irving whispered, looking at his bowed companion, curiously. "Well, I must go forth to open one in my own life. Coming?"

"I'll wait till she's gone," said the other with a little shudder.

Irving descended the broad sweep of steps in time

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to see Mrs. Vandever and her friend whirled, in a white and gilt electric brougham, out of Chambers Street into Broadway.

Across the street, Agostino was unobtrusively visible, leaning against a corner of the City Hall, the ends of his sackcoat thrust upward by the insertion of each thumb in a trousers pocket. The Italian gave Irving a cursory glance, then fastened his beady eyes upon the ground, with an air of amiable humility.

CHAPTER II

A LODGING-HOUSE DREAM

AFTER leaving the Court House, Irving Payne boarded a Broadway car, bound north. Disregarding the objections of the rear-end clingers to the accretion of another atom, the young man calmly squeezed himself between some "*matinée* girls," in a warm juxtaposition that seemed to call for the music of an East Side dancing-club. With a good-humor thoroughly American, and a disregard for the comfort of others typically Manhattanese, he looked up Broadway's swarming canyon. Along the margins of the cliffs — that is to say, the roofs of the skyscrapers — he was seeking the office in which, on the morrow, his duties as railroad day-clerk, were to begin. When, at last, he saw its rounded tower and fluttering flag above the enormous wholesale houses, there came to him a thrill of satisfaction. Those gilded signs were guarantees of his kinship with the tense, eager faces that forever drifted up and down the sidewalks. He had become one of them.

He felt the eagerness they manifested. They must hurry, hurry — or be left behind; and so must he. Of the city's four millions how many thousands were already left behind so far that, for them, the path was

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lost that leads out of the wilderness of failure? He remembered the wreck he had encountered at City Hall Park — the mendicant who, in borrowed clothes, had been intent upon divorce from a lady now the wife of a distinguished man of affairs. Had that first husband of Mrs. Vandever once hurried like these thousands whose rhythmic footbeats sounded above the crash of traffic? Had his face worn as did these, a look of burning impatience to reach some destination coupled with a blank oblivion of those touching him upon the way? But, no — surely Agostino's debtor had never taken an active part in the city's life. Surely he had never really lived.

But every fibre of Irving Payne was alive and tingling. Even when tightly wedged between the high school girls whose handkerchiefs were damp from their hero's sorrows — sorrows mellowed by footlight-glamour and orchestral sighs — Irving held his form bent forward, ready to leap at the first possible second. He hurled himself into space at West Fourth Street, and was almost at the northern corner before he had checked the impetus given his body, as a last indignity, by the jammed street-car.

His quest of Mrs. Sadie Wyse stopped him before an old-fashioned brownstone front, which bore the legend, "Gotham Repose." Irving was pleasantly surprised. The address Mrs. Wyse had given him was that of a lodging-house; one of those shabbily respectable retreats near Washington Square, promising reasonable rates with accommodations apologetically

A Lodging-House Dream

meagre. Gotham Repose with its high stoop, and its stone steps whose edges showed the dents of Time's never-aging teeth, seemed to have inherited some of its original owners' integrity. It promised loungers a fair degree of safety in leaving keys in trunk-locks. Fashion had, indeed, fled to make room for necessity; but necessity had not yet allied itself to vice. The house stood in a row of its kind, not far from Greenwich Avenue. It looked out upon a bare triangular space through which one street ran completely, ran till it was out of sight; and to which another street came, peeped in, and, as if charmed by the prospect, ended itself then and there.

Irving thought it would be a neat stroke of economy to learn all that Mrs. Wyse knew of his parentage, and, practically at the same time, engage a room. The thought pleased him, for he delighted in economy when it conflicted with none of his desires. He hastily ascended the steps without touching his hand to the iron railing. The old-fashioned knocker, a reminder of the Greenwich Village of a century ago, looked at him as with a staring and unfriendly eye. As he let it fall, its reverberation seemed, in a curious manner, to resound in some unexplored depths of his being; and an indefinable sense of oppression was upon him, at the opening of the street-door.

On deserting Broadway, Irving had left behind those clashing sound-waves of which one is scarcely aware until they have been succeeded by silence. In this triangular "place," noises were infrequent and of no

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violent nature. Now, as the young man entered the sombre hallway, a deeper stillness closed about him, suggesting still farther isolation. At a glance, his eye took in the various doors, the abrupt flight of narrow stairs, which barely grazed the top of the back entrance; the interior of the parlor, revealed through the open threshold, and the gray-haired lady who had admitted him.

“I am Mrs. Wyse,” said this lady, in a low, restrained voice.

This, then, was the only living person, at least so far as Irving knew, who possessed the knowledge of his parentage. The young man inhaled sharply, and his muscles grew rigid. It was as if he felt himself about to plunge into a cold and unknown stream. He gave his name, and referred to the letter.

“Kindly enter,” said the lady, showing no surprise, no particular interest. She moved gracefully toward the front room. “I have taken this house,” she continued, as he followed her, “and I rent the rooms to those who can furnish satisfactory references, and I—”

She added something which, to judge from her impressive manner, was of interest; but her voice had fallen below the hearing-point. The lady closed the door, shutting out the lodging-house atmosphere with its evidence of damp umbrellas in the rack, a bathroom somewhere upstairs, and a surreptitious habit, on the part of lodgers, of doing light housekeeping over gas jets.

They seated themselves in the parlor, she, distant

A Lodging-House Dream

and self-possessed, he, doing his utmost to restrain his impatience and to prepare himself for a possible shock. There prevailed in the room an air of taste which did much to condone the association of the upright piano with the folding-bed. On the wall were two portraits, one of the Prince of Wales, the other of a man who appeared equally distinguished.

“My husband,” said Mrs. Wyse, following his disturbed glance. “The Prince — later King Edward — was our friend. Thanks to him, we met many of the nobility, when we had our house in London.”

There was something in the aloofness of the lady's bearing to suggest that, in her association with the nobility, she had, as it were, caught a sort of duchess-contagion, and had been stricken for life. She impressed Irving unsympathetically. As he looked from her to the Prince of Wales, he did not, for a moment, doubt her claim to the rank that one acquires from contiguity with greatness. All this was outside of his experience, and therefore, of his sympathy. Moreover, he was not here to learn of princes. The father and mother who had deserted him to blind chance, who had never emerged from their cloud of mystery that he might accuse them definitely — what of these? Nevertheless, as the lady drew nearer the object of his coming, he felt an impulse to delay the revelation.

“And so,” came the distant voice, without curiosity, without satisfaction, without, in a word, any emotion, “I see once more — Irving Payne.” She paused a mo-

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ment, then added reflectively, "It is but yesterday, or so it seems, that I saw you, a little babe, in your mother's arms."

Irving's face burned. He sought desperately to still the sudden hammering of his heart. "My mother?" he exclaimed, sharply. But he could not go on, though his lips moved. What could he ask, without asking amiss? The first great vital fact confronted him, demanding definition. He stammered out, "Is she dead?"

"Yes," Mrs. Wyse answered, dispassionately, "she died many years ago. Shall I tell you all I know?"

"I entreat you to do so — tell me everything."

"About twenty years ago, I lived here happily with my husband. You have, of course, read of Colonel Wyse in your history, when you were a schoolboy. Yes, that great commander was my husband. We had a lovely home on Murray Hill. Perhaps you remember about the funeral — how the President hurried from Washington on a special car — that was before special cars were so common. And now, see! I am reduced to taking in lodgers —"

The faint voice sank below the surface. When it came to Irving's ears, it was saying, "About that time. Yes, a woman came to my home — a woman of the under stratum." Mrs. Wyse seemed to set this woman at an infinite distance from herself and the Prince of Wales. "She told me that she had taken into her humble tenement, a mother and babe from Chicago. The mother had just died — died from pneumonia brought on, doubtless, by exposure to the weather —

A Lodging-House Dream

that was a cruel winter. The woman from Chicago was your mother; and you were the babe."

"Brought on by exposure to the weather?" Irving ejaculated, with a shudder. "And you say that was my — mother?"

"Yes. But I continue. Why did this woman of the lower stratum come to me, why tell me about the woman lying dead in her poor room, and the motherless babe? I will explain. When the Colonel and I came over from Europe, the year before his death,—we were much abroad, at a time when Europe was not so common,—it chanced that our tug had on board the wife of the captain. As we came out of quarantine, I engaged this excellent woman — Mrs. Payne — in conversation. She wished to adopt a little boy, never having had any children."

"Ah, yes," Irving exclaimed, "I have heard Mother Payne speak of the lady who helped her to find an orphan."

"Exactly. I considered her purpose a worthy one, and let it be known that I should like to find a deserving case. So this woman of the lower stratum came to me, and I sent her to the wife of the tugboat captain. I need not tell you that that gentleman was Captain Silas Payne, who became your foster-father; his boat was the *Hudsonia*. The Paynes took you, without question. Indeed, they wanted to know nothing of your parents since they no doubt —" Away went the aristocratic voice, into the depths.

Irving, desperately determined to catch every word

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that concerned himself, drew his chair nearer. What he most wished to hear, had not yet been uttered.

Mrs. Wyse, whose lowness of voice was not the result of weak lungs, but of acute self-consciousness, continued in that key which modulated her personality to the tone of princes: "I did not know whether the Paynes adopted you or not," she murmured. "In fact, I lost sight of all the characters in our little story. About a week ago I read in the papers of the burning of the *Hudsonia*; it appears that Captain Payne had allowed the insurance to lapse. I am very sorry. I saw a reference to his 'adopted son,' and knew from the details that it must have been the babe whom I had recommended to Mrs. Payne. It occurred to me that, since you are now of age, you ought to know at least as much of your parents as the woman of the lower stratum told me before her death."

"Her death! Then this woman who befriended my mother is dead, too?"

"Yes, she was pushed from an 'L' platform, and killed instantly. I imagine I am the only one who can tell you of your father and mother, except —" The rest was lost, but Irving meant to have all before he left.

It was years since he had spoken of his mother. Now when he pronounced the name, it sounded strange and unnatural in his ears, as if his voice sought a new and untried tone in which to pronounce the word of mystery.

"This woman of the lower stratum," Mrs. Wyse con-

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tinued, "told me that while your mother was lying dead in her home, your father came to seek her, and, finding her dead, threw himself upon her body with heart-breaking cries." Mrs. Wyse spoke evenly, but Irving started up, while darting pain pierced his heart.

"Why were they separated?" he demanded, roughly. "Where had he been? Why was she alone, to be exposed to the weather?"

"Young man, pray be calm. Your mother had married against the wishes of her family. She was connected with a very powerful family here, but your father, while a good and deserving man, was poor. He was a Westerner, and they had eloped to Chicago. Affairs had gone badly. She slipped from home with her tiny babe, to appeal to her family. She came to New York, meaning to write to her husband that she had gained forgiveness, never doubting that she would obtain it. But she was repulsed. Disease struck her down. She was dying when she wrote to her husband, and as I said, when he reached her, she was already dead. Your father died soon after, also of pneumonia, and perhaps, or, I should say, *no doubt*, without desire to live. So you see, they have all been gone, many years—the father, the mother, and the woman who sheltered the mother and nursed the father; only you are left, you and your foster-parents."

Irving, who was still upon his feet, walked to the window, and stood staring vacantly across the triangular "place." His emotions were varied, but their only expression was a deep frown of perplexity. That his

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parents had probably discarded him with a selfish, even criminal indifference to his fate, had been one of the sombre probabilities of his life. That is why he had dreaded all revelations. In spite of the tragedy that spoke beneath the surface of Mrs. Wyse's coldly chosen words, Irving felt an almost overpowering relief. That his father and mother should be dead was by no means startling; it was what he had always hoped, because death seemed for them the only excuse. It now appeared that they possessed this excuse; not only so, but death had overtaken them — they had not pursued it.

But was it not strange that the Paynes had known nothing of the story? Perhaps not, since, in their desire to have him as their very own, they had refused to examine any clew that might have led to his identity. His frown, caused by the maze of tangled and broken threads that alone remained of his past — this frown vanished. A feeling of infinite pity for the mother seeking forgiveness, for the father seeking his young wife, for the obscure fate of both, softened him, but not to the point of revealing his emotion to the landlady. There was something about Mrs. Wyse that demanded respect, yet forbade confidences. He could not think her false; but he believed her cold and unsympathetic.

“You have my sincerest gratitude for what you have told me,” he said, presently walking to her chair. “What you have told me, makes — everything so — different!” He extended his hand, and for a moment her cool fingers slipped into his grasp. “What was my father's name?” he asked, abruptly.

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“I was sure you would be glad to know,” murmured the other, “that your mother was connected with the best circles of New York society, and that your father was a gentleman, and that it was not indifference that caused you to be left unprovided for. His name? Let me see — it escapes me — in fact, I can remember neither his name, nor your mother’s maiden-name. But I shall, no doubt, recollect them; or, at least, if I do not —”

Irving’s disappointment was great. “Surely you have not forgotten?”

“I am afraid so — yes — I cannot remember. The woman of the lower stratum —”

“She is dead!”

“Yes, but she left a husband — a worthless fellow — a tramp, a miserable tramp. He deserted the woman even before she had breathed her last. He remembers the whole story.”

“A tramp!” Irving echoed, in dismay. “Then the solution is indeed lost!”

“It is only a short time since I met this tramp,” said Mrs. Wyse, thoughtfully. “He hangs about the city every winter. He will be sure to cross my path in a month or two, for he never fails to question me.”

Irving regarded her doubtfully. “Question you?”

“Yes. This tramp would like to sell his secret, and he has always suspected that I knew the people who adopted you. The Paynes did not wish themselves to be known in the matter that was to shield you. So the tramp never has found out who got you, or what has

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become of you. But he thinks I know. And he is anxious to make a little money out of his knowledge."

"As for my mother's family," said Irving, with a contemptuous smile, "I would not give a penny to know who they are, I care not what their position. Those who turned away my mother to die of exposure, are dead to me. But certainly I should like to know my father's name, and my father's people. So if you ever see this tramp again, do not fail to send him to me."

"Yes," whispered Mrs. Wyse, folding her hands. She was dressed in mourning, presumably in memory of the Colonel, and the black setting added a touch to the effect of her gentility.

"You have rooms to rent," said Irving, somewhat abruptly. "Have you a cheap one? I mean a *very* cheap one."

"My skylight-room is occupied. There is the third-floor back, for four dollars, held by a young man who means to give it up unless I can find him a room-mate. He is very respectable. Would you like to share the expense with him?"

Irving considered. "What do you know of his business?"

"He's a night clerk in a Broadway railroad office. He is at work from six in the evening till three the next morning."

"Well!" cried Irving, "since I'm to be at work during the day, that would suit me. So would the price. But I'd like to see my man."

He found his man in the third-floor back, a short,

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stocky young fellow, very dark and taciturn whose manners plainly indicated that Irving was to be spared the fatigues of friendship. In planning how boxes and chairs could be so arranged as to permit free movement in the narrow chamber, it was Irving who talked, and smiled amiably, while Wedging merely nodded or shook his head.

“Many things can be piled upon the radiator, I suppose,” Irving remarked. “It never gets hot enough to burn anything, eh? That bedstead will have to stay across the window. We’ll bring in another, and fill all the rest of the space with it. But where’ll *we* be? Suppose I am in bed at ten. Here you come at three in the morning. You get your bed and stretch it across the door. Good. At about eight — or, at worst, seven — I am ready to sally forth. Now, will you be willing to get up and let me pass, or must I go down the fire-escape?”

Smiles are luxuries; Wedging was an economist. “I’ll change the door hinges so the door’ll open into the hall.”

“And you won’t object to my climbing over you, every morning?”

“Not for two dollars a week,” answered the utilitarian.

That evening as Irving dined at the window-shelf of a lunch-wagon, which he styled his “buffet,” a new exhilaration flavored his egg sandwich and Frankfurter. Before the burning of the *Hudsonia*, he had felt it his duty to learn all he possibly could at the university —

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his foster-parents asked only that he become everything they were not. In their necessity, it was now his part to aid them with his brain and hands. An artist-friend had found him occupation; upon the morrow he was to begin his career as bread-winner. Nothing could have shed such cheering light upon the prospect as he had derived from the revelation of Mrs. Wyse. The burden of the past had slipped away. The cloud that had, throughout his life, threatened his future, seemed to have rolled away, showing a new sky full of hope. True, his parents were dead; but they had loved him. Father and mother had become separated; but their misfortunes had been caused by their own poverty and the unforgiving spirit of their kindred.

When he returned to the triangle where the three streets met, what had formerly seemed only dulness, was now peace and sweet content. As he passed the parlor-door on his way to his room, Mrs. Wyse addressed him, and he reproached himself for being irritated by her almost inaudible voice.

“I hope you will regard Gotham Repose as a home, rather than a lodging-house,” she murmured. “Every evening this room belongs to my — guests. The piano is free to all. I hope you will enjoy my hospitality.” She appeared distinguished, as she stood in the doorway, the light streaming over her gray hair, and touching her correct mouth.

Irving thanked her, thinking it not likely that he would ever put this hospitality to the proof. He had almost reached Wedging’s room, when he discovered

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a young woman coming down from the garret — doubtless the occupant of the skylight-room. Instead of a staircase, there was, as one often finds in such houses, simply a carpeted ladder. The first warning the young man received, of any one coming down this ladder, was a little foot, and an ankle, rounded to a marvel.

It was just such a foot, it was just such an ankle, as Irving most admired, and least often saw; and foot and ankle belonged to a form which carried out all the promise of this exquisite beginning. It was a figure neither tall nor impressive, but it was one filled out to the extreme of ideal plumpness, without the indiscretion of heaviness.

Irving passed slowly on; but when he reached his door, he found it impossible to enter without looking back. Nothing could have exceeded the roundness of her arms, cheeks, chin, neck. This wave-scheme was continued in her black hair which was bound in scallops above large black eyes in a most tantalizing manner. There was, above all, a curve of the red lips which would have undermined the last foundation of resistance, had one stone remained upon another, in Irving's breast.

Her dress was in the perfection of the latest possible mode; but Irving was too absorbed in noting face and form, to judge of the quality of fabrics,— a practised eye needs but a glance to differentiate the *débutante* of the upper world from the simple shopgirl. Still, Irving's reason had not entirely deserted him; it told him that a lady of Fifth Avenue would not inhabit the skylight-room.

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When the last sound of those amazing feet had died away, Irving slipped quietly into his new quarters — as quietly as if afraid of awakening a dream of beauty. One look told him that Mrs. Wyse had set the second bed — a slender iron affair — upon one leg in the only available corner, there to remain until Wedging came to reduce it to the horizontal. Irving's baggage was here from the ferry-house — the Paynes lived in New Jersey.

Backing the one rocking-chair against the bed which he was to occupy, — thus removing the rockers from the tiny field of operations, — Irving seated himself, chin upon hand, and gave himself up to a bewildering dream. The radiator gradually lost all warmth; then it became cool; then cold. At last, the young man started up, and sought in his box for three rubber balls. He was an adept in keeping them up in the air, and it occurred to him that such rapid exercise should be warming. He could not go to bed so early, for he had not thought long enough about the exquisite curves of — of the floating flag above his railroad office, of the rounded dome, the gilded letters of the various signs. All his future seemed written in rounded lines of beauty.

He grew warm; so warm that a flush appeared in his cheeks. A ball dropped but he did not pick it up. He had heard a sound from below that seemed calling. It was a "diminished chord," crushed out of the upright piano.

"Let us see about that!" said Irving, preparing to descend. He examined his tie, patted his hair, reset his pin. Then he hurried down to meet his fate.

CHAPTER III

THE JESSIE ROMANCE

IRVING PAYNE'S dream of splendid curves did not vanish with his first night at Gotham Repose. For one of his years, he had seen a good deal of the world, hence did not make the mistake of confusing the dream with reality. Still, in the midst of such relentless realism as one finds in a railroad office, one may yet live much in dreams.

Twenty stories above the sidewalk, the noise of Broadway came to those office windows as the distant hum of bees. In the office, the routine work of typewriting letters and making tabulated reports scarcely allowed one's eyes the briefest holiday excursions from green baize tables to blue-prints along the walls. So far as intercourse with mankind was concerned, Irving might have been on a desert island with a few savages to fetch and carry. So deep was one's immersion in this back-water of existence, that the swinging of the heavy glass doors passed unnoticed.

Messenger boys, no less obviously uniformed by the insolence of their swagger, than by cloth and buttons, kept the elevators busy. The noisy feet of telegraph boys, even their open-mouthed manner of chewing interminable gum, passed unperceived.

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Had there been a disposition on Irving's part to escape, for a moment, from this perennial hurry, there was the chief day-clerk to crush the instinct of self-preservation. It was the business of the "old man"—who was not much older than Irving—to destroy individualism. The "old man" knew that he owed his position to the fact that he was like, not unlike, all successful chief-clerks. It was for him to get the utmost work possible from each inferior, and the way to do so was to treat each man as a unit in a great machine. To this superior, Irving was no more a man than was the private stenographer a young woman.

It did not take many days for Irving to realize the impossibility of pleasing the chief-clerk. There was a certain amount of work to be done; if he failed to do it, there was a host of others waiting to step into his place. To do one's best meant exactly what was required of every pawn in this great game of business. That is why every face wore a look, more or less alike, not of kinship of blood, or brotherhood, but of common fate. In that microcosm, so near the sky, each brain that felt itself capable of independent thought and wider achievement felt, at the same time, that iron bit of necessity that guides through unflowered paths to one's daily bread.

Hitherto, Irving's life had been singularly free and simple,—free because he was never required to serve actively upon Captain Payne, and therefore was as unrestrained as the river, without the river's toll of labor; simple, because of the wholesome, if obscure, lives of his

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foster-parents. The Paynes had asked nothing of their adopted son, except to acquire an education that would fit him for a higher sphere than they had ever known. But for the burning of Captain Payne's tugboat, having faithfully attended the university long enough to satisfy his foster-parents — needless to say, himself as well — would have been free to look about, before plunging into any business. But when the *Hudsonia* went up in flames, the young man was glad enough to thank his artist-friend for his trouble in securing him a paying position. It did seem a pity, after studying so long at the university, that he could not work at Latin, or French, instead of railroad tariffs. Fortunately he did not find his Latin or French at all in his way.

At the lodging-house of Mrs. Sadie Wyse, Irving would scarcely have found sufficient relief for his buoyant disposition, in its recoil from the remorseless grind of Broadway, had it not been for his dream. There was no satisfaction to be derived from his room-mate. He saw little of Wedging, except when crawling over that dark and taciturn young man's sleeping form, in the morning escapes from the third-floor back. It is true that, on ascending to the cramped room at bedtime, he usually found sheets of paper strewn about, covered with rows of figures. These figures, scribbled by Wedging, seemed to deal with the market prices of every stock and bond cried upon Wall Street, or at the Curb. Wedging's calculations usually ended in a neat row of six zeroes, preceded by a figure not to be despised. That is why Irving, when conversing with Jessie Tiff,

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often referred to his room-mate as "the millionaire." In the meantime, Wedging worked for fifteen dollars a week.

Irving received twenty, but did not therefore feel justified in an interest in the Stock Exchange or the Board of Trade. But it did put him, as it were, upon his feet, at least for conversational purposes, so far as Jessie was concerned. Jessie Tiff was the one relief that rendered Mrs. Wyse's lodging-house a fit recoil from the slavery of the green baize desk. She was the dream, the dream of glorious curves, that had descended by way of the carpeted ladder from the skylight-room, into his life. If the day's work in the skyscraper was a period of suspended mental animation, a sort of waking dream in monotone and monochrome, the dream of Jessie — which made nothing of her last name — was done in infinite variety.

Irving sometimes dreamed that she was not a shop-girl, that her tones were never jarring, that her form of speech was not remorselessly bound in the fetters of borrowed slang. He dreamed that her taste in dressing had not been derived from close observation of those upon whom she waited at the department store; he dreamed that her splendid poise, her graceful movements, her little archings of the brows, and flexible turnings of the mouth, had not been copied from living prototypes of the fashionable avenues. He dreamed that all Jessie's manifestations of culture and refinement were inherent, were as much a part of the actual Jessie, as was her charming form, and her deliciously rounded cheeks.

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It is true that there were times when the rather high-pitched, rather sharp-edged tones of the pretty girl, made these dreams quake for their very lives; when the same slangy expression that had done duty at a display at the Museum of Art, was brought to bear upon a seven-course dinner for forty cents — both were “heavenly.” Had her phrases been electrotyped, not to save the labor of setting up new type, but because there were no new ideas to be published? There were times, too, when, through the veneering of a more complex semblance, little spots of the original material appeared, before the ever-watchful Jessie could apply a brush of borrowed varnish.

But there were other times when Jessie’s great black eyes looked out wistfully upon the world that threatened to engulf her, and when the curved mouth was held motionless in something like the melancholy of a child who is sad just because she must at one time or another be everything. At such times, Irving’s dreams, no longer fighting against great odds of actuality, held high carnival — a Mardi Gras, of which Irving was the king, and the queen was not far to seek.

It was a curious truth — maybe it was not the truth, then? — but it seemed to Irving that he most enjoyed Jessie when she was not present! Could such a paradox be possible? For instance, when Monsieur du Pays filled the parlor with his tenor voice — that voice, so Madame said, that had once sung with Caruso — Irving was filled to his inmost being with the melody of Jessie. It might be soon after the girl had slipped from his side, soon

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after she had ascended to her skylight-room — perchance to clean her gloves with benzine — and it was certain to be while Monsieur was still singing. Monsieur's voice would tremble with —

“J'ai vu les séraphins en songe —”

To the young man, “*séraphins*” was the French for *Jessie-phins*.

According to Jessie, Monsieur was temporarily “out of a job.” Madame stated it differently: “Monsieur du Pays is no longer appreciated.” He had sung in grand opera, many times in Paris; once, but yes! — in Milan; and at the Metropolitan, before the fire. Alas! Monsieur is no longer young. He tosses back his great head with the air, he swells his chest, and as he sings, keeps his eyes glued upon the portrait of the Prince of Wales. But he sees not that once-boasted asset of American High Society. No, no, he beholds, instead, thousands of breathless faces propped, as it were, against giant support of his “*Vive encore, hymne éternel.*” And when, in his last “*S'élançe vers leciel,*” he projects his voice heavenward, he hears the tumult of vanished years, as if ten thousand *bravas* sound for him their ghost-music. But to Irving Payne, all this is simply Jessie made harmoniously audible.

“His throat is uncertain,” Madame du Pays explains for the hundredth time. “That is just the trouble. One never can tell when it will cease to — how do you say? — *support*. Monsieur has stood behind the footlights that caressed Parepa Rosa and other very great

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artistes. But on his last appearance before the multitude — *mon dieu!* his head was thrown back, his chest was expanded, as you see it now; but no music issued from that traitorous throat,— not so much as one audible sigh. What would you? The rabble thinks only of getting its money's worth. If one cannot sing, another can. But you hear him to-night — is he not the great singer?" And Madame's eyes, usually gaunt and troubled, fill with a shining delight, bright enough, perhaps, to dissolve a tear. And, with Jessie gone, Irving sees only Jessie, hears only Jessie, loves Jessie, or loves her not. For it is a dream.

And if Jessie Tiff has designs upon this young railroad clerk, if there is premeditation in her absences, in her preening of feathers, in her clever imitation of finer natures, who shall say she has not the right? Need we climb the carpeted ladder and slyly enter Jessie's room — the right of all honest readers — to discover the young occupant, in faded kimono, carefully pressing and otherwise mysteriously renovating her gowns and winter wraps for the undoing of mankind? Shall we watch her creep from bed in the cold dawn to cook her egg, and heat her coffee, over the gas jet, shivering the while — not we, but Jessie — because the radiator is colder than her feet? One may have perfect feet, it appears, without the means of warming them, at the sixth hour of a December morning. Shall we take note of the fact that, though her wages are only six dollars a week, her room rent is two — that her breakfast and dinner cost fifteen cents each, while the luncheon in the

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department store restaurant is ten? At any rate she has not much left, after the price of living, for the pleasures of life! There is something like a dollar and thirty cents for occasionally tipping the waiter, and for clothes and laundry — but fortunately one can do one's own washing. No doubt there is a mother on the East Side, who borrows a little money now and then — there is very little over yonder, it is said. So let Irving Payne look to himself!

She recognized in Irving Payne a clean, upright man, one to be trusted. Without doubt, his devotion to any girl would take the old-fashioned course of matrimony. Perhaps she would marry him. His twenty dollars a week seemed a great deal, and, for all she knew, her respect for him might really be that love of which people spoke when they were on the stage, and of which everybody sang. It was plain enough that Irving brightened whenever he saw her coming, and that he sank into a sort of trance whenever she went away. Perhaps love affected him thus; all hearts do not act alike.

As Jessie industriously washed her stockings on the rickety stand of the little skylight-room, she cared not a pin for the powerful voice of Monsieur du Pays, as it came storming up the three flights of steps. As clearly as if she were down there, she could see Irving sitting with folded arms, dreaming of her, while pale-faced, emotional little Madame du Pays accompanied her husband on the coldly severe upright piano. Jessie preferred the pianos in some of her friends' boarding-houses, pianos whose tops groaned under a heterogeneous

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collection of small statuary in undress, glass-encased chromos, and lithographs. But Mrs. Wyse did not use her instrument as a pedestal for art. Mrs. Wyse would be seated by the folding-bed which disguised itself so successfully as a bookcase, that it seemed rather an accident than an accessory to the conspiracy of utilizing space. Yes, there sat Mrs. Wyse — Jessie saw her only too distinctly — wearing the lofty look that indicated she had had the music made to order at some fashionable voice-establishment.

Well, they liked that sort of thing. And so did she, she supposed, only — one must make one's living, and make it in these very stockings, until others can be darned.

Twenty dollars a week is, no doubt, a great deal of money to one who earns only six. But remember! with twenty dollars come five times as many longings that may almost be gratified. On a small income, you know your limitations; but when the income is enlarged, who knows what may happen? Think of thirty dollars' worth of longings on twenty a week! It was the problem of Irving's life to get his thirty dollars' worth for his twenty. Not that he had twenty a week that one may take from his pocket to spend as one pleases. Half of Irving's earnings went to his foster-parents, that they might not lose their former payments on their New Jersey cottage.

The first Sunday, he took them the ten dollars. The second Sunday, he sent it — it would have been difficult to leave Mrs. Wyse's lodging-house on that second

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Sunday. The third Sunday he seemed glued to the house. On the fourth, departure was unthinkable. The first week of Jessie was like playing with the cocaine habit. Later, it was fastened upon him.

The department store in which Jessie had accepted a position as saleslady — she served at the handkerchief-counter, near the music-room — was but a block or so from the airy nest in which Irving daily drooped his wings. Until six in the evening, he seldom stood up, and she never sat down, except during the noon-hour. Naturally, they sometimes sat down together. It might be in some dingy little restaurant in the French Quarter, or among the Italians south of Washington Square, where everything is cheap, and strange tastes may be attributed to a foreign cuisine. Or, they might lunch together in the department store restaurant. And what a difficult taste he had in the way of handkerchiefs! Considering his means, that young man bought too many of them, there can be no doubt of that! This prodigality took him often to her counter.

He was standing there with her one day, just after their noon-luncheon, when they heard for the first time a song that was destined soon to sweep with awful devastation down every street and alley of the city, like the consuming fury of a prairie fire. It began — in ragtime, of course —

“You may have the rest of the world,
But give me New York for mine.
I'd swop the dough of Baltimo',
And all the wealth of Philadelph',
And all the fat of Cincinnat',

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And all the can of old San Fran',
For a little bit of Broadway."

That was the name of this *pièce de résistance*, "A Little Bit of Broadway." There was a chorus, also, you may be sure, in ragtime —

"New York! They all embark
From the land of Cork,
Let alone Newark, New Jer . . . zy."

Jessie smiled. "Good for the nice old boy!" she said heartily, glancing at the partition that shut off the music-room. "He's found a job at last."

It was, in truth, Monsieur du Pays singing in the music-room, so that prospective purchasers of the newest songs might know what they were getting for their twenty-three cents. Poor Monsieur du Pays!

"He deserves something better," Irving exclaimed, with a wry mouth.

"Sure! Don't all of us?" Jessie smiled. "He's on to his job, all right. Ain't he the sweet old thing!"

Irving winced. But when Jessie smiled into his eyes, not only showing a generous pleasure in the good luck of the whilom star of grand opera, but at the same time revealing an entrancing tenderness of melting lips —

There were other times — better times, for they were mellowed by soft lights which were closely kin to even softer shadows. This was after Jessie had joined the evening's army of working-girls. That sea of weary faces, was touched, seemingly, with a sardonic mirthful-

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ness, as if laughing at the fate so curiously devoid of humor. Jessie, borne along in the stream, was more like a beautiful leaf floating on dark waters, than an integral part of the stream of toil. Irving would detach her, leading her away to some cosy restaurant — what is so romantic as eating? — where prices rose to the level of cosiness. For a time they became denizens of the world in which the young man would have remained always.

As they rested, with a keen appreciation of the blessings of rest, among snowy napkins, gleaming mirrors, and palms that were real; as they were soothed by the music of an orchestra composed of three violins and a piano; as they were touched to vivid glory by the edging of starlike lights, it was as if the department store and the railroad office were the dreams, and this dream, the real awakening. If the piano was always breaking through the gossamer cloth of melody spun by the weaving bows, did they notice? If the waiter kept them waiting because he saw no fee at the end of his field of service, did they care?

When the possibility of lingering longer in such scenes of gayety diminished to the vanishing-point of the cashier's half-veiled look, Irving would take Jessie home, by way of Fourth Street; and, as they entered the quiet "place" which he dubbed "Lee's Triangle," perhaps he would sing out joyously —

"Let alone Newark, New Jer . . . zy."

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Then both would trip up the steps of Gotham Repose
singing,

“New York!—”

Which they pronounced *N'Yark* —

“They all embark
From the land of Cork” (*Cark*, mind!)
“Let alone Newark, New Jer . . . zy.”

“You are always calling this place ‘Lee’s Triangle,’”
said Jessie, on one such occasion. “That’s not its
name.”

“It’s my name for it,” said Irving, serenely.
“These three streets, coming together, make an isosceles
triangle, don’t they?”

Did they? Jessie was sure she did n’t know.

“So,” Irving expounded, “as it’s an isosceles tri-
angle, I call it ‘Lee’s Triangle’ for short.”

Jessie did not in the least know what *isosceles* meant,
but she laughed; it is nearly always safe to laugh.

They went into the parlor — reference is made to no
particular evening, but to any evening. She picked out
the air of “A Little Bit of Broadway.” When she
might have struck a wrong key, Irving held his finger
upon it, to frighten her away; but if she stayed away,
his hand went seeking hers. It often proved successful
in the quest. There was more enjoyment in touching
her hand, than in merely looking at it. Its shapeliness
seemed of that sort that is better felt than seen; besides,
its warmth was lost to the eye. Sometimes he held it so

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long before she drew smilingly away, that the possibility of Mrs. Wyse's entrance somewhat disconcerted him. But it was not disconcerting to Jessie; and it was delicious to Irving.

Sometimes when they came briskly out of the world of crystalline white, Irving would say, "I'm afraid your hands must be cold."

And Jessie, very frankly would extend her hand without a word — ten times more charming because without a word — and Irving would take her hand; sometimes he touched her cheek, so red from the nipping frost, so round, so adorably round. Mrs. Wyse never interrupted them. That was well enough. Old people do not understand; old people imagine — but what have we to do with old people — Irving and Jessie were as young as two persons can possibly be at their age in the twentieth century — what a great, what a magnificent, what a marvellous century it is, to be sure, because we are living in it!

Doubtless it was as well for Wedging that he had to go to work at six p. m., and hence saw nothing of all this. On Sundays when both Irving and Wedging were free, Jessie could take her choice; each was equally devoted. Though Wedging "knew nothing about music," and therefore, being a true-born American, boasted somewhat vain-gloriously of the fact, he never tired of the havoc Jessie wrought in popular airs. Like a ship at anchor, he rode the sea of melody, heeding not the changes in the currents. He took up his position whence he could look into her face, usually on the

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very divan occupied on weekdays by Irving. As Irving listened every day, so listened his room-mate once a week, and both heard the same thing — not the Coon song, not the ragtime ditty, not the Indian ballad, but the subterranean murmur of their own emotions. If Jessie lightly skirted difficult bits of accompaniment, if, beholding ugly runs, she darted around the base, in order to play again the easy passages, who cared? Who cared for anything but Jessie?

To Wedging, love was no dream. It was a reality, wide awake and keenly alive to the certainty that his income could not adequately support a wife. This knowledge kept his intelligence from even so much as dozing.

“Nobody is depending on me,” he told Jessie, as they stood, one clear December afternoon, watching the bay from the Battery wall. “All I earn belongs to me — and it’ll be yours, if you’ll wait for me. You’re the first girl I ever asked, and I’ll never ask another,” he added, with never a sign on the surface, to suggest the swift current of subterranean emotions. Did he think *that* the way to win Jessie’s heart — feeding her upon facts?

“But I ask you,” he went on, prosaically; “and I ask you to wait. For I tell you, I *know* I’ll be well fixed some day.” And he held up his right arm, the fist clenched. That was a great deal for Wedging to do. It was a great deal for him to say. Unfortunately, Jessie did not compare him with former Wedging-manifestations.

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“Just let me know when you are,” was Jessie’s non-committal retort. The stocky and exceedingly dark young man had none of Irving’s grace, or good looks. He did not dress so well; and he had never spent a penny on her behalf. Wedging’s parsimonious precautions to ensure a future day of ease, seemed unattractive. What a waste of time—going to Wall Street and Broad Street every weekday, immediately after his stingy luncheon of buttermilk (two cups) and bread-and-butter! How uninteresting, dawdling about brokers’ offices, or in the visitors’ gallery at the Exchange—only to come home to fill many foolscap-pages with the fluctuating prices of stocks and bonds! It did not enrich Wedging, nor did it amuse Jessie. She fancied it discontented him with his daily grind. Moreover, why did he pretend to care for her, when his heart and brain were given to railroad-bonds of jumbled geographical names? Three hours a day were not too many to spend on Wall and Broad Streets, yet he had never once taken her to a restaurant, or to a show. Not even to Moving Pictures. Just think of that!

“Can’t you give me a little hope that you’ll wait for me,” said Wedging, “just to make the game seem more worth while? There’s no use talking about love and all that; but of course, if I did n’t love you, I would n’t be asking to devote my life to you.” (How funny she thought him, when he said “love and”—as if any conjunction, no matter how scientifically copulative, could add to perfection!) “This is no time to be romantic” (it was the only time that Jessie cared a pin for) “and

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I know I'm nothing" (in his honest effort to win her, he was pretty hard on himself), "but the time 'll come — you 'll see — What do you say, Jess?"

"I'm getting cold," was what Jessie said, as if hunting something in a childish game, and getting farther from it all the time. "Ugh! I'm freezing. Don't you hate those choppy little waves out there in winter? Let's go back to the old woman's —" Thus we designate Mrs. Sadie Wyse, in our pride of youth. "Say, Mr. Wedging, Irving Payne gave me the sweetest little Christmas present I *ever saw*. I'll show it to you, when we get back." Cute? It certainly was.

"He's got nothing, except what he works for, day by day," Wedging growled. "I'd hate to work like a dog, with nothing to show for it. But if I save up, remember it's for your sake, Jess. What do you say?"

She said practically nothing, till they reached Trinity Church; there, she led the way into the graveyard. His gaze instinctively wandered down crooked Wall Street, and her heart was hardened. "Oh!" she said, hypocritically, as she bent over a defaced tombstone, "I was mistaken . . . I thought I read your name on it." But it was not really so bad as all that. Wedging's hopes seemed dead; but they had not yet been buried.

Wedging's ideas of economy were not those of Irving Payne. It was Irving's custom to save as carefully as present duty and pleasure allowed, save to the sacrifice of personal comfort, even personal needs — then spend all in one grand pyrotechnical display of joy. About

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once a month, one might find him in the marble corridors of those hotels in which people of wealth are seen all the time. During his brief evening of perihelion, he rubbed elbows with men whose names are heard around the world — possibly without the firing of a shot for native land — and dined in the same room with women whose diamonds, horses, and divorces furnished breathless reading for those of us who are not so interesting.

For that day — nay, for that hour — no one was more prodigal, in proportion to his capital, than Irving. His tips to the waiters changed each into winged-heeled Mercurys; his critical taste was that of a born gourmet; and, at the theatre, no mediocre talent could coax his applause. In every appointment of dress he was immaculate. He held Aladdin's lamp as long as there was a dollar in his pocket; and he rubbed it without hesitation. When the golden night was fled, gone was Irving's glory. But other such nights were to be anticipated; those of the past put a good taste in memory's mouth, and the threadbare present was to be borne with grim philosophy.

Hitherto, these upheavals from gray obscurity into the phosphorescent glare of bizarre splendor had possessed for Irving Payne an isolation that makes even a volcano appear lonesome. His glory had lighted no sympathetic eye. Now, he was to have a companion. The climax of New Year's Eve was almost at hand, and Jessie was to shine by his side. There could be no dark corner in all the Great White Way, with Jessie by his side.

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Their plans were laid with the strategic care demanded by economic joy. To the limit of his all, Irving meant that they two should, for a time, take their places among the excessively rich and the perennially idle. They held delighted conferences over the wisest ways of securing the most folly — a dollar will travel many roads, but on some it rolls much farther than on others. Irving half-believed these confidential plottings must be as enjoyable as the possible fruition. Time would tell; but, at present, Time was holding his tongue — for Time has little to say, when two are young, together, perhaps knowing — for he is very wise — that neither would listen.

It was a novel experience to Irving, to tell another — and such another! — just how much money he had to *burn* — “spend” would be an anachronism. He confided in Jessie as if she had been — what shall we say? — a favorite sister? So far, no word of love had complicated the situation. Therefore, he could look into her black eyes as often as he wished, without forcing a blush from their depths. Well, let us see: Every week he sends ten dollars to his foster-parents — they have little to do in this history besides receiving that weekly allowance — and his room comes to two more, his meals to five, and his laundry and the street-car fares. . . . Why go into that? But think of making these confidences to one so womanly, yet so girlish; so rosy, yet never too red; so plump, so round — that’s the word, so round — oh, the wonder of her! His watch has been pawned — “You need n’t be afraid, I’ll get it back —

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I've done it before; I always manage to redeem it." He who is so young and strong — she who is so young and round — surely they could redeem any promise, any hope, any ambition. Is happiness an old miser of a pawnbroker?

Here they sit, on the night before the Great Night, intensely alive to the present, while speaking of the future; borrowing some of the next evening's brilliancy to warm this evening's smiles. They are in an Italian restaurant that promises very little with its weather-beaten front, its overshadowed sidewalk, its small windows. There is no sign as of "The Boar's Head," or "The King's Arms," — of course not. We read nothing on the sign but "Pasquale's"; that shows plainly enough, for each letter lights up, one at a time — they seem to chase each other across the wall in an electric race. That is the exterior. But within — glasses tinkle, dishes clink together, laughter rises.

Irving and Jessie hear everything, see everything. Now comes Chartier, the rather celebrated Chartier, who conducts a French restaurant; he confers with Pasquale, his Italian rival. Has Pasquale a singer he could spare? Chartier's soloist has been arrested because of — But none of us are perfect. It seems that these men exchange hostages of art, like generals in time of battle. Chartier, the Gaul, finding superfluous Italians on his list, sends them to Italian masters. He goes away empty-handed, however; Pasquale has no French talent to spare.

Jessie whispers to Irving, "I wonder would Monsieur

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du Pays like Chartier's better than the music-room at the store? ”

“ I'll ask him,” Irving answers. The next instant Monsieur du Pays is forgotten — all is forgotten but New Year's Eve, that epoch of frenzied delight. All New York will be a pandemonium of revelry by night, with no ears for any warning car rattling over the stony road — New York! And —

“ You may have the rest of the world,
But give me New York for mine.
I'd swop the dough of Baltimo',
And all the wealth of Philadelph'—”

And, in short, all civic splendor —

“ For a little bit of Broadway.”

Together they chant the lines in that dingy Italian restaurant off Washington Square, after their spaghetti, siroppo, and black coffee — chant while their feet beat time on the sanded floor, and their eyes turn from the cheap print of Garibaldi hanging in the place of honor, to smile into each other's glowing face.

CHAPTER IV

RICH — FOR ONE HOUR

THE cab is at the door — what magic brought this shiny-black, star-eyed carriage to quiet “Lee’s Triangle” for our Cinderella? Into it climbs one of the most wonderful creatures in all the city, namely a Cinderella who, thanks to her surplus of \$1.30 a week, has contrived to play her own fairy godmother. Never mind the unheard-of sacrifices, the starvings, the cold hours in the skylight-room. Never mind the pinching that must follow this night of Jessie’s reign. For she does not mind in the least, just now. Then, why should we?

After her — very close, indeed — comes Irving Payne in his silk hat, his Chesterfield overcoat, his silk-faced dresscoat, his white drill single-breasted waistcoat, his white tie, his white deerskin gloves, his moonstone studs and links, his patent-leather buttoned tops and — if one could see to the very skin of him — everything a gentleman should wear, and nothing that a gentleman should n’t. We stand almost in awe of our hero. Whence this apparel of rich simplicity? Heavens! do not inquire of us. It is on his back, at any rate.

“I wonder, shall we have trouble to find places for our dinner?” says Jessie, with the distinguished languor

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of one who appears weary of *filets de sole*, marquise and G. H. Mumm, extra dry. She was dressed. . . .
But no, spare us!

“Trouble? I should think!” Irving interjects, laughing. Leaning back in pleasurable excitement—the horses are now clacking down the street—he tells her “the latest.” There’s no use to go to Murray’s, unless you engaged a chair weeks ago. At Shanley’s, the reserved seats, that is to say, *every* seat, has been sold at five dollars. It’s the same story at Martin’s. At Rector’s? Listen! Twenty-five dollars for two. What do you think of that? “Did you ever!” (This from Jessie.) And mind you, that’s merely for the right to sit down. The real expense is later.

“But, Irving, the big hotels—?”

“Same thing,” says Irving, jubilant over difficulties. “At Delmonico’s, at Sherry’s, at the Waldorf-Astoria and the like, they have n’t charged in advance. But really, it’ll be just as hard to get into any of ’em. I’ve known fellows—I mean fellows with the unlimited—turned away, hotel after hotel. It was that way last year.”

“Then what will we do?” asks Jessie, with a delicious shiver of alarm.

“You wait,” says Irving, who knows no more than she, what will happen. “I always trust to luck.”

It was early, but already the streets were filled with the holiday throngs. The noise had not commenced, but every man, woman, and child to be seen on the sidewalks showed themselves provided with fruits of the

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afternoon curb sales — cowbells, tin horns, squeaking balloons, rattles, iron mocking birds, and everything else small enough to be carried, and loud enough to be heard above horses' hoofs. Another evidence of the approaching Saturnalia was furnished by the show-windows; they were boarded up from ground to topsash. Miles of pine boards protected plate glass, all the way from Trinity Church to Fourteenth Street. Apparently, the Old Year was expected to die hard.

The cab stopped before one of New York's most splendid hotels. Irving was amazed to be graciously received; he and his lady had been expected, it seemed — not only so, but wonder was expressed that "the others" had not come.

"Are the others coming later?" inquired the head-waiter, who guarded the street door as jealously as a sentinel listening for the password. At his nod, princes of fortune were admitted; at the shake of his head — always accompanied by a regretful and respectful smile — other princes were solemnly assured that "every place was occupied." As for the wandering *canaille*, they were thrust out, to a man, into the outer brightness of Broadway, which, to them, was the same as outer darkness.

"The others will, no doubt, come later," said Irving gravely — outwardly, his gravity was almost sombre. Of course he had been taken for some one else — that was temporarily fortunate.

"Will you wait for the others?" inquired the sovereign of the dining-room.

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“We will wait at the table,” said Irving. “You need not bring us anything yet.”

When they were relieved of the dread presence, Irving looked at Jessie. “It’s a gold brick,” he observed. “I wonder who I am?”

“I thought we were the whole thing,” laughed Jessie. “It seems there are others.” They laughed together, delighted with their adventure. It was as if they had just come to court, riding up to the castle out of some good old romance of olden time.

There was much to be seen in the way of beauty and bounty, and, after all, they had come to see, rather than to eat. They enjoyed the prestige of lolling gracefully in their coveted chairs, as to expression, conscientiously *blasé*, while tardy arrivals envied them their good fortune. They won the errant glances of little parties seated at their before-theatre dinners. Irving was delighted to observe that Jessie could hold her own — or, to speak precisely, could hold the manner and air of an upper world. For to-night — just for to-night — he made one in this company of wealth and ease. He was a prince, dining in his own palace, and that young fellow who habitually held his nose to his typewriter eight hours a day, in some remote frontier of the sky-scraping world — he was not, since his only existence was in Irving’s consciousness.

As they chatted incessantly, Jessie’s studied grace lent lustre to his princely state. So perfect was her pretence of being used to it, that no artificiality outcropped; the very fact that she was a novice kept from her face that

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hardness, and from her eyes that level insolence, that comes from — what shall we say? — from too much of it. To Irving and Jessie this was but a play in which they acted, a one-night's performance only. The be-diamonded ladies whose gleaming shoulders and clouds of lace showed in long vistas down the regal banqueting-hall, little did *they* think that our friends were mere pretenders, taking artistic delight in their disguises. Alas! they did not think of them at all.

“Here comes old Waxworks,” whispered Jessie, referring thus disrespectfully to the head waiter. That tall, immaculately dressed personage did, indeed, come, his austere face drawn in a many-creased mask of stern reproach. “And, oh, look! immediately behind him are two couples, advancing in a straight line. They are, without doubt ‘the others.’ What shall we do?”

Irving looked up with seeming calmness. “We have waited for you,” he volunteered.

The young man who was in the lead, responded coolly, “Many thanks.” He hardly looked at Irving, because Jessie had caught his eye — a handsome gray eye, it was, much like Irving's. His face seemed to have come out of a popular novel, popularly illustrated. It was much like Irving's also.

The master of the feast waved his hand accusingly at Irving, as he said to the newcomer, apologetically, “I took him for you, sir.”

The newcomer then looked hard at Irving. The resemblance between them was rather striking. Jessie noticed it at once; so did the two girls of the party. It

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reminded Irving of looking at himself in the glass. He laughed at the fantasy, and something in his rueful merriment caused instant response. Potential liking hovered in the air.

The girl who had come with the leader of the party asked, in an amused drawl, "Who am I with? The gentleman who says he is waiting for us, looks more like you than you do yourself."

The chief dignitary turned upon Irving. "I must ask you and your lady to give up your seats," he said.

Irving, who had already risen said, "I will not retreat. I throw myself upon the mercy of the enemy."

"You are saved," said the stranger. "We lost a couple on our way here; fortunately they fell into the Bronx. You shall fill up the breach."

All seated themselves, gayly. The adventure was as preposterously funny to the strangers as it was charming to our friends. There were no formal introductions; they had fraternized in the midst of life's battle, presently to go each his way. Never again after to-night would these six sit down together — so much the better, perhaps. But, for the hour, how joyous they were! Joy was everywhere; laughter leaped, like flame, from table to table: for was not this the last night of the Old Year and the first night of the New?

The young man who looked like Irving, looked so like him that he need not be particularly described. One cannot use the same economy in terms on the other young man; but, fortunately, he is not important to our purpose; it is enough to say that he had recently come

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out of the West, bringing some of it with him. His companion was Stella. She and Beauty were chorus-girls, overdressed, it is true, but their natures were so disproportioned from the exaggerations of certain traits and the minimizing of what conventionality holds dear, that they might have seemed more artificial in simpler attire.

The girls were chums, that was plain. A marvellous understanding ran like a private telephone line from one heart to the other. Who would have thought to hear their sallies, honoring each other's jests rather than exacting honor for one's own — rare friendship, indeed! — who would have thought them living on eighteen dollars a week when the show was "on," and, out of this salary, each paying for her two pairs of shoes, stockings, tights — everything, you understand, and living on nothing when the show was "off."

No one could have known these things, for these things no longer obtain. Irving is no railroad clerk, to-night; Jessie is not a shopgirl; Beauty and Stella are not *danseuses* — there are no such parts in to-night's play. Every one is a star on New Year's Eve.

There was something about Irving's frank enjoyment of everything that warmed the heart of the young man who resembled him; but there was something about Jessie that kept him from often looking at Irving. When all was said, Irving was a man. "Lady," — the stranger addressed Irving's companion, "I have at last met my Waterloo."

"Have you?" said Jessie, very much at sea.

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Irving tacked to her rescue. "Are you Napoleon, or Wellington?" he inquired, his tone suggesting that he had mapped out the Emperor's part for his own. In truth, the other's admiration gave Irving a pang, not so much because it was obvious, but because Jessie seemed to find it grateful.

"I am the Duke," the stranger retorted.

Irving laughed in his eyes — he could n't help liking him; but he answered warningly, "In that case, this is not your Waterloo."

Nothing could save Jessie at this moment, for she placed her own hand upon the rudder. "Oh," she cried, tossing her head, "I ain't a teetotaller." There was a hilarious burst of laughter. Jessie was by no means an ignorant girl; in truth she knew an incredible amount of facts, but all of them were dated nineteen-hundred-and-blank.

After that, Jessie was called Water Lulu, while he who admired her was impartially hailed as Duke, Nap or even Welly. Irving Payne was metamorphosed into Knickerbocker, and Bird Martin, the sun-burned Westerner, was simply "Colorado."

Jessie soon forgot her confusion, and wisely grew taciturn. But she was as full of laughter as a quivering sunbeam. When her curved red mouth closed, her eyes laughed; and when she laughed with her lips, by drawing back the corners of the mouth, the flash of her even teeth was irresistible. Something in the distinguished admiration of the Duke seemed to animate her with tingling life. As for Beauty and Stella, they

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seldom laughed out, but, at times, spoke in loud tones, as if, by force of voice, they would achieve the purpose of laughter.

“But after all,” said the young man who resembled Irving, speaking near the close of their repast, “there ought to be some sort of explanations, you know. Really I am not the Duke, though I look it. Martin never lived in Colorado — he came from Kansas, wherever that is. He wants to break into society, but he keeps breaking out in such unexpected spots —”

Bird Martin grinned at Irving. “It’s hard,” he allowed, with exaggerated humility.

“Now just leave Colorado alone,” cried Beauty, in her loud tones, “I’m developing him very nicely.”

The young man resumed: “And my name is Vandever.”

“I’ve heard the name, somewhere,” murmured Irving. It instantly recalled the beautiful face, so full of melancholy, that had chained his attention in the Court House. Could this be the son of the Mrs. J. S. Vandever of Fifth Avenue prestige? That was conceivable. But, in that case, he must also be the son of that degenerate, that pencil-peddling mendicant, of the East Side. It seemed an insult to ascribe to this gay, cultured young man, a father so disreputable. And yet — that tramp had once been the husband of this stranger’s mother — if his mother was Mrs. J. S. Vandever. Irving sought to show no change of countenance.

“Well,” smiled Vandever, “and I’ve heard of you,

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too, Knickerbocker. That book of yours — what did you call it? — ‘History of New York?’ Yes? Humph! Part of it was mildly amusing. But don’t dramatize it; the public wants something different. By the way, did you write about New York before you visited Manhattan? That’s the rule, you know.”

“Oh, I’ve been here before,” said Irving, with his boyish laugh. “I know the Flatiron from the Goddess of Liberty.”

“Silly!” said Jessie, reproving her companion with a grimace. Just as if everybody did n’t know that the Flatiron was not standing out in the water! Irving could say some really bright things, sometimes, she reflected.

Vandever drank in the charm of the provoked Jessie. She found his deep eyes revivifying. To her, he stood as a type of chivalrous wealth. His reckless spending moved her to something like contemptuous pity for Irving’s limited prodigality. And Vandever was as handsome as Irving. And, to the shopgirl, he seemed so much more a man, in proportion to his fortune. Like Irving, like everybody, she had heard of the Vandevers; and here sat the heir to many millions, looking into her face with glowing eyes. The standard of Jessie’s favor deserted Irving for Vandever, just as it had formally gone over from Wedging to Irving.

She reflected that, by a word, by merely keeping silent, Vandever could have cast Irving into the street. What consideration he had shown! Such heart! As

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the talk flew back and forth, she did not seek to catch the bright interweaving threads; but when Vandever spoke, her curved mouth responded unconsciously in little tell-tale dashes and dots of telegraphic motion. She feared her uttered words must proclaim the handkerchief counter; she scarcely ate, lest her movements betray the atmosphere of cheap eating-houses. But she possessed a certain quality that lends grace to almost any setting, a quaint shyness that is restful to eyes the most cynical.

Vandever consulted his watch. "Now for the show!" he cried. He turned to Irving with hearty insistence: "Do come with us, Knickerbocker, you are a part of ourselves, to-night. Don't spoil such a fine beginning by selfishly mouching off by yourself —"

Jessie looked appealingly at Irving, but Irving had already bought their tickets.

"That's nothing," cried Colorado; "I have a box for the season. I can't give you as much room as we have out West, but I insist that you fill up what we have."

"Oh, out West!" cried Beauty, reprovingly. "Where's that?"

Stella exclaimed, "Who cares for any other part of the world —" And she began to sing, in the showgirl's sterilized voice —

—"Give me New York for mine.
I'd swop the dough of Baltimo'—"

Beauty sang forth the next line,

"And all the wealth of Philadelph'—"

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“Come on, Jessie!” exclaimed Irving, “you’re there with the goods, on this song.” And they mixed up the lines thus —

“And all the *fat* of old San Fran’,
And all the *can* of Cincinnati!”

Then everybody shouted lustily,

“For a little bit of Broadway.”

Then Colorado, thinking the others were with him, brayed forth, “New York!”

“You must say ‘New *Yark*,’” Beauty reproved him. She continued severely, in her capacity as society-trainer: “The worst kind of a give-away is to do a thing right, when it’s right to do it wrong.”

Singing in the palatial banqueting-hall? Why not? You could scarcely hear a locomotive whistle. What a din, as they emerge upon Broadway! Is there a discordant note capable of being snared, that is not poured forth from the green and crimson horns? They squeak, they bellow, they rumble, they trill, they blare. Thanks to Vandever’s resolution and Jessie’s sad treachery, those two go off in one cab; Beauty falls to Irving’s share. It is only until they reach the theatre — still, Irving did not want to be Beauty’s Beast. Had he not witnessed the charming *naïveté* of Jessie? He, as well as Vandever, had found it restful to the eye; he as well as Vandever, had been impressed by the difference between Jessie and the chorus girls. Thus they are mismatched, however, thus they slowly progress through a storm — a hurricane of confetti.

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The horses can hardly make their way through the dense crowds that no sidewalks can contain. Thousands of laughing voices beat upon one's ear. The huge city is seeking, for one night, to express its power in audible guise. It is hard to find full expression, yet horns, ticklers, and shouts can do much. If one have no great wealth, he may at least spend all he has, appearing rich to the rich — who do not care how you appear, more's the pity! But, best of all, consider Irving Payne, who will soon be with Jessie, after all; as far as his money goes, he travels with kings of finance. That splendid cab is no hired vehicle — it belongs to him, to the bottom of his purse, if he so desire; and as long as he can pay for the seat he owns the very horses, the very driver, the driver's very soul.

To be a part of such life — that is Irving's reward for all privations, past and future — a part of the noise, the laughter, the city's song. Of course it is supposable — one may suppose anything — that some railroad clerks, some shopgirls, some chorus girls are hiding in humble lodgings during this more than Mardi Gras, this more than Roman Carnival, — are burrowing in obscure garrets to let their earnings accumulate. Is not Wedging doing so at this very moment? — fun-lacking, drudge-hardened Wedging, the lover! And see, now, how far he is from his lady's heart! Not to be a part of it — well! — what's the use to live in the city? If one cannot mingle in the city-life, one might as well be in — no matter — are not all deserts alike?

Here they go, then, Beauty throwing confetti from

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lowered carriage-window, sometimes swaying back against Irving's shoulder — and Irving never putting forth his arm to catch the supple form. He might do so a hundred times. When the blinding light of this brightest and longest street in all the world, paints her young-old face as with radiant sunshine, and a sudden lurch turns up her lips toward his, then he might, without exertion, or offence — but he never does; not that he intends to be a priest, or is blind to the languorous charms of Beauty. But, to save himself, he can't help thinking of Jessie with Vandever the Handsome, Vandever the Bold, and — heavens! let us hope Vandever will play fair!

They meet in Bird Martin's box. It seems to Irving that it is a long, long time — months — since he and Jessie sat down together, to discuss spaghetti and siroppo and black coffee, under the patriotic eye of Garibaldi. Is the realization as pleasant to the taste, as was that black coffee of Pasquale — Pasquale whose sign reads simply "Pasquale's," as if the thousand other Pasquales of the city were not? Jessie seems to think so. Will you look? — that rascal of a Vandever is holding her hand!

CHAPTER V

A NIGHT OF LOVE

WHEN the six young people are finally settled in the box, the play is half ended. That does n't matter, since the plot has no consistency, unless it be that of always appearing at odds with itself, in trying to make the impossible episodes seem connected. But it is not the play on the stage, it is the play facing the stage, that really counts.

Irving's eyes sweep the "diamond zone" of which he finds himself, for once, an integral gem; they suddenly halt; they have found a face looking across the wide gulf, and the face is unmistakably turned toward him. It is a face — he would have said, it is *the* face — of distinguished dignity and profound melancholy. From beneath the glorious jewels in the black hair, eyes of a softer and more moving glory, seem gazing at his youth out of the mellow mist of the Indian summer of middle-age. Her eyes, finding themselves discovered, turn away to look at the young man no more; but the one look has caused his head to whirl with half-etched emotions. The court-room unfolds around him; at his side trembles the tramp who often haunts his memory; and the face in yonder opera-box, that is the striking face

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that lends pathetic mystery to his reproduction of the divorce court.

A shudder crept over Irving's form. Turning abruptly to his new-found friend, he asked, "Are you related to the Mrs. Vandever in that box?" He awaited the answer almost breathlessly, hoping for a negative. A negative would make short work of the tramp nightmare.

"Rather," young Vandever answered, bending over Jessie's hand. He held her hand closely. He was interested in her rings, perhaps.

Beauty observed. "Is that our cue?" she asked. "Must we come on?" And she held out her hand that Bird Martin might hold it.

"Jessie!" Irving exclaimed, impatiently, even angrily, as he found that she did not draw away. A hot flush mounted to his brow.

"Don't worry about Water Lulu," said Stella graciously. "I'll hold your hand if you feel lonesome. You don't seem very humorous, do you, Knickerbocker?"

Irving, with an effort, swallowed his resentment. "I don't know how I ever thought of all those funny things in my History of New York," he said, absently. His eyes had again wandered to the opposite arc of the box-zone. Mrs. Vandever was apparently some twenty years younger than this white-haired second husband—she must be almost the same age as the tramp. How unlike either, she looked! As for the tramp, doubtless the life of a degenerate had given him that loose, shiftless, good-

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natured air, which seemed by no means all bad, yet lacked any definite element of good. As to the second husband, this J. S. Vandever of vast enterprises and corresponding influence, his stern and sharply cut face seemed to defy the white gantlet that time had thrown upon his head. The face of Mrs. Vandever was moulded for the play of sensibility; in contrast with the man of steel nerves by her side, she impressed one with her throbbing and resolutely restrained womanhood.

“That lady in the box,” Martin volunteered, “is the Duke’s mother. The gentleman with her is the great J. S. And they have a daughter that I wish was with them, for the sight of her is worth —”

“I wish,” Vandever interrupted, coloring, “that you’d keep my sister out of this, Colorado.”

“Colorado,” said Stella, seeking to speak lightly, and not altogether succeeding, “you talk too much.” A discordant note had jarred the harmony of their too-light comedy,—a sombre warning, coming from below the surface of things—a premonitory Wagnerian blast, hurled into the rippling shallows that flow toward tragedy. Stella and Beauty look neither at Vandever nor at each other, but each glowing cheek seems to have been splashed suddenly by a grayish streak of care. And so—Vandever’s sister must not be mentioned in our presence. Are not we beautiful also?

Stella seeks relief in her native element. “Frazzle will never make good,” she remarks, directing Beauty’s attention to the ballet. “Her dancing’s too conserva-

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tive." Stella and Beauty are oddly drawn together at this moment.

"She's got to be conservative," Beauty answers, professionally; "hers are mere shadows of mine, or yours."

"Shall we change the subject?" Vandever suggests, feeling Jessie's hand about to elude him.

Jessie rashly steps into the place of the fallen. "That disorganized mob we passed through, to get here," she says, in her Sunday-afternoon voice, a voice too correct, too distinct, alas!—"is the worst I have ever saw."

Jessie seems lost, but Irving, ignoring affronts, gallantly covers her retreat with, "Oh, I don't know"—tone absolutely natural, and sincere—"I saw it that bad last year."

Vandever, conscious of the enemy's weakness, forbears to fire a single shot.

Down goes the final curtain. "Now!" Irving exclaims, with vast relief, "the play will begin." He would have been quite intoxicated by the brilliant scene, but for Jessie's hand in Vandever's. Why did *he* want to hold her hand? Why did she let him? In all their adventures through dingy streets and into shaded restaurants, Irving had never held her hand so long. Nor had Jessie ever looked at him, as now she looked at Vandever. He experienced a sense of pain, to be understood by any one who has not forgotten his youth—a half-deadened twinge that was not without sweetness. To feel injured by one as pretty as Jessie is, in itself, a romance when one is young—for the note of youth

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must be insisted upon as the motif in this life-overture. It yielded Irving anticipations of a delicious quarrel, perhaps on their homeward ride. Love feeds — we do not say it fattens — on misunderstandings.

All were standing, hovering at the front of the box, like pigeons ready for flight. Says Jessie to Irving, with determined loyalty, "I will ride back to the hotel with you."

He has never seen her face so bright, her eyes so liquid, her form so inexpressibly rounded, has never felt so subtly the perfume of her being. To return with her to the banqueting-hall seems preferable to all other attainable delights. But he answers quietly.

"Why not return as we came?" He cared *that* much, at all events. And one must care a good deal deliberately to thrust deeper into one's breast the weapon that another has but lightly wielded. They go as they came, therefore, rolling through the tumultuous street, breasting the deafening breakers of sound which have been intensified a hundred-fold. Oh, the merriment of the thousands! How happy are they, because, the poor Old Year lies a-dying!

"Home again!" Vandever exclaims with his joyous, sunny smile; they seat themselves at the table that witnessed the formation of their acquaintanceship. Is it possible that, but a few hours before, Vandever and Jessie had never met? Irving does n't count. Their flushed smiles and little-knowing looks,—we do not speak of Irving's; he had nothing to look knowing about — the smiles, we say, of Vandever and Jessie, showed

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that they had been getting on capitally. As the night wears on, faces grow rosier, voices merrier; those who have never met speak to each other, breaking through the palisades of all conventions. The night has gone mad.

Up and down the streets of New York, swarm multitudes from Harlem, the Bronx, the Jersey shore, the East Side, Brooklyn, Long Island — swarm in one huge rivalry of noise-making. Endless processions of automobiles vie with each other in attempts to out-scream, out-bellow, out-laugh. When the doors swing open to admit sumptuously attired women with their perfectly groomed escorts, a wave of sound rolls in over the tables, breaking against mirrored walls like the shattered billows of a cliff-checked sea. And when the doors are closed, and jealously guarded against all who have not some magic password, then the tumult of the dining-room makes light heads grow dizzy.

After ten o'clock, nothing in the great hotels, or in any celebrated restaurant along Broadway, can be bought to slake the thirst, but champagne. Fortunately one need drink nothing; fortunately, too, one's money may be already spent.

It is twelve o'clock. What a frightful uproar! Those who thought noise had attained its climax, had not reckoned upon church bells and factory whistles. The Old Year is cast out upon the rubbish heap of time. Oh, the New Year, the New Year! *Vive le roi!*

This midnight pandemonium is the warning call to our Cinderella. All is spent, saving the cabfare to

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“Lee’s Triangle.” Those splendid black horses must soon be converted into mice.

“We will go home, now,” bravely speaks Irving to Jessie.

“Yes,” Jessie faintly responds. Until break of day there will be song and laughter in every hotel and restaurant between Fourteenth Street and Columbus Circle. It will take the revellers till break of day to spend their million dollars, though they average eight dollars each for champagne alone. Among these seventy-five thousand all-night devotees of pleasure, Jessie must leave, in Beauty’s care, her new-found prince, the Duke de Vandever —

“Let’s all,” says Beauty, opening her cigarette-case.

“When shall we three meet again?” inquires Vandever, sincerely regretful over the separation.

Irving rashly promises, “Exactly one month from to-night at eight, at this table. Who’ll be here?”

“All, all!” cries Stella. “Drink to it!”

When they were alone in the cab — “Jessie,” Irving asked, defiantly, “*did* he kiss you?”

“No, he never,” came the prompt response.

“I want you to tell me, Jessie,” Irving persisted, in a hard, unreasonable tone, “*did* he?”

“Well?” Jessie asked.

“Oh, Jessie!” he burst forth. “And you knew all the time that I — that I —”

“You did n’t, and you don’t,” said Jessie, kindly. The voice grew strangely soft. “You see, I know about it, Irving — and you *don’t*. We are just jolly

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chums. And — and oh, what a night, what a night we have had! Please don't spoil it."

Jessie's tone was so unusual that Irving was calmed in a moment. He felt that he did not know her as well as he had imagined. He spoke anxiously: "But, dear, you could love me — just a little — I know that —"

"Yes, dear," she interrupted, speaking in that same strangely old voice, "I could love you: just a little. But just a little love is the smallest thing on earth, when you want all. Some day, when a girl gives you a great, big love, you'll know what I mean. But don't ask me, and don't ever ask anybody, for just a little love. It's all, or nothing; and I tell you, I know what I'm talking about —" She gave a little gurgling laugh, and added, "And you don't!"

They stood before the rough-edged steps of Gotham Repose. The cab was gone — and Irving's last penny with it. Irving was grieved and silent. Jessie held out her hand to him — the hand that toiled so ceaselessly at the handkerchief-counter — the hand that Vander had held — and said, "And when you find that girl, Irving, I don't want her to be like me, but more like — like you."

What could she have meant by that? What could she mean by these sudden tears, by this hiding of the face behind the hand he had not taken? "And, O Irving!" she cried desperately, "I wish I was like that, myself — I mean like the girl you will win some day — I mean like you. Because — I don't know anything,

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and I can't do anything, and I want to be — something else."

The crystalline clearness of New Year's Eve was softened to dim indecision, in "Lee's Triangle." The faces of the dreary houses were softened by the refinement of dimness and repose. Even the rough cobblestones were smoothed out like a gray sheet of paper. Irving drew Jessie softly to him. Her lips, the lips that Vandever had pressed — were so near, that her breath warmed his cheek; but he did not kiss her. He only held his arm, for a moment, about her neck, then softly passed his hand over her eyes, and touched her hair. "Little girl," he said, gently, "good-bye. Go upstairs and dream, and I'll just stroll about a while, and — get used to waking up."

He waited till her form vanished in the dimly lighted hall, then wandered for a time about the deserted by-streets, but the distant roar of Broadway kept breaking upon his meditations, and besides, it was very cold. So it was not long before he came back to the lodging-house, without one thought concerning the possibilities of the New Year, without one resolution for the future. Rather heavily he ascended to his third floor back; and, as he crawled over the log-like body of Wedging, he prodded it quite unnecessarily with his cold knee, in getting to his own bed. Poor Wedging! What had *he* done?

CHAPTER VI

THE MORNING AFTER

THE morning after — ah, everything seems so different on the morning after, self included — everything except the daily grind! When Irving encountered Jessie on the lodging-house steps, the morning following New Year's Eve, she was just as round, without doubt; but her eye no longer flashed, her cheek was pale, and her raiment was toned down to a department store atmosphere. He found her greeting somewhat distant, not as if she meant to slight him, but as if she could not force her thoughts away from images of a past scene.

As they sat side by side in a Broadway surface-car, Irving recalled their parting of the night before: how he had spoken to her of love, and, while speaking, had felt the bitter-sweet of longing; and how, somewhere in the early morning, he had been awakened from profound slumber by a little heartache that spoke thus: "Don't forget that Jessie loves another!" He did not forget, but the ache was gone. What had become of last night's tenderness? Cruel fate, to throw these two so prosaically together, the morning after! Was it because her hand and lips had been appropriated by Vandever, that Irving found them insulated from the

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current of his desire? Or is emptiness of soul, a corollary to emptiness of stomach? Without a penny to his name, and nothing pawn-worthy in his pockets, there seems no help, just now, for the Jessie romance.

They parted almost in silence, these two who had subtly changed to each other, and to the world; and Irving went up to the day's work, which had not changed. The same blue prints stared at him in the same melancholy way; the same worldly-wise messenger boys noisily came and went; the chief-clerk wore his habitual look of cold suspicion of the world, as if he fancied it meant to skip a few of its revolutions the first time he was off guard; the stenographers were just as haughty, and just as resolutely pompadoured — as if their customary grievances against something had been provided with the ride in the elevator.

The office-work, then, was the same; but is not one's real life entirely apart from the office? Irving came here to dig for gold. Life is spending, is it not? — spending or hoping to spend — not digging, surely. After all, there is a grim satisfaction in having a familiar routine running, like a thread, through the heart of one's days. Irving could reflect, and actually did feel without reflection,—“ My money is all spent. Jessie does not love me. But here are the same old reports to make out, and columns like those of last week, to foot up, exactly as when I had my money and my dream of Jessie.” The injustice of the system that keeps gray-bearded clerks at the same old desks while young favorites are crowded to the best posts without previous serv-

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ice — one may denounce this, as one did last month, and as one will next year. There's nothing like a perennial grievance to make one think himself unchanged. The indignation in the hearts of those who had toiled for "sixty-five a month" for the past twenty-five years, with never a hope, at this late day of "getting a raise" — who can say that this very indignation does not keep those hearts fairly young?

And yet, Irving was really different. He hardly knew it, for he was hungry without his breakfast, without his luncheon, without his dinner. Surely, at this rate, the young man will starve! But at dusk we find Irving over on the West Side, in the very heart of Old Greenwich Village. He is traversing those streets which a giant's hand seems to have cast in a maze of tangled threads between Houston Street and West Fourteenth. He walks briskly — his last streetcar-ticket is gone — till Weehawken brings before him the home of his artist-friend, the one who had found him the position in the railroad office. He has come to borrow money, perhaps? Let us see.

It is one of those old houses that stand as monuments of the bygone days when Greenwich Village was a stage-journey from the city of New York. All about these jumbled streets stand ancient buildings, facing any direction, making no attempt to keep out of the way,—houses and streets whose very existence is unknown to the great mass of the real city. For the real city has forgotten the past, it cares not even for the present. The real city has thrown its heart into

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the future, like a heart of Bruce hurled into battle, and is straining every nerve to reach it. But over in Weehawken neighborhood, life has fallen asleep. Even the tenements of Trinity Church swarm dully, as if the hives were half-smothered. Irving beholds a bit of some past century, snared, as it were, in a time-trap — a trap that could not possibly hold its ancient prey, but for the one-time custom of leasing houses for fifty or a hundred years.

Irving's friend has lived sixty years in this same house, here where no artist of a modern day would think of dwelling, or even of visiting, unless he had a soul above strange smells. The neighborhood — but really, there is no neighborhood, for one has nothing to do with the factory except rejoice when its smoke blows toward the Hudson. One lives to oneself in the rooms back of the corner grocery, with the studio on the second floor, and, for the rest, with one's memories of dead friends, which flavor even the visits of those still living.

The house is of frame, crowded at one end by a three-story brick, and shoved at the other by a line of one-story shops. Its side faces the street, for it has neither front nor rear, standing like one in a train of cars, the brick house for the engine, the little shops for flat-cars, its broadside turned against any tide of innovation that might threaten. Irving swiftly ascends the outside stairs which stretch from grocer's door to studio door, hugging the side — or, if you will, the front — of the building.

When he reached the narrow platform above, he

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opened the only door, as usual, without knocking, though he had been six weeks absent. He passed at once into the barn-like room, which occupied the entire upper story. A man—the man he sought—was working at a half-finished portrait, with brush fastened to the end of a long mahlstick.

The man looked up without surprise—he had recognized the footsteps on the outside stair—and nodded with a sort of gruff cordiality. “There you are!” he said, with unmistakable satisfaction. A light swung over the easel, and its green shade deepened the habitual reserve of the artist’s expression. He was sixty years or more; strong, or rather, tough, for his age, but not as the saying goes, young.

“I never come into this room,” Irving declared, breezily, as he sniffed the faint perfume of paints, oils and turpentine, “without feeling that I have lost my way out of life into some sort of a story.” He noted, with an affectionate smile, that Christopher Burl’s table was just as he had last seen it, heaped with charcoals, pastels, colors, and trays of paint-tubes squeezed to limp disfigurement, or lying flat with plenty. Beyond the swinging light, the paint-cabinet stood ajar, as usual; and, as usual, the blue vase, as tall as a man’s shoulders, looked across the bare floor at the articulated skeleton.

Yes, everything seemed to be as it had been for the past three years, the same remote corners of semi-gloom, the same homely, time-blackened rafters, the same matter-of-fact unfinished walls, here plastered, there only lathed,—and the same Christopher Burl, reserved, seri-

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ous, slow of movement. Even the half-finished face on the canvas harmonized with the atmosphere of familiarity; it was the face of last night's theatre, of last month's court room, and now, it seemed naturally enough, the face of the huge studio.

Irving observed, after first drawing a chair before the open fireplace, and seating himself sidewise on the arm, "I see you are painting Mrs. Vandever's portrait."

To that, nothing was to be said, apparently. Mr. Burl was not filled with redundant words.

Irving secretly delighted in the other's silence, for it always pleased him to recognize familiar traits in those he liked. And he liked this Christopher Burl immensely, without knowing just why, unless because the other cared a great deal for him.

"I was thinking, as I came over here," Irving said, cheerily, "that I could n't, for the life of me, explain how you and I ever get on so well. I feel more at home with you than with anybody, even Captain Payne, my foster-father. Was it really just three years ago that you came up to me in Washington Park to borrow a match for your pipe? And did the match really light up our acquaintanceship — or had we known each other a long time, in some former existence?" He laughed at the whimsical fancy. "It seems that we just grew on each other, till we've become grafted."

"Just grewed up," said the artist, with a touch of Topsy. There was no smile on his face — it was somewhere within, and could n't get out. Christopher Burl's white hair was stroked straight up, according to custom;

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his drooping mustache was white, and so was his short goatee, which left exposed the smooth, full cheeks. The pockets of his eyes were pronounced. The nose was straight and slightly rounded at the end. The broad brow was unwrinkled. Save for the shadow in the eyes, there would have been something boyish in the general effect; but the shadow was there, ever lurking, as if Time, in his hurry, could not stop to cut his trademark at the corners of the mouth, or upon the forehead, and had left sorrow to tell of his passing.

Irving looked affectionately at the platform supporting the dais, on which he had once posed as a model, schoolbooks in hand. His eyes wandered to the dingy green damask curtain pulled across the skylight above the dais, to shut out the gathering night. Those had been jolly days. Having squandered every nickel of father Payne's allowance, here he had come to weather the gale of poverty, until the next remittance from New Jersey brought him into port. Now, he was a man. And still —

Irving laughed out, suddenly and loudly. "I suppose you can guess what I've come for?"

Mr. Burl slowly unstrapped his brush from the mahlstick. "Another relapse?" he asked, looking intently at the young man, as if in half a mind to paint him on the spot.

"Have n't a penny in the world," Irving declared, not buoyantly, but by no means despondently. "I was just thinking — I'm precisely as I used to be, except I'm no longer a boy. You'll think that ought

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to make a difference. I'm sure it ought. But it does n't. Feels just the same. Yes, I've come back to you, to recoup."

"Pawn tickets?" the other asked, without seeming interest.

"One gold watch. One diamond stud. Several *et ceteras*. New Year's Eve," added Irving, listing his misfortunes.

Mr. Burl was distinguished for pregnant brevity. "Hungry?"

Irving imitated him, successfully. "Not a bite to-day."

"Still hold your job?"

"Still on that, yes. Oh, I'll make it all back in a month,—well, say two months. In the meantime? That's the point. I must recoup. Going to let me do my cooking here, as in the university days? Going to let me have that spare bedroom? Lodgings are very expensive."

"Why not eat with me at my club?" Mr. Burl asked, just as he had often asked Irving in the days referred to, when the young man's resources were on the minus-side of zero. He came to the fireplace, spread his legs, and stared down at the other's changeful face, his own never changing.

Irving shook his head, always grateful, but always determined. "Not for mine," he declared. "I might as well go home and let mother and father Payne take care of me, or go to work on a tugboat. No; if a penniless man is n't independent, he is n't anything,

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not even a man. But I'll tell you what I will do," he added, as a concession, "I'll borrow, if you don't mind."

There was one strange thing about this Christopher Burl, an entire stranger until three years ago, he never objected to lending. Irving was just as willing for the money to change hands as was the other. Is there any greater proof of friendship?

Mr. Burl spread out his sackcoat, with nervous, slim hands buried in the pockets. "Boy," he said abruptly — at certain moments, psychologically similar, he always addressed Irving so — "I don't ask you if it pays; but, do you *feel* that it pays?"

"Does it pay?" repeated Irving, his eyes on the dancing flames, his hands locked behind his head — "Why! it's what I'm for."

Mr. Burl gave a noncommittal grunt, and tramped away from the hearth, kicking a hassock skimmingly over the bare floor, on his way to the table. He groped under palettes, papers and varnishes, unearthed a check-book, and filled in a blank for one hundred dollars. The same fountain-pen, without one ironic flourish, recorded Irving's promise-to-pay. The artist paused a moment to stare blankly at Mrs. Vandever's portrait, as if wondering how it had got into the room, then came back to the fire, after going out of his way to kick another hassock after the first. He had no dislike for hassocks, as such; the act of kicking merely expressed a psychic state. Had not Irving known him so well, he might have suspected reluctance to lend, out of all proportion to his willingness to borrow.

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Knowing him so well, he was deeply puzzled. Something had happened during his six weeks' absence — something of vital importance to this lonely man.

Mr. Burl abruptly, haltingly, made his announcement: "I am sorry to tell you, Irving, that you cannot have that spare bedroom that was as much yours as mine, during your educational recoups. It is — it is in use. That is to say — it is vacant, to-day, and it was vacant yesterday, but — the fact is, it may be occupied at any time. Which would inconvenience you."

Irving was astonished. He was not certain whether the other was a widower or a bachelor, but it had been his understanding that Mr. Burl had no living relative.

The artist continued: "But, as for coming here to concoct your messes, since it's cheaper than the restaurants, come ahead. Partition off your old corner. Cook what you please, when I'm away at the club; but if I'm on the place, nothing but cocoa, mind."

"Then I'll get to work," said Irving, starting up briskly, still wondering about the bedroom, and about his friend's reticence. "With a salary of twenty a week, room-rent at two, remittance home of ten, and most of this hundred to the pawnbroker, I'll have to hustle, I tell *you!*" He grinned somewhat ruefully.

In a short time, Irving had fenced off a distant corner with his familiar screens, which fitted groove into groove. A ceiling of canvas about eight feet lower than the studio's rafters, stretched above the screens and the two walls of unplastered boards. Fortunately this improvised chamber embraced a window by means of which

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the odor of his cookery might escape. And sometimes it really did escape in that manner. A small coal-oil stove, and the presence of the little grocery in the same building insured a satisfied appetite.

In the meantime, the artist had drawn one of the two huge armchairs before the hearth. With his briarpipe alight, he watched the ridiculous shadows of arms and shoulders cast by Irving upon the inner side of the screens. Every bite taken by the young man was distorted to Gargantuan proportions, but Mr. Burl did not smile; he only smoked and watched, with brooding intentness.

When Irving finally emerged,—“Now,” said Mr. Burl, abruptly, “sit here”—he nodded at the other armchair, “and tell me all about it. Everything, mind; and—if you tell me of any wisdom, I’ll not believe it.” His goatee slightly quivered, which was as good as an open laugh.

So Irving, from the depths of the great chair—the chair which was usually dedicated to old Dr. Adams—told of the wonderful lights—and of none of the shadows—of New Year’s Eve; for of course he began with the most important event of the past six weeks. The Duke—by the way, the son of that very Mrs. Vandever, yonder, on the canvas—the Duke had said this; Irving had said that; and Jessie had looked—but that was all over, now.

Mr. Burl, with legs crossed and with upper foot slightly swinging to and fro, drank it all in, as he looked from Irving to the fire, and back again. Irving

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talked on and on, in a rush of merry memories, forgetful of last night's heartache; and Christopher Burl reached forth to break a coal into a streaming flare of crimson. His face was touched by the light with a glow his emotions were no longer able to paint, however artistic they might feel; but Irving glowed independently of the fire, as if he were adding physical warmth to the room of shadowed corners. Yes, thus they spoke, thus laughed, on New Year's Eve; thus, in a word, they had for a few hours, *lived* — as many live every day. Nothing to worry about, nothing to do but pursue happiness, always overtaking it, then rush on to new delights. If one can but afford it, there is a whole lifetime of it — no recoups, no fears of pawnbrokers, no cooking in a corner. Surely it is what we are *for!*

“To keep it up *all* the time,” sighed Irving, not with envy, but with infinite longing; “it must be great!” Then he added, “But to change the subject: I've found out all about my parents.”

Christopher Burl dropped his pipe upon the bearskin. Too bad! There was a faint, sickly odor of scorched fur. After hasty hands had dashed away the sparks, a round bluish spot remained. The artist rose, nervously. “Never mind the rug,” he exclaimed. “What about your mother?” He refilled his briar, with a slightly tremulous hand.

“She is dead,” Irving answered softly, as he stared into the fire. “She came to New York, alone, to ask

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forgiveness of her family. She'd eloped with — my father; her family disapproved of him. They would n't forgive. They turned her from the door." His voice deepened. "She was in great want. After she died, the Paynes took me, knowing nothing about her." A poignant pathos stole upon the young man's heart; it seemed to spread until it engulfed both him and his listener. He related all he had been told by Mrs. Wyse. Somehow, from her lips, the story had failed to achieve the tragic note that one feels rather than hears. The cold, carefully correct manner of the landlady had sterilized her narrative. Now it quivered with sorrowful life. In the telling, it came to Irving, surprisingly, how futile was all last night's adventure. The words he had but recently spoken about the real object of life, how hollow and meaningless they sounded, now, in memory!

When he had told everything, there was a long silence, broken at last by the older man: "You know nothing of your mother's family?"

"No; and I don't want to know anything. Those who had the heart to turn her out in the street to die of privation, well—" He gave a short, bitter laugh: "You can understand that I would n't desire their acquaintance."

Mr. Burl, with hands interlocked behind him, paced the floor with downcast head. He had taken his favorite path, that between the tall blue-and-gilt vase, and the skeleton. "Well!" he said, not pausing in his walk,

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“and so, now you know — thanks to this landlady. Well! And after knowing, you are precisely where you were before, eh?”

“Indeed I am not. I know that my father and mother loved me, and deserted me for one reason only — because both died.”

“That makes a great difference,” Mr. Burl admitted.

“A vital difference,” said Irving, starting up. “Don’t you see? I can think of them without misgiving; I can think of them with love and pity. And before Mrs. Wyse told me the truth, I did n’t know. I was always afraid that they were — had been — what they were not, you understand. It gives me deeper breath. I have a heritage of poverty, but also of honor. And thanks to father and mother Payne, I have not felt poverty’s sting. They have given me love.”

Back and forth marched the sombre figure of the artist. At last he said, “And your father’s name? *His* family?”

Irving shook his head. “Mrs. Wyse thinks she can find out for me, if she can’t remember. But so far, she has n’t been able to give the slightest clue.”

“You’ll let me know, if you find out?” asked the other, eagerly — he who was never eager. Irving promised, of course, and presently the figures which their intercourse had brought out of the vanished past, faded away, and other matters, matters of the day, clouded the very memory of the dead. The talk flowed presently into brighter pastures; flowers of friendship were refreshed.

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“Come!” cried Mr. Burl, resuming his seat, “sing for me, boy. You’ve neglected me shamelessly these past weeks.”

“I’ve been awfully busy,” said Irving, then thought of Jessie and paused with open mouth, then laughed. He sprang for the guitar. “There’s a song — it’s old now — been out, a month — but maybe you have n’t heard it —”

“I never hear any songs that you don’t sing me,” said the other, still with subtle reproach.

Irving tuned the guitar, slapped its back; tuned it again; spread his fingers over the strings, as if to wrench them off; went to hunt a hassock, meanwhile humping his body over the instrument as if careful not to wake it; propped his foot; tuned again; and so, at last, reached the point of clearing his throat. His voice was flexible — a real convenience, when the only chords one knows are in C Major, to which all songs must be adjusted. He began:

“You may have the rest of the world,
But give me New York for mine.
I’d swop the dough of Baltimo’,
And all the wealth of —”

His voice died away. The ghost of New Year’s Eve waved at him. “A person can’t sing that by himself,” he declared; “it sounds so flat!”

“It seemed to swing along fairly well, I thought,” the listener demurred.

“Oh, but it ought to go like a house afire,” said Irving, with a rueful laugh. “It takes a whole lot of peo-

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ple. When I sing it alone, it's as lonesome as — as the morning after."

It was about eleven, when Irving bade the other good-night. Then it was that Christopher Burl, with marked embarrassment, returned to the subject that had previously mystified his guest. "Very sorry you can't have that spare bedroom, Irving, but —"

"Oh, that's all ri —"

"And hold on. That is n't all. You're welcome here at any time, as far as housekeeping goes, except — unless — In fact, we'll have to make some sort of arrangement. Now, boy, I'm going to be as frank as a man can be who speaks of mysteries. To be plain, the person that will come, occasionally, to occupy that spare bedroom is — a — is an unusual person, who does n't want it known that he or she — as the case may be — is in the city. There are reasons. They are excellent. Of course, since you're not to have the bedroom, we've solved *that* difficulty. But suppose that person were up here, when you came in. That person would rather die than be discovered in New York; I have no doubt *would* die — but I owe that person shelter."

"Then," Irving began, dismayed, but still too loyal to take offence —

"No, let me think." Mr. Burl dug his hands into his coat pocket, and spread out the corners till the sack-coat was like a sail. "See that window, over the outside stairs? Now, whenever you come this way, look up; and if this bicycle-lamp is in the window —" he took one from the mantel, where it could not have

The Morning After

belonged —“that will mean, ‘Stay away.’ You see?”

“It sounds adventurous,” Irving said, doubtfully.

“It is adventurous,” Mr. Burl admitted, pursing his lips. “I would not miss your company, when the coast is clear, for any consideration, but I would n’t have you come here, when that person is here, for — well, for anything; it’s a matter of honor.” He laid his hand upon the young man’s shoulder and said, with unwonted gentleness, “You feel all right about it, I hope, boy?”

“I believe you really want me to come,” Irving said, hesitatingly.

“With all my heart. I want to hear more talk, more songs, in a word, I want you, boy. So humor my little mystery. There’s no harm in it, I assure you. After all, the mystery is not mine but — the person’s. And God knows, it’s something that can’t be helped.”

“Sure, I’ll come,” Irving declared, heartily. “I’ll keep an eye out for the bicycle-lamp; you’d better light her up at dusk, if there’s danger. And I’ll sing for you till I’m hoarse; maybe I’ll finally learn how.”

Mr. Burl was intensely gratified at the way his mystery had been received, but his only token of pleasure was a crushing hand-grip and the words, “If I had my wish, you’d live here all the time.”

Surely that was much to say for a man who, three years ago, was an absolute stranger. Irving returned the clasp impulsively, declaring that the bicycle-lamp would introduce a delightful note of uncertainty into the adventures of his housekeeping. And yet, when he left

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Weehawken Street, his step was hardly so brisk as at his coming, although, of course, the mysterious "person" could not concern him. He arrived in due time at his lodgings. Was there something sinister in the deep quiet of "Lee's Triangle"? Was there something forbidding in the frown of the narrow brownstone front? The stone flight showed, in the gloom, its grayish steps, like teeth broken at the edges, laughing in their old age. Were they laughing at Irving Payne?

CHAPTER VII

STRANGE MEETING IN THE STUDIO

IRVING was not now gathering dream-roses in his waking hours. During the days following his readjustment to economic conditions, work in the sky-scraper appeared the most vital of realities, that upon which hinged his self-preservation. Cooking his own dinner took away the essential zest for a meal which is born of vague ignorance as to details, and optimism as to the ensemble. A preliminary taste with one's nostrils, if too long enforced, dulls the palate.

His evenings were spent so late with Christopher Burl that, when Irving returned to Gotham Repose, Mrs. Wyse's parlor had been converted into a bedroom, while the halls were but cold odors of the day's history. Sometimes, when he started to work in the mornings, he met Jessie, but they soon parted company; for the young man's Spartan breakfast of one cup of coffee and a bun was not such as the brave could offer up at the shrine of the fair.

Moreover, Irving imagined a grievance against Jessie — he hardly knew what it was — some reason for feeling aggrieved, such as forces people apart without prompting too close a scrutiny into the cause. He had virtually offered Jessie his most sacred possession —

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one might almost say, his only possession — his heart. She had not taken it, luckily; and now he had ceased to feel like giving it away.

Had Irving really cared, even as much as he thought he cared, it would have been bitter irony that he served merely to remind Jessie of young Vandever. Irving's face and form, thanks to the surprising resemblance, brought before her the "Duke" standing among lights and flowers, his head thrown back that he might look down into her eyes, his eloquent hand clasping hers, knighting her spirit, as it were, till she ceased to feel herself an integral factor of department store life.

But Irving did not care as much as he thought he cared; and, according to his disposition, having lost one interest, he sought another. He could compare no pleasures to those that come as one's money vanishes — pleasures, alas! that show such ungrateful haste to overtake the money. But such delights were for the time beyond his reach; so he exercised his gift of lowering his sounding board to catch those timid tones that twitter an octave below the full song of joy. Let but a note of pleasure, however faint, float within reach, he became its megaphone, swelling it to exaggerated proportions.

The young man exercised himself as heartily to cheer up the lonely artist, as he had striven to amuse Jessie. In making the pretty shopgirl happy, his motives had been somewhat mercenary, after all, because her sweet smiles had paid him in gold. His was a very different reward, for making Mr. Burl's goatee quiver from the amusement that hid below the surface. Still, it was

Strange Meeting in the Studio

something. This endeavor to brighten up Mr. Burl's life, not so much as a return for hospitality, as because all lives ought to be bright, forced upon Irving's memory the desire of the French *restaurateur* for a soloist. He was telling Mr. Burl about Monsieur du Pays, when he recalled Chartier's quest.

That very night, Irving dropped in at the French restaurant, to interview the proprietor, and, the day after, sought Monsieur du Pays. He did not have to visit Jessie at her handkerchief-counter, to learn that the Frenchman was no longer employed on the other side of the partition. He knew it when Mrs. Wyse informed him that Monsieur was in his room, but —

"Not the front room on the second floor," said the little woman in distinguished black. She added in her aggravatingly correct tone, "He occupies the rear." Therefore, Monsieur du Pays was no longer a tryer-on of popular songs, daily fitting the voices of the musically affected. He and Madame were wont to flit back and forth between front room and back, according to good fortune.

"What honor!" Madame du Pays cried, her voice breaking in the fragile shrillness of crystalline excitement. "Give yourself the pain to enter. Here we are, all two."

Irving gave himself the pain to enter; also "*de vous asseoir.*" From the window behind Monsieur du Pays' leonine head he caught a melancholy view of the scabby brick wall, upon which an early cat paraded.

"But yes," said Madame, observing the young man's

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disconcerted inspection, "one sees much of the wall, is it not? *Eh bien!* We feel much with ourselves, however — what you say, *to home*. We need not look at the cat."

Irving told them about his lonely old bachelor-friend, of course saying nothing about the bicycle-lamp, for that might have assumed to them the significance of a native legend. Would Monsieur du Pays sing for the white-haired artist, just as a friend? It was no professional call, but perhaps Monsieur would enjoy the visit. It would be a delightful treat to Mr. Burl — "And all of us will be richer," Irving declared, genially.

"'T is true my voice is at the rest," said Monsieur, "for it is two days since my throat refused to support; it is that I have what you say lost the job. I am very strong to-day. I could r-r-roar like a lion." He shook his long blonde locks, defiantly. "But I cannot roar off the job; for do I leave Angélique, to sing for pleasure?"

"*Ah ciel!*" cried Madame, with amazing volubility, "you go with Mr. Payne. It is my heart's desire. You come back, you tell me everything of new. Not often we are asked to drink the wine of friendship. We have *bien soif* for that wine, *toujours*, is it not?"

"Do I leave you for the wine of friendship?" exclaimed the impressionable tenor. "Who but you supports my courage when my accursed throat will not support my voice?"

The thin, shabbily dressed Angélique,—how her ordinary face was transformed by the rare dignity of

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the woman who knows herself beloved! Had Irving ever thought her plain?

The young man, half-remorseful at separating these old lovers, hurried to explain that Chartier would be at the studio. Chartier would hear Monsieur du Pays sing, and doubtless contract for his services, since he was without a soloist. Yes, it was the Chartier who owned the restaurant just off Washington Square, where you get a seven-course dinner for forty cents, with grand opera thrown in — that is to say, a soloist, two violins and a piano. They were in desperate straits for a singer. Their old soloist was lost; no one could find him, not even his wife. Chartier had explained, “It is that he have another girl — *voilà!*” In this restaurant Monsieur du Pays could sing the great songs of ten — thirty — fifty years ago.

“If the great songs have been composed that long,” Irving added, doubtfully. He could not think there had been much grand opera before the twentieth century. “And if your voice fails — anyway, there will be so much noise and rattle of dishes —”

“It is what you call an opening!” Monsieur exclaimed, in an altered tone. “Who knows? I may crawl through, perhaps. I will come. My throat —”

“Your throat will stand under, I know well,” cried his wife. “You have this position already in your hand. Mr. Payne has given it. And you sing only the songs worthy. I nevair again,” she cried, her eyes flashing; “I nevair hear from your lips that ‘Coon, coon, coon, little yaller ba-a-a-by.’”

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So it was arranged that Monsieur du Pays should come to the studio the next evening, at eight.

“And you must tell your artist friend,” cried Madame, “for I will not be there — and Monsieur would not tell — that once he sang for the great Queen Victoria, so good and very large. And at Rome — *Italie, vous savez* — as he stood after his last farewell, with his hand upon his bosom — so — the ladies threw their earrings and bracelets at the feet of him.”

When Irving had departed, Madame locked the door, and, from a dark cabinet, drew forth certain mysterious concoctions. Then Monsieur sat down, with a towel tucked under his celebrated throat, and Madame proceeded to knead, manipulate, and tinge the long blonde locks which her ever-watchful eyes had detected in gray treachery. For it was not yesterday that Monsieur had sung for the Queen, so good and very large.

At noon, the next day, Irving hurried to the West Side to prepare Mr. Burl for an evening of pleasure, and also to take a hasty luncheon from his tins. Mr. Burl had already set forth for his old-fogy club, so the luncheon was consumed hastily, and rather more noisily than usual. Above the clink of bottles and jars, rose the young man's voice in a little Italian song. He and Jessie had picked it up from the waiters of a happy-go-lucky lunch-stand, no matter where, no matter when, since, as he sang it, he did not once think of Jessie. Soft mush he made of the syllables — the only way to show proficiency in modern tongues. To think that he could

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sing that song without one souvenir of Jessie's smile, Jessie's voice, Jessie's roundness — oh, the wonder of it!

Suddenly his ears were assailed by a marvellously sweet, fresh voice, such as one may imagine issuing from the heart of a dewy rose — “Agostino! I hear you, Agostino! You are in that corner. But you 'll not escape me this time.”

The voice sounded in the studio, at no great distance from the screen. Irving no longer sang. He stood open-mouthed, petrified. The name Agostino swept his mind back to the day of the Nathan Hale monument, and the letter from Mrs. Sadie Wyse. The Italian who did not wish his cigar smoked by the socialist, was called Agostino. Irving remorsefully reflected that, in his hurry to tell Mr. Burl about Monsieur du Pays, he had forgotten to look for the bicycle-lamp in the window. That was natural since, having never once found it, he had ceased to fear its presence on the window-sill. Possibly the lamp was there, now, and its ineffectual warning had been intended to prevent his meeting the owner of the sweet, fresh voice, the voice of a dewy rose. Probably the owner of that voice was the “person” who had dispossessed him of the spare bedroom. If so, Mr. Burl had resolved upon keeping them apart.

“I see you now!” exclaimed the voice, with manifest license of conjecture. She gave vent to the merriest of laughing trills. What a happy voice — but above all, what a freshness permeated its deep-throated *timbre!*

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It suggested fragrant fields under summer skies. "You might just as well come out," the voice continued. "I will wait here all day, if necessary."

That was much longer than Irving could wait, no matter how displeased Mr. Burl might prove. Besides, in spite of the possibility that the lamp was in the window, and that the lamp meant avoidance of this girl, and that it was to Mr. Burl's interests to prevent a meeting, Irving yielded to a certainty — namely, that he must see this speaker. He hastily put on his coat, closed his window, snatched up the nickel-plated coffee-urn to sight at his grotesque reflection, and was moved thereby to indiscreet mirth.

She heard the half-smothered chuckle, and grew comically severe. "I knew I'd find you here!" she declared. "Shame on you, Agostino!"

Desire to see the speaker called him forth; the necessity for presently returning to the office commanded. He issued from his den. "I am not Agostino," he said, with deep humility, "but I am greatly 'shamed."

She was standing by the blue-and-gold vase, one hand lightly resting against the rim, which rose above her shoulder. She had cast her wraps over the back of the nearest chair. Her cheeks were stained red from the nipping January air, while her eyes were bright with the sparkle of the outside world, as if she had brought its frosty brilliance into the sombre studio, and, by the warmth of her being, had melted the cold brightness to a sunny glow.

"Then —" she began, as if to catch up his words.

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Her lips, parted in amused surprise, and her eyes, never faltering, mutely finished the question.

Irving laughed as he gave his name — laughed at himself for being caught, and at her for the dumb surprise, and at fate for bringing about the meeting.

She was of that rare type of womanhood that inspires a sense of fellowship, even admiration, without a necessary accompaniment of sentiment. Probably her artist's working-dress — the blue blouse with its rolling turned-down collar, and the business-like yacht cap — had much to do in forming Irving's impression. He found something boyish in her attitude, perhaps the effect of great independence of character, suggesting that sex was not her dominant quality, and might be disregarded in summing up her essentials. His conception was strengthened by her form, tall and sturdily built, and by her serene air of self-poise. There seemed nothing weak about her, yet nothing bold.

Charmingly at variance with this dominant note, was the full Southern face, with its merry, slightly raised, slightly projecting upper lip; and the deep, sweeping lashes; and the glorious richness of hair; and the eyes which, however independent, could not help being of a luminous brown, essentially feminine.

“Miss Adams,” she said, with an intermingling of the stranger's interest, or curiosity, and the stranger's reserve.

“Oh!” cried Irving, his handsome face lighting up, “then I have at last met you. You are, of course, Dr. Lewis Adams's granddaughter?”

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She smiled whimsically. "But why am I a matter of course, when you are a mystery?" She was younger than Irving, but felt older, and as sure of him as of herself. She felt that if he should ever shake hands with her, his arm would move through space in the shortest line from his heart, not in an arc of any social mode. In truth, with those penetrating brown eyes, she saw to the bottom stratum of his nature; saw quite through those superfluous layers which he believed to be his true self.

"I, a mystery?" Irving exclaimed, ruefully. "But has n't your grandfather, or Mr. Burl, told you about me?"

She shook her head, unable to hide her amusement at his disconcerted air, but ready to believe anything he might say: not because she had seen so little of the world as to be credulous, but because she had seen enough of it to have faith. She asked, "Why not tell me, yourself?" Then her rippling laughter was heard, like those meadowbrooks in the sun that purl in our memories of childhood.

The young man expostulated: "As often as I have heard of you! And they have never mentioned me to you? I have never been here when those two life-long friends were sitting yonder in the armchairs, that they did n't treat me to anecdotes of Winifred Adams. Did n't you know, during my university days, about my coming here to — to — I mean about that screened-in corner, yonder, and my — and why it was there?"

"Never, to all your questions," responded Winifred

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Adams, waving her strong, full arm as if to sweep his doubts into the gigantic vase.

“How insignificant I must appear to others!” Irving murmured.

The playfulness in her eyes engulfed the stranger’s reserve. “But this leaves you entirely free to tell your story in your own way,” she suggested.

“I am dreadfully handicapped, nevertheless,” he returned, snatching at his watch. “I’ll soon be whistled to Broadway. And we’ve been so long meeting, I’m afraid it may not happen again, since Mr. Burl and Dr. Adams are so secretive. I know of your studio in the attic of your home near Madison Square, and of your pictures, and exhibitions. Mr. Burl is as proud of your work as *I* am; he and I used to celebrate whenever you scored a success; I am one of that admiring and unknown public that you may have heard of. And I know how your grandfather took you to Paris when you were only fifteen years old — and I know how long ago *that was*.”

“How alarmingly well-known I am!” she exclaimed, with a return of her reserve. She walked to the fireplace, as if to step out of the conversation.

“And how when you were only three years old,” Irving chuckled, “one day your grandfather bought you a long cane of stick-candy, and you said to him, ‘G’an-papa, is oo doin’—’”

Winifred turned and made a face at him, by pouting out the under lip, and drawing down the upper lip — a most charming *moue* that made him burst into delighted laughter. Her facial rebuke had been given without

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design. She was so surprised at what she had done, that she joined in his laugh, as if both had been caught in a naughty prank. Then, in an effort to recapture her shattered dignity, she asked with a merry little frown,

“Did n’t Agostino come here to-day? — a low, heavy-set Italian with a mustache —”

“I have n’t seen him; Mr. Burl will know.”

And here was Mr. Burl entering from the outer landing, his step heavy and slow, his face darkly thoughtful. At sight of them, he stopped abruptly, stared with unwavering eyes, while his white mustache bristled above his white goatee.

Once more Irving remembered about the bicycle-lamp. His eager voice betrayed some nervousness as he exclaimed, accusingly, “And you never told Miss Adams about me!”

At the same moment, Winifred asked, showing greater eagerness, “Uncle Christopher! Have you seen anything of Agostino?” She laughed because Irving had almost drowned out her words, then added, as an afterthought, “How do you do, Uncle Christopher?”

Mr. Burl’s stern face slightly relaxed, while his eyes grew at least twenty years younger. He came forward briskly, exclaiming, “Well, well, well!” He laid a hand on each of Winifred’s shoulders. “Come!” and he pushed her to the armchair. “Sit you down, Sunbeam. Well, well, well! What a happy surprise!” So he was not angry, after all. There was no bicycle-lamp in the window.

“No doubt you *are* surprised,” she said, with pre-

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tended severity. "Have you stolen my model? Oh, Uncle Christopher, what plagiarism! I'm sure there's not another Italian in Mulberry Bend *quite* so villainous looking as my own Agostino. And I found him first," she added reproachfully.

The muscles in the lower part of Mr. Burl's face slightly quivered — a treat in the laughing-way, that he seldom permitted himself. "You'll have to find another dago," he said, briefly. "The Black Handers, not I, are after your prize. He's frightened to death, and is hiding — don't breathe it, if you value his life at a straw — in the home of a New Jersey tugboat captain — Silas Payne. By the way," he added indifferently, not as if he had just thought of it, but as if it did n't matter, "Captain Silas Payne is this young man's — what do you say? — foster-father."

"I'm glad to be brought into this," remarked Irving, who had been holding aloof, "even if the connecting chain is Agostino. But I did n't know father Payne had ever seen this Italian. I have n't heard him mentioned."

Mr. Burl turned to Winifred, as if Irving did n't count. "So you wonder that I never told you about this fellow?" He nodded with the back of his head at the young man. "Well, well, well! I'm surely glad to see you, Sunbeam. Shall I tell you about him now?"

"Do!" cried Winifred, nestling down in the great chair, and drawing Mr. Burl beside her. They were not related, hence her "Uncle Christopher" was a signal honor. "I have already suspected that he has a strange

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and hidden story. But say the very best for him that you conscientiously can, Uncle Christopher." She looked down at the hem of her blue blouse, as if ready for anything.

"Here is a young man, risking being late at the office," began Mr. Burl, severely, "who, all his life, has looked upon pleasure as the only — but no! I shall tell you nothing." Mr. Burl interrupted himself, impatiently. "This is my friend, this Irving Payne, a good fellow through and through, whether he ever does anything, or not."

"But the story?" Winifred demanded, looking up searchingly.

"You'd think no more of him if you heard it," said the other, "and that's why it has never been told you."

"But Mr. Burl!" Irving remonstrated with a flushed face. His laugh was forced, for, oddly enough, the word "pleasure" had given him pain.

She regarded the young man with a pensive, studious gaze which showed no consciousness of the rich golden beauty of her brown eyes, or the handsome features, manly yet embarrassed, that he held half-averted.

"But it's all your point of view, Sunbeam," Mr. Burl explained, indulgently. "You see, a sunbeam can't understand a shadow, being altogether outside of its world. I might tell you how romantic a shadow may be; but what's the use? *You* are a Sunbeam."

"Then," said Winifred, thoughtfully, "Mr. Payne — is he altogether outside of my world?"

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“So far outside,” said Mr. Burl, with conviction, “that he does n’t know your world exists!”

“Oh, *then* —” said Winifred. It was as if to say, “Good-bye!” with one’s handkerchief, waving it from deck, over an ever-widening sea.

Irving felt hurt. He looked at his watch again, then spoke with a gravity that may have been just a little exaggerated: “I came to tell you, Mr. Burl, that I’ve arranged to have the friend I spoke to you about — Monsieur du Pays — the man with the magnificent voice — you remember? — he will come to sing for you, to-night. And we’ll have a violin, too. I believe you’ll like it.”

“How fine!” cried Winifred, looking at Irving again, her brow showing a puzzled wrinkle. “Grandfather and I have planned to spend the evening here. Will your friend mind singing for us?” She turned to her host: “Or shall we put off our visit?”

“Put off your visit? Put away such an idea! No, no, this boy is always doing something to enliven me. It’s often like blowing at a dead coal, eh, Irving? But I appreciate his intentions, even when I don’t appreciate the music. You won’t mind Dr. Adams and his granddaughter, will you, boy?”

“Uncle Christopher,” Winifred suggested, “maybe he is a sunbeam too!”

“He beams like one,” remarked Mr. Burl, dryly.

Irving was, indeed, radiant at the sudden prospect that opened up before his mental vision. Alas! he was

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obliged to make a dive for the door. He called back, *en route*, "Mr. Burl! Please don't prejudice the jury in the prisoner's absence."

Mr. Burl pursed his lips. "I promise not even to refer to you, till you show your face this evening."

Winifred called, "And shall I promise not even to think of you?"

He need not have shouted his protest as he almost fell down the outside stairs. Winifred did not make promises that she knew would not be kept.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ITALIAN SPY

THAT evening, Irving visited a restaurant before his return to Weehawken Street. The precaution was well taken; for, when he entered the studio (the bicycle-lamp was not displayed), there sat Winifred Adams in the armchair, just as he had left her. Dr. Adams had been called away; but Christopher Burl, pipe in mouth, was marching from the blue-and-gold vase to the skeleton, then back again.

“Go ahead and boil your cocoa, Irving,” said Mr. Burl, with the tactless practicality of the old. “Don’t mind us. Do your cheese-and-cracker stunt, then come join us.”

Winifred opened her eyes wide.

“I have eaten,” said Irving, with dignity. The next moment he laughed in spite of himself. “Well!” he added, “I wish, after all, I’d let you tell the story before the real trouble happened in. Go ahead, Mr. Burl, and relieve the tension.”

“I’ve been dying from curiosity all afternoon,” murmured Winifred, “so you can well understand that I’m now exhausted.”

“The story we are about to tell,” Mr. Burl began, with portentous gravity, “deals with a man named

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Irving Payne. After he had lived to the age of — how long do you want to live, Irving? We'll give you every advantage."

Irving was about to answer, that after thirty-five, it was immaterial, but remembered that his friend was much worse than that. He said nothing. But he was intensely alive to new impressions. He would not have thought it possible that the great armchair could ever frame so fair a picture. The splendid brown hair was turned to the gold of the brown eyes, by the rosy hearth-flames. The pure white of her cheeks was rendered dazzling by the swinging lights. The height and solidity of her form gave her impressiveness; she was not one to be lost in an armchair, however large and cushiony. In changing from the artist's blouse and cap to simple attire, she had changed, seemingly, from the comrade to the woman. She was a woman in every feature of her alert face, in every movement of the long limbs, the strong bust, the flexible fingers. But her womanliness had none of the shrinking shyness, the difficult hesitation, of a vanished age. It was a womanliness that passed judgment upon men and events, because she had taken her place among men of affairs, to help to mould the events of the future, wielding her brush as Joan had wielded her sword, holding her place in the front ranks of the world's workers, as Joan had once led in battle.

The impression upon Irving — it had dwelt with him all that afternoon, at the office — was the more marked because Winifred's essentials were not his own. He felt that Mr. Burl had spoken with truth, though the truth

The Italian Spy

was exaggerated. He was, indeed, outside of this young woman's world; but it was not a world whose existence was unknown to him. He knew it just as he was acquainted with some history in many volumes — Hume, or Grote, or Guizot, or Bancroft. He knew what was to be found in such reading, just as he knew what was to be met in Winifred's world. But the knowledge had never inspired a spirit of investigation.

Mr. Burl resumed: "When the subject of our sketch died, at the end of a very, very long life, it was said of him that he had cheered the lives of those with whom he came in personal contact; that he had a pleasant smile, and was good and honest; and that he now shares the oblivion which is the penalty one pays for entering paradise. And that is the whole story of Irving Payne."

Irving laughed a little ruefully, but Winifred did not even smile.

Then with subtle diplomacy, Irving broached a scheme which he had perfected between breaths in the railroad office. "I have been thinking," he said impersonally — it is not good policy to appear anxious for acceptance of terms — "that your story, the true story of Irving Payne, might be slightly enlarged before the obituary. I was acquainted with this colorless mortal, and I knew that he meant to visit home next Sunday, where he would no doubt see Agostino, Agostino the wonderful Italian model."

"How I envy you!" Winifred exclaimed. "Do you know, I have him more than half-painted into a great picture — I mean great in size —"

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Mr. Burl interposed with, "You mean nothing of the sort!"

Winifred continued, her chin showing how completely the artist was disdained: "And it's maddening to be compelled to sit idle, while my brain is burning up my plan to crinkled paper. You know what it is to be obliged to do nothing when you want to work — work — oh!" she concluded, with astonishing energy.

Did Irving know? "Yes," he said, "I knew you felt so. The part of the story that Mr. Burl has omitted is this: If you and he, or if you and your grandfather will go home with me, Sunday afternoon, we'll force a compromise with Agostino. If the old romances are true, nothing so delights Italians as slipping about in the dead of night to enter houses at secret signals. Agostino will come to be painted, I'm sure, if he may do so stealthily."

"But if you know him," responded Winifred, doubtfully, "could n't you induce him to form the plot? If you would!" And her eyes sparkled.

Irving waved away the suggestion. "Not without you," he said decidedly. "I don't know him at all. I could n't influence him in the least. But *you* —"

They were discussing this idea when the brisk step of Winifred's grandfather was heard without. He entered breezily — a smooth-shaven, kind-faced man of seventy. His white hair was parted carefully in the middle, while in a straight course with that popular line of short division, was a youthful dimple in his chin. His manner suggested that in youth he had stored up a

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great quantity of reserved vital-force for these very days.

Irving knew that Winifred's parents were dead, and that she lived with her grandfather in the big house northwest of Madison Square. Winifred, seeing their friendly footing, cried out that only a conspiracy on the part of Dr. Adams and Mr. Burl had kept her from hearing of Mr. Payne.

"And he has a story!" cried Winifred, accusingly. "Uncle Christopher won't tell it right, and grandfather has never told it at all."

Dr. Adams leaned an elbow upon his knee, propped a plump cheek upon his knuckles in a self-conscious attitude, as if for a photographer. He looked into the fire. "I don't know Mr. Payne's story. As for Chris, he never could tell anything straight."

Christopher Burl retorted with exceeding gruffness, "I've never learned to soften my stories for weak brains." Then he looked sidewise at his old friend, and thrust forward his goatee, like a mastiff awaiting attack.

The doctor remarked that attitude, and said, "*I don't want your bone!*"

The ostensible rudeness of these life-long friends to each other, and their courtly deference to Winifred, amused and touched Irving. The elders delighted in nothing so much as chaffing each other with rather heavy jibes — these points, however, always wore foils: but they were not mocking each other so much as they were mocking old age. When Dr. Adams and "Uncle Chris-

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topher" vied with each other in showing Winifred honor, it was not as the old regard the young, but as if she were able to rekindle those coals of youth which lie smothered, or haply glowing, in the hearts of the oldest of us.

Irving began to fear that Winifred might suspect some dark thread in his life-history. "I'll tell it myself," he declared.

"Tell it, tell it!" cried Dr. Adams. "We'll swear to every word, won't we, Chris?"

"Like troopers," Mr. Burl declared.

They made a charming picture about the enormous fireplace, their faces reddened by the up-leaping flames, their hair touched to gold or snow, by the lights swinging from naked rafters. Back of them were the dusky nooks of the studio, their mysterious shadows playing along the barnlike walls, or fleeting over the glimmering floor. Winifred occupied the centre of the hearth-arc, with Mr. Burl on her right, his pipe taking transitory visits from mouth to knee; and, on her other side, Dr. Adams, apparently enjoying his photographic pose. Irving, of course, leaned against the mantelpiece, his face softened by brown shadow.

"When I met Mr. Burl, three years ago," said Irving, "it was like meeting some one I'd always known. I can't tell you exactly how, but pretty soon he knew everything about me, and I knew as much of him as I know to-night — and that's almost nothing."

"Nothing about him to know," Dr. Adams interjected; "he's only a paint-brush and a stomach."

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“Into which stomach,” Mr. Burl commented, “none of *this* doctor’s pills will ever be pumped!”

“I was attending the university,” Irving continued. “I was always running out of my allowance, though father Payne was pretty generous. I don’t know why, for I kept account of every penny — I have the little books showing everything I’ve spent for the past five years. It went somehow.” He laughed. Then in a light tone he told of his cookery in the studio, of his transitory flights into the upper world, of his recoupments, his present eclipse. All was gay, cheerful, natural. Why save, except to spend? After spending, what is left, except to save? It was an endless round of the wheel of life. He kept it oiled as best he might, till it reached its highest point. After that — well, down it had to come, of course, sinking from its own weight — the specific gravity of necessity that holds poor mortals to the earth’s surface.

Winifred, with hands clasped about her knee, listened with steadfast gravity.

“And what is ahead?” inquired Dr. Adams, interestedly.

Mr. Burl turned upon him: “Just what is behind, simpleton!”

Irving laughed: “I ask nothing better,” he declared. “After the drudgery of the railroad office — horrid monotony! — or the cut-off existence of a river tug, I suddenly plunge into real life; I find a new pair of lungs to breathe with, like an extra pair of bellows in a cramped blacksmith’s shop. You three won’t understand this.

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You could enjoy that true life every day. But suppose you longed for it all the time — the true life — and could peep into it only once a month or so; then you'd understand why I'm willing to live a sort of grub-life between flying-days. I don't feel that *all* of me is at work, in my obscurity; but when I emerge, every fibre of me is alive."

Dr. Adams changed his pose, to lay a hand upon Winifred's strong arm. "This girl of mine," he said, "belongs by rights to what you call 'real life.' She was born into it, and has the means. Do you see how white my hair is? That comes from trying to persuade her to take her place in society — to give up daubing and smearing and finger-staining and making some rather remarkable pictures, by the way. But she won't listen. She won't spend her time sitting up to be visited, or going to visit people she does n't want to see. I've had to give her up." He shook her arm playfully, crying, "Oh, you little grub!"

"Yes!" Mr. Burl echoed, catching her other hand, "you little grub! Why do you renounce dinners and theatre-parties and balls and week-ends — in a word, 'real life' — to waste your time in cheering up the old heart of this pioneer of Grub Street? Just because you *are* a grub, as Irving says. But come, Sunbeam, I know you must have your flying-days —" And he lifted her up by the force of his sinewy arm.

"We fly!" exclaimed Dr. Adams, also rising. The two old fellows started on a run down the studio, dragging the laughing Winifred along between them.

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“Up and down!” cried Mr. Burl, his nimble legs oddly at variance with the stern, business-like aspect of his overhanging brows and fixed mouth. The boyish countenance of the doctor glowed under the middle parting of his white hair; and the dimple in his chin deepened. Winifred’s skirts swayed protestingly as her tall form was propelled violently through space. Her cheeks reddened; were there ever softer, more finely modulated fields of satin, for the growing of red roses? Her bosom rose and fell in the broad curves of perfect health; and when she laughed, her voice came to Irving with the fragrant suggestion of the heart of a dewy rose.

“Now to the skeleton!” said Mr. Burl sternly. When they reached that ghastly trophy, the artist stared hard at the grinning skull. “We’re no kin of yours,” he declared.

“We don’t know you,” cried Dr. Adams.

But Winifred said nothing; and Irving noticed, when the men were again seated, that she paused behind her grandfather’s chair, and stooped to rest her blooming cheek against the snow of his hair.

When all were in perfect breath, Irving’s project was broached. Dr. Adams at once agreed to accompany the young man Sunday afternoon, in quest of Agostino, whereupon Winifred’s hesitation vanished. The adventure into Jersey assumed the guise of a holiday excursion. They discussed the details with enthusiasm; Irving was enchanted. What a day it would be, with the old doctor by his side — to say nothing of Winifred!

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It was half-past eight when footsteps were heard, and Monsieur du Pays was presented to the party. The once famous tenor was followed soon after by the French *restaurateur*, Chartier by name, who has absolutely nothing to do with this story, except to distract us with his violin. For although Chartier brought his hired violinist to accompany Du Pays, he could not forbear the temptation to bring his own tormenting instrument. It was a long time since he had taken a holiday from his restaurant, a long time since he had drawn the bow. He meant to hear Du Pays and amuse himself at the same time. At sight of Winifred, Du Pays had grown straighter, had shaken the blonde locks from his leonine brow, as if his throat were endowed with strength from Sampson's hair. But Chartier, eager only to play, seated himself abruptly, motioned to the first violin of his restaurant orchestra to do the same, and arranged his rack with feverish activity.

A dark and silent form had halted at the door, separated by the length of the apartment from the lights. It was Pasquale, he of the Italian restaurant. Irving wondered at his presence, and Pasquale himself, knowing he had no business there, looked mean and evasive.

"He would come," said Chartier, nodding his head toward the motionless figure. "He follows. I say to him that I come here to accompany a great singer that I learn about, it may be to engage him for my restaurant. Pasquale say, 'I come also.' I say, 'But no.' It is in vain. Here we have him."

Pasquale did not utter a sound.

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Then the hired musician spoke, the middle-aged man with the red, good-natured face: "I told him that I did n't think you 'd want him here, and I knew *we* did n't; but we could n't do a thing with him, this Pasquale."

Pasquale moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue, looked shiftily toward Irving's screened-in corner, as if suspecting it of caging a wild beast, and remained discreetly silent.

"Pray let him stay," murmured Winifred, in some distress.

The hired musician, subtly aware of Winifred's charming personality, stuffed out of sight the frayed edge of a socialistic cuff, and pulled up the shirt band from which the collar was banished, presumably, in the interests of the brotherhood of man. Yes, there was no mistaking the lazy, shiftless musician; it was the socialist whom Irving had accompanied to the Court House the day of the divorce-suit against Mrs. Vandever. In a word, this hired violinist was the first husband of Mrs. J. S. Vandever, and the father of Jessie's young Vandever, otherwise "the Duke."

Irving had not seen the tramp since that day of Mrs. Sadie Wyse's letter; and, as the musician made no sign of recognition, he contented himself with a careless nod. The wanderer — Chartier addressed him as Arnold — was better dressed than when selling pencils at Tompkins Square, but not so well as when fitted out in Agostino's rented garments. His long shaggy hair stood over his brow, or fell down to his eyes unevenly, and his large face with its suggestion of physical comfort, was

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covered with a week's beard. The young man remembered his impression of almost two months ago — an impression of a refined natural man, from whom the spiritual nature has departed; or rather, of a man whose spiritual qualities, never uppermost, have been absorbed by the earthy nature. It was not as if the musician were base or sensuous, but rather as if in straying from his highest estate, he had halted on the level plain of unambitious ease.

They made ready to play, and it was then that this musician, known as Arnold, caught Irving's eye. Instantly the man put his finger upon his lips while he assumed an expression of intense warning. The next moment, he was bending over his instrument. Irving was amazed. Did the other mean that he did not want to be recognized? Or was he referring to the presence of Pasquale?

The overture, difficult of execution, was decidedly painful, suggesting the guillotine. It was amazing how Chartier could draw every note almost in the exact place, without ever achieving perfection. All that his sweaty labor evoked were squeaky protests and guttural rasps.

“*Ah, mon dieu!*” groaned Du Pays, inwardly.

Arnold with exceeding deliberation, laid his bow upon the floor, delicately adjusted his violin in its case, and picked up his rack to dismember it. He had never heard his employer perform, hence his hopeful beginning. Rising, he again pushed back the cuff, and started for the door. Chartier called him angrily, with threats of

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dismissal, but Arnold paused not till the door had closed him from their sight. Chartier, however, continued triumphantly, and poor Monsieur du Pays, hopeful of employment at the restaurant where mere menials would be detailed to his accompaniment, raised his voice —

“ *Una voce poco fa
Qui nel cor ni risono —* ”

Mr. Burl muttered, “ ’T is the Barber of Seville.”

Chartier’s violin squeaked horribly.

“ Aye,” whispered Dr. Adams, “ and with his razor keen ! ”

In the meantime Irving was thinking about Arnold’s strange gesture, and his precipitate retreat. Had his departure been prompted by an æsthetic ear alone? As the first husband of Mrs. Vandever — how incredible that seemed! — possibly the portrait of the lady had startled him, rousing bitter memories. Irving glanced at the easel; no, the portrait was turned with its face to the wall. Besides, Arnold had warned Irving — warned him of what? In his exasperated perplexity, Irving lost some of Winifred’s charming looks, as she delicately placed her fingers on her ears.

At last the execution was complete. Du Pays sang triumphantly,

“ *E cento trappole, faro giacar, faro giacar, faro giacar,—* ”

And it was done. From Chartier’s poised bow, seemed to drip the blood of his murdered cavatina.

Irving started from his reverie to announce, “ Monsieur has sung for Queen Victoria. And at Rome —

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Rome, *Italy*, you understand — the jewellers did a thriving business when he sang grand opera, for the ladies threw their gems at his feet.”

Chartier played on. “So sorry —” murmured Winifred, rising, “that —”

“Yes, yes,” declared Dr. Adams, wickedly abetting her, “we have already stayed an unconscionable time. Good-bye — adieu. So glad we heard you, Monsieur du Pays. No, Chris, no, we really must be going. Eh, Sunbeam?”

“We have stayed *too* long,” Winifred declared. Then turning to Irving, who was disconsolately helping her with her cloak — “Remember then, Mr. Payne, we shall expect you; and if Agostino —”

It was as he drew the sleeve upon her arm that the merest chance directed his eyes toward the almost forgotten Pasquale. Such a look in the Italian’s eyes! Such a contraction of the mouth! In a flash, Irving suspected the motive of Arnold’s warning — of his coming. Yes, Arnold was a friend of Agostino’s, and would know that Agostino had sought refuge at the studio. This Pasquale must be one of the Black Handers, seeking Agostino’s life.

Winifred, a little out of breath from the exertion of the cloak, repeated, “And if Agostino —”

Irving caught her hand, and pressed it, significantly.

Winifred, who was not used to having her hand pressed significantly by strange young gentlemen, turned crimson and tried to free herself. But her look of anger turned to surprise, as her eyes sought Irving’s. As for

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the young man, he gave her hand a tighter pressure. Not only might Agostino's fate depend upon her silence, but his own happiness seemed to hang upon her firm, warm hand. Never before had he been given such an opportunity to do good, by the holding of a perfect hand.

Irving spoke aloud, "Yes, you can depend upon me. I understand."

"And I understand," said Winifred, which meant that he need cling to her no longer, since she comprehended the danger. He was obliged, therefore, to release her. And in a few minutes the cab had whirled her and her grandfather into another world.

When they were gone, there never was a studio more cheerless, more vacant, more monotonous. With Winifred out of that armchair, there never was a chair that held out its arms with such hollow mockery. Irving, suddenly grown gloomy, almost morose, to judge from appearances, drew from his pocket the little rubber balls which he was able expertly to keep up in the air by the exertion of a single hand. He did so keep them in the air, holding his other arm rigidly behind his back, while Chartier played discouragingly, Du Pays rested his throat, and Christopher Burl smoked his pipe in motionless gravity.

After watching a while, Du Pays exclaimed, desperately, "Where may one obtain those things?"

Irving, never ceasing in his recreation, said briefly, "Corner grocery."

Du Pays scurried downstairs, and soon returned with

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rubber balls. He held his unengaged arm after Irving's example, and essayed the difficult feat. The fancy struck Mr. Burl, as he watched each standing fixedly, one arm behind his back, his eyes staring upward, that they were seeking their missing members among the rafters. It was impossible to guess Pasquale's thoughts, but not a movement escaped him; and from time to time he stealthily looked toward the closed-in corner, no doubt suspecting that Agostino was crouching behind the screen.

When Chartier had had enough of it, he departed, carrying Du Pays with him, permanently engaged; Pasquale reluctantly followed. Irving lingered to talk it over with Mr. Burl, but at last he, too, went down the outside steps, and vanished in the darkness. It was very cold, but the young man was hardly sensible of the nipping breeze, for romantic prospects and romantic memories attended him.

When he found himself before the lodging-house of Mrs. Sadie Wyse, he could still feel Winifred's hand clasped in his; and having reached the old stone steps — to which all his romances seemed to bring him, at last — it came to his mind that next Sunday, the day of his projected visit with Winifred to his foster-parents, was the day appointed for meeting young Vandever and his friends at the palace-like hotel, uptown. There would be plenty of time, after returning with Winifred, to keep the engagement with Vandever. Time? If one only had as much of some other things! Irving thrust his hand deep into his pocket — just seventy-five cents.

CHAPTER IX

THE TRIP WITH WINIFRED

JUST seventy-five cents, it has been observed, was the sum total of Irving Payne's ready money. As the young man sat in the studio with his friend, the night before the Great Sunday, he said nothing about his resources. When one ostensibly scrapes the bottom of the empty bucket, it is a crying hint for refilling. Mr. Burl, after lending a hundred dollars — most of which the pawnbroker had added to his hoard — must not suffer extortion. Truly, imposition is the toll of friendship; but even such friendship as that of Damon and Pythias, languishes under too high a tariff.

As the two stared into the fire from the great arm-chairs, Irving was wondering how he was to find money for the morrow. He would not need a great deal; but one cannot travel about the country with beautiful ladies and old gentlemen who keep their shoes out of the dust, without something more than seventy-five cents. As for taking Jessie to the hotel to dine in the evening with Vandever and Bird Martin, and the two chorus girls, or two other girls of similar pliable conventions,— that was out of the question.

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In the first place, to take Jessie anywhere was unthinkable. Jessie was so — oh, she was a good girl, a really good and well-disposed little creature, but — Irving fidgeted. He had entirely forgotten how round Jessie was, or if he remembered, he did n't care. Why should n't she be round? What of it? He made nothing of her roundness.

In the second place, even if he wanted to take Jessie; even if it were not Jessie or anything like Jessie, but if it were Winifred, for instance — even then, how could she be taken to a banquet on the leavings of his seventy-five cents? Money is a very useful thing. It is more than a convenience.

“For Heaven's sake, boy,” remonstrated Mr. Burl, suddenly pointing his pipe at him, “leave off digging your heel into that rug, and that ditch in your forehead! Be a social animal. Come to the surface.”

Irving would not disclose his pecuniary embarrassment, so he passed to the third reason for foregoing the supper at the uptown hotel; a reason he had thus far artfully withheld, that it might be used for conversational purposes. Irving was reminded of it when his attention was called to the rug. The round bluish spot recalled the night when Mr. Burl dropped his pipe, on hearing that the young man had learned of his parentage.

“By the way,” said Irving, shutting out Jessie's face with this conventional barricade, “Mrs. Wyse stopped me in the hall, this morning, to tell me something of extraordinary importance. It was, that she had met the

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tramp who knows my father's name, and the name of my mother's family."

Mr. Burl almost dropped his pipe a second time, as he uttered a grunt that might have been expressive of surprise, or congratulation. Then, as Irving remained silent, the other said, "Well? Give us their names, Irving."

"I don't know the names. The tramp would n't tell Mrs. Wyse. He told her to get five hundred from me, and bring it to him, and he 'd give her the whole story."

"Umph! And you pulled the wad out of your pocket, I suppose, and forked it over, eh?"

"I told her, 'Let's make it a thousand.'" Irving squirmed in the chair, and added, "Well, I had to tell her I was dead broke, of course. Anyway, if I 'd been the millionaire I expect to be, how 'd I have known the tramp would tell her the truth?"

"And how would you have known that this Mrs. Wyse would have delivered the goods?" returned the artist.

"Oh," retorted Irving, "Mrs. Wyse is all right. You never saw such a pattern of aristocracy and morality. She was a friend of the Prince of Wales."

"In that case, of course she has every virtue," Mr. Burl growled. "But *I* don't believe in her. I believe she meant to keep that money. I don't believe in her tramp. There 's no such character, in my opinion."

"If you knew Mrs. Wyse,"—began Irving. But what was the use to try to reproduce the austere qualities of the little woman in black? "Anyway," he said,

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“I made her tell me where she was to have met this tramp, to hand him over my supposititious wealth. She was to have met him at Rutgers Square at a quarter to nine, Sunday evening. So I am going there myself; and I ’ll get all from him he knows.”

“How ’ll you recognize this mythological tramp?”

“In the first place, he is a tramp. Then, he ’ll be standing by the old fountain. Then, he has a mop of red hair, an enormous red mustache, and wears a ragged blue army-coat.”

“Does n’t it strike you as singular that a friend of the Prince of Wales should meet the man you have described, at such an unheard-of place as Rutgers Square? Is n’t that the forum of the socialists?”

“All my life is a singular story,” said Irving, contentedly. “Just take to-morrow, for instance: I ’m to go home, in the company of Miss Adams, which promises to be a charming adventure — and we must n’t forget the grandfather; then I ’m to fare to the uptown-hotel, to explain to Vandever that the dinner is called off — and you don’t know what a fine fellow Vandever is; it does me good to look at him, he so resembles me; then I ’m to meet this mysterious tramp, and force, or wheedle from him, the name of my father — I don’t care a penny for my mother’s family; then I ’m to smuggle Agostino into Dr. Adams’s house, unbeknown to the Black Handers, and get him away again the next night —”

Irving started up impetuously. “But this is life!” he cried, his cheeks glowing.

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“Because it’s all in the future,” Mr. Burl explained.

“When the future is charted,” said Irving, sententiously, “the day’s voyage is bright with hope.”

“I’ve found out this about the future,” retorted Mr. Burl, tapping the arm of his chair with his empty pipe, as if beating time to his words: “If you suck all the juice out of it, before it’s yours to eat, you’ll find it a shrivelled lemon.”

“A shrivelled nothing!” Irving scoffed. He would have gone away, but Mr. Burl proposed the spare bedroom. Why not sleep there to-night, and stay in bed the next morning, indefinitely? Thus he would be fresh and ready for his Herculean day of pleasure and adventure. Irving gladly acquiesced. Nothing was said of the strange “person” who prevented the young man from habitually using the bedroom — a “person” who, so far as Irving knew, had never yet come to occupy the chamber. Since he was not to return to his lodgings, they made a very late night of it, talking a good deal and saying even more by their silences.

But that money must be borrowed. When Irving repaired to Gotham Repose, shortly after noon, the next day, he was hardly sensible of the changes that had taken place, and were still in progress, in the lodging-house. It seemed to be a day of extensive house cleaning, or moving. Doors stood ajar, unrelated pieces of furniture were taking an airing in the halls. An explanation of this unwonted phenomenon was received from Wedging. Irving found that prudent lover busily ciphering over many stray bits of paper. At his en-

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trance into the third-floor back, Wedging gave his usual recognition, not by word of greeting, or by nod, but by a certain spasmodic contraction of the crooked-in legs as if to say, "I know you're there."

"Well, old man," said Irving heartily, throwing his hat upon the bed, and inwardly amused, as usual, at his own attitude of hail-fellow-well-met, "how goes it?" But he put his hat on his head again, for the room was not so warm as he had expected. In fact, the radiator was stone-cold.

"Oh, *I'm* all right,"—Wedging's tone intimated, "But I fancy you are in a bad way." He gathered up the stray leaves and pocketed them. "Guess you know Mrs. Wyse has skipped—no? I don't care, as I meant to pull out in a short time, anyway. A stranger has rented the house, but Mrs. Wyse got away with most of the furniture. Oh, she's a wise one, Mrs. Sadie is—not."

Irving was speechless. Skipped? Going to pull out? What could it mean?

"And I'm going to leave the railroad office, too. I've got a job with a broker over on Wall Street. Come to Sledge and Horn's, some time, and give us a call."

"I'll do it!" cried Irving, emphatically. "I'll place an order for a few million shares in A, B, and C Stocks and X, Y, and Z Securities. But in the meantime—what do you mean about Mrs. Sadie Wyse?"

"She's pinched all the lodgers in the house, in her

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money-schemes," said Wedging, "except me. She's skipped the police, just in time, carrying off the booty. Poor Jessie Tiff entrusted her with all her savings, and will have to go to live with her mother in the East Side. Look here, Mr. Payne," Wedging rose and thrust his hands into his pockets, while a deep red crept into his dark cheeks, "Is there anything — has there ever been — between you and — between you two?"

Irving's answer was unhesitating, assuring, and colloquial: "Nix!"

"Then who is it?" Wedging burst forth, plainly astonished at the other's denial. It gave Irving an unpleasant thrill, this manifestation of emotion in the phlegmatic, colorless lodger. "I tell you, she cares for somebody. I thought it *you* all the time. And this is the day for settling it — but since you — But I tell you, it's *somebody*, for when I asked her to marry me — as soon as we knew Mrs. Wyse had robbed her on get-rich-quick propositions — well, she refused *me*, all right."

Then it must be Vandever. Irving exclaimed, "The little —" But he did not complete his expression of Jessie's folly, not even to himself. New matters were being thrust upon his attention with a vengeance: Wedging's offer to Jessie; Jessie's adherence to an impossible ideal; the amazing revelation of Mrs. Wyse's duplicity. And the new landlady must be interviewed at once; since Wedging was going away, Irving would speak for the skylight-room. All this was immediate, thought-compelling. But all this, in fact, the entire

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universe, faded into insignificance before the pressing need of the moment. Not theories, but conditions, confronted him; money must be borrowed.

Wedging was impossible. Irving descended to the second floor front,—no longer the rear room overlooking the scabby brick wall,—Monsieur sings at Chartier's.

“You cannot enter,” said Madame du Pays, not opening the door to his knock. Her voice was abjectly apologetic. “Monsieur have the headache. Is it the visit of friendship we are fated to miss? But to-morrow, come. But to-day, *non, ca ne se peut pas.*” All this with incredible speed of tongue.

“It is no visit of friendship,” said Irving, piercing the door with sabre tones. “It is the visit of beggary. I have come to borrow five dollars. But don't bother, I'll pawn my watch again — it's a very handy time-piece.”

“No, no, no, no,” cried the voice of Monsieur du Pays. “*Entrez, mon ami.* Make the door open, Angélique. *Eh bien! C'est beaucoup mieux.* I feel better, for the light of a friend shines upon me. But, *mon dieu, me voila dans un bel embarras.*”

Monsieur du Pays was indeed in *un bel embarras*. Something had gone wrong with the hair-dyes, and Monsieur's head was no longer nobly blonde, but as red as a flannel rag. The air, too, was filled with a pungent odor that had refused the window — a carriage-shop odor, recalling fresh leather, freshly varnished wood, and freshly greased axles. The tenor was himself the vehicle in process of remaking.

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“You want five?” cried the soloist, rising like a hero above his humiliation. “Shall I not make it ten? Do I not owe you all? It was you who told Monsieur Chartier how well he play — ah, *could* you? — and you it was who did so, how you say? — jolly him; he take me at the fall of the hat. *Qu’avez-vous donc?* We make it ten, is it not?”

But Irving was firm. Only five, to be paid back at the next pay-day.

“Pay it back!” the two exclaimed in perfect unison, as if their part had been carefully rehearsed. Then Madame led with, “Do we not know?” and Monsieur declared, “I already hold it in my hand again.”

It was early in the afternoon when Irving breathed the refined atmosphere of the Adams home, off Madison Square. He had hardly seated himself in the little world of easy culture — a culture too sure of itself to commit the unpardonable fault of being over-cautious — when the doctor and Winifred announced themselves ready for the journey. On his way to the *coupé*, Irving was impressed with a sense of home-permanency, suggesting that whoever came and went with the ebb and flow of fashion (it was always ebb tide now in this once aristocratic district), the Adams family meant to remain. In this home-permanency the servants stood for more than accidental necessities. The butler was no cold abstraction of butlerdom, but a man with evident interest in frontdoor admissions; the coachman, while never once turning his head to look down at the three in the *coupé*, made it felt that his wooden expression was for the

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public gaze, while at bottom, he and the doctor understood one another.

They discussed certain plans for inveigling Agostino to Winifred's studio, happily not feeling bound to any of them. This freedom to propose anything, however absurd or impossible, exactly suited Irving's fancy, which never cared for hard labor. It amused him to force Winifred's smile, and often he made her smile against her will. It was a captivating process, that smile of Winifred's, a lighting up of the wonderful brown eyes, a little uplift of the sweeping lashes, an irresistible tremble of the upper lip, and an almost microscopic drawing in of the under lip.

In her street-dress, he found her different from the free and independent workman of blouse and cap, different from the meditative evening-lady of the huge arm-chair with hearth-flame glory. She was now the picture of reserved womanhood, holding in reservation, from no conscious volition, a thousand subtle graces which, like sweet violets, hid themselves for no other reason than because they were sweet violets. She did not impress him as seeking to hold him at a distance on account of their difference of station in life, or for any cause. She was at a distance, nevertheless, and he felt it even more surely because she made no point of the difference. The sweet violet does not appear to know it is sweet; but, however the wild violet may flaunt its larger leaves, and hold its larger blossoms in air, it knows what it is about, in not shrinking from sight in inodorous modesty.

The Trip with Winifred

Irving, then, perceived this intangible difference. If he had cared greatly for Winifred, it might have stirred his ambition to reach her own plane of being. Should he ever care greatly for her, he might make the most difficult of attempts — that of remaking himself; not as Monsieur du Pays, for change of inherent character requires an alchemy far more potent than any hair-dye. Since he could not yet care enough for Winifred to do violence to his nature, he could not but take her innocent isolation in a sort of reproach to himself, who was conscious of no wrong. Therefore his teasing efforts to compel Winifred's smile — a teasing which, however free from malice, was doing him no good in Winifred's estimation.

Dr. Adams pointed out the high-backed stone seat at the base of the Farragut statue, as his favorite resting place in Madison Square, which was another way of saying in New York City. The silver-haired descendant of former Madison Square devotees grumbled at the caprices of old neighbors who had abandoned their birthright for the pottage of "Millionaire Row." He remembered when these enormous buildings were not — when vacant lots and disreputable stables and hovels had their place in the world of interrupted culture, forming a relief, a certain setting of picturesque necessity. "But you are so young, so abnormally young," he broke off, with an impatient shake of the head; "one place is the same as another to you."

"Yes," remarked Winifred, "if *you* are in it."

Her grandfather, to hide his secret delight at these

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words, cried out despairingly, "Oh, why have n't I Chris Burl here to quarrel with?"

The coachman let them out at the Twenty-third Street Station, with a proprietary air as if calling all coachmen to witness the superior grade of humanity that he handled. The travellers were engulfed in the chilled brilliance and unassertive but unescapable smells of the Subway. After the uproar of Broadway and Twenty-third, the electric monotone of the underground passage was grateful to Irving. It gave him a sort of intimacy with his companions. Being obliged to stand up, for want of room, he had the pleasure of forcing Winifred to look up constantly into his face, with her always unafraid eyes, and her sometimes deliciously quivering lip. The other passengers must have envied him his privilege; he was sure they did, and brightened proportionally, for he was always at his best when people were looking.

"By the way," said Irving — not to Dr. Adams, of course, though that gentleman was standing at his very elbow, but to Winifred, though she was inconvenient — "has Mr. Burl finished Mrs. Vandever's picture?"

Winifred opened her eyes so wide, and Irving saw so much of their luminous brown splendor, that he almost began to care for her on the spot. She said, decidedly, "He has never begun Mrs. Vandever's picture."

Irving hardly knew what she said, from looking into her eyes; and she was so surprised at his question, that she forgot to look away. That was unlucky for him, too. "But I saw it, when it was half-finished," he managed to say.

The Trip with Winifred

“*That* ’s not Mrs. Vandever’s picture,” said Winifred, with the finality of professional wisdom. “Do you know Mrs. Vandever?”

“I have seen her several times. I even spoke to Mr. Burl about that portrait. He did n’t deny its being hers.”

“Just like him!” said Winifred, with the whimsical tilt of her little mouth, that was almost as harmful as the open look of the great eyes. “I know the picture you mean. That is n’t Mrs. Vandever’s portrait. It’s just a fancy sketch. There was n’t a model. He saw a face in the street, went home, and mixed his paints. He told me about it.”

Irving challenged her with, “But do *you* know Mrs. Vandever?”

“Her daughter is to spend the day with me to-morrow — she’ll sleep at our house to-night,” said Winifred conclusively, and her grandfather came into the conversation with —

“What, what, what! Know Mrs. Vandever? Bless my soul! I’ve been her family physician since before she married — twenty-five or thirty years, I should say. What about her?”

“Grandfather,” interposed Winifred appealingly, “is Mr. Burl painting her portrait?”

“Chris?” ejaculated the physician. “Mrs. Vandever? Fiddlesticks!”

Irving laughed aloud — they were so sure, and so was he. “If we ever meet at Mr. Burl’s studio,” he cried, “I’ll show you the evidence.”

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The ride on the ferryboat was all it should be, on a dazzling Sunday afternoon. The transit to Jersey City interfered somewhat with the growing romance, but the automobile that bore them out of Harrison into the deserted country, gave them once more the appearance of a family group. Irving drove. The afternoon was bracing with February cold, not too intense; and Winifred, animated and rosy, kept pointing out picturesque glimpses of barren fields and quaint cottages. Irving, who knew every foot of the way, for his boyhood had been spent in the neighborhood, took advantage of by-roads, and seldom-travelled short-cuts, to bring his favorite haunts into prospective. He and Winifred differed as to artistic values, and argued; she for the sake of art, he for an excuse to look at her.

Presently Dr. Adams, riding over this light talk as if it were stubble, brought up the subject of the day's excitement: the suicide of a young married man who had been supposed enormously rich, but who had proved almost penniless. "There was nothing left in life that he wanted," the doctor explained, judicially, "and therefore he got out of it."

"He had his wife," said Winifred, who manifested a decided hostility to the deceased, or rather, to his method of escaping a difficult situation.

"Yes, nominally," said the doctor, dryly. "But she was used to going at a certain pace, and he had nothing left to keep up with her. She'd have left him — been bound to — would n't know how to live poor. She's

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rather shallow at best, and it takes a genius to know how to live poor."

"I had not suspected," remarked Irving, "that I was unusually gifted."

"Oh, you don't know how to live poor," — the doctor disposed of him in a sentence. "I do not say to *be* poor, but to *live* poor."

"Young Warne had his life, at any rate," said Irving. "He had as much as I have."

"What is life?" returned the doctor, didactically. "Nobody knows. All we can know is our idea of life. Warne's idea of life was to live as the very rich. He sacrificed everything to appear a multimillionaire. When he kept slipping back and back, till he had lost the race, there was nothing to keep trying for. You might say he'd lost his life, before he shot himself."

"He had never really lived," Winifred exclaimed, her eyes burning. "He thought that eating and drinking, the club, the ballroom, the theatre, the Stock Exchange — he thought these incidents of existence were *life*. The only standard for any life is its ideal. I don't believe we'll be judged by what we are, but by what we try to be."

Irving felt the sudden sword-thrust, but made no sign.

"Now that he is dead," Winifred went on, with increased earnestness, "can you tell me what the world has lost?"

"Only a pretender, I should say," remarked her grandfather.

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Winifred caught at the word, her eyes flashing. "Yes. Only a pretender to the throne a *man* should have occupied. Such an opportunity — to be a man! How the world needs men! — so much more than men need it. And this Mr. Warne is gone, and the world fed and clothed him for nothing. He did n't pay his board bill, since he did no good for the race. And *I* say, the sooner the better!"

"Why, my dear Sunbeam!" the old man remonstrated. "*Please* don't be so bloodthirsty."

Winifred caught herself with a nervous laugh.

Irving spoke: "I'm glad that pretender's name was Warne; for to save my life, I can't help feeling you are discussing Irving Payne."

Winifred grew crimson and bit her lip; at sight of which Dr. Adams cried out, loudly, "The bull's eye! The bull's eye!"

Winifred made a revengeful grimace at her grandfather, that would surely have been ugly upon any other face. As Irving turned to look at her steadily, she held her lower lip between her teeth, but would say nothing.

"You are no doubt right," remarked Irving, very pleasantly indeed, as to externals; "the sooner the better. But before I shoot myself, to get out of the way in order that some real man may ascend my throne, allow me to make a last speech — or leave a letter — 'Kind friends: Before this bullet finds a vital spot —' You know, if I only wound myself, I'll be arrested, but if I kill myself they'll give me flowers; and that seems hardly fair, does it?"

The Trip with Winifred

Winifred interposed, with vehemence, "Don't!"

Irving's real feeling asserted itself in sombre silence. Dr. Adams made no attempt to relieve the tension. If the young fellow — who was perhaps not so frivolous as he appeared — could derive any good from what had been said, let it sink deep, while there was a chance for seed-germination! Irving, who did not believe he was a useless factor in life, because life was so dear to him, and who did not admit the right of others to claim superiority for their different views of life, tried to look as if nothing had happened; but he could n't quite, though he hated sulking.

"Anyway," said Winifred, at last, trying to rally, and appearing, in spite of her splendid height and breadth of form, almost child-like in unwonted embarrassment, "I could n't have meant you, Mr. Payne, in the remotest degree — I mean, except in the remotest degree — or if I did, I did n't — I was n't conscious of it. It was just what Mr. Burl said about you in the studio, that day we met. Have you forgotten that day?"

Had he!

"And when you told your story, you confirmed all he'd said. You told us yourself that you were — that you did n't care for anything except — oh, you know what you said. And grandfather is very unkind, and — and very unjust, and I think, ungallant." Her voice faltered. "Forgive me, Grandfather, but you ought *not* to have pointed my words at Mr. Payne; for we are almost strangers, and naturally I can know nothing of his ideals."

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“ I have n't any,” Irving obstinately declared.

“ Then ”— Winifred's eyes flashed —“ be Mr. Warne, if you please, and take all I said as meant for you!”

Dr. Adams hid his face in his handkerchief, and shook all over from some suppressed emotion. What that emotion was, he carefully concealed. But Winifred's eyes were bright with defiance, and, at the same time, moist from wounded sensibility, when the machine drew up before the simple cottage of Captain Payne.

As Irving, still with face inscrutable, leaped to the ground, a shepherd dog came bounding around the house, barking joyful recognition. Irving pointed at the friend of his boyhood, and spoke of himself as having already sought ignoble oblivion. “ At any rate,” he remarked, quizzically, “ his dog loved him.”

Nothing was to be said to that. As all three stood before the gate of his foster-parents' home, Irving, with his sudden, winning smile, turned to Winifred, and silently extended his hand.

She looked at him suspiciously, conscious, the while, that her grandfather was watching, to see if she would yield the point. Her look halted in the outlying dimness of a smile. “ But I have nothing to retract,” she warned.

Irving's smile grew instantly sunlike, and her last lingering mist was dissolved. “ But I have everything to admit,” he responded.

Then they shook hands, and were friends.

CHAPTER X

THE LITTLE NEIGHBOR

IRVING had telephoned their coming, and his foster-mother met them at the door. She was a motherly woman, whose redness of face suggested much bending over hot ovens for the evolution of browned turkeys and savory pies. One felt instinctively that, however she might mix her tenses, she would not be guilty of a heart-solecism. Irving kissed her heartily and announced, "This is mother Payne," just as he might have said, "I present the first lady of the land."

"I am sorry to break bad news at the front door," said Mrs. Payne, "but I would n't send you word, Irving, for we did n't want you bothered. The captain has gone and broken his leg; and you can come in and see for yourself."

Inasmuch as the door opened directly into the sitting-room, and as the room was small and the captain no pygmy, being, indeed, a man of much blood and hard breathing, he was seen without difficulty.

"Well, Father Payne!" exclaimed Irving, reproachfully, as he gazed upon the helpless limb extended across a chair, "what have you done now?"

Captain Silas Payne narrowed his eyes to quizzical slits, while a thousand little wrinkles, about mouth and

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eyes, formed a fit accompaniment to some witty rejoinder. It was the wit itself that failed of manifestation. He could think of no pertinent reply to Irving's affectionate taunt, so his droll expression faded away, unfruitful.

The situation called for a truce to conventions, and Winifred was quick with sympathetic interest. "I fell from deck," the captain told her, "but I broke only one of 'em. Irv tells us you want Agostino. They say every creature has his use, and you've proved the saying. But I'm afraid he'll never go back to New York. He's scared to death on account of the Black Handers. They wrote him a letter, demanding money; it was signed with the orthodox black fingers spread out as if to dip in his heart's blood. Of course it would make no great difference if they did nab the dago; but you could never make *him* believe it."

"The way he fell from deck," interrupted Mrs. Payne, to whom only one subject proved just then of moment, "was this: he was coming down the Passaic after a lumber-berge, when two boys who'd been rocking their skiff got themselves overturned. The captain never waited a second, he just *jumped* —"

"But never reached them," interposed the captain, much embarrassed at his unwonted role of hero. "All I accomplished was a game leg. Doctor, how's business?"

"Swimming," Dr. Adams answered, in nautical phrase.

"But the best is to be told," persisted Mrs. Payne, as

The Little Neighbor

she tried to smooth down that lock of the captain's hair that she had been smoothing for thirty years. "The father of the boys thinks it means something to risk your life for little children; and he's going to let us have a porgy, on easy terms, just as soon as the captain can walk."

"He's rich," the captain explained, "and does n't care how he spends his money, I guess. Well! This means a new start in life for me, so I can't complain — my tug burned to the last plank, doctor, and no insurance. But the porgy will keep us afloat. Oh, there's nothing like breaking a leg, to get up in this world."

Winifred would have liked to ask what a "porgy" was, but suspected from the sound of the word that it was something not to be discussed before ladies. She observed no mystification upon her grandfather's face — she would get it from him when they were alone, at all events!

"Agostino is working for our Little Neighbor," said Mrs. Payne; she had been giving Irving pats upon arm and shoulder, when she thought the strangers were not looking. "Miss Adams had better go after him alone, for he'd take fright at a crowd of us, and likely enough run away. Irving, how *could* you stay away from home all this time?" she added, plaintively.

"I intended coming every week," said Irving, remorsefully, "but one Sunday just followed another, till weeks were months and — I hardly know how it

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was. I'm never so happy as when here, but — but —" Nothing occurred to him more explanatory than his last word, so he left it to speak for itself.

Irving went with Winifred, to show her the way; but Dr. Adams, like a good old gentleman, remained with the disabled captain. Mrs. Payne entertained him with details of country life. Her years of wandering, first as daughter of one tug captain, then as young wife of another, had given her an inextinguishable zest for permanent anchorage. Ever since their adoption of Irving, the little family had dwelt in this cottage, never tiring, unless Irving tired, of the perennial themes of vegetables, chickens, and a cow.

Likely enough, Irving had heard these subjects sufficiently exploited. As he conducted Winifred in quest of the Italian model, he did not allude to the charms of rural life. "You'll like our Little Neighbor," he predicted. "She has lived just across the street from us, as far back as I can remember, but I've hardly ever conversed with her. There never was anybody as shy and timid. She is about mother Payne's age, I imagine. She hides herself from the world; there's a life secret, no doubt. It's too bad, when you consider what a fine sort she is. Maybe that's the reason. She owns the greenhouse, and, every season, sends a market wagon to Gansevoort Market, not far from Mr. Burl's studio."

The Little Neighbor's cottage was even smaller than that of the Paynes. No one answered the bell. Irving said, "We are sure to find her in the greenhouse. She never leaves her place, unless some one is sick, and needs

The Little Neighbor

her. If it had n't been for a tough case of pneumonia in my boyhood, probably I 'd never have met her."

If Irving had been wounded by Winifred's seeming assumption that he was a useless weight to the earth, her pretty interest in his little confidences did much to soothe the pain. That she was interested in every word he spoke regarding "the Little Neighbor" was unmistakable; and when Winifred was interested, her opened eyes and parted lips revealed a charm of depth and sweetness which her habitual reserve merely suggested. Oh, it paid well to interest Winifred!

Sure enough, they found the Little Neighbor in the greenhouse; under her supervision, Agostino was spading an asparagus-bed. He was the first to see them coming; all movement ceased, save for the snapping of his small black eyes. His employer, next perceiving, widened her blue eyes in startled terror. She had been taken so unaware, that she could not even falter a greeting.

Agostino growled, "*Come confonde!*"—which, to his mind, stood for Italian discrimination and English asperity.

Irving hastily explained the object of the intrusion, and introduced Winifred to "Mrs. Hurt." As on the few former occasions of his conversing with her, so now, he felt the oddity of addressing her as "Mrs. Hurt," because in his home she had always been spoken of merely as "the Little Neighbor." What need had she for any other title, since, apparently she had neither relatives nor friends? Why not be called "Little Neighbor" to

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the end? This small, silent creature, always in black — what a fossil, truly! Only the need and illness of those about her could move her to spasmodic life, as a fossil may be jarred to motion by a hammer's blow.

When Mrs. Hurt learned that they had not come to carry her off, the alarm in the big blue eyes — eyes so unnaturally, even pathetically large, in contrast with the thinness of the pale face — softened away. The startled expression that had given her a disquieting touch as of wildness, faded into appeal; as if, isolated from her kind, she had forgotten the stereotyped phrases with which we bridge those abysses that divide all personalities.

“It is robbing you, I know,” Winifred said, looking hungrily at the Italian, “but could n't somebody else do his work? Nobody could sit for me, in Agostino's place.”

“You shall have him, of course,” said Mrs. Hurt, in shy haste. “It was just because he was staying at Captain Payne's, to hide, and wanted work, that I let him come. Take him at once. Put up the spade, Agostino.”

Agostino cried excitedly, “I willa not go, I willa not go-a!”

“Put up that spade, instantly!” cried the Little Neighbor, displaying astonishing firmness. “They won't let you be injured. You engaged yourself to Miss Adams, and you must keep your engagement.”

Agostino grasped the spade, as if to ward off the suggestion. “I go backa, an' dey killa me,” he ex-

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claimed, fiercely. "Dat letter say if I notta be in a certain place, de stiletto for me-a. It come from de Mano Nera — de Black Hand-a." His voice grew more concentrated; his eyes were tigerish. "I willa not go. La Mano Nera, who can escape? La Mano Nera never fail-a."

"Oh, what a great big man, to be such a miserable coward!" ejaculated the intrepid Little Neighbor. "The police will protect you. Give your letter to the authorities. They'll arrest the author, and imprison him."

Agostino laughed, with the fulness of great knowledge. "Dey bring 'im to trial, yaas, ver' like! Dey sen' 'im to no prison for dey prove not'in' at alla. Maybe great big man; maybe coward. But great big man not feel mucha big, widout de stiletto in my backa. *Quante vie d'assalir mi.*"

Irving laughed at the fluent tones of honest fear, and the other looked at him as if to say, "That's the way *you* take it. Very well!"

"Agostino," said Irving, "this lady needs you in order to complete a very important work. You will go to her house to-morrow morning." He named the sum of money offered by Dr. Adams. Agostino waved it away excitedly with his spade, as if to drown the great temptation in a torrent of protestations. Luckily Irving beat him to the headwaters of threatening speech, and continued:

"Wait. Listen to me. You'll slip over to Mr. Burl's studio to-night, and look about you for a safe

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hiding-place, with the studio for your base. Early in the morning, before the Black Handers are awake, I'll come to your hiding-place with a cab, a closed cab, and carry you to Dr. Adams's. Nobody'll know you are in the city. You'll stay in his house all day, and at night, I'll come for you, and drive you to the studio in a cab. Nobody shall know but myself. Then you'll creep into some hole or other — you ought to know plenty — and in the morning we'll repeat the story of the day before; and so on, till your picture is finished. I wish it were my picture that Miss Adams wants. Why! Agostino, it would be a regular picnic to *me!* Think of outwitting the Black Handers, and drawing a handsome sum of money at the same time."

"I not like-a no picanic-a, me," Agostino protested violently.

"Let's reason about this," Irving persisted, greatly enjoying the prominent part he was playing under the respectful observation of Winifred and the Little Neighbor. "It's no trouble for you to reach Mr. Burl's studio undiscovered, since it is on the river. All the city's beyond it. Once established there, surely you can hit upon a hiding-place till morning. If you can't, no doubt Mr. Burl would let you stay somewhere about the place. And think how much you're going to be paid for all your delightful adventure!"

"I willa not, I willa not go-a," shouted Agostino, now dancing up and down in a perfect frenzy of negation. But suddenly a thought struck him with such force that he dropped the spade. His swarthy face,

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convulsed, but a moment before, in terror, broke into an insinuating and villainous smile. He held up his right hand, and snapped each finger by turn, deliberately, delicately. Then he stepped up to Irving, and would have tapped him upon the breast, had not the other drawn back.

“So it is *you*,” he said. “Alla de time, I try to think. It is *you*! And you know dat man what you talk wid, dat want de divorce-a? You ’member dat man, alla right O. K.?”

“You mean the — the pedler, or musician, called Arnold?”

“Yaas him, dat manna, dat Arnold, yaas, Dick Arnold.”

“I remember him very well.” Indeed, Irving could not look at Agostino without thinking of the seedy socialist.

“Ver’ good. *Che dici!* Oh, damma. Yaas, I go wid you!”

Agostino, evidently pleased with his secretly devised plan, formed an armistice with respectability, and, in a liquid whisper, gave Irving the details. Then Irving and Winifred left the greenhouse.

“What snaky eyes he has!” Winifred murmured, enthusiastically. “Did you ever see so perfect a Judas? He’s a treasure.”

“He’s great,” answered the young man rather absently. Then he continued, “And did you notice the Little Neighbor’s eyes? What a pity she won’t mingle with healthy and well-fed people! She could be happy,

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if she 'd allow herself to be. Did you notice, after the first shock of seeing us, how brightened up was her face all during the visit?"

"Was it?" murmured Winifred, vaguely. "I was watching my model."

"Her cheeks seemed fuller, and even took on a slight color." He glanced somewhat shyly at Winifred, and thought "No wonder!" He added, "I imagine young people never go there, except to order flowers. What do you say—" He stopped as if doubtful of his impulse, yet forced to humor it—"what do you say to going back a minute, merely to say, 'Hello'?" She may never see you again."

Winifred looked at him with adorable gravity. She was conscious of the delicate compliment, and it had come so spontaneously and so earnestly, as if it were all for the Little Neighbor's benefit, that she valued it highly. The Little Neighbor might never see her again! What a pity for the Little Neighbor! And why? Because Irving thought her such a marvel to gaze upon? Well! They would return for a moment to the greenhouse "merely to say, 'Hello.'"

And when they went back, Agostino was spading away, with many a dark thought, no doubt. But Mrs. Hurt had retired to a rustic bench, and was sitting with her face buried in her hands. The fragile form trembled.

Winifred whispered, instinctively drawing Irving's arm, to bring his ear close to her mouth (she did not

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have to pull so *very* hard), "Oh! we had better slip away."

They would have done so had not their feet sounded upon the gravel path. Mrs. Hurt started up; one thin hand sought her palpitating heart, the other brushed away the tears.

"We just came back," Irving faltered, regretful for his impulse, "to say good-bye, you know. We did n't want anything except — I thought you might like to see — it was just to say 'Hello.'"

"Oh!" exclaimed the Little Neighbor, with a radiant smile which, in a way, seemed more pathetic than her tears. "Just for that? How — sweet!" She came hastily toward them, and, as she reached the door, paused beside the carnation-bed. She said, "One for each of —"

"Your friends," said Winifred.

"But you must pin mine on," Irving declared, bending his tall form as gallantly as he had lowered his head for Winifred's whispered words. "Mother Payne always does; and when she's made it fast, she pats me on the shoulder —"

The Little Neighbor rose on tiptoe, and timidly, yet lingeringly, held her tremulous hand upon the broad shoulder; and patted it; and smiled most wistfully, as if to say, "But your place is out there — out in the great world."

And so it was. Yet long after Irving had gone forth to mingle in its strident turmoil, the influence of

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the Little Neighbor made itself felt most unaccountably. For sometimes, as he raised his face from the desk in the sky-scraper, or, it might be, in the full current of the tempestuous street-life, the great blue eyes of the Little Neighbor would seem to look at him with strange wistfulness, and he would feel her timid touch upon his shoulder.

CHAPTER XI

BUILDERS

ON their return from the greenhouse, Irving and Winifred were silent. The scene with the Little Neighbor, though brief and simple, had lifted the young people to that plane of acquaintanceship wherein lips need not move to prove themselves friendly. As they appeared at the door —

“Come in and join us!” called the hearty voice of the disabled tug captain. “We ’re all fine, you and I, and the world we live in.”

“Do hush, Captain,” his wife remonstrated; “Miss Adams won’t know how to take you.”

“I ’m not a scow, nor yet a barge, to be taken anywhere,” came the jolly disclaimer. “I ’m a porgyman, now; or will be, when I ’ve fought it out with my game leg.”

“Honey,” said Dr. Adams genially, “I ’ve found out all about porgies, so you need n’t be afraid to ask. A porgy is a small tug of, say, a hundred ton; eh, Cap’n?”

“A hundred ton,” the captain corroborated. “Aye, aye, mate.”

Having outlined Agostino’s plan of stealing to Winifred’s studio, unseen by possible assassins, Irving next asked his foster-father how he and the Italian ever be-

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came acquainted. "I can't understand," Irving declared, "why this ruffian should come to *you* for protection."

"I'll tell you the story," cried the captain, heartily, "but the doctor must tack away from my broken leg. I'm surprised, Doctor, that a man of your profession should be so colliding with disabled craft, seeing as there's no fog in the bay."

"Aye, aye, Cap'n," responded Dr. Adams, hitching his chair farther from the extended roll of bandages, "I'm luffing, sir. If I touch you again, send me below, sir."

Captain Payne grinned in appreciation of the other's amiability, and began his story, while countless wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, were spread out like nets to catch memory: "This Agostino, like thousands of his kind, left his wife and babies in Italy, and came across with nothing but a few English words and the clothes on his back. He'd heard how quick we Americans get rich (I guess Irv can tell you all about that). Pasquale, one of his countrymen, met him at the dock, and Agostino was his meat. The countryman — Pasquale — found him lodgings by subletting him a room at a price higher than *he* had to pay. Also, Pasquale found our *Agnostic* a job at the dumps, you understand."

Irving, recalling the sinister face of Pasquale in Mr. Burl's studio, the night of Du Pays' engagement, failed to head off the speaker; while Winifred, her curiosity aroused, spurred him on, with —

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“Dumps?”

“Yes, the city garbage and refuse heaps, you know,” responded Captain Payne, enjoyingly. “The scrapings and ashbarrels are emptied at certain docks, to be hauled out to sea and dumped overboard. A contractor pays the city thousands every year, to sort out the old shoes and coffeegrounds. Well, Mr. Contractor — or I should say Signor Contractor — puts the work under bosses, who hire heads of gangs, and these scrape together the ignorant immigrants just come across. The under-boss has to squeeze the day-laborer to the last drop, if the over-boss is to make anything. But even at that lick, *Aggy* did much better than he could have done in his own country, where the old shoes are not thrown out upon the heaps, and where, they tell me, the coffee ‘ain’t got no grounds.’ *A-goose* used to live right at the edge of his dump — the only home, you understand, that he could call his own. When the sanitaries drove him out of one hole, he’d burrow in another. And it’s remarkable what an appetite that man displayed, eating his victuals right —”

“Captain!” his wife remonstrated.

“How unpleasant!” murmured Winifred.

“Unpleasant?” echoed the captain. “Why, Miss, could you have inhaled that sickening —”

“Captain,” said Mrs. Payne firmly, “enough has been said.”

“Lay to!” cried the captain, apostrophizing his own bark. “This is a good story, but my wife always spoils it. But I’m not in a fix to fight it out with her. Well,

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Agostino used to help trim the scows, but I'll not tell you how he did it. He kept making money, till finally *he* had a scow hired, with laborers under him, and Lord, how he did squeeze 'em! That's how I got to know him, when I was towing his scow out to the Hook. I had a magnificent tug — the *Hudsonia* — it's gone up, now. There was a miserable rivalry always going on among the dumps. I saved *Aggy's* life twice, and he thinks I'm the greatest fellow going; and maybe I am. You see, it does n't matter how worthless your life is, under the circumstances it's the best you could have, or you'd have a better one. *A-goose* thinks just as much of being saved from a knife in the back, as you or I would. Besides, he is n't really worthless. He sub-leases a tenement, and has a little joint where he sells coal by the bucketful; so the poor dagoes who buy of him pay at the rate of \$13.50 a ton, while we have to pay only \$6.75. There's nothing so expensive as downright poverty. And so, as I said, the *Agnostic* squeezes the poor devils under him just like *he* was once — like he was once — was once — *squz*; Lord! I pretty nigh got caught in a box then," grinned the captain, triumphantly, "but I bust into the open, just in time."

"Has he sent for his wife?" Winifred inquired.

"He expects to go after her next summer — he's been sending her money, right along. Curious morals, those chaps have. He's managed to console himself — But I talk too much for my leg."

It must have been difficult for guests, the most reserved, to hold themselves aloof from the friendly

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Paynes; and, since Dr. Adams and his granddaughter possessed that most charming trait of the truly cultured, adaptability, fellowship in the front room seemed woven of a homogeneous texture, in which finer and more homely threads were scarcely to be distinguished. Irving valued far more what lay at the bottom of his foster-parents' natures than what appeared on the surface. He had wished that Winifred might divine the undercurrents. Her understanding was even deeper than he could have hoped; and his pleasure at seeing Dr. Adams and his granddaughter sitting in the midst of the little family, as if joined by some intimate sympathy to their daily lives, was greater than he would have deemed possible.

This impression, and the glow of satisfaction it imparted, were uppermost when his automobile bore him with his two companions beyond the last glimpse of mother Payne's waving handkerchief. The isolation of country roads, the sudden glimpses of retired cottages, each a world of home life, in itself complete, seemed to draw the travellers nearer together, in shutting them out from other people's realms.

But the restless streams of pleasure-seekers in Jersey City shattered the young man's dream-like ramparts, and the crash of trains and the strident note of hurry, inundated the peaceful meadows of his content. Winifred herself stood forth with disquieting clearness of outline from the soft haze of his indolent, untrekked dream-world.

They stood waiting for the ferryboat. "You see!"

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said Winifred, suddenly resuming a conversation which her companions had forgotten, and taking up her vibrating tone exactly where it had been broken off. She nodded emphatically toward the skyline of lower Manhattan. “*That* is what I meant. Look at the vessels, the docks, the warehouses, the offices; then see how certain buildings tower above the rest, cutting the sky into scraps, as if it were smoky paper.”

“But, Honey,” remonstrated Dr. Adams, startled out of some vision of the past by her energy, “what are you talking about, please? *What* is it you say you meant? And when did you mean it? — and where?”

“What we said on the ride,” Winifred returned, leaping over unnecessary chasms to solid footing. “I never see New York from across the river or the bay, without thinking of what it means to be a man. I never grow used to that sight. It thrills me, as if I had never seen it before. Man did that. How those huge buildings lord it over their humble inferiors — the gilded dome, that sharp peak, and Park Row Building which has n’t forgotten it once stood highest in all the world — those giant twin buildings with the cars running in their basements, the sure-enough tallest buildings in the world. Poor little Trinity, doing her best to be seen, — you hardly know she ’s there!”

Dr. Adams turned to look into the face that had grown almost dark in its eloquent passion for power. “You would be a Singer Building!” he declared, “if you ’d been built of stone and mortar. Why, Honey! such commercialism! You actually crow because re-

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ligion is dwarfed by these traps laid to catch dollars."

Irving hurriedly rallied to the doctor's standard. "Yes! those buildings are only brick, stone, and steel, after all," he declared. "It's those who inhabit them, that belong to real life. According to my notion, one does n't have to tower above others to live, because life does n't consist in being seen."

"Which is fortunate, too," added the doctor, comfortably, "else most of us would be dead 'uns."

But Winifred would be serious. The look she turned upon Irving was too greatly in earnest to avoid the issue. She quivered from head to foot with exalted conviction, and in seeking to express her soul, could not wholly avoid dogmatism: "It is the builder who impresses the world, and not the one who inhabits. The world may pretend to believe otherwise. Of course those who have never built anything may buy up palaces and towers, but when you look at the buildings you don't see who own them — only who built them. Is n't that true? Don't you feel so?" she asked eagerly. "The pyramids have forgotten the kings who were entombed within; but they never let the world forget the hands that raised stone upon stone." There was the fire of enthusiasm glowing in her brown eyes, in her flushed cheeks, above all, in her nervous voice. But all she had spoken was at such wide variance with Irving's philosophy of life, that he refused ignition.

"Well!" said Irving, turning from Winifred's face (they were now nearing the Manhattan shore) and

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staring at the white line that the boat was cutting across the gray surface of the tide. "I suppose I am not one to forge swords for other men to wield; or build houses for other men to enjoy. I suppose I'm *not* one of your builders, to leave some great work behind me for lazy, or incompetent posterity to wonder at."

Dr. Adams waved his hand and said, "Here is life all about us, heaped up from centuries of preparation."

"And here am I," Irving swiftly replied, "to get what I can out of it, then to go my way, giving place to others. If they get more out of it than I — well! so much the better for them; and so much the better for me, if I'm content." He looked at Winifred, finding her opposition somewhat sweet, because it signified that she was interested in him; and somewhat bitter, because he felt that she might be in the right, after all.

Dr. Adams, wishing to spur his granddaughter to another assault, murmured, as in support of Irving, "If literature is my bent, just consider all the masterpieces of the world. Why should *I* write books, when it's already impossible to read the world's best books, peddled at every street corner, thrown in as prizes with the new baking powders, the new brands of coffee?"

"If I like music," said Irving, aggressively, still looking at Winifred, who resolutely looked at the waves, "why should *I* compose operas, when so many matchless compositions are given away, to advertise pianos of some particular make? Do you understand what I mean?"

"What, what, what! Know what you mean? It's

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just like a primer to me," the doctor declared. "It's like some story I've heard before."

Winifred, still with eyes intent upon the river, smiled faintly, as if to say it was hardly worth the trouble to prolong the useless argument. Then she seemed to forget Irving and Dr. Adams altogether, as a pensive gravity settled upon her face. Was she thinking of the Little Neighbor, or of her success in the quest of Agostino? In reality, she was thinking most of Irving, when she seemed thinking least.

Irving's antagonism grieved Winifred; not, of course, because of the personal resistance, but because she had begun to take an interest in the young man; a deeper interest than she realized. She had seen enough of him to appreciate his generous qualities and higher capabilities, and it saddened her to think that his life, in spite of generous promise, might come to nothing. She wanted him to be more than a pleasant and handsome young man, more than the young men of her casual acquaintance. Somehow, she felt that he could be much more. She would have done a good deal to inspire him with the aims that had carried her to honorable recognition as an artist. But it seemed that she had not learned that secret touch which alone can correct without hardening.

As for Irving, it had vaguely floated over the sunny skies of his mind that he was not what he might be, possibly not even what he should have been; and that this lack, this possible defect, was his, not so much because circumstances had refused their aid, as because he had

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felt no prompting of the need. Naturally he resisted a reshaping of his aims, but his resistance was perverse rather than determined. As he stared at the white line in their wake, it was not entirely beyond his fancy that he might one day — some day comfortably far away in the future — become a builder, after all.

But he gave no sign of yielding, and Winifred said no more. Each stood in pensive mood, till the boat glided into its slip, just as the sun disappeared behind the silent factories of Jersey City.

CHAPTER XII

THE GATHERING OF THE POOR

IT was growing colder when Irving parted from Winifred and her grandfather. His complicated task of getting Agostino to Winifred's studio might seem to the doctor too great a favor from one almost a stranger; but Winifred was too covetous of the Italian's likeness to question the young man's assertion —

“It'll be like an adventure out of an old book of romance; I would n't miss it for worlds!”

When, after a hurried visit to his lodgings, Irving reached Broadway, that backbone of the lower city which, through mischance, was thrown out of joint at Union Square, pictures of the river scene and of “Lee's Triangle” vanished from his mental vision. For a few moments the varied impressions of the day were submerged by the swarming men and women everywhere seeking Sunday rest from week-days' toil. He had never before been so sensible of the endless procession, the confusing threads of diverging footsteps, the apparent waste of human material. Among the overwhelming tidal-waves of numbers and differences, it seemed to him that he must cling, as by conscious effort, to the anchor of his personality.

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He gave a rueful little gasp at the reflection that, as all these people were interesting to him only as a massed background for his thoughts — his thoughts of Winifred, for instance — so to them he was but a drop in the sea of life. How they swirled and broke in eddies about the bases of the giant sky-scrapers! — those enormous piles which would look down into this same chasm when cab and automobile and car bore a new generation, that of the present having come to the end of its striving. Those frames of many stories would remain; and the careless world would forget all who had enjoyed but had not built. The young man gave his short laugh; it was rather void of mirth, to-night, yet was touched with humor of a sardonic sort, such as comes easiest to those who are not builders. Winifred's influence was beating for admission.

Eight o'clock finds young Irving standing on the sidewalk before the uptown hotel of young Vandever's appointment. We have seen him enter that palatial lobby, money in his pockets, and beauty waiting on his smile, while on all sides the city rioted in a New Year's ecstasy. As he stands at the curb after his long walk, his is the consciousness that, of all the stupidly or gayly dressed men and women flitting from evening cabs to before-theatre repasts, none makes the transit of gleaming pavement more merrily than did he, a month or so ago. Alas! not forever can the year be new, however carefully it be protected with renewed resolves. Sooner or later — often as soon as possible! — the threads ravel, and traitorous holes betray the

The Gathering of the Poor

skin that the garment of the old year never could entirely conceal. But what can rob Irving of the glory that has been? May it warm his legs now, as the cold wind whips around the corner, and the pitifully small leavings of his borrowed five dollars lie inert in the lower depth of his pocket-world!

His legs and his purse are thus brought to the surface, not to excite the commiseration of the more prosperous. Those cold legs but serve him right, just as ours are undoubtedly warm because of our deserts. But they explain Jessie's tears. And who is Jessie? Irving might have asked; let it be hoped that the reader is not so forgetful. Jessie thinks he has forgotten her, as indeed he has; but she imagines that he has gone to feast with the rich and gay, wherein she errs. On this cruelest day of her life, the day on which she finds herself robbed of all her earnings by Mrs. Sadie Wyse, the low-voiced, the irreproachably gowned, the comrade of royalty, poor Jessie fancies that all the world has deserted her, except, perchance, a tiresome Wedding. She sees Irving seated at the board with Vandever — Vandever with all his splendor, with all his gayety, his prodigality, and, likely enough, his Beauty and Stella. Ah, that is too much! Yes, there is Irving, no longer mindful of the shopgirl, dressed like a king — for can one not rent the purple for a night? So thinks Jessie Tiff, passionate tears washing out her world from the last glimpse. In the meantime, one's legs are cold; is not poetic justice satisfied?

From a cab, step Claude Vandever and Bird Martin,

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one pale and the other red, from their hurried manner of life; there are so many balls and dinners and other functions to be attended or avoided, that one human body is not enough to drag through the continual round of pleasure; a single stomach, also, seems sadly inadequate.

Bird Martin laughed heartily, a little too noisily, perhaps. "We had up a bet on your forgetting this engagement," he said. "Glad to see you, Knickerbocker."

"But where 's Water Lulu?" demanded young Vandever, his handsome face plainly betraying disappointment.

"The fact is," said Irving, "I came to call it off. It 's imperative for me to be at Rutgers Square at a quarter to nine, and I have no time to lose in getting there. I 'm more sorry than you can know." He shook hands with Vandever, and his pressure was returned with interest. These two had from the beginning taken a strong liking to each other.

"Imperative?" ejaculated Vandever. "Oh, I say, now! Look here, Knick, I 've broken three engagements just to spend the evening with you — and have a time. Colorado was going for the girls, as soon 's we 'd found that you 'd kept the appointment. It 'll be too bad of you. Jump in with me, and we 'll bowl after Water Lulu, and Colorado can find Beauty or somebody else that 'll do just as well. The woods are full of her sort; but there are n't so many Jessie-dears, like breaths of flowers in April rain, you know."

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Irving was not enthusiastic. "Oh, yes," he said, "Jessie is a good girl, an exceptionally pure-minded and moral little creature. But I can't go. The fact is, Vandever, there's some information I have never learned — something that vitally concerns me. It has come into the possession of a tramp, and he'll be at Rutgers Square at a quarter to nine, and I mean to have it out of him by bribes, or by force."

"A tramp? How'll you know him?"

"He's to wear an old army coat, and all his hair in its natural red hue, and a prodigious red mustache. He'll be standing by the old fountain, and when I lay hands on him that secret is mine."

Vandever took a sudden resolve. "I'll go with you," he said, adventurously. "Maybe I'll get to see some of the rent-rioting that's crowding all the interesting news out of the papers nowadays. I have a few tenements of my own over there, but I've never seen 'em. They're on Ridge Street, and I think that's somewhere near Rutgers. Will you have me? I'll stay with you till I meet my Waterloo."

Irving was joyous at the prospect. "Come on, Colorado," he exclaimed; "I aeroplaned into your sort of life New Year's Eve; now you take a dive into my sort."

"Not for mine," said Martin disconsolately. "I didn't leave Cripple Creek to nose around the East Side. No diving-bells for me!"

"Colly is *such* an ass!" murmured Vandever, amiably.

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"But I have n't got any bridle on," called Martin, as he made for the hotel entrance.

As the Elevated car bore Irving and Vandever down Sixth Avenue, they fraternized most pleasantly. Those thousand topics of city life which everybody knows, and with which nobody, apparently, has anything to do, were like tiny threads, drawing their interests closer together. There was nothing serious about young Vandever; all things that came to him, whether of politics, religion, literature, life, or death, were indiscriminately ground in the mortar of his receptive mind under the destructive pestle of American humor. It did not seem worth while to discuss anything, only to laugh at everything.

This exactly suited Irving, or, to be precise, would have suited him a day earlier. In some mysterious fashion, he found himself not just what he had been. His laughter was as easy in its flow as formerly; but at times there seemed an undercurrent, moving in an opposite direction, as if to check lightheartedness. They left the car at the Bleeker Street Station, and in the quiet of the junction, dark faces drifted past, like disembodied spirits of evil foreboding. Occasionally the sullen silence was broken by whole-hearted laughter of negroes, inspired by some dim mote-beam of the ludicrously grotesque. Vandever noticed nothing, but Irving found himself giving heed to every slight incident of the journey. All seemed to have a part in the mystery of his parentage.

They found Mulberry Street unusually active. A crowd eddied about the white face of Police Headquar-

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ters, where officers were assembling in orderly form. Past the green lanterns jealously guarding the door, other crowds drifted, presently to circle about some old woman who had been that day dispossessed of her foul nest in a tenement, or about a spellbinder of socialistic or anarchistic faith. As the throngs swept down the Bowery, coalescing near Hester Street, one heard on every hand angry denunciations of the landlords, voiced in Italian, German, Greek, Yiddish, Russian — everything except English. Past the museums, theatres, and lodging-houses hurried the mob, seeing nothing but their wrongs. The stamping of their feet, and the increasing roar of their voices, drowned the overhead pounding of the elevated cars, while the tracks above the asphalt beat back in hollow reverberation, the discords of anger.

“It’s a riot!” shouted Vandever, in his companion’s ear, striving to be heard. More than Irving, he was repelled by the want of self-restraint, by the frank exhibition of primitive emotions, above all, by the unsavory rags and emaciated forms. Of course these people were gripped by poverty. He was sorry; his pity would have been compassion, had they been clean and plump and contained. But they were so noisy about their misfortunes! And so skinny, so gaunt, so dishevelled, and so determined to put the blame upon those who are more fortunate!

Irving shouted his reply: “They’re charged pretty high rent, considering the price of living. The landlords grow richer, the tenants poorer; there seems no limit at either extreme, and certainly there’s no sta-

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tionary point between. One is always rising, or going down." Then he gave his short laugh, as it occurred to him that he and Vandever were fair types of the extremes.

The relief of both was great when they emerged upon Rutgers Square, which proved almost deserted. If the tramp in the blue army-coat was not already at the old fountain, he should appear within the next five minutes. And then, would Irving know all? His heart leaped.

There was something ominous in the silence of the place, when one considered the great throngs of the discontented poor not far away. At such an hour, East Broadway, Rutgers Square, and Jefferson Street are ordinarily swarming with ill-clad humanity. Even the police squad, whose time of service ends at nine, had withdrawn to look after the malcontents in other quarters. The fresh squad had not arrived. Irving and Vandever were quite alone, save for one form which lingered near the old fountain.

It was the form, not of a tramp in an army-coat, but of a young woman,—an Italian, whose head was almost hidden by a red shawl. She leaned upon a crutch; when the two young men came forward, she held out a petitioning hand. The movement threw back the shawl, revealing a dark face whose childlike mouth and shrewd eyes and full, comely cheeks, produced a mingled impression of innocence, craftiness, and good looks.

A thought occurred to Irving. "Did some one send

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you here to meet Mrs. Wyse — Mrs. Sadie Wyse?” he asked. “She told me I would find a man here in a big blue coat — a man with red hair —”

The Italian shook her head, limped to prove a broken leg, and called for pecuniary treatment.

Irving was sorely disappointed, but the cripple had a form so pleasing, and even did her hopping with such native grace, that he was poorer by a quarter, when he and Vandever moved away.

Vandever, as rich as ever, murmured, “Poor little Italiana! It must be very tiresome to keep up her pretence; let us hope, when she turns the corner, she’ll stretch out that other leg, and give it a good shake.”

“It’s worth a quarter to me to believe in her lameness,” said Irving, cheerfully. “I used to have a philosophy of life that I called Taking Things for Granted. But now I want to change things, it seems — things, or people, including myself.” He laughed whimsically. “Look here, Vandever, there’s lots of money that I would n’t give poor people for fear I’d encourage pauperism; and so I’ve spent it on myself, to save it!”

“Your philosophy is mine,” Vandever declared. “I mean, Taking Things for Granted.”

“You can have it,” returned Irving, “for I’m going to find something better. Look, Vandever, see the good my twenty-five cents has accomplished; she’s cured already!”

The girl had tucked her crutch under one arm, and

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was now running across the square, as dark and light as a flitting shadow.

“It’s a signal!” Vandever suddenly exclaimed. “She’s calling somebody. Look, she’s bringing on a group of people — no, a crowd — a mob — a riot! We don’t riot with ’em, eh, Knickerbocker?” He seized Irving’s arm adding, “This is something new for *me*; is it too late for a get-away?”

It was nine o’clock. As by a preconcerted signal, given by the Italian, five thousand men and women came pouring out of sidestreets and alleyways, cellars, garrets, and bunk-houses. The roar of their voices as they came down Jefferson Street caused every tenement window to be thrown up, every door to fly open. At the head of the angry procession was drawn an open truck, carrying several speakers. Among them, Irving recognized Dick Arnold, mendicant, musician, orator. From windows, doors, housetops, and from all points of the street, rose cries —

“Down with the landlords!”

“Down with the rich!”

“Down with the Government!”

“Down with everything!”

The truck halted before the old fountain of Rutgers Square. One man held aloft a huge banner, while four speakers, standing back to back, cast their voices to the four points of the compass, all shouting simultaneously, but each his own words. One harangued in Italian, another in German, a third in Yiddish. Dick Arnold declaimed in English.

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The tumult was deafening. It seemed that no one cared to hear, but every one wanted to be heard, and to a different purpose. Irving and Vandever, caught near the outskirts of the dense mass, stared at the spectacle, without much thought of the misery that had caused the gathering of the poor. Irving divided his attention between the truck and the old fountain. He listened to Arnold's flights of eloquence, while noting the dignity which the able speaker borrowed from his very rags; at the same time, he hoped to see the tramp, red-haired and blue-coated, make his appearance on the scene. He began to suspect that Mrs. Wyse had invented the story of the tramp, in order to rob Irving as she had robbed Jessie Tiff.

Not far from the young men were a group of anarchists, waving red flags, and trying to divert the meeting to their own ends.

"Something is the matter!" bawled Arnold, from the open truck.

"Yes, with the Government!" shouted the anarchists.

At this there came cries of "No red flag!" and Arnold continued with, "We are tired of what we have. What do we want?"

A voice shouted, "Something else!"

The cry embodied a universal longing. It was taken up—"We want something else! We want something else!" Thousands caught at the seductive phrase. It was raised to heaven, completely drowning out a futile attempt to start the Marseillaise. "Something else!"

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Something else! Ah, that is it, that is what we want — Something else!” Tears came into many eyes. The impulsive embraced. The stolid raised their arms above their heads. The excitable danced up and down. The compact mass swayed back and forth, deliriously, rapturously, passionately, exclaiming, “Something else! We want something else!”

Irving, happening to turn his eyes from the truck and the fountain, became aware of snaky eyes observing him. There were the narrowed orbs of the Italian *restaurateur*, Pasquale, him who was now seeking Agostino. The shifting gaze was the same Irving had observed in the studio, on the night of the tenor's *début* before Mr. Burl. Did Pasquale suspect that Irving knew the whereabouts of Agostino? Irving felt a little shock of uneasiness; and his foreboding of danger was none the less because Pasquale, finding himself recognized, immediately vanished in the crowd.

Irving turned to Vandever, to suggest that they force their way out, since it was now certain that the tramp depicted by Mrs. Wyse, would not appear. His disappointment at not learning his father's name, was modified by surprise at finding Jessie Tiff leaning upon Vandever's arm. Jessie, who had been obliged to give up her room at Gotham Repose, was on her way to her mother's lodgings on Ridge Street. It was by the merest chance that she had met some of her friends of the department store world, shopgirls like herself who, attracted by the rent-riots, had paused at the outskirts of the mob. Here she suddenly beheld Vandever,

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like a star fallen into her obscurity. She went to him, of course, and the triumphant eyes she directed upon Irving proclaimed the right and joy of discovery. She seemed to say, "You would have kept us apart!"

The crowd pressed her close to Vandever's side where she was as safe as safe could be, for alas! somehow she had lost, for Vandever, that elusive charm of "flowers in April rain." Gallantly he protected her, gayly he smiled down into her eyes. But his two-months' dreaming was far sweeter than the night's awakening. In the brilliant setting of New Year's Eve, Jessie's simplicity had affected him as subtly as a warm breeze blowing over those flowers in April rain, of which he had spoken. But now she seemed so much a part of the vast gathering of the poor, and so essential a part, that she shared their fate in his regard.

He felt, "This is where she belongs; while I —" Not for a good deal would he have had Jessie suspect his disillusionment; but the change was so marked in his feelings, that he laughed aloud, ruefully, one might have said sadly — laughed so like Irving, that the latter cried,

"Vandever! that belongs to me!" And so did Vandever's feeling about Jessie belong to Irving. Irving saw her precisely as she was seen by Vandever. But to Jessie the world looked still the same. She had never loved Irving, and she did not now dislike him because she imagined he had tried to come between her and Vandever; indeed she had no feeling about Irving. In

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spite of all those dinners they had enjoyed together, those quiet evenings in romantic restaurants, those plottings for happiness, Irving was to her almost a stranger. That was because she allowed Vandever's image to shadow the world. Which shall be pitied more sincerely: Jessie because she loves in vain, or Vandever, because Jessie and his ideal are out of adjustment? Are they not like the mob that roars? Hear them calling, in appeal, in anger, with tears, with oaths, with prayers —

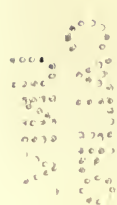
“Something else! Something else! We want something else! The red flag! Down with the red flag! The Government overturned! No, the Government made better! No law! All law! Something else! Hurrah for the Bomb! Hurrah for the Police!”

It is time to be thinking of the police, for here they come from Madison Street Station, brandishing nightsticks, proof against shouts in their honor or their derision. Public speaking has taken place without permits. The police determinedly shove their way into a disorganized mass of unresisting men and women. Like wild beasts before the hunters, they turn and flee, this way and that, desiring nothing but escape, falling over each other in the mad lust for liberty.

“If I were you,” says Vandever hastily, “I'd decamp.”

“But you're not me,” Irving declares. “I have a monopoly on myself, and nobody's going to bull the market.” He had observed Arnold coming, and desired to wait for the violently flushed orator.





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“Then I’ll see Jessie out of this,” called Vandever, already separated from his new friend by the surging tide. “Good-bye, Knickerbocker!”

Irving was prevented from answering. An officer in dashing his stick among the obstinate heads of the anarchists, had inadvertently struck a mother with babe in arms. Instantly rose a tigerish yell, as if the blow had fallen upon a hundred hearts. A panic ensued. Those nearest Irving, not knowing what had happened, caught at the report that a bomb was about to explode. Their terror amounted to insanity.

As Irving was hurled backward by the frantic populace, he saw some one knocked down directly in his rear. It was the girl who had imposed upon his benevolence. She had long since discarded her crutch, and the agility with which she rebounded from the stones, proved the perfect condition of her limbs. Unfortunately, she was no sooner upon her feet than the fleeing crowd knocked her down again. Those oncoming, would, without doubt, have trampled blindly upon her body,—for her head had struck the paving, and she lay half-stunned—had not Irving leaped before her.

“Stand back!” Irving shouted, threatening with clenched hands. Those who were hurried against the athletic champion of the fallen, sought to recoil, but could not because of the stampede. Irving, finding himself about to be lifted from his feet and dashed upon the helpless body of the young woman, made a determined resistance. An angry struggle ensued, which soon became a battle of one against a dozen.

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Into this *mêlée* suddenly leaped a policeman, with club aimed at Irving's head, because the young man appeared to be the cause of the contention. Irving, unconscious of the danger that menaced him, felled one of his burly antagonists. He would at that moment have been stretched at full length upon the ground, but for the opportune arrival of Dick Arnold.

Arnold, exasperated from the reaction of suspended oratory, and anxious to save Irving a crushing blow, grabbed, from behind, the uplifted club, wrenched it from the surprised fist, and brought it down with considerable violence upon the policeman's head.

The officer fell. To speak publicly without a permit, is reprehensible; but to lay hands upon Law and Order is unpardonable. Scarcely had the policeman's comrades reached the spot, when there was no riot, no mob, no scuffling — nothing but the din of retreating footsteps. Dark basement-passages and black alley entrances, showed whence the fluid populace had melted away.

One moment, Irving had stood fighting over the body of an unknown Italian girl; the next, it seemed that the earth moved from under him, or rather, that an irresistible tide lifted him from the pavement, to sweep him into an unknown port of safety. When he found his feet, as it were, he and Arnold, and the girl, were being ground together like pebbles in a millrace, as the mob poured along a narrow street between squalid tenements.

“Keep on your feet!” roared Dick Arnold. His

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voice was lost in the mad tumult. He squared his shoulders against those who were jammed against him, and struggled to give the girl air. Irving looked about wildly, and, in the semi-gloom, descried a deep stone doorway offering shelter from the suffocating compact.

“That doorway!” he shouted to Arnold.

They locked arms, and the girl proved herself a valuable ally; both her sex and nationality stood them in good stead. The doorway was gained, and, in its shelter, they took deep breaths, while the multitude scurried past.

“Saved!” cried Irving gayly, stanching the blood from a fleshwound, and concealing his excitement in the guise of heroics. He turned to look more particularly at the girl, who was held tightly against his side. She was pretty enough to render proximity agreeable, hence his sense of disappointment when, without a word, she dived between Arnold’s sturdy legs, and wiggled in amazing fashion from the doorway to the racing street. She was gone in a moment. Irving watched for her head to bob up in midstream, but she was seen no more.

“Such is gratitude,” Irving gasped.

“No,” returned Arnold, “she’s grateful enough. Something’s up. Wait and we’ll see. There it is — the door — look out — *your head!*”

The black door, against which they were pressed, had suddenly opened inward, and a grimy fist was aimed at Irving’s head. Arnold, unable to avert the blow,

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had given warning in time. Irving dodged, then, wheeling sidewise, felled the unknown antagonist. The man fell backward. Over his body leaped three Italians from within the unlighted hall. They paid no attention to Arnold, apparently they did not observe him. Their united efforts were bent upon overpowering the young man.

Irving could scarcely have been taken at greater disadvantage. His breath was gone; his blow, which had delivered him from the first assailant, had told almost the extent of his resources. Standing with back against the stone embrasure, unarmed, and not yet recovered from surprise, he faced three ferocious men, one of whom was provided with brass knuckles. It was the latter who first threw himself forward. Irving suddenly slipped to the ground, to avoid the murderous assault.

“Donta kill 'im!” called one of the assailants. It was Pasquale. Evidently the object of the attack was to obtain from Irving the knowledge of Agostino's hiding place.

The brass knuckles rang against the stone wall. At the same time, Irving reaching up from the ground, caught the would-be assassin by the legs, and dragged him to his knees. A blow from Arnold laid the fellow prostrate, just as Pasquale and his companion were rushing forward. They stumbled over the body of their accomplice, and Irving, who had extricated himself from the burden, slipped from the ledge into the street.

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In an instant, he was up and away, with Arnold's hand in his arm. They were engulfed by the mob; later, when the crowd diverged and thinned away down many obscure alleys, they breathed freer, finding themselves no longer pressed. Arnold, who seemed to know every devious way, wound in an inexplicable fashion now to the right, now to the left, then seeming to double upon his course. At last these two found themselves alone among lofty tenements which looked dim and spectral against the wintry sky.

"Huh!" exclaimed Arnold, who was panting violently, "I don't think anybody knows who laid out that policeman, and as for Pasquale's tribe, nobody cares. I'm sure they did n't recognize me." He gave a long whistle—"But was n't that a glorious race, a magnificent adventure! You must have knocked over half a dozen, at Rutgers Square, to say nothing of the dagoes. It 'd be inconvenient if they 'd caught you red-handed!"

"I 'd have been among the prostrate, but for you," Irving said, also panting heavily. "I wonder what 'll become of the Italian?" he added, mopping his brow, then baring his head to the cold night air.

"Oh, she's safe enough, thanks to you; and as she happens to be a friend of mine, the thanks are doubled. I suppose you 'll want to get out of this now, won't you? You 'll find everything quiet between here and Broadway. Good-night." The voice sounded a little wistful. There was no reference to their former

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meetings. Arnold's manner seemed to say, "I know you, but you need n't know me unless you choose."

"But this is where you live, is n't it?" returned Irving. "I'm sure yonder is the tenement that was so carefully described to me this afternoon. I was to have come to hunt you up, at a later hour, and since I'm already here, there's no need of coming back. It was really a fortunate coincidence, finding you at Rutgers Square."

"You say you were coming here to hunt *me* up?" the other exclaimed, with seeming uneasiness. "What an honor!"

Irving laughed at the rather ungracious tone. "You are n't overwhelmed, luckily," he declared. "Yes, I went to Rutgers Square to meet some one, and later, was to have come here after you. The fact is, Agostino —"

Arnold caught his arm, warningly. "That name is n't safe on the street," he whispered.

"But we are alone."

"Alone! I have no doubt a hundred eyes are watching us. Everything's quiet, on account of the police. Silence in this place is always treacherous. Come up to my room, and we can talk. Besides, ever since you bought pencils of me, I've wished you might visit my room."

"You have?" Irving asked, doubtfully. "Why?"

"It's a back room," said Arnold, a little plaintively. "The sun never shines into the window. Come up there, and — smile!"

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Even if it had not been a part of Agostino's plot for Irving to communicate secretly with Arnold, he could not have resisted this invitation. Moreover, the romantic mystery of Arnold's life interested him deeply.

CHAPTER XIII

IRVING PLOTS STRATEGY

SO I owe this visit to Agostino, do I?" said Arnold, when Irving Payne entered his humble room on the fourth floor of the tenement. "In that case, we'd better lock the door." He did so. "It isn't the only good thing I've owed to Agostino," he went on, as they sat down before a little coal stove. "You remember how he dressed me up for the divorce court, I suppose? What a tyrant he proved over his cigar! He's a hard master," he concluded, laughing heartily.

There was a bed of coals that needed stirring and feeding. Arnold poked, and replenished, without moving from his chair. "I keep everything within reach," he said, pushing back the scuttle with a lazy foot, and balancing the poker across the lap of the stove. "I can reach out, and find anything I want, on my table, or on this wall,—see my fiddle? I don't have to budge from my seat. Did you ever see anything like it?"

Irving never had. Owing to the smallness of the room, the air was rather close, hence was easily warmed. Everything was cleaner than one might have expected. The single bedstead was not hopelessly, only despond-

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ently, untidy. Arnold himself was not scrupulously neat, but he was better kept than his ragged garments seemed to warrant.

Arnold divined the other's thought, and waved his arm good-naturedly. "I derive no lustre from my surroundings," he said; "I borrow no dignity from my clothes. I go on the same principle that governs house-insurance: I keep circumstances below my real value. Well, sir, it's uncommonly jolly to see you sitting over there. Lord! you can't imagine how many times I've dreamed of it and longed for it. You see, I'm a lonely old codger, and I have n't got anything except my dreams and myself. When I meet some one that takes my fancy, I imagine him chumming it with me, in my sort of life — and it's a good sort of life, too, if you go in for this sort of thing from choice. Of course if you *have* to be poor, you're always wishing you were n't, or that other folks were. But when it's optional, it's comfortable enough."

"I'm delighted to know it's optional with you," said Irving, heartily. "And I'm glad to have a peep into your life. As you say, I owe it to Agostino. He's hiding from the Black Handers, over at my foster-parents', in Jersey. But a young lady who'd engaged him for her model, needs him so badly that I've undertaken to get him smuggled into her studio early in the morning."

"That's a big contract; I hope it's a pretty lady."

"Both," Irving nodded. "Both, Mr. Arnold. Agostino finally agreed to spend to-night in the room

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directly across the hall from Pasquale's bedroom. Pasquale is the leader of the Italian gang —”

“ Oh, I know that well enough. So Agostino wants to come to close quarters with the enemy, does he? ”

“ He says Pasquale would never dream of *his* sleeping across the hall.”

“ Agostino is a genius,” Arnold declared. “ But that room is occupied by a lady — by the way, the very Italian woman whom you saved from being mangled by the mob. Her name's Bianca. She is Agostino's sweetheart.”

“ Agostino said she was his clerk in the coalshop.”

“ Yes, that's one of her capacities, I believe. Well? ”

“ Well, Pasquale will suppose Bianca is safe in her room; but Bianca is to slip out, as soon as Pasquale is asleep, and Agostino will take her place.”

“ What is to become of Bianca? ”

“ She will come here.”

“ Which will throw me out into the street, I suppose? ” exclaimed Arnold, ruefully.

“ That was Agostino's plan. He said you had plenty of other places.”

“ Agostino is charming,” Arnold declared, with a grin. “ But I can understand that he would n't dare come here himself, since we are known to be friends. I am a little uneasy about him and Pasquale passing the night so close to each other.”

“ But Pasquale will think the other room still occupied by Bianca.”

Arnold laughed. “ Oh, I was n't thinking about

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Pasquale's doing anything. The trouble is, Agostino will know that Pasquale is in reach of his stiletto! But we can leave Pasquale to bother about that."

It occurred to Irving that it was strange he should feel neither aversion nor fear, in the presence of this Bohemian. The fact that the door was locked seemed to insure safety, and promote good comradeship. The table was overrunning with second-hand books, dingy and tattered.

"Best way to keep your property from being stolen," observed Arnold, following the young man's gaze, "is to have property that nobody else wants. I daresay I'm the only man in the neighborhood who would rather read about a bandit than be one. As for my fiddle, everybody knows it's mine; and I've played in the streets so often for the young people to dance, they'd fight for it any time, to restore it to me. But you were saying that Bianca is to sleep here, while Agostino sleeps in Bianca's room. Then what?"

"In the morning, before daybreak, precisely at six o'clock, Agostino is to be standing at the lost-and-found stand near the entrance to the Brooklyn Bridge. I'll pick him up in a closed carriage, and whisk him away to the lady's studio."

"Splendid!" Arnold lit a cheap pipe and, leaning back with an elbow on the table, surveyed his guest with indolent satisfaction. "I just can't tell you how jolly it is to find you here," he declared, anew. "And it's such an amazing coincidence, too! Everything fits in so well. If I had n't been with Agostino the day

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of the divorce suit, he would n't have dreamed of sending you to me."

"Did you get your divorce?" Irving asked, never ceasing to wonder that young Vandever's father should prove such a castaway. Arnold nodded. Irving volunteered that he had met Claude Vandever twice; had, in fact, been with him at the mass-meeting. To that, Arnold offered nothing; only smoked.

"Mr. Arnold —" Irving began, impetuously.

Arnold stopped him, without apparent intention. "Wait; you have n't told me how you happened to be at Rutgers Square; it's no secret, I suppose?"

Irving, checked in his purpose to rouse Arnold from his lethargic condition, was a little confused. "No," he said, hesitatingly, "my landlady told me that if I would be there at a quarter to nine, I'd find a tramp who could tell me something I was intensely desirous of knowing."

"Such as, for instance —"

Irving hesitated again; but the kindly eyes, the pleasant face, red and coarsened by a preponderance of physical enjoyment, even the comfortable slow drawl of the sleepy voice, all invited confidence. He said, "My father's name."

Arnold sat suddenly erect. "What?" he called, sharply. Then he grasped his pipe, and began refilling it. "That's odd. Excuse my starting. The tramp was n't guaranteed to look anything like me, was he? I'm a tramp, you know."

"This particular tramp has red hair and a red

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mustache," smiled Irving. "My landlady — she was my landlady until she decamped with her lodgers' savings — was Mrs. Sadie Wyse. Never heard of her, I suppose?"

"Never. And if she's a thief, likely enough she invented the tramp. So you don't know your father's name? Your mother's, perhaps?"

Irving shook his head. "Both are dead," he explained. "They died when I was an infant, and those who adopted me did n't want to trace out the relatives, because they wanted to think of me as belonging only to them. But I am all the time thinking, Mr. Arnold, how surprising it is that you —"

"Oh, I daresay!" interrupted Arnold. "I am very surprising, I have no doubt. You wonder that Claude's father should be such a degenerate as I. But Claude is not so lucky as you in one particular. You don't know who your father was, you tell me; well, Claude knows his."

"He knows you?"

"My dear boy, he does not know me — how could he? But I invited his knowledge. I appeared before him a couple of years ago. I said, 'Claude, you have a happy home with your mother and your step-father. I could offer you nothing but a nomadic existence. At the same time, I feel it is your due to make the choice yourself. Here I am. Know me, if such is your desire.' It was not his desire. Of course it was not his desire! I was in Agostino's best rented clothes, too. I even wore a tie. But it was not his desire."

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Arnold stirred at the fire, which reddened his face more than ever. Irving mused deeply. Then he spoke:

“But that was n’t his fault, Mr. Arnold. It’s yours. Leave this unworthy life. Be yourself. In every word and gesture, you show that you could be a man among men, not a drifting wreck.” Irving was embarrassed, but he persevered: “You call yourself a degenerate. You call yourself a tramp. And you say that Agostino is your master — that Italian trimmer of the dump-scows! You accept these surroundings!” Irving started up, impulsively. “Mr. Arnold! Come back to yourself. Take your place in the world that needs you. Let me help you.” He gave his nervous, high-tension laugh. “This is my first attempt at this sort of thing. But I’m terribly in earnest. I can’t leave you here to mould and decay in your cellar-life.” He was sadly impeded by that fear of being ridiculous which, like a weight, drags so often at the heels of good resolve. But the next moment he stretched out his hand, as if to draw the mendicant from a material quagmire. “Let *me* help you!” His manner was theatrical in the sense that the theatre catches, at times, those moods in which one’s real self forgets to hide behind convention’s mask.

Arnold stared at him strangely. “You don’t understand, of course. Shall I tell you? But how can I? Yes. When I was Mrs. Vandever’s husband — when she was Mrs. Arnold — something happened, which was so entirely my own fault, and which cut me off so irrevocably from society, that no one could defend me, no one could claim me as a friend. What I was ac-

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cused of I could not deny, it was too open; and I did not want to deny, for what I did was done because I wanted to do it, right or wrong. What it was is no matter; but it was so big a thing that it simply blotted me out. You see? For a man can do a thing bigger than himself, something to raise him above himself, or to destroy his life. And when I did this thing which was bigger than myself, and found that it had forever cast me down — *forever*, you understand — it was my part to make the best of it. That's what I'm doing now. Look around you. *This* is the best of it! Sit down, my friend, and don't look so troubled."

"There's something better than this."

"Not for me. After I did that thing, I tried to hide myself. But it was no use. The man I had been could not be hidden. I decided to become a different man. Therefore I sought the extreme of respectability and dignity. I became the tramp. One thing was left to me, and is with me still — the love of life. The life of a tramp is not such a sad affair — see how many follow it from choice! There is all the ease, and enjoyment of food, and, above all, the irresponsibility; nobody expects anything of you; you go here or there, it's no matter; this is your home, then that — the open air, the moving train, New Orleans, Seattle, with the return to New York. But I mustn't dilate, or you will be tempted to try it yourself. Sometimes one plays the fiddle in a restaurant-orchestra, but is not bound to stay; or labors as a farmhand in Missouri, or Kansas, just for a taste of home-cooking and the feel of sweat

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on a sunburned brow; and the little children come sometimes and lean against one's knee, big-eyed and unafraid, just as one's very own might have done."

"But even now —" Irving tried to say. The other interrupted:

"And there's nothing else for me. What I did cut me off from my own rank, clouded my name, ruined me, as the Arnold who had been respected. I tell you, there's no going back. But I'm content with my life. Don't you think it sounds rather pleasant, after all? Let me tell you about Bianca. Perhaps you know that the sea occasionally washes up a quantity of sand and forms little islands hereabouts, bits of land that belong to nobody except Neptune. There is such an island at the mouth of Sheepshead Bay that came up from the sea in a night, as it were. I lived there for years; indeed, it's my summer home. The tramps have taken possession of it. Bianca's father lived there. Bianca grew to love me — just a tiny thing, then. A man is n't all bad when a child loves him, eh? I want to be buried there. Very fitting, you'll allow — the unclaimed tramp, buried in No Man's Land."

"Fitting!" cried Irving, strangely indignant. "No! I tell you, *no!* It's a real tragedy, this story you tell me — a lost life, a lost opportunity. And even if it contents you, don't you owe something to the world? How is the race to be uplifted, if each shirks his part?"

"Have *you* done anything for the race?" inquired Arnold, with his slow smile.

Irving seemed to see Winifred standing before him.

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“Have you paid *your* debt to the world?” Arnold persisted. “Is society any the better because of you? If you die, will some great work for mankind be suspended? But stop! You are very young, my dear boy. Let’s vary the question: Have you planned any great deed? Have you resolved to be of any use? Have you any prospect that when you die — say at seventy or a hundred, or a thousand — something will stop beside yourself?”

Irving grinned somewhat ruefully, and Arnold laughed outright, as he refilled his pipe, and sent forth wide, thin rings of leisurely smoke.

“I know you work hard enough,” resumed Arnold; “your dress shows that, and the care you take. Is the work just for yourself, or for mankind? Don’t you devote the earnings to pleasure? In a word, are you a respectable tramp? And if so, don’t we differ merely in degree? You like smart society, and strive for it; I like a good meal and a chair by the fire, and they come without much striving. Neither of us does anything to help the old world along. My dear boy, we are both tramps, take my word for it. And now I’d better hunt up Bianca, and tell her what’s expected. Stay till I come back, so you can carry Agostino word that all’s arranged. If you like a good tale, help yourself. I have the entire two hundred and ninety-one volumes by Dumas in those boxes, and I’ve read only about two hundred. Courage, my friend; I’ve no doubt they’ll hold out as long as I do, and I ask nothing better. I might find better books — to remind me of my faults! But

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these of good Dumas *père* — well, they make me forget!”

There was something irresistibly winning in the broad humor of the man's red face. Irving could not forbear a laugh, though he felt uneasy. “I have n't given you up,” he declared, as Arnold drew on a tattered overcoat.

“When I come back, we'll discuss, if you will,” said Arnold. “But I'd rather read a book aloud, and catch your eye between pages. I'll hurry back.”

But Arnold did not return; neither did Irving open any of the paper-backed books that strewed the table.

It was Bianca who, in no great time, opened the door, to discover Irving sunk in profound meditation. He started to his feet, at sight of the dark face — in which showed a dull red,—then recognized the coarse black hair, the comely form. She explained in halting English that Arnold had been discovered before Pasquale's coalshop. He would be shadowed henceforth, therefore dared not come home, lest it be discovered that Irving was his friend. Bianca had come to say that she would expect Agostino. As she showed no embarrassment about the money she had obtained under false pretences, Irving made no reference to her discarded crutches.

“You understand,” Irving said, “that you are to give up your room to Agostino, while you come here to spend the night?”

She understood. And Irving had better wait till she had gone, before he slipped from the tenement. And

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Arnold wanted Bianca to get a book from the table in which a torn letter marked the place — a book by some one called *Signor Doom-iss*, if Bianca was not mistaken. The book was “Ange Pitou.”

“By the way,” said Irving, carelessly, willing to detain her a moment, because the red shawl over the dark face presented a picture not displeasing — “I suppose you know that Agostino is married, don’t you?”

Bianca waved her arm assuringly toward the South. “She over dere,” she answered remotely. “In Fiesole; dat ver’ far over de sea, Fiesole.”

“Perhaps Agostino will go to Fiesole, one day, to fetch her,” Irving suggested.

“No,” said Bianca confidently. “Oh, no! Agostino, he make-a much mon’, him. I helpa ver’ much. I sell-a de coal, w’ile he oversee’ de dumps. He do not’in’ widout Bianca. You ver’ good to me to-night, you. You helpa me, maybe save my life-a. I not forgetta dat.” She paused at the door. Suddenly she asked, with smouldering eyes, “W’y you say he maybe go to Fiesole? He better not! He ver’ much better not go for dat woman! She an’ de kids not ver’ safe-a in New York.”

“Oh!” said Irving, seriously. “How many children has Agostino?”

“Two — t’ree — I know not how many,” returned the other, shaking her head. “Dey over dere — Fiesole. We not talk-a ’bout de kids. He care not’in’ for *dem*, an’ he hate dat woman. W’enever I ask ’im, he tella me dat right, O. K. An’ I not forget w’at you

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done for me, to-night." But no word about the twenty-five cents.

Having waited until he felt it safe to venture forth, Irving left the tenement, and, in due time, encountered the stinging wind as it swept up the side streets from the Hudson, to swing around the crazy corners of Greenwich Village. As he stamped up the outside stairs of the Weehawken house, he was obliged to grasp the solid plankguard to keep from being blown upon the rough flags.

Mr. Burl was in his studio, working away at a portrait under the green light; Irving noticed at once that the face was not that of Mrs. Vandever, although the canvas was the same. "Oh!" he exclaimed. "You've altered it; and now Miss Adams will contend that it never was Mrs. Vandever's picture."

"Prove that it was, if you can," returned Mr. Burl, his face as solemnly impassive as usual. Indeed, the picture was fast ceasing to be that of any face; it was dissolving in brown and gray streaks of mist. Agostino crouched at a corner of the fireplace, as if to take up as little room as possible.

"The fact is," said Mr. Burl, nodding toward the sullen Italian, "I am painting the picture of Agostino's mind. Well, is Bianca ready to give up her room?"

When Agostino was gone, Irving complained, "But it was a pity to ruin Mrs. Vandever's likeness, for it was a splendid portrait."

To that, Mr. Burl made no reply. "What I want *you* to do," he said abruptly, laying aside his brush,

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“ is to sit in yonder armchair, late as it is, and tell me every word of your adventures; and as a reward, you shall have the spare bedroom. For the bicycle-lamp is not in the window. Confess, Irving, that you did n't look to see if it was there!”

“ The fact is, so many things have happened —”

Mr. Burl shook his head. “ But you really *must* look for it, my boy. It would be a very serious matter, if you should ever run upon Somebody in my studio. So, in the morning, you 're to take our Agostino to Dr. Adams's, in a cab, are you? Why, your adventures are n't half ended!”

“ Not half,” said Irving, who was sleepy, but still enthusiastic. “ And the best is to come.”

Mr. Burl nodded emphatically as he rejoined, “ Yes, Winifred is, by all odds, the best.”

“ And since Claude Vandever's sister is spending the night there,” murmured Irving, “ who knows but I may meet her, too?”

“ Who knows — anything?” said Mr. Burl, thus closing that chapter of the young man's thoughts.

CHAPTER XIV

IRVING'S ADVENTURE WITH HIS SOUL

WHAT a day that had been! Just the kind Irving Payne so dearly loved, and so seldom found scattered among the dull colored days of his bread-winning existence. Each half hour had contained a full chapter of romantic happenings. For a long time he lay awake in Mr. Burl's spare bedroom, lingeringly reviewing the pleasing history:

Chapter First: the chat with Wedging; the scandalous disappearance of Mrs. Sadie Wyse; the borrowed five dollars, and the kindness of the Du Pays. Chapter Second: the brief visit to the Adams mansion; the swallow flight through the Subway with Winifred; the ferry-transit; and the automobile dash through the open country. Chapter Third: Captain Payne with his bandaged leg; the Little Neighbor with her timid hand upon Irving's shoulder; and Agostino holding the spade, terrified at his appearing. Chapter Fourth: the return with Winifred and Dr. Adams. Chapter Fifth: keeping the appointment with young Vandever, with the unexpected sequel of the mob at Rutgers Square, and the heroic defence of Bianca. Chapter Sixth: the flight; the conversation in Arnold's room at the tenement; the coming of Bianca. Conclusion: the return

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to the studio; the altered face on Mr. Burl's canvas, and the dark form of Agostino as it glided out into the night; the late monologue at the fireside, with Mr. Burl for listener, and the day's adventures for the subject.

It was a whole book. Or rather it was a series of pictures. As the young man tossed restlessly to and fro, minor details and minor characters became subordinated to central ideas. As in a book one naturally gives greatest interest to a chosen few, so in his memory Irving dwelt longest upon two in the day's drama — Winifred Adams, and Arnold. It was indicative of the profound impression Dick Arnold had made upon him, that this tramp should prove a rival in his recollections of Winifred. The Paynes, the Du Pays, Mr. Burl, and Agostino and Bianca, even young Vandever and Jessie, were lost in the dim perspective that defined his concentrated thoughts. Winifred and Arnold not only remained, but seemed each the corollary to the other. Their life stations were so irreconcilably different that their association in his mind demanded explanation. It was easily found.

In the first place, on his way to his foster-parents', Winifred had suggested to Irving his worthlessness to the world. On his return to New York, she had deepened the sombre impression. During the brief stay in the squalid room of the East Side tenement, Arnold had advanced the same theory.

“My dear boy,” Arnold had said, “we differ merely in degree. We are both tramps.”

Previous to that, Winifred had declared with glow-

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ing enthusiasm, "It is the builder who impresses the world, not he who inhabits."

Irving found himself unduly impressed by this unanimity of condemnation. He told himself that his interest in what others thought of him was abnormal. He tried to dismiss both verdict and jury from consciousness, but he could neither forget nor fall asleep. He found himself arguing. It was a mistake to assume that the world is impressed only by builders; the world is impressed by those who can make a show, a sensation. If one builds up a great book, who knows it before the builder is dead? If one builds up a life of public service, he is a politician, not a statesman, until he has passed beyond earthly reward.

Besides, suppose one does *not* impress the world; is he therefore a tramp? Irving's outlook upon life had been from a strictly personal viewpoint. One works a mine, not to give men a livelihood as diggers, but to get out the gold. Irving had been delving laboriously in the mine of life, since his employment at the railroad office; he had ignored baser metal in seeking the thin golden vein of pleasure. That had seemed far more valuable than the homely ores he had been obliged to cast aside. The result of his labors had pleased him for an hour, but had done the world no good. What of it? What of himself? What of life?

At one moment he recalled Winifred's eloquent face and voice, he saw her luminous eyes burning from dark brown to translucent amber: to her, life meant so much! Then appeared Arnold's face, through whose

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red good-humor a former refinement seemed remotely struggling: to him, life meant so little! Winifred saw the need of the world. Arnold recognized only the right to enjoy his life in his own way. And both put Irving upon Arnold's side.

Sleep had grown impossible; not only so, but Irving felt an ever-increasing impatience of restraining walls. He heard the west wind whistling around the corner, as if calling him to come forth. Perhaps he would have obeyed without other urging, in spite of the cold. A new call sounded in the tap upon his window, a sharp tinkling sound of gravel upon glass. Was it an accident, or a summons? Irving rose upon his elbow and listened intently. The wind rushed past. The momentary hush was broken by a louder blow upon the pane.

Irving leaped to the floor, and looked out. The street was dim from a distant grime-obscured light, and, in this appropriate dimness, Agostino was to be seen, crouching beneath the window.

Irving uttered his name in distasteful surprise. Surely the morning was soon enough for the crafty dealer in coal!

Agostino said nothing. He was there; it was for Irving to question why. Irving questioned, sharply emphatic.

It then appeared that Agostino had changed his mind about meeting Irving the next morning, near the entrance to Brooklyn Bridge. Everybody meets at the bridge entrance. The world would be there. *Che!* a hundred men would observe Agostino. Pasquale him-

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self might lie in ambush, or a dozen capable Black Handers. It was not that Agostino feared the devil; he did not anticipate harm from that source, or from any other. But to be seen, that was the point, to be *seen* — no, Signor, it could not be! Even his saints in Heaven must despair of his safety, if he were seen!

“Does all this mean,” demanded Irving, in disgust, “that you are trying to break your engagement with Miss Adams?”

Oh, as Heaven and the holy angels were his witnesses, nothing of the sort! But a safer rendezvous must be selected. If the young gentleman would follow him, Agostino would indicate the spot. He would not mention the street, lest spies be listening. He could not mention it, because he had not yet determined — it is best to have no thoughts in one’s head, when the Black Handers pursue; even thoughts can be read. But hush! Would Irving follow from afar, noiselessly, and in shadow?

Irving would follow. Agostino furnished the rational excuse for obeying his impulse to flee from the bed, the room, the house. He dressed quickly, and soon was in the street. As Agostino slouched along in advance, Irving followed down the crooked streets, feeling a queer elevation of spirits in finding himself under the open sky; and, with the sinister form of the Italian sometimes half lost from view and never distinctly defined, the young man thought less and less of him, and more and more of the problem that had begun to absorb his mind.

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At the crossing of Fourth Street and West Tenth, it occurred to him that his moral domain was laid out in just such incongruous paths — ways that bent back and turned upon themselves. *Was* he essentially a tramp? Not because Arnold had said so, but because his conscience declared the truth? Not because Winifred was a splendid young creature of lofty ambitions and high aims; not because *she* thought so, but because Irving made confession? Not because the world would hold him so — that, at least, was no question. The world does not regard a man as a tramp, so long as he asks for nothing.

But Irving had now reached the point where it mattered not so much what Arnold thought, however good-natured; or Winifred, however fair of face and form; or the world, however indulgent. What did Irving think? what judgment must he pass upon himself? That was the question at present; and, owing to his highly wrought state of mind, influenced doubtless by the nervous condition of one who needs sleep but cannot find it, this question clamored for solution. It seemed to the young man that all other problems of life must be suspended until he had the answer to himself. It was not so much what life was for, as what was the use of himself. Nor was it so imperative for him to decide of what use he was to the world, since the explanation of that was far from complex, as whether or not it was needful for him to be of use. In a word, was life for him, or was he for life?

His trend of thought was so unwonted that when

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he reached Broadway, it was as if he had wandered into a strange land; that was because he had grown strange to himself.

The theatres had been closed for several hours. Cabs, hansoms and taxicabs whirled past, making more light in the thick fog than did the yellow gaslights of the all-night restaurants. The huge signs, which not long before had given the street the right to be called the "Great White Way," were dying out, or had already lost their incandescent glory. Agostino turned aimlessly toward the south as if going nowhere in particular. Irving felt what the other expressed. He cared nothing about the destination.

One of those sudden February changes that sometimes lend spring fragrance to the breath of winter was abroad. The fog increased, but its humidity became almost warm. Occasionally Irving asked himself why the skulking form of the cat-footed Agostino seemed less real to him than the vision of Winifred's pursuing face, and Arnold's rags. One seemed calling him to arms; the other to inglorious peace. The first suggested arduous endeavor; the second, a purposeless life of ease. Both, however, were in accord on one point. Winifred seemed to say that, as matters stood, she really saw very little difference between Irving and Arnold; Arnold seemed to say, "Of course there's no difference. Both of us are tramps."

Irving's thoughts grew concentrated; they focussed upon this: "What is the use of my life?" It was no longer a foregone conclusion that he must be merely

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an atom in the city mass. There stirred within, the desire to differentiate himself from his fellows. The very desire, undirected as yet, and not quite sure that it was in earnest, sent an odd thrill throughout his body; it was not unlike the effect of a deep draught of sparkling wine. Unconsciously he caught a larger breath. He thought,

“ If I should become one of the world's builders? ”

Agostino did not stop in his southern course till the Battery was almost reached. Suddenly he dived into obscurity, and at first Irving feared him lost; but he reappeared among the jumbled sailors' quarters on South Street, and indicated with crooked finger the door at which Irving would find him in the early morning. After this evasive gesture, he did in truth vanish.

Heartened by this disappearance, Irving faced about, neither sleepy nor weary. His new idea, which as yet, was hardly a resolution, kept stirring his blood: “ If I resolve to become one of the world's builders? ” Accompanied by that thought, he roamed the streets all night long, unconscious of the lapse of time.

He reached Thirty-eighth Street, at the hour before dawn, the most silent hour in the city. Practically all the street lights were extinct. The pavements were blackened by shadows of giant buildings which brooded over the scene of vanished life. They assumed a sinister aspect, as if darkly triumphing in the knowledge that though the workers would come on the morrow, no doubt, and on the morrow after, a day must come when other hands would take up their feverish toil. There

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was now no sound of wheels or hoof-beats; the cars passed only at long intervals like empty shadows of phantom-life. Occasionally an evasive form slipped from some side street, bent, as Irving might well suppose, upon no honest business. Once he came upon a standing policeman, fast asleep, his back propped against a darkened lamp post.

Life seemed at a very low ebb, as if its flow might cease altogether. In the darkness and silence, Irving, abnormally introspective, saw a symbol of his own end, when the fever of his day should chill to nothingness. Once in a while, a sudden blinding flash would spurt out of the gloom as startling as the quick glare of an arc-light, caused by nothing but a flaming match at the end of an unlighted cigar. Then it would go out in a gloom more depressing than before the relief. "Just like me," remarked Irving, grimly prophetic.

In front of dull-faced saloons and noiseless restaurants, strange objects stood in rows, more like Oriental jars for the hiding of Ali Baba's trustful thieves, than garbage barrels awaiting the carts. Underfoot was the crush of an unending carpet of newspaper fragments, cast up by the vast tide of humanity out of the deep of a day's doings. Far away up the hushed canyon of Broadway, shone one lonely light from as far away as Forty-second Street. It was one note of hope in the night's sigh of desolation.

As the blackness began to merge into heavy gray, Irving's thoughts were diverted from himself in contemplating his approaching expedition to the Adams

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home. The all-night restaurants grew a paler yellow in the haze of dawn. Cabmen, waking up in their boxes, down the lonely side streets, clattered into audible existence, for the possible call of tipsy fares. As Irving hailed one of these cabs, the milk-wagons were dashing recklessly along the way — as if to extinguish some fire with the water in their cans. The surface-cars showed the drooping heads of early workmen, half-nodding upon their breasts; baskets and lunch-cans were held listlessly upon knees not yet rested from labors of the previous day.

As Irving was driven toward the spot where he was to find Agostino, he passed parties of young men in half a dozen hansoms, on their way to Central Park, to dissipate the inconvenient fumes of revelry. Madison Square swam like an emerald mystery in the billowy shreds of vapor, and the Flatiron cut the fog like a knife, sending it drifting up the streets on either side. When Irving at last picked up Agostino to bear him back to Madison Square, the city had caught its deep bass monotone which it was to *hum-m-m* through the course of another day.

Irving fancied he detected a new air about Agostino's slinking form. It was natural that he should shun all eyes, for if the Black Handers discovered that he was in the city, they would either extort from Bianca a revelation of his hiding-place, or include her in their vengeance. And yet, Agostino seemed not so much to be shrinking from observation, as to be on the watch himself. As the swarthy, crisp-haired Italian sat face

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to face with the young man, never uttering a word, unless compelled by the American's remorseless sprightliness, it even seemed that his show of terror was considerably exaggerated. Why did he continually press his face to the window, to stare at the increasing crowds, instead of holding himself secure in his dark corner? Yet, if not afraid of discovery, why did he continually moisten his lips with his crimson, cat-like tongue, that little flickering as of flame that impressed Irving so unpleasantly?

The cab stopped at the servants' entrance of the Adams mansion. Agostino slipped to the ground, looked in every other direction than that of the house, then glided toward the open door, still with head turned over his shoulder. The butler was on guard, to be treated as a man, or a post, as the guests thought best.

"Pretty early, is n't it, Williams?" said Irving, cheerfully — he had heard the name but once. "But when you're hiding from the Camorra or Mafia, because they've taken a notion to initiating you, and if you object to riding the goat, the quicker you're indoors the better; eh, Agostino?"

"*Che!*" grunted Agostino, who seemed not so interested in getting indoors, as in seeing who passed in the street. A footman took him in charge.

Irving was conducted to a reception-room, off from the drawing-room; it was bright and cosy, producing an instantaneous impression of homelikeness. When left alone before the open fireplace, he warmed himself in a deep content, lazily enjoying the varying red

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glows cast along polished surfaces from the tiptoeing flames. He breathed deeply, as if to inhale the intangible atmosphere of refinement and family affection. It was now broad daylight, but a grateful twilight lingered in the room, as if to soften the edge of the day's reality.

When Winifred entered—it might very well have been Dr. Adams, but see how fortune smiles upon us!—he was impressed not only by the kindness of her face, but by its perfect health and unaffected loveliness. She had the added charm of appearing before him in the early dawn, an hour that inevitably suggested domesticity, almost intimacy of companionship. To a young man of lodging-house isolation, nothing could have been more charming. It was like a breath from some higher sphere, to which his lungs were not accustomed.

“Good-morning,” said Winifred, cheerily. It was the second time they had shaken hands. “I’ll never be able to repay you for all your trouble in bringing me my model. I knew that, when I consented to your plan. But I am a dreadfully selfish creature, when my work is in question. See how I’ve put myself in debt to you! I’m so remorseful—but not really repentant, I’m afraid, for I’d have to let you do it again, under the same circumstances. I must go to have a look at him, to be sure he’s all here! He’s such a treasure. Will you mind? I’ll be back immediately.”

Irving had not interrupted, because it was so much pleasanter to hear her voice than his own. But now he roused himself with, “It was no trouble; there was no

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end to the adventure of it! However, my mission is ended now, Miss Adams. I turn him over into your hands. And I must go out to work," he added, with a gay smile, "with my own."

Winifred laughed, and, as on the day of their first meeting in the studio, the sound reminded him of a meadow brook among stones. "You are not to go just yet," she declared. "My grandfather would never forgive me if I let you. Please tell me you'll stay. You are to have breakfast with us, and it will be ready in a moment. The whole house has been turned topsy-turvy to humor my designs upon the Italian."

Of course he would stay. The graciousness of her manner, as if making him one of them, touched him with a new dignity. "And there's something I would like very much to tell you, Miss Adams," he said impulsively; "something I've been thinking about all night. I haven't worked it out, completely, but I believe, with your help, I can come to some sort of a decision."

"I will not be gone long," said Winifred. The words, and her manner were disappointing. They had become impersonal. No doubt in his eagerness, he had permitted his eyes to reveal too plainly the depth of his regard. She had not refused his confidence, but her polite reserve had made it impossible for him to put into words what he but vaguely felt. After all, was it better to remain silent concerning that night's strange indecision? It might come to nothing.

As he thought it over, he was glad Winifred had

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checked his impulse. If he ever resolved to be more than he had been, not prediction, but fulfilment should be offered such a girl as Winifred Adams. "A very forceful character," Irving mused. (His ideal of womanhood had never included the quality of forcefulness.) He stood before the fire, hands in pocket. "No softness, no yielding timidity," he reflected. (His ideal of womanhood had always included softness and timidity.) "She's splendid," he murmured; "but she'd always keep a fellow keyed up to his highest pitch. She deserves a royal husband, a real man. It'll be no summer picnic for *him*, either!"

Irving shook his head, smiling. Then he looked about the charming little room, and expanded in its comfort. "Old man," he apostrophized himself, "a fellow would n't ever have to toss up balls, here!"

CHAPTER XV

THE JERRY ROMANCE

WHEN the door again opened, Irving had definitely decided to say no more to Winifred about the battle that had been waged in his mind during the midnight hours. However, it was not Winifred, but a girl of about eighteen, who started to enter, then halted irresolutely. Irving knew it must be Miss Vandever; there was no resemblance to Claude Vandever, but that was explained by the fact that Claude was Mrs. Vandever's son, and she who looked into the room was the daughter of Mr. Vandever. Happily, there was no connection between this dainty little heiress, and the tramp, Arnold.

"I thought Miss Adams was here," she murmured. Here was no question of propriety, but whether or not the good-looking young man might prove interesting.

"No one is here but Mr. Payne," said Irving, quickly. "May he present himself to Miss Vandever?"

Miss Vandever entered, and approached the fireplace, saying, "We got over that very nicely." Her face was rather small, but exceedingly bright. It was lighted up with white flashes when she spoke. She was dressed as a schoolgirl who is soon to put away her books, and add an inch or more to her skirts. At

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present, the heavy dark hair hid her ears and narrowed her face, though the brow was left high; and this narrowing of the clear white full-view, together with the pointed chin, usually held slightly up-tilted, gave an air of tantalizing piquancy. Even her manner was sharp in outline, each swiftly changing mood clear-cut, standing out for itself, with no promise of being merged into a fresh emotion.

"Yes," Miss Vandever continued, "Miss Adams told me how hard it was to get you here, but she does n't mind hard work. Of course one will work awfully hard to have a good time, but *she* will take any amount of trouble just for nothing — I mean, just for some serious object, you know! But of course, she is n't going to paint you before breakfast, is she?" she added, innocently.

"Unfortunately," said Irving, who suspected that she knew better, "if I am ever portrayed, I'll have to do it myself."

"I fear in that case," said Miss Vandever, holding her foot to the fire, "that the picture will flatter you."

"No, it won't," Irving declared, "for I dote on my faults."

It did not matter how brightly the flames darted their rays, for the foot was perfect. "I am afraid," observed the other, with a thoughtful look at Irving, "that you may not be able to see beyond them."

"Yes, indeed. You are beyond them, and I am not only pretty well pleased with myself, but with you, too." That was invited by her daring attack.

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“ Ah,” she said, solicitously, “ but is that good for you? ” She was quoting a line from the latest popular play. Every one ought to know that her catch-words called for the stereotyped answer — “ What is good for me, is bad to me. ” Not, of course, that there was any sense in it, but because a ready answer proved that you knew what was what.

Irving, instead of meeting the test, sidetracked with, “ Thank you for considering my welfare. ” He was charmed with the little creature. This rapid fire of subtle nothings, this adventurous impudence which good looks alone could excuse, was precisely after his own heart. He hoped Winifred would take a very long look at Agostino, and that Dr. Adams would sleep late.

But Miss Vandever was disappointed. Irving, she reflected, was handsome and quick; but neither good looks nor a quick brain outweighs what everybody knows. Still, she ought to try him again; from some mysterious reason, he might have been prevented from hearing of the play, though if he was anybody, the supposition was astounding.

“ Where is the connection? ” she asked. This was the title of the latest popular novel, with each copy of which went a coupon whereon the reader might hazard his guess as to which of the three heroes the heroine preferred. This coupon, if sent to the publisher before a certain date, accompanied by half-a-dollar, stood a chance of winning, as prize, a grand piano. It was incumbent upon Irving to answer, “ I have n't sent in my guess, ” or, “ I have n't paid my fifty cents to find

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out," or something equally apropos and equally fatuous.

But Irving answered, "Somewhere in the future, I hope," thus falling into the grave he had already dug.

Of course she had known he did not belong to her set, but now she concluded that he did n't belong to anybody else's. He was henceforth to her as an infidel, or a Turk, or a book-agent. From her fourth year she had lived in one of New York's largest hotels, in charge of maids and governesses, and directly under the influence of well-tipped and exceedingly wise young bellboys; her intimates had been the children of other divorced, or loosely connected parents. If there was anything in the ways of the world of their own set unknown to these petted children of fortune, they would have liked to know what it was, and would, doubtless, have found out.

When the divorced J. S. Vandever took, as his second wife, a lady who had divorced her first husband, his daughter was fifteen. Up to that time, her sphere had been the hotel-world; but so infinite was its variety that, to her mind, it contained everything worth while. During the three years of her father's second marriage, she had changed. Hotel influences had been as fixed upon her girl's heart, as letters cut in stone; but a seclusive school, a refined home, and a careful step-mother had, as it were, superimposed new symbols upon the old stone-cuttings. To speak of her algebraically, she was the same, plus x . That addition was, as yet, an unknown quantity. What she had been — what to a

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softened degree she was still — cooled her interest in Irving. If he could not talk in the language of the day, she would not talk to him at all.

There was silence, during which she wished Winifred would return, and Irving hoped she would n't. At last, she remarked with a supercilious glance that would have been disagreeable, had her good looks permitted, "You understand, I am only an understudy. I have n't set out yet."

"Still in school?"

"Well — theoretically."

"Then," smiled Irving, "what is good for you, seems bad to you?"

She caught her breath, and a spot of red showed in her cheek. "Treachery!" she cried, accusingly.

"And," Irving added, in triumph, "I did n't spend my fifty cents to find the connection!"

So he had known all the time — known about the play, about the book, and, best of all, had known how to conceal his knowledge. He must know everything! Her relief was so great that she laughed from pure pleasure. The young voice rang out, a little sharp perhaps, a trifle louder than Winifred's, but irresistibly infectious. Irving laughed with her, delightedly.

"Don't you know," she exclaimed, pointing her finger at him, "I took you for an Indian?"

They were still laughing when Winifred returned, accompanied by her grandfather. The newcomers were not at all surprised at sounds of mirth from these two,

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so recently strangers, because Dr. Adams understood Irving thoroughly, and Winifred knew Miss Vandever to the innermost fibre of her complex being. Presently all were seated at the breakfast-table, Winifred at the head; the doctor, of course, at the foot; Miss Vandever on one side, and Irving in Paradise. To the young man there was a zest about the morning hour impossible to the others, a zest heightened by allowing his mind, at sly intervals, to steal away to eating wagons and hot-coffee stands, and the partitioned corner of Mr. Burl's studio.

When Irving first heard Miss Vandever addressed as "Jerry," he thought himself mistaken; afterwards, he accepted it as a most fitting name. "Jerry" was perhaps not poetic; neither was the bearer of the name; it suggested something masculine, and there was a knowingness about this girl which spread out rather thinly over an immense territory of knowledge, utterly at variance with the old-fashioned notion of femininity. Jerry acted upon Irving like champagne, stimulating, vivifying, carrying him beyond himself, yes, much farther than his usual mark,— as a man may jump with a strong wind at his back. She was as intensely modern as himself, as Winifred, as Jessie Tiff. All lived in to-day, but each so differently, they were connected by little else than the day's span.

When Jerry addressed Irving, as she did almost exclusively, his answer was bubbling to the surface before her lips had paused. After his response, she would

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come again, with a flash of light all over her face; then he would meet her with sabre stroke. And so it went on.

Dr. Adams watched them with a sort of paternal satisfaction. He had known Jerry's mother before her first marriage; he had been her family physician for so many years that the step-daughter was to him a mere child in short dresses, whose ankles were still to have a look at the world for a long, long time. Perhaps she would never grow up. Her very name stood, to the doctor, not for worldly wisdom, but for immaturity. She was only Jerry — why should n't she laugh, and talk nonsense, and make unblushing advances to Irving? So the old fellow listened with that smile that caused his chin-dimple to quiver. What they were saying was not worth a snap of his finger; it was the way they said it that rested his mind. Both of them were deluded with the notion that their words had pith. The doctor knew them to be nothing but words; but he knew, as well, that his knowledge of their futility had been paid for by a good many years at the bargain counter of Experience.

So the genial physician did not secretly laugh at them because they thought themselves wise; and by no means did he betray that he looked upon them as very young. It matters not how carefully the old cover up the traces of their age, if they let their consciousness of difference peep through.

As for Winifred, charming and gracious hostess, and perfect friend, she withdrew entirely behind the coffee-

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urn, that Jerry might have all the glory of conquest. Her thoughts were so engaged with details of her day's work, that Jerry's visit seemed most opportune. Winifred was not always equal to light repartee when paints and canvas and a great idea called from the attic studio. But she had the tact not to mar the fine web that others were spinning, though she might not add a silken thread of her own. There was no hint to Irving of her serious purposes, nor of her lack of sympathy in his frivolous view of life. If Irving fancied her farewell smile too distant, he misunderstood the reason; as she saw him depart, she was thinking less of him than of Agostino.

When Irving went to his downtown office, he felt that something had entered his life to make it fuller and richer. His night's adventure into unknown aspirations was half forgotten. All day long the blue-prints smiled down upon him as celestial trimmings to the whiteness of his joyous memories of the early morning. Those blue-prints had been ugly until to-day. What a bright day was to-day, to be sure! — so full of flashing thoughts and stimulating light-points! And are not all eyes gray? — and all hair scalloped in dark waves over tiny ears? And all ankles — what shall we say? There is no word.

Jessie had had ankles, too, once upon a time; but do we think of them, we who are to return to Dr. Adams's at dusk, to carry off Agostino to hiding, in our cab and, incidentally — think of that incidentally — to eat dinner with Dr. Adams and Winifred and — and Jerry!

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But where else should we go? where else eat? What know we of lodging-houses, or dingy little restaurants with sanded floors? Surely it was not *we* who thought ourselves happy with Jessie Tiff by our side, her hard-worked little fingers lying in our palm? We still bear the name of Irving Payne, it seems, though even that should be something else, so far removed are we from a world that any Wedging inhabits. Thus have the white face-flashings of a young girl consumed the foundations of our high resolves, consumed them so thoroughly that we do not suspect we are treading in ashes!

At dusk Irving — for, after all, there is only one of him — betakes himself to the brownstone of departed fashion, in whose neighborhood a few siren-voices are still to be heard, faintly calling above the roaring rocks of commercialism. And as he goes, it seems almost incredible that he has seen Jerry Vandever but a brief hour; indeed, it is incredible; for he has seen her during the entire day. He has the right to feel that he knows her well. It is odd how one's blood, or muscle, or bone, can tingle, shooting forth little pains, long before the days of rheumatism! The thought of Jerry's vivid personality produced such pains, much more old-fashioned than she. Of course it was not love, so brief had been the acquaintanceship. And yet, love has no more need of time, than has eternity for day-clocks. So, he *might* have fallen in love, only he had not; though he told himself, one never knows.

It was a marvellous Jerry who sat opposite him at dinner, a Jerry a thousand times more coruscating,

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more scintillating, more divinely luminous, than any Jerry could possibly be at half-past six in the morning. The fact is, Jerry was greatly pleased with Irving; he was new to her experience, varied as that experience was, and he proved *so* adaptable! And Jerry, from her baby days, was accustomed to going after anything she wanted. Therefore she went after Irving, with all sail spread, taking the highest sea with a firm hand on the rudder.

She was used to conversational bouts with young fellows to whom a college or university atmosphere adhered, youths who give you blow for blow, as quickly as you send; the efficiency of the blow depending not upon force, but on rapidity of execution. Irving gave not only as good as you sent, but often better. She found her conversation with Irving an exceedingly yeasty affair, its froth produced by swift and violent action cast up from waves of native humor; not — as she usually discovered in others — from an inherent mediocrity. Here was no contest of who should be the first to get to the stock phrases of the day, or who should begin to revive the wan ghosts of once-vital slang. Their words came swift and easy and futile, like the tossing back and forth of rubber balls. Jerry found her best powers called into play, and, even then, was kept doubtful as to the issues of the engagement. Her interest in the young man grew; it warmed into admiration; it expanded into the blossoming hope that she might see more of him, be with him oftener, to whet her wits against his flashing blade.

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We fear we have given too high an idea of the repartee at Dr. Adams's dinner-table, to expose our own weakness, by seeking to reproduce it. Moreover, such conversation is suited only to the hour and circumstance. That sparkle would seem flat upon this page, should Irving, or Jerry, find it coldly served forth. It might, at this late day, cause a sigh, Heaven knows how deep, for the time when one's young heart felt no shadow. "Did I say *that*?" Jerry might ask, looking with coolly critical eye at her own warmed-over epigram. "How absurd!" Or, "Did I really laugh aloud just at *this* point? But what was I laughing about?" What, indeed?

In the meantime, one must not suppose that Winifred was still upstairs, painting away, in the twilight. Physically, she was at her place, just as if she were *all* there. But mentally, she was gone. The gay badi-nage of her guests suited her admirably, because it permitted her thoughts to concentrate upon her picture of Judas Iscariot. She was deeply abstracted, in seeking to visualize her conception, even to the extent of a little frown in the broad forehead. When Irving should go, when Claude Vandever should come for his step-sister, when in a word, only she and her grandfather had the house to themselves, then, oh, then, how she would fly to the attic where her ideals were wont to unfold!

The time at last came for Irving to bear away Agostino in cab-seclusion. He must say good-bye to Jerry, with no surety of seeing her again, save as youth

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itself gave bond. Dr. Adams had opened the evening paper and was determinedly reading it. He had no difficulty in obtaining his own consent for this rudeness, since Irving and Jerry saw only each other, and Winifred was steeped in a dream of colors. Suddenly the doctor looked up with —

“Who was that rascal that threatened to dynamite Agostino before Sunbeam could paint him?”

With difficulty, Irving extracted his thoughts from the enmeshing net of Jerry's raillery. “Pasquale,” he answered, seeing the doctor as from a long way off, as if he had been no bigger than a man's hand.

“*Hum!*” Dr. Adams grunted. “Well! All I have to say is — poor Pasquale!”

Pasquale was even then in Purgatory. Candles were burning for his soul, in this world, while his particular saint was looking after his interests in the next. The paper gave all essentials in eye-gripping headlines, then narrated the main facts in the leading paragraph.

That morning, Pasquale had been found in his bed, stone dead, with a stiletto in his back. It was fortunate that his old enemy, one Agostino, was not in the city, and had not been seen for ten days at least, otherwise, one might have suspected Agostino of the crime. Every one occupying Pasquale's floor of the tenement — it was a modern tenement, fairly clean and well-kept — was known to be a bosom friend of the *restaurateur*, with one exception. The exception was a young girl, known as Bianca. Bianca was a peaceable and well-disposed young woman, a friend of

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Agostino's, but not at all unfriendly to Pasquale. It could n't have been Bianca, because there had been a struggle; the murder had evidently been committed by a man. And, since it was not Bianca, it seemed certain that the criminal could not have been an inmate of the tenement.

Having related the principal facts, the newspaper repeated every one of them in amplified form; and, having done that, it went into copious details, none of which added any light, and interjected several woodcuts of the tenement, which lent an additional touch of ink-blurred mystery. It was clearly the work of the "Black Hander," and would go at that.

Dr. Adams touched the bell, and told the butler to bring Agostino — "Not in here, mind you," added the doctor, with a look of pronounced distaste, "but to the door, where Mr. Payne will join him."

But, Williams explained, apologetically, Agostino was gone.

"Gone?"

Yes; he had refused to wait to be conveyed hence by Mr. Payne. He had informed the butler that he no longer feared the Black Handers. "He went right out into the street, bold and open," Williams concluded; "he said that he had had a dream, and it was all right."

When the butler vanished, all in the room were thinking the same thought, but no one cared to express it. And so Agostino had had a dream? Well, Irving had his dream, also — let us hope of no such desperate

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consequences. With no Agostino, there was no use, now, for Irving. Let him say good-bye.

His farewells were spoken, not as if he were about to set forth for Europe, but as if on the eve of departure to another planet. From Europe, one comes back; but his service to Art warranted no social relationships. To Winifred he was a shade reserved, not because he felt resentment at her past effort to improve him, but because she had so soon relinquished the attempt, and above all, because she had shown herself unwilling to receive confidences. With little Jerry Vandever, he had a last passage of arms, and, when she struck a blow that he might have parried, he let it fall, to show her that his heart was touched.

Farewells with Dr. Adams were of a more practical nature. The elderly gentleman was as adamant in his resolution to make good all actual expenses; and though pecuniary considerations were like a dash of cold water to the young man, he was compelled to draw forth his notebook — that little volume of his daily expenses which had never suggested to his methodical mind the expediency of laying by a penny. As man to man, Irving revealed how much Agostino had cost him, and as man to man, the doctor made good the cost. Thus Irving came out even, as to outlay, with all his adventures, and Jerry Vandever, thrown in.

That night, for the first time, Irving took possession of the skylight-room which Jessie, on account of her trustfulness in Mrs. Sadie Wyse, had been obliged to relinquish. As Irving climbed the stairs of Gotham

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Repose, and after them, the carpeted ladder, there came vividly to his mind, the night when the dainty feet and plump ankles of the shopgirl descended into his world. The skylight-room seemed to cry aloud of Jessie; it was almost as if she had been bodily present, — no doubt her thoughts were there. The air was sweet with a faint perfume that seemed to emanate from her inner being, like a breath that hovers after lips are cold. Everywhere he found reminders of her. On the table were odds and ends of ribbons, worthless, yet eloquent. The bed was the same that had upheld her form so round, so warm, apparently so eternally young. The wall-hooks had held suspended her garments purchased with so much toil, kept neat with so great labor. That skylight, now black and cheerless, had looked down upon her day after day and night after night, uttering, alas! no knowledge.

All the influences to which Irving had been susceptible during his Madison Square sojourn, seemed to melt and fuse into the environment of "Lee's Triangle." Memories of Jerry and Jessie blended. He sighed pensively. All seemed so softly sad, so mildly lonesome; everything — this life, you understand — was so at odds with itself, and with oneself! There came the startled thought that perhaps he had loved Jessie, a few weeks ago, had loved her, after all! Had he? Who knows?

Or perhaps it was Jerry who caused a weight to settle upon his heart. Or perhaps his blood ran faster because his struggle of the night before was about to

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be renewed. Was it enough, this skylight-room, with all it stood for? And even Jerry Vandever, with her splendid world of gay futility — was *that* enough? To be content with less than one's utmost reach is no virtue; is it a vice? Into Irving's sentimental regrets and indefinite longings a certain entering wedge of inflexible, self-questioning was being driven — not very deep, because the driving force came mainly from without, but deep enough to awaken the old questions: Was there not something more, something better, something else?

CHAPTER XVI

TRAMPS AND KISSES

WITHOUT pausing to analyze the change of moods experienced by Irving during the next two months, let us pass to two events in which he took the leading part, with the hope that he may express himself more fully than could any historian, however impartial.

Of his lodging-house life, it is enough to say that Wedging had disappeared, presumably in the direction of Wall Street; that nothing more was heard of the dignified and sadly conscienceless Mrs. Sadie Wyse; that to Monsieur and Madame du Pays was soon restored their five-dollar advance; that Jessie faded, by-and-by, to the dim perspective of a mere Tiff; and that, when Irving thought of Agostino as stealing to Pasquale's bedroom, stiletto in hand, he felt that he had no more to do with the matter than had the police.

But the young man's interest in Dick Arnold, so far from diminishing, grew upon him, till he found himself giving much of his thought to the careless vagabond. It finally led him to seek out the disreputable neighborhood in which he had found shelter from the police raid, on the night of the gathering of the poor

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at Rutgers Square. Arnold was not at home, but Irving left a note on the littered table, saying that he would call, the following night, at eight. The hour named found the railroad clerk climbing the steep, ill-lighted stairs of the tenement, and Arnold standing in his open door.

The greetings of Arnold were boisterous and sincere. "Come right in!" he exclaimed, grasping his guest's hand and wringing it vigorously. "Come right in, and don't be afraid I'll try to sell you any pencils. I've built up a fire fit for the king of romancers, and there on the table is one of his books. I've not read a word of it, think of that! A book by Dumas, mind you, altogether unexplored, with very likely half a dozen sequels to come, in due order, so that when you're done, you've only fairly begun. And here is a friend to cap the climax; a friend through thick and thin, or surely you'd never have visited me in this grimy den, eh? It is n't a matter of business, I hope, eh? You've not come for any serious purpose, I trust, eh?"

"I have, though," said Irving; but his smile was not alarming. At first, he was considerably disappointed. The street was more squalid, the tenement more rife with evil smells and jangling noises, than he had remembered; the bedroom of the socialist was barer and bleaker than he had cared to believe; and Dick Arnold had lost much of the advantage which remoteness and a partial memory afforded.

And yet, by the time the other had checked his genial flow of buoyant speech, Irving found his mind return-

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ing to its former impressions. The little panting stove, the scratched chairs, the shabby bed, and the slovenly table, formed Arnold's appropriate setting; and Arnold himself became something more than a drifting wreck; his inextinguishable spark of *camaraderie* glowed from among the ashes of a wasted career. To the degree that Irving came under the influence of Arnold's lazy content and frank exaltation of the senses to that degree rags and squalor faded to negligible quantities. One's heart may pass through fire to reach one's friend; but when it can go through an outer crust of squalid rags, there must indeed be a strong appellatory force in the man behind those rags.

"What! You have a serious purpose? So much the worse. I will not listen to a word you have to say," cried Arnold, with prodigious resolution, "until you give the password. It is '*D'Artagnan*.'"

"'*D'Artagnan*,'" repeated Irving, unhesitatingly; "if he were in a hundred books instead of only six, we could not have enough of him."

"*Bon, bon!*" cried Arnold, clapping him upon the back. "So you, too, are one of us? Sit down. Spend the rest of the night with me, what do you say? Let's talk until our throats grow husky, or read aloud about my dear Chicot or Porthos. Forget that you are well-tailored and clean, and I swear, I'll never once see any difference between you and me. And do you like a crappy, or black bass, most deliciously browned? Or an oyster stew that will break your heart because there's not an 'r' in every month of the year? I know the

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place, and it's open all night long. Or if it's music, I'll have down my fiddle and my bow — Uncle Ned! — and we'll lose ourselves in five flats; or the *Traumerei* — that suits me best, it's my story in slow notes. Do you know, it always makes me think of that sad line in 'The Man of the Iron Mask' where my beloved D'Artagnan is going along to meet his fate — you remember? His best friends were dead, then. It goes something like this: 'And then D'Artagnan went on alone — always alone.' You see? Like me. Only, he had never married, had n't D'Artagnan. So I'm one ahead in adventures. Ha!" He shook his head. "But it's good to see you over there, my friend. This is what I call life."

"Don't call it that," Irving remonstrated, striving to regain the purpose of his visit. "I'll admit that it's — that it has its compensations. But you were meant for something better than this, Mr. Arnold. Not that I fail to see the atmosphere from your point of view. But you are only camping-out, on the edge of existence. This is n't life, you know; it's only a between while."

"So much the better," returned Arnold, serenely. "Camping is my avocation. I'm just a Gipsy, and mighty glad to have you leave your life to pay me a visit, and share with me my between-whiles. I suppose you spend your days in the awful boredom of taking yourself seriously — and very right, too. It is n't given to every man to live in a tent, my boy."

"There was a time, and not long ago," said Irving,

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impetuously, "when I was a harmless sort of an idiot —"

"I hope," said Arnold, with a grin, "that you've come into Solomon's riches, along with his wisdom, eh?"

Irving laughed.

"I'm a Gipsy," Arnold repeated, "therefore a fortune-teller. I'll tell your fortune. You are a brunette, young and unmarried. Very good. You have come across a worthless castaway, and, strangely enough, you find yourself taking an interest in a fellow who talks Latin, and eats with his knife. You want to take away his knife, and dress him decently. You think he is throwing away his opportunities. You are right enough. You've come here to tell me that you've found me a respectable job. Heavens! A job! Look you, my boy, why should I labor, when I can have all I want for nothing? *You* labor; what are you more than I? Clothes? decent lodgings? But these are no part of you. They are nothing. It's only the soul-part of us that's worth while, and souls wear neither rags nor dress-suits. When your soul and mine appear at the Final Court of Appeals, side by side, I should like to think — the Judge will not say, 'Soul, where are thy patched, or thy carefully-creased trousers?' No, no! He will say, 'Behold! here are two tramps. They did nothing for the world, and now we can do nothing for them.'"

Arnold said this so whimsically, and so good-naturedly, that Irving laughed louder than before,

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though somewhat ruefully. But after the forced mirth, he rose and said with resolution, "That will not be said about my soul, Mr. Arnold; and I mean to see to it that yours also escape such condemnation. You're judging me by what I was. I grant you, I'm nothing yet," he hastened to say; "but I'm beginning to look about. You're right in guessing that I've found you work. Look here! As you say, I have taken an interest in you—I can't get you out of my mind. Come! You're not willing to waste so much of my thought-time, are you? Be reasonable, and get out of my brain."

"Good!" said Arnold, laughing heartily. "But how?"

"You remember that when your old friend Agostino was hiding from the Black Handers, he stayed at my foster-parents' over in Jersey? Well, while there, he was employed to do gardening, by the Little Neighbor—that's what we call her among ourselves—a widow, who has a greenhouse, just across the street from us."

"The Little Neighbor?" Arnold repeated thoughtfully. "That's a friendly sort of title. I like it. Don't ever change it. And in this greenhouse, there's digging to be done, eh? And you think I might take Agostino's place? It sounds very interesting—all except the digging. That is the part that would never suit me. You didn't propose my services, I hope?"

"Yes, I did. I went home last Sunday, and made it a point to drop in at the greenhouse. I told her about you."

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Arnold stared at Irving blankly.

“I tried to make her see you as I see you,” Irving continued, as the silence grew strained. “The Little Neighbor was immensely interested, and so sympathetic.”

“You told her my name?” stammered Arnold, rising to open the door. There was no one listening in the hall,—had the suspicion caused him to make this movement? Perhaps he needed more air, for the room was not well ventilated.

“Yes, I told her your name, of course. Why not?”

“Did she agree to let me come to work for her?”

“She did n’t refuse. I know it’ll be all right.”

“So you know that? Oh, the knowledge of youth and inexperience! It’s past belief. But the fact is, Mr. Payne,—I mean the fact apart and aside from the very Alps or Gibraltar of fact—that I could never dig, *never*—the fact is, that I am about to go away.”

“From New York?” asked Irving, disappointed at the reception of his plan.

“Yes—oh, it’s possible. There really are other places, you know, even in April. My time of vagrancy is here. The road calls. ‘Paddock,’ I think Shakespeare names it. Perhaps it is feline. No matter. At any rate, I’ll get, for a season, from under Agostino’s thumb. He’s a hard master. Don’t look so crestfallen, poor philanthropist! Let’s forget it, and enjoy the night. Really, I shall come back, some day, come back alone—‘always alone.’ And yonder’s the spit of land in Sheepshead Bay where I want to be

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buried. I passed some lazy summers there, lying prone in the sun, burrowing in the sand with little Bianca laughing and dancing at the edge of the tide. Oh, the jolly life of the irresponsible ge'man of the road! What a bonanza I'd have been to Monsieur *Doom-iss!* I ought to have made a series, don't you think? Book First — Early life, and marriage, and respectability — a very, very thin volume, that should be, for it would necessarily be rather dull; respectability always is pretty heavy, is n't it? And then would come the real story. I'd rather he'd written a part of it than lived it, myself. But — *brisons là dessus!* Ah, pardon! My knowledge has suffered a leak."

"You are *too* bad!" cried Irving, vivaciously. "You would n't be so disappointing, if you were n't so promising. I tell you again, my friend — for I am your friend, as you suggest, even through your rags — rags of which you are not worthy, since they can't help themselves, and you could. I tell you again, I am determined not to give you up. Come and work for the Little Neighbor." His tone grew persuasive. "Live in the open air, Mr. Arnold; be as free as you like, only — pay as you go; don't beat your way through life. You will say that I'm no better. A few weeks ago, that may have been so. But I'm trying my best to find the true vein in my metal; I mean to work it for all it's worth. Maybe you could help me."

The young man was so earnest and sincere, and at the same time so unaffectedly modest, that Arnold was deeply moved. For a few moments he regarded in

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silence the flushed face and purposeful eyes of his guest. He cast aside his own mask of easy indifference. It was impossible, of course, to erase the lines of the dissipation of years, and, now that he had become serious, the red face, the heavy lax form, and the general air of self-indulgence, became more pronounced. He seemed, himself, to realize that the character of jester was unescapable; and, when he presently made response, his manner indicated that he meant deeply what he said, but could hardly expect it to be received seriously.

“Did n’t you understand, the other day, when I told you that a certain deed had cut me off from society? If you’ve forgotten, recollect. I tell you plainly, if I were such a fool as to try to regain my old place in the world, all the world, on recognizing me, would cry out, and the latter state of that man would be worse than the first.”

Irving interposed: “Yes, I’ve thought over what you said about that. But I am more and more convinced that it’s a crime to allow any one deed to ruin a life. I don’t know what kind of deed you committed. I don’t care. It was just one deed. Is it to prevent you from accomplishing a thousand good ones?”

“If I’m to have any peace of mind,” Arnold exclaimed, hastily, “I must be engulfed in oblivion. I must look up at life from the bottom of a well. To revert to your former figure, which pleases me, I must camp out, Gipsy-like, at the edge of existence. On account of old ties, or tangles, I’m too closely bound

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up in the history of other folk, to put forth an independent history of my own. Should I make any sort of a mark in the world, people would ask, 'Where does he come from?' Too many would know."

"If you changed your name —"

"All the time, there 'd be the fear of discovery, like crumbling mortar between the bricks I should try to set in place. No. As it is, I can loiter about the home of my birth, about the house to which I brought my young bride, and nobody suspects — for Arnold is only a tramp. And, to be just, I am not the original Arnold. I 'm a sort of ghost, haunting the grave of my departed self."

Then his manner grew more cheerful. He lighted his pipe, and waved Irving back to his seat. "You must n't think I 'm unhappy. There 's nothing that so makes for contentment, as drawing a circle about yourself to exclude the unattainable. Of course *you* have n't the artist's hand to do that, for youth never sees the line that divides it from the impossible — looks right over it — always feverishly striving for what is not within its reach. But I have drawn this circle which shuts out wealth, fame, a home, and even the companionship of such a friend as you. Well, having drawn my circle, I do not look beyond it, but regard the possibilities of my small territory. I find good books, unlimited travel, an excellent digestion, and a charitable world."

"Charity!" Irving protested. "Is sustenance a favor, or a right?"

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“ My friend, do not begrudge me the kindly smiles that help me along the way; even if eyes look at me through tears, am I not worthy of them? Who is more to be pitied — the man who works and fails, or the man who does nothing? Yes, a favor; I have no right to anything, even to you. Don't laugh at the world because it is kind to the tramp — neither is hurt by the kindness. You 'd help a fellow across the street, if you found him hobbling on crutches. And a tramp is a cripple in heart or mind — only his body is sound.”

Irving felt the subtle appeal for sympathy, and allowed himself to come completely under the domination of the other's influence. The memory of that night lingered with him throughout life; it was so different from any other experience, and its sensations were so completely made up of inexplicable sentiment. He had not intended to remain long, yet when once he had accepted Arnold's point of view, he desired to linger. There was something about the tramp that had always appealed to him as intensely human and adventurously fascinating. Arnold, in himself, seemed one huge adventure. As they took turns about at the book, one reading a chapter, then the other, it seemed that these two, and not the mere fictitious characters, were swaggering up to Paris inns, engaging in duels in the first chapter and swearing eternal friendship in the next.

Irving, agreeably to his taste for rechristening people and places, substituted his name and Arnold's, for the principal heroes, taking care to Gallicize them that they might not discredit their setting. Thus he was

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“Irvilonne Paynos,” while the elder was “Ricardo Arnois.” Some confusion resulted, for when it came Arnold’s turn to read, he invariably called the star actor by his own name. When Irving concluded his chapter, “Irvilonne Paynos” might be on the eve of unhorsing “Arnois”; but when Arnold came to the book, it was “Paynos” who rolled in the dust. If this damaged the fabric of the plot, it produced, on the other hand, so much hilarity that when, at last, the two fared forth for the fish-restaurant, they were sore from much laughter.

Even during their discussion of delectably fried bass, recurring shreds of memory would, as it were, tickle their nostrils, causing sudden outbursts, closely akin to sneezes. Blandly insensible to the immense amount of attention they attracted, they at last rose, fresh for a renewal of the bout.

Arnold had scarcely tasted his wine — had he been alone — “but I drank so much in the book,” he declared, “that I can hardly walk a straight line.” Then, when they regained the street, he said, with a touch of sentiment, “The fact is, ‘Irvilonne,’ you act just like champagne on my system.”

They returned to the tenement, and again Irving wondered to find all so dark, so noisome, so unclean. And again, it was not long before all things were transformed by the magic touch of a genial personality. There was more of “Arnois” and “Irvilonne”; there was more, much more, talking beside the little stove. Arnold had down his violin, and might have grown

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melancholy, had not a petition to desist come from across the airshaft, in the shape of a boot, whose iron heel left its round-robin on the door panel.

At parting, in the gray dawn, Arnold explained that he was going away that very day; and when Irving exclaimed that he was sorry to have him vanish out of his life, the tramp said laughingly, "Oh, I may see you again." Then he added, "Are you on your way to the studio?"

"Yes, I'm supposed to be sleeping there, to-night. Why not come that far with me? It is n't late. And you know the way — you've been there before."

Arnold made a grimace. "Yes, I went there to save Agostino's life. I would n't go back for anything less pressing. It's an awful distance. It carries me so far back into the past, that I almost lose myself."

"Did you know Mr. Burl, in your past life?"

"I wish you'd promise me one thing," said Arnold, with sudden earnestness: "Never mention my name to him. Yes, I knew Mr. Burl, once upon a time. He did n't recognize me, the night Pasquale went there to hunt Agostino. I should think not! If I'd told him who I was, he would hardly have believed it. People change so. *O tempora! O mores!* Good-night. Give me your hand again. Don't forget 'Arnois.' And some day you may look for him."

The effect of this visit upon Irving seemed out of all proportion to the cause. While eating his herring and dried halibut, while boiling his cocoa, and washing his tins behind the studio-screen, it seemed inevitable that

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he should always be comparing his life with that of the tramp. If Jerry Vandever could have seen him thus! At night, in his skylight-room, he washed his handkerchiefs — to enter no farther into particulars — where Jessie Tiff had washed hers, that he might make weekly payments to Mr. Burl on that debt contracted for one night of pleasure. Had Jerry seen that!

And it seemed no longer worth while. Truly, he was not the care-free gentleman he had been, in the ante-Jerry days. But was it because of Jerry? Sometimes he wondered if the impressions Jerry had produced would not be weakened by a second interview, if he would not find her less fascinating at short range, if he had not magnified her charms, attributing to her certain qualities in himself. And then, sometimes, even at the office, he would find himself smiling at some Jerry-recollection, a look, a word,— smiling, it might be, under the very eye of the cold-blooded chief-clerk; and with the smile might come a sudden realization of himself. He did not wish Jerry on a lower plane. He was not sure that he wished Jerry at all; but he desired to be lifted to her side, within reach, at any rate. No circle circumscribed this young man's longings. And with his longings, his resolution grew.

In the meantime, you would have thought that he did n't know there was a Central Park. He cared for life, not topography. A place was interesting to him, only as a place in which to live. Fifth Avenue called insistently. He heard, but could not go. But there flowered within him that tenacious resolution to go up

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some day to possess the land. This definiteness of purpose had already changed the tenor of his life. It even gave him a new look. But he was still working for twenty a week. One may have new looks on a small salary. Occasionally Irving strolled to the Washington Arch, and stared — one might have thought, threateningly — stared up the beginning of Fifth Avenue. One day his would be the right to tread that prosperous thoroughfare, not as a visitor, but as a denizen. In the meantime, he halted at the Washington Arch, biding his time, conserving his forces, *à la* Valley Forge.

The next incident worthy of record, after Irving's parting with Dick Arnold, was that of the mysterious kiss. We need make little of the young man's indefatigable efforts to land a better job than the one he held in the Broadway railroad office, since his intriguing with men in power, and friends out of power, came to nothing. That he was persistently looking about for work in some field that promised promotion, is mentioned to indicate that his ambitions were not inert wishes. The mysterious kiss was in no way connected with his resolution to get on in the world. Kisses seldom are; yet they seem none the less interesting because of that.

The event could never have taken place, but for Irving's overworked condition. He came to the studio, one noon, completely fagged out. The very brightest of his hopes of advancement had been destroyed by the promotion of an inexperienced kinsman of the general manager. Irving's disappointment was keen. He did not want to

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blunt the edge of it by making a pretence that anything was as usual. He had no appetite, and would not light his oilstove. It seemed that everything ought to stop a while, before a renewal of the daily routine. He threw himself into an armchair, glad to find Mr. Burl away. Talking would be unnecessary; everything was unnecessary, even thinking. He suffered his mind to lie prone, unresisting and oppressed, beneath the burden of the great failure. In a short time, he was sleeping heavily.

How long he slept before the too comfortable fire, could not be known. He was awakened in the strangest manner. Somebody's lips were pressed upon his, not violently, but softly, lingeringly, with a communicated sense of tenderness. His first fancy was that he lingered in Dreamland, while a dream Jerry bent over his chair. If he were dreaming, what could be gained by opening his eyes? He waited for another dream-kiss, but it did not come. There was a rustling sound near him, as of skirts and footsteps withdrawing.

The sounds were so realistic that it came to him, with startling conviction, that real lips had kissed him; and that the faint, indefinable perfume, that seemed to linger in his hair as if from another's contact, was a significant reality; and yet that the face he had imagined bending over him, with its white flashes shading away to softest rose, was not Jerry, but only his thought of her.

That thought of Jerry was now dismissed, not only as unlikely, but as inadequate. He was conscious of a

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wonderful, ill-defined emotion, as inexplicable as it was profound, such as no kiss of Jerry, whether in dream or waking-hour, could have produced. Confused and thrilled, it seemed that for a moment he durst not open his eyes. The lips that had pressed his own, had seemed to plead for secrecy.

When he was wide-awake, he discovered Winifred Adams standing not far from the blue-and-gold vase where he had first seen her. Her gaze was intent upon him. He stared back, catching his breath, with the involuntary thought, "Could it have been she?" The inevitable suspicion brought a ruddy glow to his cheeks. She saw the tell-tale color, and answered with an almost imperceptible blush.

Her brown eyes did not falter. The young man hastily rejected his first thought. It was easier to think that Jerry had kissed him in a dream than that Winifred had in reality. However, a kiss from Winifred was unthinkable. But in the meantime, every instant of silence made matters worse. The young man gave his short laugh, now much confused.

"How would I do," he asked, "for 'The Sleeping Sentinel'?" He rose.

"Not at all," said Winifred, "for in that case, I must be the enemy, and really, this is n't an ambushade." Her voice had the old freshness, the old naturalness, the old revivifying influence. It caused him to breathe deeper. She continued, with admirable calm: "Grandfather brought me here this morning for my farewell visit to Uncle Christopher. I'm spending the day. I insisted

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that I would n't be lonesome, if they went to see about my cabin for the voyage. I think it will be several hours before they return." Then she added, as if giving a needful explanation, "Uncle Christopher said you would n't come here to-day."

"He said that?" Irving exclaimed, feeling unreasonably aggrieved. "I don't know why he should have thought so; I have n't missed a day for the past two months." (To himself: "No, it could n't have been Winifred, it *could n't* have been. Besides, why should she? I am nothing in the world to her. And even if I were —") Irving's face was again red.

Winifred was almost alarmingly cool and contained, as she responded with, "He did n't tell me why; but he said very positively, that he knew, he *knew* you would not come to the studio to-day."

Irving looked at her blankly. He felt a desire to take Mr. Burl by his goatee. "Anyway," he declared, "I am here." ("It was somebody else, for kissed I was, and that I can swear!") "And so you are all alone?"

"They will come back by the time I've painted Uncle Christopher a little remembrance," Winifred said. If she had purposely avoided a direct answer, her manner did not betray caution.

"I'm afraid you'll think me rude, Miss Adams. The fact is, I woke up from such an extraordinary dream — do you believe in dreams?"

"Yes, but only as dreams. You did n't know I am going voyaging, did you?" she asked with a friendly little smile that seemed to accept him as a friend of the

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family. "To-morrow I sail for Italy, to be gone six months." She looked at him with her smiling clear eyes, as if to show that there were no shadows on the hilltops.

He was sensible of a poignant regret. It seemed such a pity that Winifred should leave New York. The city would be so empty! (To himself: "It is very certain that whoever kissed me, she did it before Winifred came into the room. I can't ask her, 'Do you know I have been kissed?' Besides, there's something of mystery in all this, much deeper and stranger than the question of mere identity.") To Winifred: "I am so sorry that you are going away, Miss Adams." His manner was impetuous, heart-felt. "I am *so* sorry."

Into Winifred's cheeks came again the slight color his first blush had evoked. But her voice was cool, oh, so much too cool! "I am surprised to hear that."

"You have a right to be surprised," he said, speaking rapidly. "You and Dr. Adams were both very kind and cordial in asking me to come back, after that little adventure with Agostino. I will tell you why I never came. It's because I was waiting to bring you a bit of work partly of your own hands. What do you think I mean by that? I mean a different — a changed Irving Payne. Do you remember our conversation on that trip to Jersey? And are you sorry to share in the partnership?"

"Grandfather thought me dreadfully dogmatic," Winifred murmured.

"I thought so myself," said Irving, snatching at his

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watch, and dismayed to find that it was almost time to go to work. "At any rate, you showed me myself in a sadly uncomplimentary light —" he smiled a little ruefully — "but, as it happened, and as I knew at the time, it was the true light."

"Oh!" said Winifred remorsefully, "but —" But what more could she say? Of course it was the true light. It was Irving's acceptance of the fact, that touched her.

"So I determined," he went on, almost breathlessly, "not that very hour, of course; not that night, though I walked the streets till morning, thinking it over. But, in the course of time, I made up my mind to be one of the world's builders. That's my determination to-day. I have the strength and skill. I have n't found the lumber, or the nails yet, but I'm hunting. What I meant to do, as soon as I'd found them, was to come to you, and say, 'Watch me — I'm going to build!'" He gave his whimsical laugh which, nevertheless, was very much in earnest.

Winifred laughed too, and her laugh was a happy one. She was very glad. "The materials' are n't of so much consequence," she declared. "The resolution's the main thing."

Irving cried out, with a nod, "I've got it!"

Winifred impulsively extended her hand. She thought him splendid. They were sitting by the fire, in the chairs of Mr. Burl and Dr. Adams; they faced each other; Irving held his open watch upon his knee, racing against time. At one moment she was telling

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of her labors and plans, as to a *confrère* — what she was to do in Italy, what she hoped to accomplish on her return, and how sorry she was to leave her grandfather. “You must go to see him!”

The next minute Irving was telling her about his traps to catch jobs — how he had all his acquaintances looking out for him, and how they always seized upon the game in the traps for their own purposes, and what he meant to do when he caught a plump hare of his own. He questioned her about her pictures; she, him, about his routine. She sketched one of her ambitions upon the air, and it took color in his faith in her. As for him, his ambition was to have a part in the stupendous advancement of the metropolis. In some way, he would like to help to tunnel the island with subways, to span the rivers with bridges, to touch the parks with new beauty, to cause gigantic buildings to tower above the earth for the housing of vast enterprises. In the meantime, one earns but twenty dollars a week.

“I am preposterous, of course,” said Irving, laughing, “but a person is no longer visionary after he has succeeded. All that I hope for now will seem reasonable enough after I’ve done it.” In spite of his laugh his eyes burned.

“You must remember,” cried Winifred, “that I believed it before you did it.” And her eyes burned also.

He tried to explain the change that had come over him, a change that was growing more definite every day. “I look just the same to everybody,” said Irving, “except to myself. Sometimes I stare into the glass, and

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think, 'Who are you?' Not that my features are altered, but my ideas are so revolutionized. I think the greatest difference is in the way I regard my work at the office. Once — it was before I knew you, Miss Adams — it seemed to me, that all that work was good for, was to provide the means for having a good time. In that light, work was a necessary evil. It was no part of real life, it was a sort of suspended animation. Now I feel differently about it. I want to help the world a notch higher, and nothing but work will do it. I don't know how to tell you how different that idea has made everything! I know the fellows at the office would think me crazy. But I do my work, enjoying the thought that it's definitely helping the world. If I ask for greater work, it is n't so much on account of increased salary — though I'm still human — as because I shall be able to help things along more. I want to be a factor in the improvement of Greater New York, but even that does n't seem to bound my desires — I want to help to build up my country, to make travel, and labor, and culture, easier to others. But even that is n't the worst about me: I want to have a finger in the world's progress! Perhaps I'll keep right on till I visit Mars, in some sort of an aeroplane *Santa Maria!*" He jumped up, laughing. "Time's up!" he declared.

They clasped hands in a way not easily to be forgotten. It was as if they had never known each other until then. Yes, she was glad to share in his partnership! So delightful and so absorbing did Irving find those few minutes' confidences, exchanged with almost

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lightning rapidity, that he reached the street before he again remembered the mysterious kiss. Could anything more conclusively have proved the potent spell of Winifred Adams? Perhaps in all his history, that kiss had been the most amazing experience; yet Winifred had driven it from his mind.

His realization of this fact checked his steps involuntarily. He was almost at the head of the street, but he could not forbear looking back at the rambling frame house which more than ever resembled an old freight car, sidetracked from the main line of business, the brick engine in front, the shop-flatcars in the rear. What a dingy, obscure building to have roofed over so many glowing hopes and purposes!

As Irving looked back, not standing entirely still, lest he never catch up with his press of work, he received a shock. At one of the windows of the studio, appeared a face, pale and indistinct. It vanished before he could define its features; but he had had time to discover that the face was not Winifred's. This, however, was not the only cause of his startled surprise, since he had already convinced himself that the kiss had been bestowed by some stranger. In the window-sill, directly below the pane that revealed the unknown's watching face, Irving perceived the bicycle-lamp. It had been placed there to prevent his visit, and that is why Mr. Burl had told Winifred, with perfect assurance, that Irving would not come to the studio.

Surprising as Irving found all this, there was not a moment to be lost in returning to Broadway. He re-

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sumed his course with all speed. But though he shared the nervous haste of those *habitués* of the city streets who seem ever behind-time, his thoughts raced still more madly ahead. The Somebody whom Mr. Burl did not want him to meet was a woman; evidently she must be a friend, not only of the artist but of Winifred and, most probably, of Winifred's grandfather. And this mysterious Somebody, this woman who had entered Mr. Burl's life within the last year, had kissed Irving while he slept! More than that, she had risked discovery in bestowing that salute, when evidently she did not desire to be discovered; and her lingering lips had betrayed an affection more unaccountable than the kiss itself.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GATHERING OF THE RICH

A WEEK elapsed before Irving's return to the studio. He would have gone back the day after his meeting with Winifred, to excuse himself for having overlooked the lamp-signal, had not the lamp itself warned him away. He took for granted that Winifred would speak of his visit; but when he found himself once more established in his old place, no reference was made to his indiscretion.

Concerning the mysterious kiss, he concluded that Mr. Burl's strange visitor — possibly a relative who had forfeited her position in society — had found him asleep in the studio; had been reminded of some dear one, either dead or lost to her — a son or a brother — and had given way to a momentary impulse. Winifred, who must have known of the woman's presence in the house, might not have known of the stolen kiss; at any rate, he had shown by his manner that he did not suspect Winifred of having bestowed it.

Irving little imagined how deeply Winifred had appreciated his chivalrous conduct on that occasion, or what admirable tact and delicate consideration she had discovered in his unconscious bearing. Ignorant though he was of the impression his inherent fineness of

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nature had produced, he, nevertheless, realized that, in the few minutes of their interchanged confidences, they had come very close together. For weeks after her departure for Italy, he enjoyed the recollection of their hurried words, which had leapt, like fire, over dry barriers of conventionality, springing higher and higher from the fuel of heart-longings. Had so much ever before been said in so short a time? These two had felt themselves to be meeting for the first time, possibly to part forever. Each had looked, each had spoken, as if all depended upon complete self-revelation. Why? That was a curious question for consideration.

Clear cut as was his impression of Winifred, it was destined to lose much of its outline during the events that clustered about the international races at Briarcliff. It is doubtful if Irving would have thought of going to the races, but for his chance meeting with Jerry Vandever. She was with her step-brother when Irving encountered them in the foyer of an opera house, on upper Broadway. It was a gay meeting; all was hurry and brilliancy and kaleidoscopic transition. Life was marked in staccato notes.

Claude was surprised that Jerry and Irving should be acquainted. Jerry pretended indignation that Claude should never have told her of his adventurous New Year's Eve. Claude was tall and handsome and distinguished. Irving looked like him, as usual. Jerry was so swiftly changing, so piquantly engaging, so brightly flashing, that one's eyes ached, almost; one's heart, quite.

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"I've often wondered what became of you, after the mob," Claude declared. "The last I saw of you, Knickerbocker, you were defending a prostrate female — to revert to old style — against an hundred foes."

"Oh, I'm warranted," Irving assured him. "But you don't ask about Miss Tiff."

Claude's face fell. "Do you know, 'Bocker," he murmured, heedless of his step-sister's "Miss Tiff? Oh, what a name!"—"Do you know, Jessie proved a sad disappointment. Perhaps it was n't her fault, though really I don't know but it's a crime for a young lady to begin at a higher pitch than she can sustain."

The crowd began to bear them apart. Jerry asked: "Are you going to Briarcliff? I am. *Do* come — you can tell me all about you dreadful *protégé*, Agostino." As the chasm widened, she called, "I'll be there. See if you can find me!"

Irving accepted the challenge. "I'll find you," he called, delightedly.

When, in his sky-scraper, he asked if he might have Friday off — Friday was the great day. "No," said the chief-clerk, unemotionally, irrevocably. Irving suggested that he could supply a substitute.

"We'll find a substitute for you, whenever it's necessary," said the chief-clerk, closing the interview.

Irving did not relinquish his purpose of going to Briarcliff, but it would be necessary for him to return in time to go to work. He was as familiar with the automobile races, thanks to the papers, as one can be with any event that has not yet taken place. He knew

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that the night previous to the races would, if the weather should prove favorable, be crowded to the brim with romantic possibilities. All the world was going up to Briarcliff in the night-time, to be ready for the dawn's excitement. It was not unlikely that he might find Jerry with her party; certainly he would search, with the probability of finding happy adventures.

In meditating upon these latent probabilities, Irving felt the stirring of his old self. In his impatience for the day, or rather night, of pleasure, he lost much of that zest for his daily work of which he had rather boasted to Winifred. It had become once more the daily grind; while, in his anticipations of finding little Jerry, Winifred was quite forgotten. It seemed that the old days had come again, days like those of New Year's Eve, when he was ready to squander his last penny — and the last penny of anybody else — for a brief episode of gay life. Yet, in reality, it was different. In the old days he had looked upon such golden moments of prodigality as the end of the month's work, the goal to which labor tended. Now they seemed but wayside inns, where one might rest before going on to greater achievements.

It was shortly after one in the morning, when Irving stepped off the ferryboat at Tarrytown, and set forth to walk to East View, the toe in the bulgy-stocking outline of the Briarcliff course. It was a warm April night. The moon had not risen, but nowhere was darkness. The intense glare of countless automobile-lamps cut a network of blinding white against the

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shrubbery. Incessant blasts from raucous horns came as calls to adventurous combat. As the young man turned to the right, at Main Street, and followed the trolley tracks to the summit of the hill, he found himself in the midst of a scene of varied movement. All the countryside was awake. As he went down the hill and followed the lakeshore, streaming bands of diverging radiance bathed his face and form. The water sparkled from electric splendor. Beyond the Hudson, a faint glow told of an approaching moon.

Irving found himself a part of the hurried procession, a part in the gay tournament. He was glad that others could ride, and that he could walk; he envied no one, but used men and women of every degree as spice to his zest. The prouder their bearing, the more he felt himself in the company of princes.

And what a company! Even before midnight thousands of electric cars had turned their goblin-eyes toward Westchester County. The races were to begin at a quarter to five in the morning — the earlier the better, since they were to continue almost six hours. The honking, the rattle, the explosion, the whirring, the chugging, the harsh breathing of automobiles, left upon the air unbroken clues like ribbons of sound; they streamed from the Island City, from New Jersey, Brooklyn, Long Island, from up State, and inland town, from points as far remote as Cleveland, Chicago, Canada.

Every line of approach was packed with panting machines and noisy sight-seers. A thousand automo-

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biles had already reached the Stephen Memorial Church, having come to Tarrytown by way of Scarboro. More than four thousand had reached the racetrack, scattering along its oiled surface in search of advantageous parking-places. Among the hills and promontories overlooking the elliptical valley, grandstands had been erected for the accommodation of seventy-five thousand spectators; but it was already evident that more than twice that number would see the start-off, at four forty-five of this April morning.

Irving covered the distance from Tarrytown to East View in less than half an hour. The more he heard and saw, the faster he was impelled, both body and mind. His feet flew; so did his thoughts. The dull roar of voices intoxicated him; the beautiful, and the richly dressed, stirred him to heroic aspirations. The balmy air of spring which to-night seemed more sure of itself than hitherto, and the glittering stars in the cloudless sky, were to Irving as the breath of love and the crown of youth. It seemed that though one had never loved before, he might begin then and there, even with no definite object for his desire. If he could find little Jerry! At one time he had fancied he might have cared for her. Why not begin to-night?

Along the thirty-mile track the multitude had scattered between the grandstands seeking to preserve the homogeneity of family groups, but in many cases disintegrating and commingling with strangers. They gathered about camp-fires, which roared from hundreds of brush-heaps. Tents stood everywhere, before which

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bonfires leaped. There was presented the picture of an encamped army. Irving reconnoitred it from East View to the Lodge, but Jerry was nowhere to be discovered.

He found the living pictures most alluring, not upon the course, or among the tents, but away from the main road. Anywhere within a quarter-mile of it, you might find a camping-party around a fire, the women asleep among the robes of the automobile, or resting tired heads against brothers or husbands. Irving found the contemplation of their weariness infinitely sweet; it seemed to speak of faith in earth and sky and fellow-man. Nor was there enough room in the cars for all the richly dressed women; many lay upon the ground, their exquisite robes protected by heavy rugs. Twenty thousand women were sleeping thus, or seeking slumber, beneath the open sky. But among them, Jerry did not appear.

As one in the vast drama, Irving resolved to take more than a passive part — to become a central figure before the blinding footlights of the machine-lamps. He would build a bonfire of his own, and watch the human moths flutter to his adventure-net. Soon after his arrival, an army distinct from that of the electric vanguard, more numerous and restless, began to descend upon the scene of future combat. This tremendous reinforcement came in overcrowded trains from Central Station on Manhattan Island; it crossed the river in three divisions. As these trains, packed to the guards, climbed the hills, the glitter of their windows showed

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like toy lights beneath the watchful moon. When the cars were emptied, men and women streamed down the hillsides, to stop before any available fire.

No one seemed to care where he stopped. Off the race-course, hundreds of automobiling parties were lost, jesting about not being able to find their way, chatting unaffectedly with strangers, as if all were common guests at a Gargantuan picnic. Irving, having rented a small space, and purchased fagots at an extortionate price from the thrifty natives, lighted his fire. He heard on all sides, "Where are we?" "Don't know. Can't get through the jam. Better stop wherever you find yourself, until daylight." The cars would whirr softly against the yielding earth, then back, then chug to one side with impatient *honk, honk!* — and Irving would almost feel as if he belonged to a party of his own. In the meantime he increased his blaze and waited, solitary but serene.

If wisdom and virtue are ever rewarded — as assuredly sometimes is the case — Irving's foresight furnished an illustration in point. For it had hardly begun to occur to him that he was not unlike a tramp — say a Dick Arnold — camping on the edge of existence while everybody else was enjoying real life, — before his reward was in his own hand. He was standing with his back against the brushpile, watching enormous touring cars come out of the night, their long bodies of white, crimson, brown, blue, and black, crawling along with sudden flashes of twin eyes, which disappeared at the turning of the goblin-heads. Like giant fireflies

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the automobiles hovered, as if about to spread gaudy wings. One of these huge insects of pleasure crept up to the edge of Irving's circle of good cheer; and one of the fairies who, as it were, had ridden down from another sphere, addressed the railroad clerk:

"Sir Knight, are all the seats taken?"

Irving advanced eagerly. "There 's a box reserved for your party, Dr. Adams," he exclaimed, in impetuous haste; for the fairy of the white-and-gold night-flier was indeed the excellent physician. The driver at his side was Claude Vandever; and the two ladies in the tonneau were Jerry and her step-mother, Mrs. J. S. Vandever. Behold the reward of foresight!

"I 'm found," murmured Jerry, who was glad, but so sleepy she could not keep her bright eyes open. All were tired out.

"Hello there, Knickerbocker," called Claude Vandever, lazily, "how 's the History of New York?" He and the doctor slowly descended from their seats.

"Just as humorous as ever," Irving declared, heartily grasping his hand, and looking beyond him at the drooping Jerry.

The doctor made a desperate effort at vivacity. "What, what, what! Irving? How 's ball-tossing?" He had heard of the young expert from Mr. Burl. His smile showed, for an instant, the dimple in his chin, exactly under the middle-parting of his silvery hair. But it was no use; he was so sleepy he could hardly stay upon his legs.

In a very short time, the scene was shifted effectively.

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Claude, after introducing Irving to his mother as "one of my best friends," had carried away Bird Martin in the automobile — Martin, who had appeared so closely behind the others as to suggest design, and who was carried off to his manifest unwillingness. Mrs. Vandever, Dr. Adams, and Jerry were disposed among the heavy rugs and robes which Claude had thrown overboard to lighten his craft, and the young girl was soon shamelessly asleep.

To Irving it appeared the long-delayed sequel to an old story, to find himself at the feet of Mrs. Vandever. She did not look so young as on the day of the divorce suit, or on the night of the theatre party. But the touch of age, imparted by wakefulness and the wearisome incidents of more than twenty-four hours, could not rob her speaking face of its charm, or dim the melancholy softness of her eyes. It was like a faint shadow of far-off old age, which the dawn would drive away.

"We must get a few winks," the doctor declared, "or we'll not be able to keep our eyes open during the races."

He did not regret having brought Mrs. Vandever to the races, since J. S. Vandever could never find time for such things, and, during Winifred's absence, Dr. Adams found more time upon his hands than he could dispose of satisfactorily. But he knew what was due his constitution, and he meant to see that it had its tribute of attention.

Mrs. Vandever did not glance toward Winifred's grandfather. For years he had been her only physi-

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cian of body and mind. He had kept her physically well, and had let her weep when she must. He was one of those strong and congenial souls whose presence you feel even when bodily absent, and who, when at hand, receive your thought-waves, and send them back at flood-tide. So Mrs. Vandever did not glance toward him; she did not care to be always looking into the glass of her past. But at Irving she did look, with a deep and speculative gaze.

“You resemble some one,” she murmured, and suddenly she no longer felt sleepy, or looked nearly-old. “Mr. Payne, are you related to — does your father live in the city?”

“My father died many years ago,” Irving answered. “His home was in Chicago. I was only an infant. I’ve been told that I look like your son.”

“Do you? Perhaps you do. I thought of somebody — I think.” Her voice died away. Had she caught a glimpse of Irving as he sat in the court room beside Dick Arnold? Very likely that was the cause of her perplexity. Irving hoped she would fail in her attempt to bring back the memory. He did not care to be associated in her mind with his friend, the tramp — his friend, her first husband. How incredible!

“I am curious to hear your voice,” came her flexible tones. “It may bring to me what I seek. Shall we talk? Your mother —”

“She, too,” Irving answered, “died before I can recollect.”

“Did you ever see me before, Mr.—Payne?”

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“On New Year’s Eve, at the theatre.”

“Then perhaps — but that would be flattery.” Her smile was full of a tender sadness. “But you are one of Claude’s best friends; that’s enough.” As if moved by an impulse she did not herself understand, she held out her hand. “We ought to ratify, ought n’t we? You’ll never be a stranger again, I hope.” She held his hand even when he offered to draw away; in her soft pressure was a yearning for something infinitely remote from Irving, yet something to which he must have formed a link.

It surprised Irving, but touched him more, that he should stir within her a tender regret for any buried joy. Her face suggested strongly that some sort of spiritual relationship should exist between them. Out of the world of the unknown she had risen, with all that familiarity one sometimes finds in strangers, hinting at past existence, or future association. Possibly his acquaintanceship with Claude might explain this feeling.

“We’ll not try to account for it,” said Mrs. Vandever, almost impatiently, as if reading his thoughts, “unless you accept the Identification Theory. That is a fascinating philosophy, don’t you think?”

Irving, suddenly in deep water, professed but a cursory acquaintanceship with the new school of thought which, to his artist-friend, he had denounced on more than one occasion. He divined that Mrs. Vandever was a sensitive woman with an unhappy past and a disappointing present, and that, in seeking peace of mind,

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though but for a day, she allowed herself to drift from theory to theory.

As Mrs. Vandever talked, in her richly inflexioned voice, of Identification, it seemed that to her tones clung a perfume of the dried rose leaves of other faiths. This, too, may fail, she seemed to say, but happily it will endure until the next discovery. As she talked, Irving filled his eyes, thence his brain and heart, not with Identification, but with the picture of a gorgeous crimson slumber-robe, bearing its pure snowflake of maidenhood — Jerry, by name — which one might fancy about to melt away under the rosy warmth of the bonfire.

Christianity was too old-fashioned. Nobody went to church these days,— for this was the Twentieth Century, always to be written in capitals; but if anybody should go, what would he find, more than a faint echo of the Christ-call, reflected from the deadening walls of modernity? Mrs. Vandever had been a Christian, then an Orientalist; but she felt sure that Identification had a wider appeal; it was for anybody who wants anything — and who does n't?

“The philosophy of the Identifier is so simple,” she said, languidly. “All he has to do is to form a mental image of a desired object; as soon as the mental image exactly reproduces the coveted object, image and object become identical.”

“I have made a mental image of Slumber,” drowsily murmured Dr. Adams, “and if you can tell it from me in two minutes, I ’m no true Identifier.”

This levity was treated with that unanswerable weight

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of seriousness which, from its mere specific gravity, can crush to powder the most cogent reasoning.

“Do you mean,” Irving asked, looking covertly at Jerry’s unconscious face, and feeling that he was getting a thousand times his money’s worth, “that if I want anything — well, say a person, for instance — a friend, you understand — if I make a mental picture of that person, by reproducing in thought her features, voice, form — or his features — yes, *his*, you know,— and if my mental picture is exactly true, that then I can get the love of — of him?”

“We do not speak of getting. You have him already, as soon as your mental image corresponds to his appearance. You make him yours by identifying him with yourself. He is not only yours, he is you.”

“In a physical sense?” Irving ventured. It occurred to him that an experiment should be very interesting.

“There is no physical sense,” returned the other, with the confidence known only to those who understand the universe. “The Identifier does not seek to reproduce physical pictures. To gain a friend, you must form a mental image of his spiritual qualities. You must know him as he is. Then he becomes you. The process is called an Ostentation. It is only those who have communed long and intimately with truth, who can make a complete Ostentation.”

From the theme of her religion, she presently passed, as by a natural deflection, to her extensive charities. With her beautiful face touched by a kindly desire to

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entertain Irving, in a voice eloquent with living interest, she described her Home for Friendless Cats. The idea was by no means original, but, as yet, it had not been overworked. Every spring, at the Hegira of Fashion, petted toms and tabbies were left to perish at the closed portals of affluence, or to mew away their lives in malodorous back alleys. The beautiful marble palace erected by Mrs. Vandever on Long Island for these unfortunate creatures, had proved a blessing to families who did not care to take their purring favorites on their rounds at fashionable summer resorts. At "Gotham Pussery" cats of all degrees were consoled for absence from sunlit ranges, until such times as maids and footmen came to bear them home.

It occurred to Irving that Gotham Pussery had taken the place, in Mrs. Vandever's life, of a normal interest in human beings; he felt no inclination to smile. Instead, he was sensible of a secret compassion, that she should be obliged, because, doubtless of a starved life, to find her satisfaction in the newest styles of religions, and to follow the latest swing of the charity-pendulum from East Side waifs to West Side cats. In the young man's opinion, he got more out of life at "twenty per," than did Mrs. Vandever at eighty thousand a year.

The stimulated interest that had come from Irving's likeness to some one Mrs. Vandever had known, presently grew dulled under the stress of exhausted nature. She slept, with her companions. Irving wandered to the fire, and, standing there, with his back to all the noisy and confused world, he looked at Jerry to his heart's

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content. At Jessie Tiff, one could look too often. Was it because Jerry Vandever was so small, that you could never see enough of her? The night wore slowly on, but not slowly enough for the railroad clerk; for the night was all that belonged to him. It was almost time for the dawn to lift, when Jerry stirred, rousing herself from profound slumber, and waking him from a profound trance.

Those gray eyes opened with deliberate slowness, as if afraid of scaring away a preconceived impression. They looked full at Irving — sure enough, it was no mistake! He saw the characteristic white thought-flashing illumine the delicate cheeks. “You!” she exclaimed.

“And *you!*” said Irving, sinking upon his knee at her side.

She raised herself on one elbow, and drew a warm slim hand from under the robe. “How jolly!” she exclaimed, radiantly. “Did I know you were here?” Irving’s cheeks were filled with the color of her slumber-robe. “You must have stepped right out of my dream,” she declared. “Take my hand, and help me up. I was never more wide-awake in my life. Let’s slip away to the bonfire, and not wake ’em — just you and I; there’ll be a thousand chaperons all around. Mercy! Isn’t this a jollification! Goodness! I feel like the Goddess of Liberty, off the dollar.”

Her hand was in his. He drew her up, and toward him. “And I’m the Fourth of July, in your honor,” he declared. Her face was so close, that her breath

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was upon his cheek. He felt her yield to his impelling force.

They could not possibly have approached their faces nearer without a meeting of the lips. Jerry looked up into his eyes with a flashing laugh, then drew back. "So many are looking, you know," she said lightly.

"I dreamed you *did* once," said Irving. Still holding her hand, he led the way to the bonfire.

"Was it — pleasant?" inquired Jerry.

"I did n't rub it off," Irving declared.

She flashed at him again. "How did you come here, Mr. Payne?"

"Just stepped off Mars, at the last conjunction."

Jerry's quick flashes came and went with the pulsation of the sheer pleasure of youth. "What do they talk about, on Mars?" she asked.

"Only of you."

"What do they say about me?" She stood before the bonfire, with one hand clasping her slender arm as it swung behind her, just as she had stood in Dr. Adams's little reception-room. Irving's face glowed; he was too near the fire, perhaps.

He answered, "Everybody on Mars feels about you in the oddest way — as if you were the only woman in the world. They feel —"

"With four letters?" inquired Jerry, innocently.

"And begins with 'L,'" came swiftly back to her.

"Not the one the English go to, I hope," she murmured, wickedly.

"Jerry?"

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“ But — ”

“ Jerry! If I don't begin calling you that this moment, how am I ever to grow up to it? It 's already six weeks, or more, since we 've had a good talk — the only talk, by the way — and soon I must leave you, Jerry.”

“ You must be very fond of Mars.”

“ No, it is n't that, Jerry. I 'd have come sooner, only I have to wait for a conjunction. We have a conjunction whenever there 's a high tide — of finance.”

“ Then you wanted to come sooner? ”

“ Oh, Jerry! ”

“ Ever and ever so much? ”

“ Just like that.”

“ Good thing you came when you did,” she declared, threateningly. “ I'm already dreadfully old — eighteen almost, if you can take my word for it — and next fall I make my *début*, and *then*, Mr. Payne.” She waved out her arm as if to sweep him back to his remote planet.

“ Don't, Jerry!” Irving gasped. “ It made me feel horribly lonesome, when you did that.”

“ But I 'll stay with you to-day, if you want me,” she said, adorably.

Irving groaned. “ I have to go back. I'm a Deep Waterway Commissioner. I begin digging on my canal, at nine A. M. That 's why we have to talk fast. That 's why I have to tell you with so much abruptness — nothing to lead up to it, for lack of time — that there 's nobody on the earth like you, Jerry.”

“ But what about Mars? ” she asked, looking at him

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with pulsating temples, flashing cheeks, quivering lips, pointed chin, restless feet, vibrating body. Of course she looked at him with the gray eyes; but her vision seemed distributed, as if all her body were but a chain of thrilling life-points, sending forth the electric waves of a personality charged with an amazing number of volts.

“There are no women on Mars,” Irving declared; “not one, not one! That’s why I’ve come across. And now before your mother wakes up —”

“My step-mother, you mean.”

“Poor Jerry!” he murmured, compassionately.

“Poor *nothing!* Step-mothers are the most satisfactory, *I* think. You do what you please, and they don’t expect anything. ‘Lady Vandever,’ as I’ve always called mine, is a darling. Irving Payne, let’s quit being clever; will you agree? Or can you help it?”

“It will be hard,” he allowed. “What shall we gain?”

“I really want to talk to you seriously,” she said; and she looked in earnest, for the first time. “That’s why I dreamt of you. I have a dear friend in trouble — I know you’d love her — and I want to get her out. I was wondering who could help me — and thought of you. Are you flattered? Somehow, you are different from anybody I ever knew — as anybody living on Mars ought to be. Dig under your sand, and I’m sure there’s bedrock to build upon.”

“But sand is a good thing, too,” responded Irving, secretly pleased.

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“Oh, I know — but I have all the sand I have need of. Bedrock is what I want. Under the sand of most people is only — mud. That ’s why I ’m going to trust you, in telling you an awfully serious history, and in asking your advice. For my friend — she ’ll be just eighteen, in Newport-days — is miserably unhappy; and she is so dear to me that sometimes — Well,” she laughed somewhat unsteadily, “sometimes I am unhappy myself.”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RACE AGAINST DEATH

IT was in the midst of ten thousand jangling and discordant noises that Jerry began the story of her friend's difficult position — a position which Irving was assured made even Jerry miserable.

“She is pretty and charming, my friend of nearly eighteen, and last summer, at Atlantic City, she was married. In secret. Such a foolish, idiotic business — Where's my dictionary of synonyms?” Her face had clouded, its light muffled in sombre thoughts.

“In my heart,” said Irving, who could not think her deeply in earnest. “Beautiful, charming, delicious —”

“Oh, I know all the synonyms for *Jerry Vandever*,” she impatiently retorted. “I should; I've heard 'em often enough. I want to describe that marriage. You must understand, he was the sort she'd never known before. It was n't love at first sight; but she found him different, and she did n't know what it was. It seemed a prank to skip off the Boardwalk, and get married. He was wild and Westy without the wool, and she — well, she's pretty gay, too. But as she was n't of age, it is n't a legal marriage. She never thought much of *that*; but just as soon as it was done, she found it a —” Her voice sank, “a horrible mistake.”

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Irving was shocked by the aversion her features expressed.

Although the babel of voices broke in jarring waves on every side, it seemed to him, as Jerry paused, that the air was impregnated with a deep silence. She leaned forward, one foot playing nervously with some twigs that had fallen from the heap. She slowly moved them back and forth, as in a studied game. The hand that clasped her arm, as it swung behind her, slipped up to the elbow. Presently she resumed, still with eyes intent upon the sliding foot:

“They were married, in Atlantic City — had run away from a house-party that — had ridden over from a country place — married under assumed names. I tell you, there was *nothing* legal about it. Just after the ceremony they took the train for Philadelphia — reached there at dark — went to a hotel, registered as Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so. It was when the bellboy got the key from the clerk, and told them to follow him, that — oh, I don’t know, exactly. That man — the man my friend had married — looked into her face, and she found it was — what I said — a horrible mistake. She sent him away — that man — on some sort of pretence — yes, she wanted something before coming down to dinner, must have it. She thought to herself, ‘*If he won’t go?*’ But he went.”

Jerry drew a long breath. “Then she slipped from that hotel — fairly *flew*, I tell you — to the station, to the country place; and nobody ever found it out.” She raised her head, and Irving found her cheeks stained

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with bands of crimson. How ashamed she appeared to be, for her friend's folly!

"Well!" cried Irving, consolingly, "since nothing came of it, and can't, as it was n't legal; and, best of all, since it's somebody else's story —"

"But something has come of it," returned Jerry, giving the twigs a vicious blow with the toe of her slipper, that sent them into the fire. "That man bobs up everlastingly. He wants that girl; that's why he married her. He loves her, and he holds that power over her — the secret. He has n't used the power yet, he does n't exactly threaten, unless by his eyes; but I tell you he wants her, and means to make her his wife — and she's afraid. What would *you* do?" She broke off suddenly.

Irving answered, without hesitation, "The affair was n't a marriage,—merely a foolish indiscretion. The girl should tell her family, and let them settle him for good."

Jerry stamped her foot impatiently. "Tell her family!" she echoed, with a bitter laugh. "Yes! That *would* be pleasant! And would n't they always be afraid of her doing something else rash? It would put an end to *her* liberty."

"The sooner, the better," said Irving, taking a man's view of the subject.

"Oh, bother!" retorted Jerry, who had advanced ideas. "So *that* is the only solution that occurs to you? Well, I know one better. And you can help me.

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I'm going to trust you fully. You know Claude? He's the man."

"What!" exclaimed Irving. "Is it possible? But I don't see anything wild or *Westy* about him. Claude's a fine fellow, I think. If he really loves the girl, how could she do better?"

"What queer ideas you must have on Mars! Don't I tell you she wants to be free? How can she care for a man, when she's afraid of his power over her? Besides, she wants nothing but liberty. Oh, but he is wild and *Westy*, for all that. You don't know Claude. He has always picked out such chums as Colorado — he likes something different, just as I do. Maybe that's why he took a notion to my friend — she's out of the humdrum, herself. Gay!"

"It must have been a great adventure — for him," mused Irving. "And after your friend treated him so shabbily, I think it was splendid for him to keep mum."

"Yes — but he's only biding his time. He means to marry her yet. And she means that he shan't. And you're to help us."

Irving was perplexed. "But how? Remember, I live on Mars."

Jerry answered, with appealing eyes, "I will tell you what you are to do for me — I won't say for my friend; I'll say for my sake. But Dr. Adams is awake. Anyhow, I am not entirely sure of you," she added with a sudden delicious laugh. "I'll tell you later. You'll have to choose between me and Claude; and, just at

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present, I'm afraid you might go over to the enemy. Since you won't have to go to digging canals until late, you must stay to the first of the races — stay with me — won't you, Irving?"

After that, would n't he? And before that, for that matter. Before carrying away the automobile, Claude Vandever and Bird Martin had lifted an enormous hamper to the ground. Of course Irving shared in the picnic-repast, and he hardly knew which he found most delightful, Mrs. Vandever's refined cordiality, Dr. Adams's boyish gusto, Jerry's quick movements and nimble brain, or the mere consciousness that he was a part of the swirling tide of life. Not only was the part an entertaining addition, but a useful one, since Claude did not appear till the meal had been despatched.

Claude at last came on foot, with the dismal intelligence that he had broken an auto-wheel, or, rather, that it had seemingly broken itself without cause, and the machine would have to be hauled by powerful horses to the side of the race-course. His glowing cheeks, unusually bright eyes, and gay humor over misfortunes, suggested that the auto-wheel was not the only one that had gone wrong.

Dr. Adams whispered to Irving, "I fear the young scapegrace has been tossing rather high balls of his own, eh?"

Perhaps he had, but Irving did not reply. He felt an impulse to hide the weakness of his friend. He hoped Mrs. Vandever had not noticed, but it occurred to him

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that Claude's taste for gay life might have caused some of the mother's melancholy.

During the course of the breakfast, Winifred Adams had been mentioned, and the very name brought to Irving's mind the sense of another atmosphere. For a moment, his gayety was flawed. He found himself wishing that Jerry, who so evidently liked him, might have been more like Winifred. What a dear old world it would be, if it could ever like you for exactly what you are!

Swiftly events moved forward to Irving's climax. The automobile had been patched up sufficiently to be drawn to a parking-place overlooking the race-course. Our friends, along with some two hundred thousand other folk, awaited the first booming of the dynamite-signal.

At last, around the thirty-mile circuit ran the cry, swift as the very wind, "Car coming!" Signal flags were waved. The regiment forces sought to keep back the crowd which, being American, would stay behind no line laid out by law and order; would, on the contrary, pack itself, in hopeless congestion, in the way of any possible danger. The Vandever car looked upon a bit of zigzag road leading to a bridge. It was five o'clock.

Suddenly from around a bend in the road appeared a blood-red glow, like a second sun racing out of the sky. Almost as soon as seen, it resolved itself into a huge car, swerving from one side to the other of the crooked road. It boomed across the bridge. It was gone.

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“*Car coming!*” This one was gray. It shot past the spectators like the nebula of another world, weird, scintillating from the morning’s first bright sunshafts.

“*Car Coming!*” And when the twenty-two, entered for the races, had made their first lap, one had grown used to the aërial visitants, which came out of space, and vanished into distance like fleeing comets. But one never grew quite used to the danger of short turns, which ever hinted at death.

Two hours passed. They almost seemed as many minutes, to the retreating, onrushing observers — that ribbon of humanity on each side of the track, which wavered back and forth at every approach, and which never wearied of mad cheering. In this reckless line, on the side next the Vandever machine, Claude persisted in holding a foremost place of daring.

It was seven o’clock when, at the first sharp turn, “No. 13” — a green stripe of paint warding off the ill-luck of the number — threw up a cloud of dust, and caused a rain of gravel forty feet away. The car careened, and lost its balance. The wheels on one side rose in air, and were still off the road when it bent back and zigzagged over a culvert. The car fell back upon the suspended wheels with a crash that lifted up the wheels on the other side. The bend was taken at a frightful angle, at the speed of a mile a minute. It seemed that the car’s side must be crushed into the earth. The driver, gripping his short cigar between clenched teeth, bent to the tilting of his machine, and

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all vanished in a cloud of dust, apparently to destruction.

He was "Old Gipsy" a favorite of the populace. The other twenty-one cars must pass before it could be known whether or not he survived. All during this time of suspense, while cars, red, drab, gray, and white, flitted by, Jerry stood on the front seat, with Irving beside her. She was holding his hand to steady herself, not conscious of holding anything. Perhaps Irving did not know his hand was being clutched, sometimes convulsively. Perhaps he did not remember that somewhere near the sky over Broadway, a railroad office would presently be waiting for him.

The car that had succeeded in outdistancing all others, was of Italian make; its driver, however, was an American. Whenever this red machine appeared, there was an international scream for Italy, and for the United States. One sees it coming now, three hundred yards ahead of the gap. The police-hardened mob — in which Claude ever makes a vociferous unit — sees the front wheels rise in air, as if to leap upon their heads. They fall back in wild confusion. Oh, how Jerry clings to Irving's hand! The oil on the track has long since ceased to "hold." The car that has just whizzed by, leaves a dense pillar of smoky dust, completely hiding the gap. Into this choking obscurity the Italian car leaps, quivering, spluttering, to take the turns as chance may direct. A strap, fastened to the tool-box at the rear, has worked loose. It threatens to become entangled with the driving-chain.

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To continue so, means probable death; to stop, means of a surety, to lose the race. The mechanic, opened knife in mouth, crawls over the swaying body of the car. He leans over the end, sustaining himself with one hand. His head is near the fleeing earth. He reaches down with flashing blade. The next instant the dust-curtain had closed upon the picture of his peril.

“*Car coming!*” Is it — yes — no — but yes, a blurred blue, that is what the tearing speed has mixed from red and green — yes, green — a green ribbon of mist about a looming meteor.

“It’s Old Gatsby! It’s old Gatsby!” He holds his cigar-stump ground in the clench of immovable teeth. It’s our old favorite — not really old, at all, — and he’s safe and sound, and going at breakneck speed — possibly he’ll overtake the Italian car. Probably he will. Of course he will! “Go it, Old Gatsby!”

Oh, how Jerry wrings Irving’s hand, as she jumps up and down, her eyes blazing, her sweet girlish voice quite hoarse and discordant, now, with her — “It’s Old Gatsby. Hurrah for America! Hurrah for US!”

And Irving, also wildly enthusiastic, exclaims, “You darling! You beautiful Jerry! Hurrah for Old Gatsby! Hurrah for Jerry!”

“Oh, it’s glorious, it’s glorious,” Jerry pants, almost exhausted from patriotism. “Now there comes that drab one. I hope it won’t win, don’t you? I *hope* it won’t. I wish it would break something — not kill anybody — quite. But *did* you see Old Gatsby, so cool, so — Look! look!” The car had almost careened.

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Speech perished in a mighty shout. There was a surging back of the lawless mass, a futile appeal from police and militiamen, a treading down of some one in the throng, and such ravenous curiosity to see the injured man, that if he escaped fatal mangling, suffocation seemed inevitable.

“Somebody is being trampled to death!” exclaimed Dr. Adams, who sat beside Mrs. Vandever. Yes, to be sure, those two had been all this while in the tonneau, within reach of Irving’s hand, but a thousand miles from his perception!

Irving did not need the physician’s warning to discover the cause of the sudden panic. From his elevated position he saw not only the crumpled form, but the bloodless face. It was Claude.

Irving’s first impulse was to hide the identity of the fallen man from his mother and sister; his next, to leap to the ground, and battle with the mob. He pushed his way through the congested mass of shouting humanity; he leaped over obstacles that had become fixed by the press; he struck savagely at some one who injudiciously sought to maintain standing-room; he reached the motionless figure. The next moment he had lifted him in his arms.

Jerry stood waiting, almost forgetting the races in her curiosity; but Irving penetrated the crowd at a point remote from the disabled automobile, and with the help of the tardy police, succeeded in bearing Claude from the field, without revealing his identity to those in the car.

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It was half an hour later when Irving suddenly reappeared beside the Vandever machine. Jerry had already forgotten him, or pretended that she had, and kept her eyes resolutely upon the race-course. But Irving had not come to speak to Jerry.

“What, what, what! You again!” exclaimed Dr. Adams, with a shake of his head. “Do you know it’s ten o’clock?”

Irving had a sudden vision of a Broadway railroad office, but he did not betray any feeling save a certain steel-like intensity. “I want to speak to you, a moment,” he said, withdrawing, that the other might follow. He added, impellingly, “On business!”

“Business?” repeated the physician, grumblingly. Nevertheless, he descended to the ground with youthful agility, and overtook Irving, suspecting the call had to do with the accident.

“Dr. Adams,” said Irving speaking rapidly, “Claude has met with a serious accident. He was trampled upon dreadfully.”

“So it was Claude, eh?” snapped the physician. “Where is he? I *thought* that fellow was somebody who’d been drinking — might have known!”

“I took him to the nearest hospital — you know they’ve arranged some temporary —”

“Of course I know. Come along. Let’s run for it.”

They ran for it. When the tent was reached, they found several surgeons in charge, each with a keen,

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scientific interest in the only casualty of the morning. Dr. Adams was greeted both as physician and as a representative of the victim's family. After a thorough examination, the physicians withdrew for consultation, leaving Irving with the nurses. He had not been long with the apparently lifeless body of his friend, before Dr. Adams reappeared with the others.

Dr. Adams drew Irving to one side, and said, in the crispest of brittle words — "Irving: *hum!* — Know what 's meant by blood-transfusion?"

Irving searched his memory — "The injection of salt water into the veins, is n't it?"

"Tut, tut, tut!" snapped the other, his spectacles gleaming in his intense, but fairly well controlled excitement. "I mean direct transfusion, young man, direct — *direct!* It must be immediate, or never."

Irving caught his burning sense of the need of hurry. "I understand. You want me — to —?"

"Exactly so, exactly so! We want some of your blood. Will you give it to that young rascal?"

Irving exclaimed, "To the last drop."

"You 're our man. Quick! All my youth has n't turned white in my hair; some in my heart yet! You see his kind of life — Claude's kind — does n't leave enough blood of the right sort in one's veins, at best. Young man — I know you!" He penetrated Irving's soul with his keen, sword-like gaze. "Young man, your blood is pure. That 's what the world needs — pure blood. Now!"

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Irving bared his arm.

“What, what, what!” snapped Dr. Adams. “You don’t suppose we’re going to lop that off, do you? Nonsense! Get up on the table. Now, gentlemen!”

CHAPTER XIX

A TORN BANK CHECK

“Do you understand how it’s done?” Dr. Adams asked his friend, Mr. Burl — that chum of his school-days’ joys and manhood’s disillusion. Contrary to the precedent of ten years, Mr. Burl had suffered himself to be beguiled from studio and club to the home off Madison Square. He was here indefinitely; the reason — he suspected that the physician felt more keenly the absence of Winifred, than did he the protracted loneliness of his own life.

They sat in the Adams smoking-room, late in the evening. Dinner had not been served, nor would be, until the arrival of another guest. Dr. Adams felt that the absence of his granddaughter called for a change of administration; he had moved up the breakfast hour, and moved back the dinner hour, to show the servant-world that life was not what it had been.

The Briarcliff races had become history by twelve o’clock. All during that warm afternoon, the two hundred thousand who had gone up to Westchester were coming back, too weary to seek to hide utter fatigue, now that the goad of mad excitement no longer

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pricked them to vociferation. Silent, save for the chugging of their machines, they coursed down country roads, through towns and villages; they crossed the Bronx, the Harlem, the Hudson, and the East River. Across the Manhattan streets that number themselves by the hundred, down Fifth Avenue and Broadway, as far as the City Hall Park, came Fashion in undress parade. In the automobiles, half-reclined mothers and daughters, fast asleep, supported by drowsy kinsmen, while the tumultuous throbbing of the city's heart fell upon dull ears.

But now it was all over. Even the memory of it would soon be banished to the lumber-room of one's city-memory,— a room to which one seldom has time to go, to inspect paintless and broken furniture of other days. The great holiday was the same to Dr. Adams as last season's outing at Far Rockaway, save for the incident of the blood infusion. That incident promised perennial interest.

“You understand,” Dr. Adams said, joining his finger-tips, and looking very hard at Mr. Burl, to prevent the artist from losing himself in a reverie, “direct transfusion is dangerous, on account of possible embolism. You see, hypodermoclysis is always best, unless it's a case of life and death. In that case — are you listening, Chris? — then, I say, *then*, an intravenous injection should, without hesitation, be employed. Are you following me, Chris?”

“I'm going all around you, Lew,” returned the artist, taking his pipe from his mouth, and stroking his goatee,

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with exaggerated seriousness. "I can hear what you say, and track my own thoughts, all at the same time. I imagine Sunbeam 'll dance when she hears of the enthusiasm her 'Judas Iscariot' has evoked. I'm inclined to believe she shows too great a boldness in her work; she's naturally so strong-minded and independent, it leaks out of her very brush. Still, of course, Agostino — I mean Judas — would lose much of his villainous force, in a pale Burne-Jones outline; *but* —" Mr. Burl was almost pathetically eager to heap praises upon Winifred, while seeming to hold himself severely critical.

"*But*," Dr. Adams interposed, leaning forward to grasp his comrade's knee, the better to enforce attention, "hospitals were erected for the different zones of the race-course, so I had no trouble getting a Mixer tube. When you use a Mixer tube, Chris, intima is in contact with intima alone, hence you get rid of the danger of your embolism —"

"Don't call it *my* embolism," Mr. Burl growled, impatiently.

"When," resumed the physician, zestfully, "we had exposed about three-and-a-half centimetres of the radial artery, and the same amount of the vein was freed, we selected a cannula, pushed the vein through the tube, turned back the free end like a cuff —" he smacked his lips — "like a cuff, I say, snugly tying it in the groove."

"In other words," Mr. Burl snapped, waving his pipe at technicality, "you cut open Irving's arm, and

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Claude's arm, and joined the vein of one to the artery of the other."

At that moment Williams's blue eyes and bald head appeared at the door, in friendliest non-butler aspect, and Irving Payne, the expected guest, was ushered into the room. Dr. Adams nodded him to a chair, and held up a palm to push back any possible words of greeting.

"Exactly so, exactly so," he said, continuing to fasten Mr. Burl with his eye. "Then we removed the clamps from the vein, and from the artery. At first, the vessels contracted rather alarmingly, but a warm saline solution restored their normal condition. We let in the blood of the donor very slowly, very slowly, ve-ry slow-ly. For thirty-four minutes we had a continuous flow. By that time the recipient was rid of pale facies, and showed the pink coloration of health. In a word the recipient was saved."

"Why don't you call him Claude Vandever?" interrupted Mr. Burl, who would rather have painted blood, than heard about it.

"At the same time," the physician continued, shaking the other's knee, and still mechanically waving his palm at Irving, to check interruption, "the donor — this Irving Payne, if you please — showed a decided paleness of nose and ears, and coughed incessantly."

"He still looks rather pale about the gills," remarked Mr. Burl, darting a glance at Irving from under bushy eyebrows.

Irving laughed pleasantly. He had just been told

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that he would not be longer needed at the railroad office. There is nothing like losing a position, to test one's cheerful philosophy. He said, "I'll make up for some of my lost blood at your dinner, Dr. Adams." What was the use to bother them with his misfortune?

"Yes," Dr. Adams nodded. "And I suspect the multimillionaire, J. S. Vandever, will help. I had a note from him asking where he could lay hands on you, and I sent him word you were living with me. Now, don't say a word,—it's real charity for you and Chris to help me fill up this awfully lonesome house. Chris must change his studio for Winifred's, and you must give up your culinary practices to make me cheerful at my table. If you two won't consent, you'll see me stepping over to Rome, some fine morning, to join Winifred. *Then*, where would my office-practice be?"

This was a most amazing proposal, and it took away all the breath that had been left Irving on being turned out of the railroad office. He was still speechless and undecided, when Williams reappeared with J. S. Vandever's card.

"You can decide about me later," said Dr. Adams, "but it would never do to keep the great J. S. Vandever waiting a minute. Follow Williams, and behold him in the flesh. He's come to talk business with you, and remember he's one of the richest men on earth. I don't know what property he holds in Heaven."

"Oh, his wife has a house there," growled Mr. Burl, seeming not to observe Irving's surprise at the visit. "Maybe Saint Peter'll let him into *it*. I understand

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it's a home for cats. Eh, Lew? You ought to know; you mix with that class."

"I do not mix, I mingle," the other amended. When Irving had gone away with Williams who, for the occasion, was a butler indeed, he resumed: "Chris, what do you think of the boy?"

The artist stared into the fire, letting his pipe go out. "What do I think? Of — what part of him, Lew? He's a miser and spendthrift, he's frivolous and in earnest, he's an arrant democrat, and an inborn aristocrat, he's reckless, yet virtuous. He's not a type. He's just Irving Payne."

Then his voice sank lower, and he leaned toward his friend significantly. "Do you know, Lew, I had a suspicion, once, that he'd got an inkling of his family history? But he had n't. He's completely in the dark. Do you suppose he can always be kept so?"

"Why not? Nobody knows the truth of the matter but you and me and —"

"I went so far," Mr. Burl whispered, "as to paint Mrs. Vandever's picture, just to startle him into a confession of his knowledge. But he knew nothing to betray. And what safeguards him more than anything else is that he thinks he already knows the main facts. So he's not digging up buried connections."

"Humph! So much the better," returned the physician. "He thinks his mother dead, his father dead: so much the better. You say he's not a type. Who is? No man can stand for more than himself. But I want you to tell me what is to be the final outcome of

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our young friend. What'll be the net product? What's the value of him?"

"I only know," came slowly, "that many a night he's chased away the blue devils that threatened to claim my soul. He blunders along quite happily through the mazes of his ancestry, he gropes here and there in blindness, and, it seems to me, he leaves everything he touches a little lighter, a little sweeter for his passing. Really, Doctor —" He never called Lewis Adams "Doctor" unless moved to most serious speech, "I can't persuade myself that he ought not to be! He used to lack direction, but I am convinced there's a change; he seems flowing along toward some definite sea of success."

He arose, and began pacing the floor, as if it were that of his studio. "One thing — I used to ask myself toward what outlet *I* was drifting. I told myself, it was just stellar space. And that beyond that was just — vacuum; and beyond that vacuum was — nothing."

Dr. Adams propounded: "Is not a vacuum necessarily bounded on all sides? How can the nothingness of death exist, except between the somethingness of life, and the somethingness of eternity? Ah, Chris, I am aware of your old doubtings. But as for me, I need only look into Sunbeam's face, and feel the warmth of her lips on my brow, to know that Sunbeams come from afar, and therefore do not belong to this world."

Mr. Burl nodded thoughtfully. "Irving Payne has done a good deal to bring me around," he admitted; "I mean, in my reflecting upon his birth, his strange history, his possible destiny. I am led to feel —" he waved his

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dead pipe at the universe —“ that this is not enough.” Then in entire unconsciousness, he used the catch words of the populace —“ There must be something else!”

In the meantime, Irving had been ushered into the presence of the great J. S. Vandever. The clean-shaven lips and chin of the financier revealed determination; the white side-whiskers suggested aggressiveness; the high, pale forehead spoke of swift and profound intelligence; and the eyes, rather small, but piercingly bright, indicated a restless nature that was wont to sweep to vital decision without the loss of a moment.

J. S. Vandever spoke rapidly. “ Dr. Adams was good enough to insure my meeting you here, Mr. Payne. This morning you saved the life of my step-son. I have come to express our appreciation, and when he is well enough, you ’ll come to see him, I ’m sure.”

“ With pleasure. But I did nothing,” said Irving lightly. “ Almost any young fellow would have given him some surplus corpuscles. I still have all I need.”

Mr. Vandever was astonished. That anybody should make light of a service done him, or his family, was unprecedented. There is nothing for which one has to pay so heavily, as being rich. “ I have a board-meeting to attend,” said the director of vast enterprises, looking at his watch, and thinking, “ I wonder what the young man wants?” He repeated, “ A board meeting!”

Then he resumed his brisk tones: “ Well, Mr. Payne, as I said, we deeply appreciate your invaluable service — your kindness — Dr. Adams tells me you certainly saved Claude’s life, and it’s with great pleasure that I’ve

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made out this check — er — I'm not asking you to take it —”

“Thank you, thank you!” cried Irving heartily, pretending to misunderstand, and laughing with real enjoyment at his diplomacy. “I appreciate that, because Claude is a friend of mine, and besides, of course I'm not selling blood.”

Mr. Vandever was amazed at being interrupted, and bewildered at finding that the young man lacked the usual signs of one trying to get all he could out of him. “I was about to say,” he interposed, “that I don't ask you to take this check as an adequate recompense; it is by no means a price of your blood. Yet, in a way, has not everything its price? I am informed that you receive something less than a hundred a month —”

“Exactly a hundred less, just at present,” said Irving, smiling again.

“Ha? *Hum!* Er — this check — you do not ask how much it is — ought to be a substantial aid in putting you higher in the business world.” He extended the oblong slip in one hand, as he held his watch in the other.

“But I can't take it,” said Irving, with friendliest resolution. “It would be like selling my good opinion of myself.” He gave his short laugh. “It's just about all I have,” he added, “and I don't mean to part with *that*. Well, you missed the races. They were great! But you're a busier man than I am, Mr. Vandever. I never have trouble getting off. Sometimes, though,” he added, ruefully, “it's hard to get back on.”

J. S. Vandever slowly tore up the check. He con-

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tinued to look at Irving, with a curious expression in his ever-alert face. Suddenly he threw back his massive head, and took in a long breath, as if there had been wafted toward him some forgotten fragrance of far-away childhood-land, with its play gardens and mossy orchard. Then he extended the hand that had cast away the check-fragments. "Will you take *this?*" he said, crisply. Irving took the suing hand, and seemed to feel something better than the touch of millions.

"I wish I could stop and chat with you, and — get to know you," said the great J. S. Vandever, with evident sincerity. "But I'm bound hand and foot to tyrannous old Father Time. And there's that confounded board-meeting. You refuse to accept your due; very well — will you earn it? Mind you, young man, no more gifts come from me, after the insult to my check. But if you want work, hard and exacting — work that will call for every fibre of your brain, but not all your soul, I hope — work that will lift you up, if you cling to it — work that will enable you, after some years, to get your grip on the pulse of affairs — I say, if you want that sort of thing, call at my office on — let me see — *hum!* — two weeks from this day. I'll not offer you something light and easy. Whoever works for me has a pretty hard time of it. Judge whether you think it'll pay, before you begin. If you begin, I believe I can depend on you to swing to it. Good-day. No, don't answer yet. No; have n't time to see the doctor. Good-day." And it *was* Good-day. For when J. S. Vandever said "Good-day," he meant it.

CHAPTER XX

JERRYMANDERING

THE note calling Irving to Claude Vandever's bedside was brought in a carriage bearing the pleasing fiction of a coat-of-arms, and was delivered by a man in servile uniform. Irving took delight in the coat-of-arms; he drank in the liveried splendor of the footman as a stimulating draught; and, as the wheels rolled into that discreet world bounded by Madison and Fifth Avenues and Fiftieth Street and Carnegie Hill, he felt that he was coming, at last, to the home of his dreams.

Since losing his position as day-clerk in the skyscraper, he had been indefatigable in his efforts to find work. The best thing discoverable, so far, was a seat at a billing-desk in another railroad office. The pay was determined by the number of bills stamped, and that depended upon one's proficiency with the typewriter. By working at high pressure from six P. M. to one or two in the morning, Irving found he could make about \$1.97 a day. The work was so hard, and the prospect of advancement so disproportioned to the wear and tear upon one's nervous force, that Irving was all the time looking forward to the day appointed by J. S. Vandever.

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From all he had heard of the great financier's methods, hours in his offices, while not so long as at the railroad office, would prove more exhausting. But the exhaustion that attends one's efforts toward definite success is accompanied by revivifying hope. It is very different when one wearily creeps into bed at two in the morning, with all forces played out at bill-stamping, conscious that there is nothing ahead but the stamping of bills, on the morrow.

On this particular day, Irving gladly relinquished the prospect of earning his \$1.97, as he leaned back blissfully in the Vandever carriage. J. S. Vandever's appointment almost assured him of independence; the carriage lent a temporary magnificence.

At last he stood before the Vandever mansion as an invited guest, clad, one might almost say, in his all. It was a veritable palace, this immense pile. If it wanted the historic atmosphere of centuries-old Europe, it was, on the other hand, free from the mildew age bequeaths to birth. Truly one found none of that picturesque effect whose charm is attended by dampness of brick walls and draughtiness of mouldering stone. Everything was new. The polished steel gates promised, with their hard radiance, that one would find in them no sheltering of disease-germs. Behind the gates, the huge doors and the barred windows on either side had the look of newly made defence for newly made fortunes.

As Irving was passed from one footman to another, then to the head butler, he took swift note of the marble stairway in the centre of the vast hall, of the great fire-

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place beneath, of the dome-shaped ceiling, the tapestries and pictures. As he ascended one staircase after another, his soul became steeped in the refined luxury visible on every hand. Ascending thus, he seemed climbing to life's apex. All was so high above the plane of his daily living, that when he thought of the cold smells of Gotham Repose,— a recollection to which he would have forbidden the *entrée* had he been master of his thoughts,— he grew dizzy, as if peeping down at ordinary existence from a sheer precipice. The light which the stained windows glorified, streamed over exquisite statuary at the landings, over thick carpets, and frescoed walls of splendid corridors.

What a setting for one's hours of ease! Irving felt a tingling of the blood; he seemed breathing strength of nobility from the very beauty of things. If it were permitted him to dwell amid such surroundings, should he not be inspired to make a mighty impact upon the world? His old nature reasserted itself, as it had not since his last conversation with Winifred. He found yearning desires for the beautiful and for the transitory gayety of mad hours, coming to life. Not only did work at the billing-desk suddenly seem hateful, but prospects of hard labor in the captivity of J. S. Vandever lost its appeal. Any sort of labor appeared repugnant. Any kind of privation became despicable. Here was real life, here, within his reach. He had once told Mr. Burl that *this* was what he was for. Perhaps the thought lacked elegance of form, but certainly not of imagination.

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He found Claude in bed, weak and pale, but so eager to express his gratitude that he could not delay its expression. The young heir of fortune gave the penniless clerk a smile so kind that it humanized the richest details of the palatial residence. The old fancy he had taken to Irving had naturally been deepened and made tender by the musings of the invalid. He held out his arm. "I am here, because you were *there*," he said, in a voice little more than a whisper.

"He is not to talk," interposed Mrs. Vandever, who was hovering over the pillow without touching her son's head. She came to Irving, with outstretched hand. "It was so good of you to come. I must talk for Claude," she continued, seating herself on the side of the bed, that she might hold the invalid's hand. "If I say anything to displease you — well, you must blame Claude."

"You could n't say a word to displease me," said Irving, delighting in the little picture of mother-love, "because I know you would n't refer to that bit of surgery."

Mrs. Vandever hesitated. "But," she said, looking at Irving understandingly, "that is principally what Claude wanted me to talk about. Very well," she added hastily, moved by the other's discomposure, "then I won't. We'll go at once to the next point, the less important one — you must let me call it that. Forgive us for being abrupt, but the doctor would only allow Claude a few moments. Claude wants to ask if

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you are bound in any business — he means, unalterably connected.”

Irving smiled. “I’m entirely loose, at present,” he assured them.

“Good!” whispered Claude.

Mrs. Vandever rested her hand upon his too-eager lips. “Let me talk, dear,” she said gently. She turned to Irving: “Claude has set his heart upon having you for his social secretary. He has long needed one, but has never been able to find the congenial friend, such as one needs in that relationship. But he tells me that from the first moment of meeting you, he has felt otherwise toward you than toward any other young man. He believes you understand him, and could do him inestimable service.”

Irving smiled, and was about to speak when the other spared him the trouble. “We know how you regard Claude; you’ve proved that. And I can read your thought — that we are taking this means of trying to reward you for an act that could never be properly rewarded. But you are mistaken. Claude is really determined to employ a social secretary. Only, in your case, it would be not only a business relationship, but one of friends. To show you that it is a matter of business —” She mentioned a salary that inwardly took Irving’s breath away; outwardly he was calm — it was a sort of inward bleeding of the breath, unmanifested.

“Do!” said Claude, trying to make up by force of gaze for weakness of voice. “Do, do accept!”

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“The fact is,” said Irving, hesitatingly, “I am practically out of work. But Mr. Vandever has offered to talk over something with me, in a week or so. I think it’s his intention to give me a place of some sort. And I never had any experience as a social secretary. My social functions have been — well — out there —” He waved his arm, to indicate a region beyond the farthest range of the Vandever vision. “I have only dealt with society in the bulk, you understand.”

“Mr. Vandever told me he had spoken to you,” returned Mrs. Vandever, wistfully, “but I don’t want him to take you away from us — from Claude. I told him so, and he said you should make your own choice. Mr. Vandever is a very hard master, Mr. Payne — he would be the first to admit it; he takes a sort of pride in his inflexibility. In Claude, you would have a friend, a companion. We’re not afraid of your ignorance of society. I imagine you know about as much of it as I do. We are considered ‘exclusive’; but in shutting out people, one always has to shut oneself in with others who are not congenial. Besides, your duties would, in the main, be limited to correspondence. At any rate don’t refuse the position now. Let Claude think you may accept — he’s so restless, it keeps him ill.”

“Yes, I may accept,” said Irving. “It’s so unexpected, and so out of my line, you know; but I may try it.” Their faces suggested that he had conferred a favor. It was the first time he had ever been begged to accept a princely income for nothing more laborious

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than letter-writing. Such a time would probably never come again. He realized that perfectly, and yet was not satisfied. Why? He hardly knew. It seemed like a fairy-work of good chance. But was there a flaw somewhere?

In a week, Claude would be strong enough, if all went well, to explain the duties of the unaccepted and unre-fused position. A compromise was effected. On Saturday, Irving should return, should be instructed in all the details of office, and then, being better able to judge should make his final choice between Claude Vandever and Claude's step-father.

Irving went away wondering at Claude's open show of friendship. To be sure, he had a warm feeling of friendliness for Claude that amounted to something like affection; but there was nothing strange in that; Irving usually liked people. That was his way, he told himself. But that young Vandever should have taken a fancy to some one quite outside the circumference of his brilliant world — was that to be explained by the "bit of surgery"?

Fortunately it did not need to be explained. Something more important was calling for decision: Should he become Claude's social secretary? He resolved to banish the problem until Saturday. But on the following days, his shoulders, bent over the billing-desk, brought the fancy of bending over an escritoire. Nor was another reflection wanting, more appealing than all else: a secretaryship necessitated propinquity with

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Claude; and propinquity with Claude carried with it the corollary of nearness to Claude's step-sister. O, Jerry! What will you say to all this?

We shall see what Jerry says, and at a day no later than the Saturday in question. For when Irving was ushered into Claude's room, the invalid was still obliged to husband his strength, in order to add its interest to the strength of succeeding days, thus to reach perfect health by a series of partial payments. In order, therefore, to spare Claude, here is our young friend Jerry, whom no school, apparently, is able to hold inured in cells of learning.

She was the same Jerry; that is to say, she was every instant different. She was a tingling flesh-and-blood manifestation of electric force. In contact with her vibrating personality, indifference was impossible. One might be shocked, or thrilled, according to susceptibility of dynamic force.

"It is n't good for Claude to talk a great deal, even yet," she explained, "so I'm to help. He is simply determined to keep you as his social secretary. I want you to consent, Mr. Payne. I want you *so* much! I'm going to be as nice to you as I can be, and make the work seem as interesting as possible, so you'll like it. And we'd all see each other so often, you know — not have to wait for a Briarcliff race to bring us together. I don't believe you like us as much as we do you —" her eyes of gray scintillated! — "or you would n't have to be given so much time to make up your mind. I want

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you so very much, Mr. Payne. You understand, I am saying all this for Claude —”

“I believe you ’ve said enough on that point,” interposed Claude, from his couch.

Jerry looked thoughtfully at Irving. “Well, perhaps I have,” she said, gravely.

To Irving it was like a play. Would it not be pleasant to receive a princely salary for work that was exactly like a comedy? Of course, as he sat at the writing desk, as now, he could not always, as now, expect to find Jerry seated upon the floor at his feet, with her lap full of letters, and the floor around her covered with notes. Claude kept his eyes upon them. Once Mrs. Vandever entered, and departed smilingly. A trained nurse sat reading at a distant window, discreet, impersonal. Jerry, however, was everything.

Jerry tore open a letter, then looked up. She caught Irving’s gaze, and her face flashed its white light, half smile, half intelligence. “Notice,” she said, “that the letters I put in *this* pile —” She placed the missive at the exact tip of the slipper that showed itself from under the adorable fan-like skirt, no doubt for that very purpose — “are asking for something. You will refuse all they ask, and say how sorry you are.”

“Without discrimination?” Irving asked, looking very hard, either at the letter, or at the little foot fully revealed in its open-work slipper.

“Yes,” said Jerry. “People are always wanting something.”

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“ And that ’s true enough,” Irving agreed, making the dangerous experiment of trying to see to the bottom of her eyes.

“ Yes,” murmured Jerry, divining his intention, and holding up her eyes, to make it easy for him. She held them thus distractingly open, as she continued: “ It would take all Claude’s time, you see, to find out who deserves help, and who does n’t. It would keep him always visiting church-committees, and organized charities, and poor people’s rooms, where there are all kinds of contagious diseases.” With chin tilted up, she let the glory of her eyes envelop him, till his eyes fled for safety. Then she opened another letter, and laid it upon the first; a third followed the second; then a fourth. So many people wanted something!

“ Now! Here ’s something different,” she said, presently, in a brisk tone. “ It ’s from Mrs. Hoyt, one of Claude’s set.” Irving remembered Mrs. Hoyt; it was she who had accompanied Mrs. Vandever to the divorce court; the lady whose face suggested the horse-woman. Jerry had become serious, as one needs must, who seeks to define social distinctions. Irving found her gravity as wonderful as her smile. Her thoughts seemed to move just beneath the texture of her forehead, changing her features with that white light, as they darted to the outlet of speech. As it chanced, she held her mouth in such a light that the young man could see the play of her lips to best advantage. She was very kind to him.

She went on: “ Mrs. Hoyt’s is n’t exactly Lady Vandever’s set, but her set and Claude’s overlap. I ’ll make

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you a list of hers and of his, and draw a circle about those that are common to both; like synonyms, you know. Forgive me for being rather learned; I hope you won't find it dull. Mrs. Hoyt loves horses, and Lady Vandever prefers cats. But it is n't a difference of animals. Lady Vandever's set go in for Browning and Prisoners and Souls. You might go on the principle that Mrs. Hoyt's crowd — Claude's crowd — are more fun. So these letters, in *this* pile —" Much as she may have regretted it, she was obliged to extend her foot, in order to reveal the high heel; at a tangent to this interesting heel, she placed the epistle. "In *this* pile are the Hoyts' people. You answer them in a chummy, slangy kind of way. The Lady Vandever letters — I don't know where I can put them — are to be answered as if you were obliged to break the ice to get to the ink. Oh, you will be *so* polite, suggesting that your politeness had been carefully revised, like a manuscript!"

"I understand."

"Do you? Oh, I thought perhaps you had n't direct communication from Mars."

"We have wireless."

Jerry laughed. Then she held up a letter, allowing her sleeve to fall back, thus revealing a charming vista of dazzling white. Her arm was rather thin and sinewy, suggesting the gymnasium rather than the boudoir, but it appealed to Irving more intimately than if it had possessed the rounded curves of maturity. It suggested to his fanciful mind that she was still clinging to the

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illusions of youth, this Jerry, who was in reality so knowing. "When you get a letter like this," she explained, "you throw it into the waste-basket, without opening it."

Claude spoke up, languidly. "Who's it from?"

Jerry looked toward the couch, showing her pearly teeth: "Beauty."

Claude suddenly manifested animation. "Oh, hang it, yes!" he exclaimed. "Are *they* still coming? By Jove!"

"I believe," said Jerry, industriously sorting the letters, "that there are a good many chorus-girls on Mars? It must be jolly to have nothing to live up to. I do as I please; but that's so normal, it's uninteresting. Besides, I'm obliged to please to do only what the other girls do. Anyway, this summer, I mean to have all the fun that's my due, before I'm a *débutante*. We're going to the Catskills, as of course *you* will; for social secretaries are indispensable at the Catskills. Then we'll go to Saratoga, I guess, you and Claude and I. I'll only be a girl, till I've set out; but I mean to be just as killing a girl as possible."

Irving was thrilled with these glorious prospects. Would he go? Why not? "I think you can begin counting corpses," he exclaimed, a little dizzily.

"Then you agree?" cried Jerry quickly. "You accept the position? Please!" She opened her eyes to their most dangerous extent. "*Please!*"

"Jerry," said Claude, "come here a moment. If

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Knickerbocker 'll excuse me, I want to communicate a thought in your ear."

Jerry held up her slim hands to Irving. "Will you lift me up?"

After she had gone to the bedside, Irving still felt the pressure that her weight had thrown upon his hands. In a way, it was a pleasure for him to witness the perfect understanding that seemed to exist between Claude and his step-sister. But it was not the pleasure he had discovered in the affection of Claude and Mrs. Vandever. As Claude placed his hand upon the dark head, to draw it nearer his lips, Irving could not but reflect that, after all, those two were unrelated by ties of blood. He even felt a little pang, he who had no right to pangs on Jerry's account!

He might have felt greater uneasiness had he caught the words that elicited silvery laughter. "Look here, Jerry," Claude had whispered, "none of your tricks with my social secretary; none of your *Jerrymandering!*"

CHAPTER XXI

IRVING MAKES HIS DECISION

IRVING went no more to the railroad office, he no longer baited the traps which he had set in so many places of the city-wilderness for the catching of opportunities. It was no longer a matter of finding a job, but of deciding as to which one he would take.

But from this, it is not to be inferred that the young man was idle. On the contrary, the days and nights following his last appearance at the billing-desk were filled with busy and anxious thoughts. The necessity of making his choice between Claude and J. S. Vandever was imperative, and was fast becoming immediate. He knew that when he had once made his choice, he would abide by it; he understood the irreconcilable divergence of the two possible courses; and he foresaw that whichever one he accepted would regulate all his after-life.

Therefore those were busy days, though apparently he did nothing. As he threaded the streets, he saw neither men nor houses, but future pleasure and achievement. As he sat alone in the skylit room, whose breath no longer whispered of Jessie, it might be that the voice of Monsieur du Pays would climb the staircases and the carpeted ladder, lifted upon high tenor notes to

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the very roof. But they did not ascend to the peaks of Irving's exalted meditations, those tenor notes of Monsieur du Pays, he whose locks were so bravely blonde in spite of envious Time.

As a general, meditating the season's campaign, so brooded Irving over his campaign of life. Should he enter the lists of fashion as a social secretary, such moments as he devoted to actual work would be mere interstices in the day's bright hours of ease and pleasure. On the other hand, if he enrolled under the great financier, he must either find pleasure in his work, or eat his bread with a bitter taste in his mouth. Under Claude's banner, he would be led into gay society; for through his veins flowed neither yellow, as an aristocrat on this side the water, nor blue, as on the other side, yet he possessed the social temperament which is as essential to success, as wealth or birth. And because he possessed this genius of temperament which gives to one's speech a manner, and to one's ideas a sympathy, that makes one always desirable — for that very reason, Irving felt impelled to accept Claude's offer.

That he did not do so at once, showed the change that had come over him. That he should continue to hesitate could have surprised no one more than the Irving Payne of six months ago. Those dazzling prospects with which he had so often entertained himself during drab-colored hours, those gay fancies of light laughter, sparkling smiles, refined elegancies, with which he may be said to have buttered his crusts in times of economy — these were, as by a miracle, within his reach, ready to

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be materialized. Not only within his reach; there was danger that they might be actually forced upon him. He need but remain passive, hold himself receptive, and Fortune would do the rest. Fortune was so determined to seize upon him, that escape would require active resistance — resistance against that which he had always most ardently desired.

Claude had insisted; Mrs. Vandever had almost entreated; Jerry had opened her gray eyes to their widest allurements. If his brief interview with J. S. Vandever had not taken place, could Irving have resisted the temptation, or even considered resistance a virtue? If chance had not brought father Payne a new tugboat, with the means to pay off the mortgage, might not resistance have seemed wrong, if but for the sake of his foster-parents? At any rate, the longer Irving considered Claude's offer, the clearer it appeared to him in the light of an assiduous temptation, to which his old nature desired to succumb.

But within him, a new element was stirring that offered resistance to the old nature; and this, though new, was fast growing superior in strength. Doubtless the two-weeks' inner battle did more than anything else to develop that second self.

It would be difficult to express in words the motives that finally determined Irving. Certainly he did not himself vocalize his arguments. It was with him rather a decision of feeling than of logic. If he became Claude's social secretary, he must relinquish everything in life which he had formerly depreciated, but now re-

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garded paramount. In the employ of J. S. Vandever, he would find the chance to develop himself; to bring to the highest effectiveness, every inherent capability. One meant a lifetime of play, the other of work. Which should it be?

To work in this manner would mean to acquire an intimate understanding of vast enterprises; and with this knowledge would come the power to act, to make of oneself a factor in the world's achievement. It would be a lifelong self-development, a never-ending adventure with one's soul. In the romances of old, one found excitement in the clash of arms, in victory over great odds. In the romance of these most modern of modern times, one's blood was none the less thrilled by the clashings of gigantic interests, by victory over opposing organizations, over Nature herself.

As for Jerry, who had begun to occupy a good deal of his thought, a decision in favor of J. S. Vandever would not necessarily exclude her from his life. He would not see her so often, or so intimately, as in the Vandever mansion; but of course he would see her. And if he found that his interest in her was deepening into love, he need not despair. He would seek first the kingdom of achievement—perhaps all these other things would be added unto him.

When he went at last to the Fifth Avenue mansion to declare his resolution, reached after so many hours of torturing indecision, he found the white-and-gold car before the gates, which he recognized as the especial property of Jerry. J. S. Vandever, who had dashed

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up from the lower city, in his runabout, reached the door as Irving came up. Mr. Vandever knew that there was to be some sort of meeting in his wife's apartments, and imagined that the young man had come to attend an Identification *séance*, or a charity gathering.

He gave Irving a friendly nod, as he inquired, gravely, "Souls or Cats?"

"Souls," said Irving.

Mr. Vandever went at once to his library to immerse himself in legal papers. Irving was shown to the drawing room, where Mrs. Vandever and Jerry hovered; the former preparatory to swooping down upon first arrivals; the latter in a street dress denoting flight. Irving was unexpected, but welcome. Claude, however, was asleep; and if —

In fact, Irving's expression told them that he meant to decline Claude's offer; and Mrs. Vandever, knowing that her son had taken the matter to heart, intended to try her powers of persuasion before delivering the decision to Claude. Jerry, too, was anxious for Irving to accept. They were so kind, and so sincere that Irving was touched and embarrassed. It made it hard for him, all the more because he could not exactly state his reasons in convincing terms.

Presently an unlooked-for diversion occurred. Irving was suddenly struck by a look of friendly appeal, which shone out from the indefinable atmosphere of the lady's habitual melancholy; it was precisely the look which Mr. Burl had skilfully caught and fixed upon his canvas. Irving referred to the picture, by one of his friends, an

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out-of-date artist in a forgotten corner of the city. What was his name? Christopher Burl —

Mrs. Vandever swayed; but she motioned to Irving not to support her. Jerry was frightened. "I will not faint," whispered Mrs. Vandever, with pallid lips. Her hand went to her heart. She breathed rapidly, repeating, "No, I will not faint."

Jerry would have pressed the bell cord.

"I don't want the maid," Mrs. Vandever interposed, and her color rapidly returned. "It was just a moment — I had no idea I was so indisposed — Whom were we speaking of? I thought some one mentioned —"

"A complete stranger, Lady Vandever," said Jerry, assuringly. "A Mr. Christopher Burl, I believe."

Mrs. Vandever, who had almost fallen into a chair, remained sitting in sidewise position. She looked over her shoulder at Irving: "A relative?"

"Not the slightest kin," said Irving, wondering if the name of his friend had caused the change in her. "We are accidental acquaintances, but he has been kind to me. Dr. Adams knows him."

"Oh," said Mrs. Vandever, rather faintly. "Possibly I have heard Dr. Adams speak of this artist. And he is not your — he is no kin to you, then?"

"I just ran across him, one day, by accident," Irving explained — "or he ran across me, I don't know which. We struck up an acquaintance, and I found him a fine old fellow."

"Yes?" said Mrs. Vandever, in a voice that seemed

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not only to dismiss Christopher Burl, but also Irving Payne. The alteration in her manner was almost imperceptible. It was manifested chiefly in this, that she no longer urged Irving to enter her son's employment. And yet, he could not be sure that she ceased to urge because she had lost the desire. It was possible that his decisive refusal had been accepted as unalterable. Still, it was strange that, until Mr. Burl was mentioned, she had made light of his objections.

Jerry, however, had no intention of letting off Irving so easily. As we shall see, her reasons were not purely disinterested. She was attired for the white-and-gold car; her destination was a friend's home in Brooklyn. And if Irving would go with her, just for the drive! This, be it understood, was after Irving had left the house; while yet he lingered before the gates, where Jerry, with dark design, had overtaken him.

"If you would only go with me!" What a pleading face!

"Go with you, Jerry? Why, I would go with you to — to —"

"Maybe I'll never go *there*," Jerry interrupted. "I mean to turn good, when I'm old. Come, then!"

Down Fifth Avenue they glided, side by side. Central Park vanished. Into Fourth Avenue they swerved, not to bend their course till the Bowery was reached. Irving found no incongruity in the jumbled scenes of marble palaces, grimy hovels, the noisy traffic of the streets, the ugly mutilation of thoroughfares for the laying of gas-

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pipes. When detours carried them past rusting fire escapes which gleamed like rainbows in all the colors of the day's wash, or when they skirted a little park whose timid green looked already old, there was always the booming of the city in its one bass note, accompanying all other sounds, and there was Jerry's flashing face and nervous voice, giving to all incongruities a sense of unity.

In the meantime, conversation had been rapid, electric, following the course of least resistance. Jerry had a favor, a great favor to ask. And she did n't know how he would take it, because she did n't know just how much he meant what he said — when he said that he cared very much.

"For you," said Irving, "certainly I do. And you've granted me such a great favor — this ride with you — it's like a princess bestowing a gift. You don't imagine I could refuse you anything, do you, Jerry? Except to be Claude's secretary. Excuse rhyme."

"I will, for the sake of reason. Be reasonable. Anyway, I'm not going to say one word about that secretaryship, although I *do* think — even if for *my* sake, if *that's* anything —"

"Jerry! If you keep looking that way, you might just as well knock me on the head and throw me overboard. Please don't be so charming, that's a good soul. Does this remind you any of the day at Briarcliff? I love to think of that. You stood up, shouting like mad, and holding my hand —"

"I'm sure I did n't," pouted Jerry. "How ridic-

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ulous! Like this?" She caught his hand with a sudden blinding smile, and he grasped her fingers before they could slip away.

"And I told you that I loved you," Irving hurried on, breathlessly, "and I called you 'darling,' just as I call you darling, now, with your hand in mine."

"And all these people will see you," she flashed at him, without trying to draw away. "Then my picture in the morning papers. Then papa will say, 'I can see no one; I have no statement to make.'"

"And I —" began Irving.

"Oh, you will simply not *be*. Papa will fix *you!* Better put your hand in your pocket." She looked at him gravely with a face of such perfect innocence and *naïveté* that Irving almost believed it natural. "Besides," she said, opening her eyes, "when you said you loved me, and when you called me 'darling,' it was just the excitement of the races. It was just Old Gipsy."

"And what is it now?" Irving demanded, pressing her hand. "What is it *now*, little darling Jerry?"

"Now listen, Irving. I said I had a favor to ask. If you grant it, why, then, I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll let you call me that . . . when no one is around, you understand. Quite alone, Irving. You are going with us to the Catskills; I know you are, because I know you are going to be Claude's social secretary. Because if you are n't, my purpose is never to speak to you again, as long as I live. Very well, Mr. Payne. You'll climb the trails with me this summer — because I'll not be out yet, and *you'll* be nobody. I shall have

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to be pulled up those steepest paths that lead to Joe Jefferson's cabin — no, I mean Rip Van W.'s cabin, the sleeping-man's, you know. Well, *you* shall pull me up those paths. Sometimes I'll have to jump from tiny precipices, as everybody feminine must; *you* shall be at the bottom, to catch me. And do you know, among the old Dutch houses, there's a ghost that comes every night with a rope about his neck — and if I get *too* afraid, you shall hold my hand, as you're doing this minute. We'll be cut off from the set, so we'll have only each other; and oh! does n't it sound wild? And that's what it means, I want you to know, to be a social secretary."

Six months ago — nay, a month ago,— Irving would have been quite lost. Even now, he had lost directions, without much caring, so long as he held Jerry's hand.

Jerry's manner now changed. Into its brilliance entered a hardness; into her vagaries, method. "You referred to Briarcliff," she said, "and that brings me to the favor I'm to ask. I told you, that morning, about my friend who married, as a sort of prank, last summer, at Atlantic City, and who has been sorry ever since."

"But you told me the ceremony was illegal, on account of her youth."

"Oh, yes! but the man she's married to, still wants her, this Claude Vandever who is so inconstant in other matters. He *still* wants her."

"But can't get her, since she's free," said Irving, comfortably.

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“But could tell her papa what happened, last summer, and make no end of trouble.”

“But would n’t do that, since it could n’t win him the girl. I don’t believe Claude is the sort of fellow to try to intimidate a young girl.”

“You never saw Claude in love. He knows very well that the only way to hide everything is for that girl to marry him. And he wants her — oh! how he wants that girl. He’s not sensible about her *at all!* Maybe he’d be sorry to make her marry him, and yet, he’d be sorrier not to.”

“But what can I do? You wish me to speak to Claude?”

“Speak to Claude? Horrors! You’re as slow as the Senate. No, sir! I want to find out some of Claude’s secrets, so I can give them to my friend. When my friend has these secrets, she’ll no longer be afraid of Claude. As it is, he has her in his power. But *then*, it would be a draw between them. Now if you will help —”

“Help? *I?* But how?”

“I told you once that I’d found the bedrock under your nature. That means, that I can trust you implicitly. Won’t you help this poor child out of his power?” Her tone grew wistful. “Yes, I do him the justice to admit that he really loves her. But she wants to be free, entirely free.”

“I told you my plan,” said Irving: “for her to tell her parents. What is your plan?”

“To get Claude in her power, by giving her some

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secret about him — oh, I don't know what. You could find out. Something about that chorus-girl that calls herself 'Beauty.' That's what I mean. You dined with them. You could learn all about it."

Irving released her hand, automatically. "You think I would do *that*?" he asked, rather in surprise than displeasure.

"It would n't be so bad. He has no right to hold the secret of the marriage over her head. She has a right to know about his private affairs, so she can offstand that other. He would n't threaten her, when she could expose him. She'd never use the secret except to protect herself. And she's such a little dear! In fact, I am no more fascinating than she is. In fact, I *am* she. Now you know the whole miserable story. It is I whom Claude loves. And it is I who am resolved, at any cost, to preserve my freedom for some years to come. And it is you, Irving, who can do this for me, and win my everlasting gratitude. Just do what Claude wants — just become his social secretary. After that, it's as easy as A, B, C. Claude would never know. And even if he knew, he could n't think much about it. And there would be poor little Jerry, snatched from under his lion's paw."

They had reached the entrance to Williamsburg Bridge. Lifted, as by a giant hand, above the wide expanse of dull green water, the strident clanging of the city's rush pursued them. On one hand, Manhattan Island narrowed away to a straggling point, on the other, Long Island drew in her fringed skirts to make

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room for Wallabout Bay. He wondered if he would ever see these diverging shores without thinking of Jerry. He had never understood her before; perhaps not even now. But, in some occult fashion, the bristling towers, the smoking chimneys of the united city, seemed typified by this spirit, this fresh, nervous, winged embodiment of the unmoral joy of youth: fresh, not from lack of knowledge — from experience, only; nervous, with the pulsating electric force that drove her recklessly and undeviatingly to her desires; winged, not with angel pinions, but with that prematurely developed knowledge of good and evil, of the girl of to-day.

“Irving!” He felt a touch upon his shoulder. Jerry held her warm hand there, and held her face uplifted, that he might look down into her eyes. Over her delicate cheeks passed swiftly the nerve-force which he had found flashing only in Jerry’s face. He caught from her breath the aroma of youth. “You will do it, Irving? You will do it, to save me? You will do it, for my sake?”

His voice was simple, as if he would have banished all traces of emotion. “Jerry, you don’t know me.” That was all. If she had known him, she would not have asked.

They were at the highest point of the arch. She seemed held against the sky, that he might read her through and through. But he scarcely looked at her. He could feel but pity for the shrinking form, the pallid face. As in a moment she had shrunken, as if the look in his eyes had seen quite through the Jerry-charm, the Jerry-soul,

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and had found it rather different from what it had always seemed to Jerry herself.

Perhaps another than Irving might have smiled at her inability to understand his scruples, might have gone on dreaming the Jerry-dream. But if Irving could ever have loved Jerry, the possibility had vanished, not to return. It was by no means because he resolved that it should be thus, or, in fact, because his will had anything to do with the matter. Something had passed away without his volition — into the sky, it seemed; at any rate, to an inconceivable remoteness. It had passed away because he was already, in part, what he had resolved to become, by the mere force of resolution, and because Jerry was Jerry, and he understood her as never before.

It was some time before Jerry spoke. Then she sought to respond to what she believed dominant in his mind. "But I have my ideas, too; and ideals."

"One must live by his own ideals, of course," said Irving, with no shade of censure. It was not so easy to conceal his disappointment. It seemed akin to tragedy, that Jerry should be so near, so approachable, and that he should not in the least care. Their silence was pregnant with mutual understanding. The stillness between them told everything they needed to know.

"But I ought not to go farther," said Irving, suddenly; "the fact is, I have an —" He checked himself, and spoke in lighter vein. "The fact is, Jerry, I am very bad company, to-day."

"So you are," smiled Jerry. Such a ghostly, shiv-

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ery little smile it was! "Get out, then." The car stopped. She added, looking down upon him, as he hesitated on the sidewalk, "I know what I've lost. Good-bye. No handshakes. No flags of truce." She turned to the chauffeur imperiously: "Drive on!"

Irving stood looking wistfully, one might have thought regretfully, after the automobile. It seemed bearing away the last fragment of his old nature, and his new self was still so new, that he felt a little lonely.

CHAPTER XXII

THE MYSTERY IS REVIVED

SO, after all, it was somebody else who pulled Jerry Vandever up those steepest paths leading to the cabin of sleepy old Rip! Whoever stood at the base of a tiny precipice to catch Jerry, as she leaped from the brow, it was not Irving Payne. It was Claude, perhaps; at any rate, those who know Jerry must be convinced that it was *somebody*.

As Irving's choice excluded the prospect of standing at the base of a Catskill precipice, so it insured that he should not remain at the bottom of the precipice of life. The climbing would be difficult; there might be grass no greener above than below; but the air would prove more exhilarating. Possibly one lasts longer down in the valley, if happily, enough substance be found to keep soul and body together. But if the atmosphere of the heights keeps one's energies always blazing, as in a strong wind, till they are burned out to the last atom of their resistance,—nevertheless, one lives.

Gotham Repose, which we may regard as nestling close to the base of life's precipice, was, therefore, deserted. Irving had climbed above its skylit room. Those familiar shades of the lodging-house had flitted to oblivion—the young reporter who could never

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make two ends meet, even in the matter of matching some fact with his account of it; the blondined typewriter, so conscientiously artificial; the seamstress, timid and wan; the Du Pays — had all vanished from his world, as had already vanished Mrs. Wyse, Jessie Tiff, Wedging; in a word, characters enough to have stocked a dozen novels.

To be sure, Irving sometimes saw Wedging, since Irving was in J. S. Vandever's office on Broad Street, while Wedging worked in a broker's office on Wall Street. Their accidental encounters were as free from enthusiasm as can well be imagined. They had slept together, without a touching of souls.

As to the details of Irving's tireless devotion to his particular allotment of the world's work, one might as well go to hard labor as dwell upon that. It wearies one's brain to contemplate the vast amount of exercise undergone by the young man's body, to say nothing of the perplexities that kept him awake at night. If the sheets, typewritten by him at feverish speed, had been pinned together, might they not have reached from here to Mars? It is not for us to make the calculation, since no J. S. Vandever has us in mind as private secretary.

It is because Irving's duties sometimes carried him to the Vandever mansion, that we cannot dismiss this part of his life with a mere word. Two of those business calls were important in a sense entirely apart from the interests of his employer, since they bore upon the young man's life-mystery.

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The first incident came four months after Irving's entrance into J. S. Vandever's employ. That was in August, when everybody who was anybody — as of course Irving was n't — had left the city long ago. Surely enough has been said to explain the entrance of Irving, at any hour, within the steel gates on Fifth Avenue. It was not to the drawing-room that he aspired — fortunately enough, since shrouded furniture and aromatic mothballs told of absence at fashionable bathing-resorts on lake, or sea — it was the library, rather, that constituted his limited field of action in the Vandever mansion.

J. S. Vandever, with that instinct of organizing power peculiar to the genius of the few masters of the world, had penetrated to what Jerry termed Irving's bedrock. It had not taken four months to convince the financier that the young man possessed, among other excellent qualities, one decidedly rare — reliability. In the mutations of affairs and men, Irving stood like a rock against which the current breaks in vain. He was faithful; and J. S. Vandever developed his trustworthiness by trusting him. Little by little, he placed certain confidences in Irving's keeping. Like Napoleon, Mr. Vandever conquered wherever he appeared in person, but he could not be everywhere at once. He needed a Marshal Ney, and he believed Irving possessed not only the requisite courage and prudence, but the fidelity indispensable for such a position.

Moreover, Irving showed such tireless interest in all important affairs, his ambition was so undaunted be-

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fore the contemplation of vast combinations, and his ingenuity in finding ways and means when there seemed, to one less penetrating, but a single road leading up against a dead wall — this ingenuity was so inventive, that J. S. Vandever hoped, within no great lapse of time, to promote the young man to the post in question. In the meantime, he said nothing; but if he had, it would not have surprised Irving. For Irving, so far from doubting his ability to enact the part of a Marshal Ney, already looked upon himself as a future Napoleon.

In the meantime, our young Corsican, trailing no clouds of glory about him, came to the Vandever mansion, on the August afternoon in question. He was admitted at once, and he ascended, as one who has the right of way, to the library. As he opened the library door, thinking only of the papers for which Mr. Vandever had sent him, voices came from the ladies' drawing room. He supposed the servants were enjoying their summer liberty, and went on into the library without suspecting that Mrs. Vandever had, the evening before, run over from Newport.

He stopped suddenly, on finding that some one was in the room; some one who had hastily risen at sound of his footsteps, and who was hurrying toward another door as if to escape. The appearance of this woman, so far as he could judge from her dress and the back of her head, was not that of a fugitive criminal, else he might have suspected her of having slipped into the library to steal. Indeed, so swiftly and unceremoni-

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ously did she dart away, that the suspicion grew in probability.

For a moment he hesitated, uncertain how to act. If the woman, in spite of her air of refinement, was a thief, doubtless the servants were in league with her. It was unlikely that they could gain access to any papers of the secret, or locked, drawers and boxes that could be of any value to them. Still —

It was not until the door opened again that he had any warning of Mrs. Vandever's presence in the city. It was her voice, and that of a friend, which had come from the distant apartment. He now learned that Mrs. Vandever had come to town with a small company of friends on pressing business — what else could induce them to enter the oven's mouth? — and they were to return that night. Mr. Vandever had been telephoned to come, at once, to discuss a certain matter with one of Mrs. Vandever's friends.

"It was she whom you found in the library," said Mrs. Vandever, with her kindly, but remote smile. The former charm of haunting melancholy and pensive beauty remained; but the dark eyes and sensitive mouth no longer seemed to sue for his regard. Was it because he had refused to become Claude's social secretary, in becoming private secretary to her husband?

Mrs. Vandever continued: "My friend asked me to come to explain her sudden flight. You must have thought it strange, but she had suddenly grown ill, and felt herself unfit to meet a stranger."

"If I had known you were here," Irving smiled,

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“and that she was your friend, I'd have thought nothing about it. But I'm glad you told me how it was, or I might have thought Mrs.— that Mrs.—”

“Mrs. Fenly is my friend's name,” said Mrs. Vandever, tranquilly. “Mrs. Fenly is very desirous of seeing Mr. Vandever this afternoon.”

“I am going back to the office,” Irving said, “with this box of papers. If he has n't already left, I'll tell him that Mrs. Fenly —”

“You'd better just say, ‘a lady on business’; for Mr. Vandever does n't know her.”

It did not occur to Irving as strange that Mr. Vandever should not know Mrs. Fenly; he imagined that the great financier was unacquainted with most of the friends of his wife and children. What did seem strange to him was, that he fancied he had seen Mrs. Fenly before, and in some important phase of his own life. He had thought so, the instant of discovering her in the library, though her back was turned upon him. In her rapid flight, the movement of her body had suggested some one in his past. Yet he was convinced that he had never known the name Fenly. This conviction did not suggest that he was mistaken about the woman.

“I know I've seen her before,” he declared to himself, “and not only seen her, but been associated with her. And she could n't have been called ‘Mrs. Fenly’ at that time. Then what *was* she called? And who is she? But after all, what can it matter? For I am

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done with all my past; I have nothing to do with society on the Vandever side of the line."

Thus did he serenely dismiss Mrs. Fenly from his mind. Nor was he to think of her again, except in most casual fashion, until two months later, when she again crossed his orbit, in a manner never to be forgotten.

Let us pass immediately to the occasion. We shall have no change of scene, hardly of circumstance. Irving has again come to the library, not, this time, to carry papers away, but to consult a great quantity of them; and, as formerly, he is surprised to find a woman already there at his entrance, though so far from running away, she advances with a quick white smile, the Jerry smile, in a word.

Yes, it is Jerry; never for a moment can there be the least doubt of that. Why here? Design, depend upon it! Jerry has too unmistakably the air of having waited for Irving, to leave that in doubt. Yet she could not have known he was coming, unless advised by her father.

J. S. Vandever was, then, somewhere in the house; had come, according to Jerry, to meet a friend of her step-mother's, a Mrs. Fenly. "Who I detest," she added, with unbecoming scorn for her relative pronoun. All had come up from Long Island for a few days, strictly on business, of course, since September is impossible in the city—"Except, of course, for those who are out of it," says Jerry.

Irving, drawing forth the papers for the making

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of memoranda, cheerfully accepted her classification. Jerry looked at him with a thoughtful frown. It seemed out of all keeping with her expression of slightness and gayety. She was thinking that Irving did not have the air of one who is "out of it." He impressed her much more deeply than formerly. Since that morning at Dr. Adams's, his air had changed, his eyes were different, even his face seemed transformed. The exuberance of youth was excised; he was like a vessel trimmed for rough weather. The very expression of his face promised safety and destination.

Jerry perched on a corner of the table, unconsciously seeking his level. "Irving," she asked abruptly, looking far from content, "what do you think of it?" She waved her hand impatiently toward the documents. "Do you get much out of life, after all?"

Irving smiled, self-containedly. "I get all out of life that there is in *me*," he said. "That's something."

"Is it enough?" she returned, discontentedly.

"No. That's why I'm developing myself, so I can get more. We receive according to our capacity."

"But are you much fun to yourself?" she inquired, shrugging her pretty shoulders, and reaching down to find if she could touch the carpet with her foot. "Don't you bore yourself awfully, when you're alone? Can you really make yourself feel that quotations of stocks and bonds are more human than quotations of the best authors?"

Her perverse air suggested one seeking a quarrel.

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She was so little, so piquant, so bright-eyed, he thought of a bird with ruffled feathers. He answered, smiling at her, "I do not find it dangerous to leave myself alone."

She showed him her teeth. Then she extended a dainty finger, and denounced him viciously. "I know what is the matter with you, Mr. Irving Payne. You are so wrapped up in yourself and your plans, that you care about nothing else. Very well! The longer you are with J. S. Vandever and Company, the more selfish you'll become. Of course. But if *I* had to live for myself alone, and shut my eyes to everybody else, in order, as you say, to increase my capacity—well! I'd rather have a smaller capacity, with a larger heart. Yes, I would. Oh, I know very well what fine names you'd give your ambitions. But whatever you call them, it's all one. What you want is money, and lots of it, and you mean to have it, and you mean to think of nothing else but getting it. And maybe when you're a shrivelled-up old man, all weasened, and dried-out, you'll have your millions and nothing else. And you call *that* getting something out of life! Why? *You're* not getting anything out of life!" She paused, out of breath.

"Are you?" Irving asked, good-naturedly.

"Yes!" she snapped. "Fun. Excitement. Change. Oh—" she extended her arms—"all that. You see? The universe. But as for you—a desk, an office; walls and a door. Irving, leave all that, and be somebody. Come on!" Her bright face challenged.

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"It's not in your direction, Jerry, for me to be somebody," Irving said, soberly.

"And another thing," Jerry added, quickly, not without a faint dawn of rose in her cheeks, "you can prevent me — I mean you can keep me from being — I'm going to build on your bedrock, Irving, by trusting you. My engagement to Claude is to be announced as soon as I've set out. Well, you can prevent that. You know how; I told you, once."

"But I've forgotten," said Irving, lightly. "And, returning to your other subject, I have only this to say —"

"That usually means an hour's speech," interjected Jerry, disappointedly.

"That it's money that digs subways, and raises sky-scrapers, and does big things in this world, and we might as well accept the fact. I don't think the power of money is any more tyrannous than brute force used to be. Something has to govern, and if money's the ruling power, it's more democratic than any other system of sovereignty I know of, since the poorest beggar has a chance at it."

"Oh," said Jerry, sarcastically, "and I presume you mean to dig a subway, then?"

"I mean to have something to say about it, if one's to be dug."

Jerry jumped down from the table. "And you'll build sky-scrapers, no doubt?"

"And as high as anybody's," Irving laughed ambitiously.

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She stamped her foot at him; her anger was highly provocative, but not as she could have wished. "It all means money, money!" she cried. "That's the name of it, and of you and your plans — just money, money!"

"Money, money!" cried Irving, who was exhilarated by her electric personality to the point of effervescence. "All right, Jerry, it's money, money! I accept the gantlet. What is gained by pretending to despise what everybody in the civilized world wants? Of course it's money. To love it is the root of all evil; and that's why the indiscriminate mob cries out against it, seeing no difference between those who love it, and those who use it to procure what they love. In old times, the soldier of fortune had the chance of fighting his way over the corpses of the enemy, to a brief glory. But to-day —"

"To-day," cried Jerry, "we are all mercenary soldiers, it seems. Good-bye, Monsieur Mousquetaire of the Dollar. I hope you'll be bravely paid!" Jerry was flushed, and flashing of eye. She darted from the room, as if driven from an actual field of battle. In truth, she cared little about abstract principles, and no one realized the advantages of a Fifth Avenue home more than she. But Irving had sadly disappointed her. She had expected, before leaving Long Island, to make a final appeal to him; and she had hoped — But she hardly knew what she had hoped. She had hoped, at any rate. In the young man she discovered something unexpected; it was not only that he resisted her,

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but that he did so apparently without effort or regret. There was about him a certain substantiality of which she knew but little. In a way, it added to his charm, because semi-mysterious. The keenness of his eye, and the alertness of his face, rendered him handsome to a degree before unknown. There was in his features an element of masculinity and latent power, which gave the transforming touch.

He finished his work by an evening lamp, and was about to go, when to his surprise, Jerry reëntered. She came straight up to him, and held out her hand. He was astonished. The difference of opinion had meant so much more to her than to him.

“Of course I misrepresented you, Irving,” she said, “and of course I was hateful. You ’ll be a great man some day, and I ’ll never be a great woman. It’s all as we determine, no doubt. There’s Winifred — she ’ll reach high, because she aspires. I won’t, because I don’t. It tires me to think of being great — it bores me to read of those who are. But there’s one thing, and I want you to believe it: I shall always regard you for what you are. You understand? For what *you* are, not for what other people are.”

Irving was touched, but also mystified. “No, Jerry, I don’t exactly understand, because you say that so oddly. Of course I ask to be taken only for what I am. What have others to do with it?”

“Nothing,” said Jerry, quickly, “and I want you to believe I shall always feel just as I say.”

Irving stared at her in perplexity.

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“Of course you know,” Jerry faltered, “that everybody does n’t look at it that way. That’s what I meant.”

“Look at what, Jerry; look at what?”

“At parentage and all that. It’s not American, I say, to consider birth and ancestors. I just wanted you to know how I felt, that was all. Good-bye.”

“But wait a moment, Jerry. You speak in enigmas. Do you know anything about my parentage? I mean, except that my father and mother died when I was a mere infant?”

“Of course I know that Mrs. Wyse told you that,” said Jerry, hesitatingly. “But you found out better, Irving.”

With a mighty effort, Irving held his expression as calm and unmoved as if he did not anticipate some vital discovery. “And how did *you* find out better, Jerry?” he said, in a fairly even voice.

“Mrs. Fenly knows all about it,” said Jerry, who little suspected how great a shock her words imparted. “I heard her telling Lady Vandever how Mrs. Wyse — the woman where you lodged, she said,— had deceived you, in order to get money from you when she should tell the truth, at last. But the police drove her away; and besides, you had n’t much money, I believe, at that time.” She looked up, with an uncertain smile; but Irving was very grave, even pale.

“Go on, Jerry, if you please. I want very much to know exactly what this friend of your mother has told her. Did you hear it all?” he added eagerly. He

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leaned toward her with hands locked behind him, the nails pressed against the flesh.

“But please excuse me, Irving,” she said, with most unwonted gentleness. “It is very — unpleasant. And I only wanted you to know how I felt, and to say good-bye.”

But his command, or appeal, was not to be resisted.

“It was only that Mrs. Wyse deceived you, as I said, and that afterwards you found it out. And that you don’t know, even now, who your mother is. But that — but that you know your father, and that he is not — that he is not an amiable character.”

It seemed to Irving at that moment, that all his future hopes and present plans were falling about his head. His brain reeled; but, though he grew paler and paler, and though his hands trembled behind him, his eyes never wavered.

“I think I had better see this Mrs. Fenly,” he said, no longer able to hold his tones level. “No doubt she has told only a part of what she knows. You will understand that I must learn all.”

“You feel so?” asked Jerry doubtfully. It seemed to her that his knowledge of an unamiable father might have contented. “Well, Mrs. Fenly is no doubt in her room. We made her acquaintance this summer, at Saratoga. She’s awfully high class, and knows everybody. She got acquainted with Mrs. Wyse by your landlady interesting her in some business schemes that proved frauds. Mrs. Fenly lost ever so many thousands by knowing Mrs. Wyse. But do you really think,

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Irving, if you have n't known who your mother is — all this time — that it's best for you to find out?"

"Yes!" The word was determined, and convincing.

"Very well. If you'll wait, I'll have her sent down to you."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WIFE

IRVING did not have long to reflect upon Jerry's astounding news. He had not even attained complete self-control, when the library door once more opened. He started hurriedly forward, eager to confront the woman who had fled from him, on a former occasion. But he was to be disappointed. On leaving the library, Jerry had met her step-mother upon the stairs; and Mrs. Vandever, on learning of Irving's request for Mrs. Fenly, had come instead.

Therefore it was no stranger, but Mrs. Vandever, who appeared in the soft glow of the candles. She greeted him with some constraint. Her beautiful face bore the same shade of haunting melancholy that seemed so much at home there; and a look of care had stolen in, as if to spy out the land for the coming of old age. Yet she did not look old; neither old nor young — but greatly troubled.

"Forgive me," said Irving, divining how Jerry had failed in her mission, "but I should like very much to meet your friend — Mrs. Fenly."

"Yes?" she murmured, uncertainly. She did not bid him be seated, but remained standing at a distance,

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looking at him as if he were much farther away than the width of the room. The subdued beams caressed the delicate hollows of cheek and neck; they rounded the perfect chin, touching one corner of the sensitive mouth with starry radiance, letting the other shade away into the warmth of twilight shadow.

“I have learned from your daughter,” Irving told her, standing tall and pale, and outwardly composed, “that your friend, Mrs. Fenly, knows more of my family history than I. Is n’t it a natural right for me to learn all that is to be learned? I should like very much to meet Mrs. Fenly.”

Mrs. Vandever’s lips tightened. “What did Jerry tell you?” she temporized.

Irving answered, with slow deliberation: “She told me that my father is living; that he is not an ‘amiable character’; that this information was given you by Mrs. Fenly; that Mrs. Fenly can disprove the story of my birth told me by my former landlady; that this landlady, a Mrs. Sadie Wyse, inveigled your friend into some scheme by which she lost a good deal; and that your friend is now in the house.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Vandever, who was able, with that word to convey a definite suggestion of dismissal. As Irving made no movement to take his leave, she explained: “Mrs. Fenly came to town with us, strictly on a matter of business, and does not want to meet any one except Mr. Vandever. She has an engagement with him, almost at this hour, and in this room. He will be here any moment, to confer with her privately

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about her interests." Again she looked at him, significantly.

"But may I not hope to speak to her, before Mr. Vandever comes — or after?"

Mrs. Vandever grew more decisive in manner. "Mrs. Fenly would rather not meet you, Mr. Payne. Her health is delicate, her nerves are racked by many anxieties of which I know nothing; and besides, you can understand that one in her condition avoids disagreeable interviews. I must confess that, when she consented to come home with us, she exacted the promise that I should not bring you and her face to face. To be perfectly frank, my object in coming downstairs, just now, was to find if you had gone, so I might tell her."

"But you must readily see, Mrs. Vandever," Irving returned, with firmness, "that I require confirmation of her statements."

"Jerry has committed a great indiscretion," sighed the other.

"I do not know Mrs. Fenly," Irving continued, "and while you acknowledge her as your friend, I understand that you never met her until this summer."

"One need not know her long to discover in her the lady. I trust you will not cause her to regret her confidences, Mr. Payne."

Irving wondered at the other's cool aloofness, which, by the mere calling of his surname was accentuated. Once, she had acknowledged him as "Irving." He hid his disappointment over her altered bearing, just as he

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concealed his eagerness for definite knowledge, and his determination to have it.

“May I inquire,” he asked, imitating her coolness, “why this Mrs. Fenly should have been prompted to treat you to my family affairs?”

Mrs. Vandever did not at first reply. In spite of her restrained expression, she felt sorry for the young man. She had permitted herself to entertain for him a feeling of sincere sentiment, not only on her son’s account, but because of that look, that air, that something which was always recalling one out of the past, to meet her outreaching sympathies. He was asking that a wound be inflicted by her hand, a hand that would have spared him. She had sought to avert the blow; he refused mercy.

“Irving,” she said, unconsciously reverting to her former use of the name, “her motives were sincere. It is all on account of your father. I do not know his name, and Mrs. Fenly informs me you do not know it. I think she mentioned it, but I can’t remember. At any rate he is — after all, we cannot better Jerry’s expression: He is not an ‘amiable character.’ He is not — he is not desirable. In brief he is — quite impossible. Is n’t that sufficient?”

“Only the whole truth is sufficient,” said Irving, unflinchingly.

“He — your father — It is very difficult to tell you, Irving.” She paused in real distress, but he waited in silence. She was impelled to disclose all. “Your father is a — at least, he belongs to a gang —

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a band of — nihilists, or anarchists, or *something* — and worse than that — thieves; Italian river-thieves. He is one of them. And once they accused him of complicity in the throwing of a bomb at Union Square, I believe it was. He was sentenced, I think.” She shuddered.

Irving stood like a rock against which breakers are beating. His handsome face was white and sharp-cut. There was not the tremor of a muscle.

“I am sorry, my friend,” she added, and he knew how much it cost her to call him so. For suddenly he had realized the nature of the change he had discovered in Mrs. Vandever. His antecedents had cut him off inevitably from her sphere. However sorry she might feel, however kindly she might acknowledge him as her “friend,” he must be infinitely less to her than her station in life. His association with Jerry and Claude, upon whatever terms, was entirely of the past, now; perhaps even his business relations with J. S. Vandever were to come to an end.

But at that moment, he thought much less of her attitude toward him, than of his toward the world. He could not be quite just to her. Out of the chaotic mist of his doubts, out of the chasm of an undefined sense of shame, shot up that tongue of flame that smoulders beneath natures even the most restrained.

“In short, then,” he said, bitterly, “I am unfit to enter this house. Whether Mrs. Fenly has told the truth about my father, or not, *that* fact remains, I presume. I am to accept disgrace without question, as

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something I might naturally expect. Mrs. Fenly is, of course, unimpeachable and infallible. She decrees that I am unworthy. That's enough, it seems."

Mrs. Vandever's face flushed painfully. Her dark eyes gleamed as if they had caught the other's wrath, and would hurl it back in miserable hopelessness. But she grew calm in a moment. Her color suddenly deserted her, but her courage and gentleness remained. She walked toward him, swiftly.

"Irving," she said, resting her hand upon his arm, "all I ask from you is to believe from your soul that, from my inmost heart, I am sorry."

"But I won't believe this story!" Irving cried, in confused defiance. "I can't."

"But you can believe that I am sorry?" she petitioned.

He took her hand, and pressed it. His eyes, too, were tender; and they, also were brave. "I'll prove it an error, Mrs. Vandever. I must see this Mrs. Fenly."

"She has promised to write out the whole story, and send it to you."

Irving interposed, in a cautious whisper: "Listen! I hear a woman's dress. Somebody's coming. Maybe it's Mrs. Fenly. She heard us talking, and thinks I'm Mr. Vandever."

"But she must n't see you!" Mrs. Vandever exclaimed, in distress. "It would be too great a shock. Her nerves — her weakness — and the distressing story she would have to tell — with your eyes upon her —

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You must go, Irving — Quick!" Irving remained immovable.

Mrs. Vandever did not spring forward to close the door. In her heart, she felt that it was but just for Irving to face his father's accuser. Possibly she entertained the faint hope that her friend might prove in error. At any rate, the encounter was now inevitable.

The door opened, and a slight, elderly woman came into the room. On discovering Irving, a change came over her face which Mrs. Vandever watched with frightened eyes. It was the woman who had fled from Irving, on being found in this same room, two months ago; now that they stood face to face, he recognized her instantly. "Mrs. Fenly" was his former landlady.

Whether "Mrs. Fenly" was Mrs. Wyse, or whether "Mrs. Wyse," was Mrs. Fenly, mattered nothing to the young man. To him, she was the impostor who had stolen the earnings of her lodgers, not scrupling to strip even Jessie Tiff and the Du Pays of their mites; she was the fraud who had sent him, on a false clue, to Rutgers Square, to meet a tramp who existed only in her scheming brain.

"Mrs. Fenly," said Mrs. Vandever, sympathetically, "this is Mr. Payne. It is unfortunate that —"

"I am greatly pleased to meet Mrs. Fenly," Irving declared, pronouncing the name with evident relish. He regarded her not with anger, but with joyful relief. Since she was the authority for the unsavory story about his father, he need think of it no longer. A mere

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word from him, would convince Mrs. Vandever of the untrustworthy source of her information.

Mrs. Wyse, or Mrs. Fenly, staggered, and clutched at the hangings along the wall. She would have fallen prostrate, but for a chair that caught her relaxed form. Mrs. Vandever rushed to her assistance, but the elderly woman shrank from Mrs. Vandever, even as she had cowered before Irving's bright gaze. She clutched the chair with both hands, and sustained herself.

It would have seemed incredible to Irving that such a woman could have entered the Fifth Avenue world, had he not known of similar instances. Doubtless, she had crept into society by virtue of her ability to interest people of means in schemes promising large dividends.

"You see, Irving!" Mrs. Vandever exclaimed, reproachfully. "I beg you to leave us. She is not strong enough, poor lady. She would spare you the history — won't you let her? She has promised to write everything. Won't you go, now?"

But Irving did not move.

There was a period of wretched silence, during which Mrs. Wyse sought to rally her scattered forces that she might fortify her position in regard both to Mrs. Vandever and to Irving. She was, in truth, one of those remarkable women who occasionally appear in the ranks of most exclusive circles, one scarcely knows how. A step seems to lift them from obscure poverty to restless affluence. The toilsome way is hidden in shadow. Like stray comets, brilliant, unexpected and

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unsubstantial, they burst out of black space, and for a time dazzle all eyes.

Her motives for seeking to discredit Irving were not far to seek. To prevent betrayal of her past, she had felt obliged to drive him from the field. Hoping to engage J. S. Vandever in extensive donations, it was necessary to eliminate the possibility of meeting Irving in the Vandever mansion. But for Irving's obstinacy, she felt that she must have succeeded. What is more discrediting than a father so "unamiable" as to belong to a gang of river-thieves? These thoughts, occurring to Irving, produced an intelligent smile.

The smile might have discomposed Mrs. Wyse, had she not already been cast to abject depths. And yet, at this moment of terrible danger, she did not despair. Her rise from absolute penury to the functions of landlady at Gotham Repose had been due to the same never-tiring ambition, and never-developed moral sense, which had carried her from the lodging-house to the homes of the wealthy. Her plan of action was exceedingly simple, yet such as only a genius can execute: Buy extravagantly, pay for nothing. Mrs. Wyse possessed this genius of avoiding payment, and now, if possible, she was determined not to pay for her misfortunes at Gotham Repose.

"I understand, Mrs. Fenly," said Irving, finding that she was mute, "that you are conversant with my family affairs. Mrs. Vandever thinks you mentioned to her my father's name. I'd be obliged to you if you'd mention it to me. I remember your saying,

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long ago, that you hoped one day to recollect it. For it occurs to me that we have met before." He smiled again.

Mrs. Wyse had recovered from the physical harm Irving's presence had wrought, but the mental shock still left her blindly groping for safety. When such a woman, of almost infinite resources, comes to the impossible, the breakdown is more complete than in less self-reliant natures. She read in Irving's eyes a cruel mocking spirit, that meant to play with her a little while, before throwing her back into the depths of the nether world. The thought that he meant to expose her inspired her not only with terror, but with sudden rage that shook her slight form as with the ague. She hid both fear and wrath behind her pallid countenance.

"Mr. Payne," she faltered, in that refined and indistinct voice that reminded him of her Prince of Wales, "you need not be downcast. It is true that your father is not a worthy man. But there is a small fortune involved, nevertheless, and all of it goes to you, every dollar. All of it, I say, *all!* It is as much as thousands. Yes, as much as ten. Let me think: Twenty thousand. At another time I will explain how that is. The fortune is yours, Mr. Payne. But the details are secret. If Mrs. Vandever will kindly let me speak to you alone —"

"I beg Mrs. Vandever to remain," cried Irving. "If she goes, I will go with her, and leave you alone. For I want Mrs. Vandever to know about my first meet-

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ing with you. Mrs. Vandever thinks we are strangers, but we are worse than that, I believe, Mrs. Fenly."

She looked at him with eyes that besought and promised. He ought to know, she felt, that she had not sought to prejudice Mrs. Vandever against him, out of wanton malice. He ought to know that both could not breathe the same atmosphere. She had not told the worst about Irving's history; only enough to drive him away. She repeated coaxingly, "It is twenty thousand dollars, Mr. Payne, and all yours, every penny. Let me explain."

But her penetrating glance told her that this bribe of twenty thousand dollars had fallen short of the enemy's citadel. Irving's flag was still flying in gay defiance. Seeing this, she rose, yet looked again in a last mute appeal for mercy. But Irving still smiled — that cruel, deep-cut smile that had never before visited his face. She read in its cold light, the relentless judgment of one who thinks he sits in power. It fixed her doom. How little did he understand that, if she fell, she meant to drag him down! She stretched out her arm, and pointed a finger at him, like a bit of ivory, protruding from the thin black sleeve. Pointing at him, she looked at Mrs. Vandever, and said,

"You are mistaken in thinking I mentioned his father's name. If I'd mentioned it, you could not have forgotten." The slender, hard voice was without the slightest modulation. "The thieves of the dump-heaps — the Italian brigands, the wretches that people call the 'Black Handers' — they know his father by the



She stretched out her arm, and pointed a finger at him, like a bit of ivory, protruding from the thin black sleeve



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same name he wore when he was your first husband. For he was your first husband, Mrs. Vandever, before he went to live with the off-scourings of the East Side. He was Dick Arnold, your husband. He still wears the name; he is still Dick Arnold — and this man's father." She continued to point at him, contemptuously, all her fury finding vent in the gesture of scorn.

Mrs. Vandever's hands had gone to her bloodless face. They struggled at her throat, as if to tear away some suffocating grasp. Until the last moment, she had been thinking only of Irving Payne. Suddenly she found herself engulfed in the maelstrom that was sucking him down. Her first wild impression of his resemblance to her first husband — why had she suffered it to be effaced by the passing glamour of other lights and shadows? Her first presentiment was true.

But Irving, bewildered, dazed, could only cry out, "*Mrs. Wyse!*" He flung the word at her as if it had been a stone, to beat her down. "*Impostor!*" That was his second blow. His eyes blazed, at sight of Mrs. Vandever's suffering. "You think"—he renewed the attack—"that you can escape your own crimes, by piling up falsehoods about other people. *Impostor!*"

Mrs. Wyse stood as if she did not know that she had been struck. Suddenly Irving's wrath gave way to another emotion, to sudden doubts, self-questionings. "Dick Arnold?"—he said to himself in questioning mood. The tramp?

Mrs. Vandever, reeling, caught blindly at the nearest chair. It seemed to her that the refined graces and

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sacred emotions of life and love, had been stripped bare of beauty and modesty. Those illusions, cherished in seclusion, were dragged forth by a prying woman, and revealed in their poor frailty. In self-communions, she had always held herself a woman apart in misfortune; this Mrs. Fenly, or Mrs. Wyse, classed her with all women whose husbands had proved untrue. This woman of two names and two careers, but with no heart, made her, by the mere breath of ordinary speech, one of a class exploited in the smiling woodcuts of the daily press.

The little adventuress viewed, with composure, the look of horror upon Mrs. Vandever's face. She neither pitied nor despised. Turning savagely upon Irving, she said, "Call me what you will. At least I have a name — you would say I have two, or more. Very well! You have none! Need I remind Mrs. Vandever of the time her first husband eloped with a girl of very good family? She has n't forgotten, I daresay. Possibly she remembers that she would n't sue for divorce, because she wanted to make the couple doubly guilty. Yes! and was determined that the child born to them should be reared in dishonor."

"No!" cried Mrs. Vandever vehemently. "That was not the reason. I did not think of the child; only of my husband."

"But it can't be true," faltered Irving, looking from one to the other. "I feel that it can't be true." His heart was beating, as if about to burst. How could the story be true, when he had never felt a suspicion?

The Wife

“Mrs. Vandever, you can’t believe anything that woman says! She’s not what she pretends. Would n’t father and mother Payne have known?”

His voice failed him. Out of the blackness of sudden doubts, he seemed to see a face rising — the face of Arnold. It seemed to ask him: “Can you deny me?”

“Believe her?” faltered Mrs. Vandever. “Yes. She has only spoken my first intuition. I know she tells the truth. You remember what I said, at Briar-cliff? — how you reminded me — how I asked if your father lived?” She wrung her hands. “Poor Irving! When I look at you, I see my first husband — Claude’s father, and yours. Irving, you who are not my son, why are you here? Why are such truths in the world — and you, the son of *that woman!*”

Irving could not utter a word. It was all true. His mind brought back various scenes in which Dick Arnold had always spoken, and looked, paternally. And his feeling toward Claude — it had been the sense of brotherhood. Yes, it was all true; he was the son of Arnold and — “that woman.”

Mrs. Wyse slipped from the room. It was an evidence of their profound absorption, that the adventuress escaped from the house before either recollected her existence. Irving was trying to comprehend what this would mean to him, how much of shame and sorrow. And he wondered, too, how Mrs. Vandever regarded him, the son of her first husband.

She spoke in a whisper, holding her hands before her

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face. "I loved your father, Irving. But he never really cared for me, I suppose. One can never be sure. I thought he wanted me for myself alone. But no; he loved somebody else, and went away with her, and broke my heart. But I loved him. Claude grew to manhood; I still loved him. And to-day, Irving — to-day —" her voice grew passionate, "to-day, I love him, not as the man that Mrs. Wyse described, but as the man I knew. And yet — he never — you understand, Irving? — *never* — he never loved me!" Her voice died away, without tears.

"Mrs. Vandever," he burst forth, his hands clenched, "if I could —"

"If you could have known him!" she said, brokenly, "as I knew him then, the most charming companion, the gayest friend, and, as I imagined, the most devoted lover, with his irresistible laughing eyes —"

"Mrs. Vandever, I am his son; and as his son, I would give my life to atone to you for his desertion. But as the son of — 'that woman' — I cannot even come to you to offer you sympathy, or help."

Then Mrs. Vandever cried out, as if to answer him, but a sob alone was audible. When she could speak, she said, "But I will come to you!" And she came to him.

It may have been an expression of the old dramatic nature that prompted him to sink upon his knee before her. She touched his hair with a pitying hand, while her tears fell upon his face.

The Wife

“The son of ‘that woman’ cannot ask you to forgive his father. Still—”

“Still,” came her broken voice, “I can do even that.”

“He could not have hoped for so much. You may be sure I will tell him.”

“And you, Irving — can you forgive him?”

Irving rose, somewhat unsteadily. All things seemed to swim before his vision — the beautiful, sad face, the quiet library with its mellow lights, the unknown paths of the future.

“I cannot tell — yet,” he answered. “It is all so new, and wonderful, and dark. I cannot tell.” The deep melancholy of her face moved him to impotent regrets. “If it had never been!” he exclaimed. Her very words came to him and he used them, unconscious of the repetition, “Why are such truths in the world?” Then before him rose again that face that had won his friendship, that had moved him to a strange sweet sense of intimate comradeship. “But he is my father,” he added.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE AMBUSCADE

AS Irving passed beyond the bronze gates, an electric omnibus approached. For the benefit of the sight-seers who crowded every seat, a man was calling through his megaphone: "This immense building on your right is the residence of the celebrated J. S. Vandever. It cost the enormous sum of —"

Every eye was glued upon Irving, as if to extract from his personal appearance, some notion of the life peculiar to multimillionaires. Irving was so bewildered by what he had just learned, that his face wore the detached expression suited to his part as the associate of money-kings. He still looked half-stunned when giving the direction to the cab-driver—"Forty-second Street." And why Forty-second Street? Why anywhere? Why anything? His hopes and ambitions, that is to say, all that had grown to represent to him life itself, seemed to have come abruptly to an end.

Yet the period of time was brief, indeed, it might be measured by moments, when his naturally buoyant spirits paused at their lowest point, swung thither by the blow of his parentage. He divined that the Vandever portals had closed upon him, forever; fortunately those

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portals did not inclose what he held vital and dearest. Within such walls, scenes of elegance and luxury had once appealed to him as the modern Eden in the world's wilderness. But may there not have been certain days sweeter to Adam and Eve, in their toilsome wanderings, than many a day in Paradise?

Irving, while meditating upon the recent scene in the library found mingling with his bewilderment, a vague surprise that he did not experience the emotions one is conventionally supposed to feel under such circumstances. In the face of the revelations that his father was a tramp, and possibly one of a band of river-thieves; and that his mother was, to speak no more particularly, "that woman" who had supplanted Mrs. Vandever in her husband's affections — in the face of these revelations so recent and so discrediting, Irving, nevertheless, found himself the same man he was yesterday, the man he would be to-morrow. The world had changed; but he was the same. Whatever his parents' history, he was what he had been without them. That is what surprised him. It seemed that he ought to feel a certain unworthiness, a deeper shame, a giving-away of resisting forces. But if such a feeling had been his, it was quickly dissipated. In the old life, it would have been different, of course. At that time, what people thought, and how he could win and hold the admiration of the upper classes, meant all. Now it was a question of what he was in himself. He had entered an arena where the shades of one's ancestors do not come to do battle.

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As for his mother, whatever her name and condition, whether alive or dead, he would not seek to know. To Mrs. Vandever, she was only "that woman." To Dick Arnold, she must be but a memory of the dead, or a forgotten face among those once known; let her, then, remain in mystery. His mind did not reach out farther in the direction of his mother. There were many paths in his mind, but across the mother-thought, stood a high wall. He would make no effort to go around it; would the world always be peeping behind that cold barricade, to discover the secret of his origin? No; at least not in the world he meant to inhabit; the world wherein every man stands for himself.

Irving did not disguise from himself that, in any other sphere than that of the world of business, of action, of achievement, his destiny was sealed; in the sphere of Jerry Vandever, for instance. In a sense, he was an outcast from society. Well, so was that tramp, that wandering Dick Arnold, his father. Whatever the crimes of Arnold, however cruel his desertion of his wife, he was bound to Irving not only by the tie of blood, but by the destiny of a common ostracism.

The first definite conclusion reached by Irving, after the terrible shock, was to seek out his father and prevail upon him to lodge with him, giving up his nomadic life; to return, not, of course, to his former friends, but to his former self. He knew, now, what had drawn him irresistibly to the disreputable occupant of the tenement. It was the congeniality of spirit, based upon common blood. At the thought of Arnold, the glow

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returned to his heart. He felt a great loneliness as he remembered the enforced loneliness of his father. Arnold was a tramp because of Irving. He had given up all prospects, that Irving might not learn the secret of his birth. He must have found a fearful punishment in the relinquishment of all he held dear. Whether or not he had atoned for the past, was beside the question. However unworthy that hand, the young man yearned to grasp it. Arnold, then, must, if possible, be found. After the meeting, plans could be formed. Why could not these two live together contentedly? The social world had already forgotten Arnold; it need never know Irving.

If Irving had needed confirmation in his general views of the future, he might have received them from J. S. Vandever. At Forty-second Street, he left the cab, but there was nothing to be done here. Could he hope to find his employer still at the office? It was late, but the financier had failed to reach home at the time agreed upon with Mrs. Sadie Wyse. Irving risked the chance. At Broad Street, he found Mr. Vandever getting into his runabout.

Irving had not selected his words, only the idea, which he launched as best he might: "Mr. Vandever, I have just made a discovery about myself. The first husband of Mrs. Vandever — well, I learn that he is my father."

Mr. Vandever knitted his brows, making an intense effort at mental readjustment. "Well?" he said, sharply.

"I have come to tell you at once," Irving said, doubt-

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fully. "It's your right to know. I did n't know what difference it would make to you."

Mr. Vandever's foot was upon the step. He said, as he got into the vehicle, "It would not seem to place you upon a footing in the family."

Irving found himself near the verge of the declivity that leads to a smile. "Exactly the opposite," he replied. "And if it makes a difference to you —"

"Fortunately," said J. S. Vandever, with his usual briskness of manner, "I have employed you, not your father. Was that all?"

"No. You see, Mr. Vandever, it would be awkward, going to the house. There'd always be the chance of meeting Mrs. Vandever. Those miserable threads of my past — there's no way to unravel them."

"Time lost, to try," said the other, succinctly. "Cut 'em away; let 'em drift with the tide. But I understand; you don't want to be always reminding my wife — well, of course. We'll manage. You need n't go up there any more. Did you get those memoranda? All right; bring 'em to the office, first thing in the morning. Oh — did you see a Mrs. Fenly at the house?"

Irving had seen her. His admission was grim.

J. S. Vandever divined antipathy. "I see. You mistrust her. All right,—I was going to warn you. Instead of meeting her in the library, I've been looking her up. Better leave her schemes alone." Mr. Vandever was driven away.

Irving, who was expected to dinner at Dr. Adams's, repaired thither, meantime thinking over the possible

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means of getting in touch with his father. The brief interview with J. S. Vandever had left him feeling strangely invigorated. The financier's dry practicality had imparted that sort of hope which is doubly pleasing, because it not only promises well for the future, but embodies the working-plan for a realization of those promises. He was young, strong, and determined; and every one of these qualities had been accentuated, as if Mr. Vandever had called attention to them.

His belief in the death of his parents had not been altogether a source of melancholy. Until his first meeting with Mrs. Sadie Wyse, there had always been the possibility of an undesirable parent, after twenty years of neglect, suddenly appearing to ruin his prospects. Mrs. Wyse's story had proved a positive relief; it had enlarged his outlook upon life, because it had freed him from sinister apprehensions; and now, the startling knowledge of his father's existence and identity, counter-balanced the mystery of a living and unknown mother. It had been but an hour or so since discovering his relationship to Dick Arnold; yet his desire to meet that erratic acquaintance, that fugitive from society, that father in disguise, had strengthened until it was the dominant purpose of his heart.

But how could he find the homeless tramp? Possibly some one at the tenement might be able to supply a clue, though that was by no means probable. As soon as dinner was ended, he would set about his search.

If his air of preoccupation was observed by his two friends, they attributed it, probably, to another cause.

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At any rate, another cause was given before they sat down to table. Mr. Burl had just received a letter from Winifred, which he offered to read aloud to Dr. Adams.

“At least, if it won't bore Irving,” said the artist, looking sternly at the young man, as if he suspected him of criminal incapacity.

Winifred's name always came like a breath of invigorating air from some fragrant field. It seemed to Irving, whenever he heard it, that his own breath found a deeper capacity. The letter was read. There was a good deal about Italy, more about certain pictures, a few words that hinted at an immediate return, and something about Irving. Naturally the part referring to Irving seemed to him far more important than all the rest.

Mr. Burl read the words with the most prosaic voice imaginable; if the phrases could have lost their significance, they would certainly have lost it in the artist's dry throat.

“You ask if I am not astounded,” so Winifred wrote. “You ask if I am not completely bewildered over the change you say you have found in Mr. Payne. You say you think I shall be incredulous about that change. To all that, I say, No. And there is something you do not seem to have thought of, Uncle Chris. It is *that* which astonishes *me*. Because you know very well that the accidental comes more or less into everybody's life. I don't see any use in saying that if so-and-so had n't happened, this man or that would n't have been the man he is to-day. Because, so-and-so invariably

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happens. To-day the sun shines; to-morrow it rains. If I had n't been born with the artistic sense, should I ever have painted Agostino? And should I ever have painted Agostino if Mr. Payne had n't brought him to me? Well, it's just that way about the other. Chances come,— come to every one on this earth, not only once, but with the air we breathe. Sometimes they find a man waiting; sometimes a woman. It is the *waiting* that must not be accidental. Happenings are often of chance; the man must never be. So much for your argument, Uncle Chris, and if I have n't convinced you here, I'll soon conquer you face to face."

"This is vague," observed Dr. Adams. "What's the reference?"

Irving, who divined that Winifred had been writing in his defence, was inclined to extravagant gratitude. His emotion was tempered by the reflection that the dark story of his parentage must quench the light in her frank eyes. Artist though she was, Winifred belonged to the world of Jerry Vandever; and though she did not choose to occupy a place in it, it was not likely that she had escaped the influence of its traditions. The reflection caused his face to settle more unalterably into its new sternness, its resolute determination. Whatever Winifred might feel concerning him, his father must, if possible, be raised from self-elected indigence to a place of companionship at his side.

Mr. Burl read the letter to the last word, then folded it slowly. "I will explain," he said, lighting his pipe. "After telling Sunbeam how Irving had developed from

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a young man without aims, without direction, into a young man with a very decided direction toward success; and how he has ceased to toil from necessity, and is toiling from choice — you don't object, I hope? ”

“ Not at all,” said Irving, gravely.

“ You admit your indefiniteness of former days? ”

“ I do.” He smiled in spite of himself.

“ And you'll admit that, thanks to your slave's office work of the past six months, you are in a fair way to become the master of other slaves of the desk, I suppose? ”

“ Mr. Vandever has treated me with unusual partiality,” Irving admitted.

“ There's the point,” said Mr. Burl, taking his pipe from his mouth to aim the stem at the young man. “ Exactly the point I made to Sunbeam! There's the whole gist of my argument. I was writing to Winifred about you, in full detail — not that you are of any particular interest to either of us, but because you were useful as a skeleton for my vital theme. I clothed you with the flesh and blood of my philosophy. I trust you understand.”

“ I realize that I am nothing,” said Irving, with admirable humility.

“ Which,” spoke up Dr. Adams, with seeming austerity, “ advances you one notch higher than Chris will ever attain.”

“ And I told Winifred,” said Mr. Burl, nodding to Irving, and ignoring the other, “ that, although you have taken a new view of life, and have resolved to fill a real

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place in it, your resolve would have done you precious little good but for that accident of the Briarcliff races. If you had n't known Jerry Vandever — not in itself any special merit, I believe — and if you had n't gone to the races to be with her — rather a doubtful jaunt, let us say — and if Claude Vandever had n't got drunk, and allowed himself to be knocked down in the crowd — quite reprehensible, this, eh, Lew? Eh, Irving? *Very good!* You say nothing. And why? Because there is nothing to say except what I have just said.

“Very good. I will continue; I will say still more. If these accidents had not preceded the knocking-down of Claude, there would have been no need of blood-transfusion. Had you not given of your blood to that young scapegrace, J. S. Vandever would never have taken the least notice in the world of any Irving Payne. Now all this I explained to Winifred, showing her that though you are already beginning to make yourself felt among men of affairs, it is through no particular merit of yours, but has come about from forces outside of yourself.”

“You were very kind,” murmured Irving, hypocritically.

“And very illogical,” remarked Dr. Adams, “as Winifred has had the goodness to point out to him. For if you will recall the careers of all great men, at least of all Americans, you will find time and again in their careers, where the accidental chance was seized and turned to vital account.”

“Anybody can permit his veins to be opened,” growled Mr. Burl. “The blood will flow of itself.

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Anybody can drift to success, if the current flows that way. There should at least be *some* sort of choosing between uphill and down!"

Was Mr. Burl trying to find out whether an opportunity had been given to Irving to ally himself with Claude's gay and irresponsible companions, and whether he had chosen between Claude and Claude's step-father? Possibly he suspected that Claude, though reckless and unstable, was generous and grateful, and must, from his abundance, have made Irving some glittering offer. But Irving had already attained that position wherein one is not upheld by praise, but by consciousness of the right to hold it. So he said nothing.

He wished that Winifred had known, however. He wished she might know whatever of good there was in him; it was a gracious privilege to be thought well of by Winifred. But however well she might think of him — even if she should learn of his "choosing between uphill and down," what would it avail? Sooner or later she must be told that his father was Dick Arnold, the tramp; and that his mother was —?

When Irving passed Madison Park, on his way toward the East Side tenement, he was, all unconsciously, again choosing between the easy and the difficult, the life of purpose and the life of evasion. The choice was unconscious; he did not consider an alternative. The easiest thing in his future was to let Dick Arnold remain in obscurity. Arnold would never voluntarily cross his path again. Why not let him lie in shadow until the end? His mother, if living, would doubtless

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hold herself secluded, as she had always held herself. Conditions had not really changed. He had thought his parents dead; they were still dead, to him. The only change was in himself.

But it is the change in oneself that changes the world. When one becomes a new man, the world is again in its Spring. Who might not have felt toward Dick Arnold a repugnance, a sense of terrible injustice, a fierce anger, because of what had taken place some twenty years and more ago? Who might not have cast off such a father, not only because of the past sin, but of the present ignominy? Whoever might, Irving might not. It was a matter of feeling, no doubt, which, in turn, was a matter of temperament; but, in his case, at any rate, that temperament itself was partly a matter of development. This chance, too, as Winifred had divined, found a man waiting.

At the tenement nobody knew anything about Dick Arnold. There were some children who remembered him, children — how bony, dirty, and ragged! — for whom he used to play his violin, that they might dance defiance at squalor and poverty, making the noisy street sound forth its note of laughter. The tramp had gone away a long, long time ago — ages! He had said he would come again, perhaps, to make more music in the street — *free* music, you know; and sometimes with pennies. He used to read a good deal — up yonder in that room — you see? — where the new plasterer's family live now, and where the street-cleaner was arrested last week for beating his wife one time too often. The books

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were all paper-backed; when he left, he had them hauled away in a cart, perhaps to peddle them, nobody knows. This, it appears, is the extent of our knowledge; and —“ Gimme a nickel, mister!” Also, “ Gimme a dime!”

It did not seem much use to go to Chartier's restaurant, but no shred of chance should be despised. It was more than six months since Arnold had played in the meagre orchestra of the little French eating-place. Arnold? But so many come and go! Irving reminded Chartier of the night when he took Arnold to the studio in Greenwich Village, to hear Monsieur du Pays sing.

So *that* was Arnold? But he left the service that very night. And Monsieur du Pays? Only *le bon Dieu* knows what came forth from *his* gaping throat one night, as he stood singing to the accompaniment of violins, knives, and forks — *certes*, it was no sound of melody, no stipulated tenor-note. “ A shriek, Monsieur, a howl,— *je na sais pas* — what the devil!” Neither French nor English can put it in words. But that Arnold — yes, one now remembers. But he was one never to be depended upon; he might come, or he might not, and there was no way to hold him to his job; he was as poor as a church mouse, but he did not care. What would you? When one is as poor as a church mouse, but does not care, you can get no hold upon him, the trap is baited in vain.

Irving reflected that possibly Monsieur du Pays might know something, which was almost incredible. Were the Du Pays still lodging at Gotham Repose? That, too, was improbable. It was half a year since those steps of stone, like broken teeth, had laughed at the

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young man. Their grin was unaltered as he entered "Lee's Triangle." Ah, the long-ago! Irving applied at the door, pensive, even sad. Why must days pass away, carrying with them a part of yourself? The days would not so much matter, if *you* remained.

Yes, happily, the Du Pays still lodged at Gotham Repose. The second floor, front? No, sir, the back room, if you please. Aha, that treacherous throat!

To the second floor back, then, Irving ascended, and was received with *empressement* by both Monsieur and Madame du Pays. Monsieur's hair was as blonde as Irving had ever seen it, and Madame's confidence in the ultimate triumph of his throat was as optimistic. Each looked a little older, a little shabbier, a little more careworn. Monsieur had just "accepted a position" as "vocal-expositor" at a moving picture-show. There would be one picture to a verse of song — a beautiful moon, perhaps, in a sky so blue, or a maiden with a tree; the songs, too, were full of color. It was like beginning life all over again, less gloriously. But tomorrow there would be a move to the front room. Vicissitudes of fortune, are they not principally a matter of location?

And poor Jessie Tiff! What! have you not heard, then? Yes, poor Jessie is — no, not dead; married. An unfortunate marriage? That is as it may be. It is as you regard it. Poor Jessie has emerged from her roseate dream of that — how-you-say? — sporty, classy, noble, handsome young man, very rich, — so she had confided to Madame; had emerged from that dream of Millionaire Row, into the glaring reality of a Wedding.

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“Wedging was devoted to her,” said Irving, patiently biding his time.

“*Tout le monde le dit*,” cried Madame, volubly, “but it seems very sad. It was for me to marry my dream, me. But to marry Wedging, *mon Dieu!* it was to murder one’s imagination.”

As to the object of Irving’s visit, what was to be said? Du Pays remembered Arnold; had been associated with him at another restaurant, following discharge from Chartier’s; had sung to Arnold’s violin.

“Arnold was one of the most agreeable companions in all the world,” said Du Pays, finding that Irving wanted to talk about the tramp-musician. “He was as full of gay souvenirs and tingling anecdotes as his coat was full of holes. Every evening when our work was done, he would invite us to go with him to one of his favorite *cafés* — one in which he had never played, never — to help him to spend all he had earned. On such nights as I could be persuaded to remain away from Angélique, the hours were devoured. Or rather they were consumed like a flash, in the light of his jolly laughter, his smiles of *bonhomie*. There was a haze of the day-before-yesterday over all he said; I smile now, when I remember, a smile of tenderness. I knew him, in that way, only two weeks, yet see how I bring him before you. He went away — he told me, once, that he tired of everything, even of me — ah, the good Arnold! But he was like a newspaper dated in the yellow past, telling about all that had happened in that yellow and faded past, with not a word about what you call this great twentieth century. Perhaps he has gone

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back into the past, back to his original date — one may think so, since he is never seen at all,— *le bon-homme que c'est!*”

Irving had by no means come to the end of his resources. He remembered that Agostino had sent him to Arnold's tenement. Possibly Agostino might be able once more to direct him to his father. Where was this model who had served Winifred for her “Judas Iscariot”? Irving had forgotten the situation of the house in which Pasquale was murdered. He had known of it only from the reading of one day's paper; anyway, it was not likely that Agostino should be an inhabitant of that house. When fleeing from Black Handers, Agostino had taken refuge with Captain Silas Payne. Irving found, by telephone, when his foster-parent would be at home, and, at the hour, descended upon the home of his boyhood.

His coming was also a source of delight to father and mother Payne. Nothing could exceed their pride in his success, and nothing was farther from his intention than to mar their enjoyment by a revelation of what he had learned. They were so secure in their belief that his parents were dead, and took such comfort in the belief — for, as he was their only child, so they would have been his only parents — Irving told himself that they need never know about Dick Arnold. Still, his business with Agostino was very pressing.

“I'm glad *somebody* wants to see Agostino,” said the hale and hearty captain, with a rather rueful laugh, “for he is a great nuisance to me. He is always nosing around my tugboat, trying, in my opinion, to get some

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inside information on my cargoes. What for? So he can do some inside stealing, the rascal! There's a coolness between us, just at present. I caught him where he had no business, a day or so ago, and dropped him into the river. I think he swam out, all right. If he did n't drown, you'll likely enough find him at his coal-shop on the Bend."

The captain gave the particular number of this coal-shop, and the next evening, Irving was threading his way through the riotous noises, smells, and colors, of Mulberry Bend. As it was a warm night, the inhabitants had poured out of doors and windows; they overflowed the narrow streets, were dammed up along the gutters, were sucked down into foul cellars. Irving scaled the barricade of push-carts; he penetrated the rows of women, old and young, who were bargaining over their decaying oranges and unsound tomatoes — talking rapidly in an Italian dialect unimpeded by consonants, as if in a hurry to sell out before decomposition became complete.

He reached Agostino's chandlery. The door was closed, but a faint light struggled through its little grimy glass square, on which was painted, without embellishments,

“ COLE 10 CT A PALE ”

Irving knocked, just beneath the leaden saints; for, of course, there were saints everywhere, from ash-barrels to cellar-holes, since no business was conducted without

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heavenly intercession. But the saint on Agostino's shop-door was of a particularly angelic countenance. While Irving knocked, he wondered at the bewildering multitude of noisy, gesticulating, red-turbaned and yellow-handkerchiefed folk, who seemed to reek with reckless jollity. They laughed, shouted, sang in mother tongue, as if they had melted all their cares into the leaden images, and had left the saints to assume their responsibilities.

Nobody was in the shop. But presently Irving was surrounded by a family group — a woman and three children, regretfully ignorant of English, but insistent, in the dialect of Fiesole, that they were the wife and children of Agostino. With the assistance of a cloud of interpreting witnesses, Irving learned that Agostino had gone to Italy after his family. Here they were. By the look of him, Signor did not want to buy coal. Candles then? *Che!* Was it Agostino he wanted? Away scurried the children, and presently Agostino appeared, evasive, keen-eyed, sinister. He recognized Irving without enthusiasm. About Arnold —

Agostino waved his arm. He knew no more about Arnold than that wave of the arm. But was it probable that Arnold would ever come back from his wanderings? Another wave. But he had thus returned, had he not, after such disappearances?

“*Si.*”

And, on thus returning, would doubtless hunt up Agostino?

“*Si.*”

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In that case, would Agostino notify Irving, and be handsomely rewarded?

“*Si.*”

Was nothing to be extracted from Agostino but his glittering look, and his “*Si*”? Nothing but the wave of the arm. Irving retreated, unsatisfied.

It was three weeks later, that this trip to Mulberry Bend bore fruit. Irving had just come home to the private boarding-house which, according to Monsieur du Pays’s theory of “locations” marked his ascent from Gotham Repose. The house was rather dingy on the outside, but eminently respectable within; it was near his place of business, and was presided over by a widow who — alas! — was not so indistinct, nor — happily — so ambitious, as Mrs. Sadie Wyse.

Irving learned that somebody had been to see him — a young woman, very dark, and rather coarse-haired, with a red bloom under the olive skin of Italy. Who could it be? Agostino’s wife? Very far, indeed, from Agostino’s wife, as he learned when she returned, about two hours later. It was Bianca.

“Bianca!” exclaimed Irving, surprised to discover that he remembered the name of Agostino’s former sweetheart. He had seen her last in Arnold’s room in the East Side tenement. How that night came back, and how hope had leaped at sight of the pretty face and the gay red dress!

“Bianca! Has Agostino sent you? Has he found — the man I was hunting — Dick Arnold?”

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“If you come quick,” said she who had once, as a pretended cripple, begged alms at the old fountain of Rutgers Square, “I tella you all about Dick Arnold. But you not come quick, it no use to come a-talla.”

The quicker the better, not only to find his father, but to get Bianca out of the amazed environs of the lodging-house. They were on the street almost instantly.

“To Mulberry Bend?” asked Irving, hailing a cab. His heart was beating violently. What should he say, when he stood face to face with his father? By means of what arguments could he induce Arnold to give up his nomadic existence? When they were in the cab, Bianca asked, from the remoteness of her dark corner,

“You know dat Arnold, he yo’ *padre*? Agostino tell you dat?”

“No; but I found it out; he has come back?”

“Yaas. He come back. But I not t’ink you know he yo’ *padre*. Agostino know it, long time. Agostino make Dick do w’atever he say, because he t’ink you not know.”

“Oh, I see! Then Agostino held this secret over Arnold’s head, did he? And how did Agostino ever find it out?”

“Sometime Dick Arnold say too much, w’en he drink ver’ deep. But it not Agostino send me for you. Agostino not wanta you to come. Agostino know w’ere Dick Arnold wass, dat night you come to de Bend.”

“So you knew I came to the Bend, did you?”

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“ I know w’atever happen at Agostino’s. I was jus’ behind w’en you tole ’im yo’ addressa. I listen ver’ close. I wanta know w’ere you live, for you ver’ good to me once, save-a my life. And Dick Arnold, he ver’ good to me w’en I wass jus’ a kid. I do anyt’ing for you, an’ for yo’ *padre*, an’ I do anyt’ing against Agostino, oh, damma, *yass!*” The last words came in a hiss.

“ Is my father at Agostino’s shop? ”

Bianca seemed to evade the question. It appeared that Agostino had learned that Captain Silas Payne was to tow some coal barges from the Jersey shore that very night. Therefore, Agostino had decided to take some congenial spirits with him, to transfer some of that coal from the barges to the shop.

Irving felt the perspiration start to his brow. He interrupted Bianca sharply: “ Do you mean to tell me that Agostino is going to *steal* the coal from Captain Payne’s tow? ”

“ Oh,” said Bianca, by way of emendation, “ I not calla *dat* ‘ steal.’ Agostino, ’e take-a de coal, w’ile it bein’ towed along by de tug. Dey take-a de coal from de barge w’at is de most far back behinda. Capitan Payne, ’e never know not’in’ about it. Dat not Capitan *Payne’s* coal. It not b’long to him. It b’long to *nobody*, jus’ to some comp’ny.”

“ Is that the way Agostino usually lays in his stock? ”

“ Sometime’ ’e buy de coal. He not always have so good a chance-a.”

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“But surely my father would not help him in such a job as that!” cried Irving, in fierce repudiation of the base suspicion.

“No, *Arnold* not take-a not'in'. But he willa be wid Agostino jus' de same. Dat w'ere you find-a him, you look for 'im. Dey out dere, right now, out in de river, somew'ere, follerin' dat tug, or layin' for it.”

Irving was bewildered. Why should his father be with Agostino, if not to help in his criminal enterprise?

Bianca enlightened him. “You know dat Pasquale w'at wass kill', w'en Agostino was hidin'? De Black Handers did n't know who done dat, till I tole 'em. But I tell 'em!” She leaned forward, and he saw a cruel light leap in her eyes, as from the blaze in her heart. “W'en Agostino come back from Fiesole, w'at 'e bring wid 'im? He bringa back dat wife an' de kids, alla right, O. K., jus' like you told me he would, some daya! ‘You go,’ Agostino say to me. So I go.”

She laughed furiously. “I go, alla right. I go to de Black Handers! I say, ‘It wass Agostino who kill' Pasquale. How I know? Because he slip to my rooma, dat nighta, w'en Pasquale think I dere, by myself. But I know w'ere he be to-night,’ I say, w'en I hear about de coal, ‘I know w'ere he be caught, so like a mouse-a in de trapa!’ An' I tell about de coal-barges, jus' as I tella you.”

Irving instinctively shrank from her, as if to escape being scorched by the dart of her furious jealousy.

“But you ver' good to me,” she resumed, calming

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herself; "and Dick Arnold wass always so good. Bianca never forget de good an' de bad."

"Bianca, it is necessary for me to understand what you mean. Do you say that Agostino and his men are to steal coal from Captain Payne on this very night?"

"*Si, dis ver' nighta.*"

"And you have told this to Agostino's enemies?"

"You mighta righta, dey his enemies, de Black Handers!"

"But why did you tell the Black Handers about Agostino?"

"*Che!* So dey catch 'im at his job, so dey take 'im w'en he can't call for help, so he can do *not'in'*, an' so dey can killa him like-a dog."

"Kill him, Bianca?"

"Like-a dog," hissed Bianca. "Jus' like-a dog."

"Well," said Irving, thoughtfully, "I've no doubt he deserves it. But you tell me that my father will be with him?"

"Yass. I tella you w'y. Dick Arnold, he find out our plans. He find out I tella de Black Handers. So he slip away in a skiff, to tell Agostino. He gone to hunt him on de dark river. Maybe he not finda him; but he willa find Capitan Payne's tug, w'en it cross de river, and dat way, he find Agostino. But it do Agostino no good. We will be ready, too!"

Again the perspiration stood in cold beads upon the young man's brow. They were drawing near Mulberry Bend. In a short time, Irving understood everything, but this understanding availed little in clearing

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the future of sinister threatenings. The Black Handers were intent upon vengeance. So was Bianca, who meant to go with them in their concealed boat. They would descend upon Agostino, and take him in the act of stealing coal. In the meantime Arnold, having heard of the danger that threatened his ruffianly benefactor, had rowed into the darkness, to carry a warning. He might find Agostino; he would, without doubt, discover Captain Payne's tug, and this tug would bring Arnold and Agostino together. At the same time, the Black Handers would appear. Whoever first reached the coal barges, would direct the destiny of the others.

If Agostino were first to the barges, he would be stealing coal when Arnold came to warn him, or when the band of Italians came to kill him. Should Arnold first reach the quarry, he would warn Agostino away. In case of Bianca's friends arriving first, they would lie in wait to capture Arnold — thus obviating the danger of his betrayal — or seize upon Agostino.

In all this, Bianca had at heart two separate interests: she desired the death of Agostino, and the safety of Arnold. The Black Handers had sworn to save Arnold, if possible; that had been Bianca's condition of betraying her former lover. But it was probable that Arnold would not allow himself to be saved. Seeing Agostino at the mercy of cut-throats, he would leap to his assistance. He was not a man tamely to surrender when his benefactor was in danger.

That was where Irving's part in the night's tragedy came in. He was to go with Bianca and her friends,

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in search of the coal barges. Bianca's friends had consented to his presence among them. To be sure his voluntary presence would make him an outlaw like the others. But Arnold would not contend against Irving. Thus Irving would not only be the means of saving Arnold's life, in case of a hand-to-hand struggle, but he would prove a safeguard to Bianca's party.

Irving, on his side, realized perfectly the situation, with its possible consequences: To trust himself into the power of Bianca's Black Handers, was like delivering himself, unarmed, to wild beasts. To consent to their plan of vengeance, was to place himself beyond the protection of the law. And all might end in a useless attempt to save his father's life. On the other hand, to seek other help than that of the Italians would mean his father's imprisonment, or more likely, his death. In going to warn Agostino, Arnold had allied himself with the river-thieves. No one would regard his motive as leniently as did his son. Nor was it by any means improbable that Irving himself was about to end his promising career, by disgraceful imprisonment, or an inglorious death.

Yet the young man did not hesitate, even for a moment. He would go with Bianca. The cab was stopped before the Bend was reached for prudence sake. They descended to the street, at the mouth of a dark alley. Bianca beckoned.

CHAPTER XXV

THE BATTLE OF THE COAL BARGES

IRVING followed Bianca down the alley until she paused before a narrow door. In answer to her knock, given, no doubt, according to some agreed signal, the door opened. They entered a sort of lumber room; the walls were hung with second-hand clothes, the floor was littered with fragments of splintered kindling. Against this squalid background, four swarthy Italians were etched by a smoked lantern.

Their leader was a young fellow, handsome in his bold way, darker than Bianca, and heavy-browed. His name was Pietro. The intelligence of his countenance explained his leadership. The others revealed no expression except differing gradations of craftiness. Before the levelling wave of primitive passions, marks of individual distinction were obliterated.

It was inevitable that these men should regard Irving with distrust, yet the resolution of his pale face did something to allay suspicion. Bianca found it expedient to remind them of their oath — to save Arnold's life, if possible. She recapitulated the reasons for Irving's presence; she reminded them of his former kindness to herself, and assured them of his secrecy — not on the ground that he promised secrecy, but be-

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cause to betray them, would be to destroy his father as well as himself.

Bianca spoke in Italian. Irving listened to her gliding words, which seemed to slip from her red mouth like the coils of a serpent. Understanding nothing, he imitated the grave attentiveness of the others. It was not until Bianca explained, that he found they had renewed their vows to protect him and his father. His gaze passed from one sinister face to another. Shifty eyes turned from him, potential blood-guiltiness reddening their orbs — yet the vows were of mercy as well as of vengeance. Strange, indeed, that his father's fate should rest in the hands of these men, and that, in all the great city, no one could save him except this Bianca whom, one day, he had saved from being trampled by a panic-stricken mob.

In the dim lantern-light, Bianca's red head-cloth showed as a streak of blood seen in smoke. One of the men, Giacomo, low and heavy, kept his upper lip drawn in such a way as always to expose a yellow, protruding fang. Against the blackened wall this face, almost black, with its yellow tooth and its wild eyes, reminded Irving of a shaggy wolf scenting the prey.

Suddenly this Giacomo, who could speak no English, though he had lived many years in New York, snarled in harsh impatience, "*Perchè non parti?*"

Pietro held his huge silver watch toward the light. The time had come. "*Apri porta!*" he commanded in the voice of a general.

Bianca opened the door, and Pietro slipped the lan-

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tern into an oilskin bag. He and Bianca went out into the alley, followed by Irving. The others dispersed noiselessly. All were to meet at the boat.

“*Mi siegui,*” Pietro whispered to Irving. Then remembering the other’s limitations — “Don’t let on as if you knowed me. We goin’ to de river. Foller as if it was jus’ ax’dent.”

Irving looked back; Bianca was disappearing down the alley, into whose lower depths the light refused to penetrate.

In spite of Pietro’s orders, Irving kept at his side. “Bianca tells me,” he said, “that Agostino killed Pasquale, who was your friend. You want revenge. But is n’t it a fact that Pasquale had threatened to blow up Agostino with a bomb? If Agostino had n’t done for Pasquale, would n’t Pasquale —”

“*Il so!*” returned Pietro impatiently. “But it was because Agostino would n’t fork over de mon’ dat Pasquale call for.”

“No doubt; but why should Agostino have paid Pasquale the money?”

“Because he ask it. *Pest!*” It was very simple. Nothing could have exceeded the conclusiveness of Pietro’s tone.

Irving, without much hope, made a second attempt to avert catastrophe. “Why not notify the police that Agostino is the murderer? Then your enemy would be caught without danger to yourself.” Irving expatiated upon the advantages of legal rights over private vengeance.

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“ Oh, we rather fix him, us,” said Pietro succinctly. “ We don’t want no cop. Better you get back, and not be saw with me. Besides, if de cops was on de job, would n’t dey nab yo’ *padre*? *Che*? You better be glad we fix ’im. You want your *padre* nabbed when he with de men what take de coal? Then they send yo’ *padre* to the Island, sure thing, or up to Sing Sing. Oh, *we* fix Agostino, for right!”

Irving felt himself driven along a dark and untried current, with no desire to resist. He fell back then, always careful to keep the Italian in sight. They threaded a maze of tangled byways on the East Side, ever drawing closer to the river without appearing to do so by design. Pietro, when intent upon dark deeds, was wont to wander with apparent aimlessness though feeling the need of haste most pressing. In doing violence to his desires, he imagined himself more secure against detection.

When Irving, consumed by impatience to encounter his father, again accosted his guide, Pietro had paused before an illuminated clock, as if surrendering himself to an artist’s admiration of the recurring flashes of light. He spoke grudgingly to Irving.

“ Oh, *you* there?” he said, as in surprise. Then in a whisper, “ H-s-s! You never be good at dis business, you!”

“ But we are quite alone.”

“ How you know dat? Maybe Agostino think *him* quite alone, but we are goin’ to slip up on him. Maybe somebody slippin’ up on *us* dis minute. *Che dici*?”

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Quite alone! A man is never what you say quite alone, till de stiletto is in his back. Come on, then."

They glided down the street, and presently a low voice said to Pietro, "Dere is de river!" It was Bianca, who had come, apparently, from the grated mouth of a sewer-pipe; but that, of course, was impossible.

At the end of the street was a wide swift blackness, gleaming beneath innumerable lights. As they crept down the slant of the paved road, they were assailed by the sounds of the river — deep bass whistles, shrill sirens, staccato explosions of piercing steam, bell-clangings, splashings of wheels, and the rush of lapping waves against rotting supports of disreputable piers.

Irving felt his blood racing with the tide. It seemed bearing him away from the world he had known, even from the world of his dreams, into a chaos of indistinguishable emotions.

Pietro, the destination reached, grew confidential: "Bianca, here — I love her first, me. But Agostino, he have de mon', and dat is ver' good, too. Bianca think so, you bet!"

"But I hate Agostino now," said Bianca, with vindictive fierceness. "I hate 'im jus' like-a dog. *E ben!* I fix 'im, in ver' good time; to-night, I hope. I not forgeta dat Pietro take-a me to 'im. I not forget Pietro."

"De boat," said Pietro, unemotionally.

Out on the greasy planks they passed, like flitting shadows. At the bottom of some crazy steps was secured a long, slender boat, containing three men. It

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almost bumped against a squat oyster-boat, from the roof of which streamed a red glare. By this pillar of light, was revealed the yellow tooth of Giacomo. He, with his companions, held the boat ready for instant departure.

Pietro took the remaining pair of oars. Irving and Bianca were seated in the stern. They pushed off.

When they had shot out from the ugly barricade of warehouses and unsightly freight-depots, they found themselves in a scene of fairy loveliness. Swiftly they descended toward the Battery. In passing Governor's Island, the beauty of the city's lights grew more enchanting. As far as the eye could reach, the Jersey shore was found set with signal lights like threaded fireflies against the misty sky. On the other hand, Long Island blazed in the white points of South Brooklyn. The Hudson revealed, upon its ample bosom, a countless maze of twinkling gems, each gem a huge steamer, with illuminated portholes for facets. Two ribbons of fire — the Brooklyn and Williamsburg bridges — spread apart their giant bands of splendor. But the climax, the very heart of all this night-glory, was the narrow tongue of land between the rivers, extending its sharp point, as if to drink in the light of the Goddess of Liberty.

Of all this, Irving alone was sensible. He seemed to be looking upon New York for the first time; for he did not find it what it had been. As the magic of field, stream, and glen had vanished from the poet's impression of things with the passing of his youth, so

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Irving found that, with the disappearance of his ignorance respecting his parentage, something had vanished from the enormous buildings of stone and steel, from the mad throb of street life, from the vast activities of the Bay,—something of indefinite remoteness, something, doubtless, of himself. Yet the passing of his young fancies brought him nearer to real life, and left him more determined to wrest happiness from the grasp of destiny. In his resolve to make this happiness of usefulness his own, he built higher and stronger that wall that stood between him and the thought of mother.

The mists were drifting over New York Bay. Through their light spirals, gleamed the beryl, the topaz, the emerald, the ruby, the sapphire, the amber, the amethyst, and the dazzling diamond, of the city's light. Triple rows of white squares marked the passing of floating palaces. Irving recalled his tugboat-days, when he had voyaged with Captain Payne on the *Hudsonia*, picking up tows at Sandy Hook. How strange, that he should be intent upon meeting Captain Payne's tugboat this night, not to greet his foster-parent, but to rescue his natural father from among those stealing coal from the captain's barges!

The rowers showed the expertness of trained boatmen, who, no doubt, picked up a comfortable living from the wide waters. They had come up from Coney Island — so Bianca informed Irving — where was their home, or, at any rate, their retreating-point. They were to return to Coney Island after the encounter with

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Agostino. Bianca would go with them, to avoid possible inquiry in old haunts where she was known; Irving would go with them, also, if he were wise.

The Wall Street ferry-boat was the first to cross their path. Then came the Whitehall boats on their way to Atlantic and Hamilton Avenues, over in Brooklyn. Lower down, they saw a Coney Island boat swinging around the bend from the Thirty-ninth Street ferry. From on board came the sounds of a gay band. Irving caught the air; he heard voices of long-ago singing —

“You may have the rest of the world,
But give me New York for mine.”

Irving uttered a low cry, then was startled at the sound of his own voice.

“Yass,” said Bianca, “it ver’ foggy, but dat alla right for us. Soon it de time Capitan Payne come through de Kill von Kull. De time nearly here. Not ver’ long to wait. *Den* we see Agostino, he not ver’ glad, I guessa, not ver’ glad to see Bianca; oh, no, evert’ing ’s different since he come back from Fiesole!”

Giacomo uttered a strange oath. A huge revolving light had fallen upon the black water, and was moving toward the boat. At the same time, the lights of a large patrol-boat burst through the increasing mists.

Irving, in dumb fascination, watched the approach of the revolving light. Like some enormous white finger it covered them, it held itself upon them as if to point out the disreputable crew to heaven and earth. Then it passed on. But the police-boat stood nearer.

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The Italians adopted the manœuvre of dodging in and out among all manner of craft, with the sole purpose of losing themselves from the patrol-boat. When, at last, the river-guardian was lost from sight, all breathed more freely.

They had not long enjoyed the triumph of their escape, when Bianca suddenly exclaimed, "Dere! You see? *Che!* Capitan Payne's tug! And looka — de coal barges!"

"Dat 's right," said Pietro, examining the boat that had issued from the Kill von Kull. "It 's w'at we 're lookin' for."

"I bet Agostino on one of dem barges," hissed Bianca. "But if no, he come-a yet; he fall into our trapa." Irving heard her little teeth snap together metallically, as if they were the trap in question. Above the splashing of their eight oars, and the thousand shrill cries of the night-birds, he heard Bianca's grating teeth, and the ominous clicking of her tongue.

"You gotta gun?" Bianca whispered in his ear. He shrank from her with a shudder. "But you better have-a one." She thrust a pistol into his hand. "Oh, I'm alla right, you bet, Bianca take-a care herself, an' of Agostino, too,— damma!"

Straight toward them came the little tug of Captain Payne, the smokestack slanting back from the weight of the tow. There were three unwieldy coal barges fastened one behind another, the first secured to the tug by an enormous cable. The barges were set with sig-

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nal-lamps which did more to reveal their presence in the fog, than to illumine their contents.

To the last barge a boat had been secured by grappling hooks, evidently designed to bear off Agostino's stolen booty. On this rear-barge stood two men throwing basketfuls of coal into the piratical boat. The movements of these men were so calm and business-like that, if any in the passing vessels had observed them, it must have been concluded that the workers were engaged in honest toil.

The boat in which Irving crouched was directed slantwise with the current, toward the tugboat; and, as it entered the swell in its wake, the young man fancied he discerned his foster-father's form turning toward the window of the pilot-house. If so, it vanished instantly. There was a swift, lurid glare from the depths of the engine-room. The next moment, Giacomo had cast the rope about an upright at the edge of the first barge.

The boat swung round. As it did so, the oars were lifted from the water and thrown into the boat. They were now scraping against the black side of the barge. Above them towered a mountain of coal which glittered under a large lantern that had been secured to the upright. Pietro, who had retained one of his oars, smashed the lantern, and all was in darkness.

"*Mi siegui!*" Pietro commanded.

Bianca turned to Irving. "Come, climb up," she said. She put her knife between her teeth, that it might not impede her movements.

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Giacomo had already drawn himself up, by means of the rope.

Pietro wanted to help Bianca. He began, "*Mia ben* —"

"Ever' man for hisself," interrupted Bianca, scrambling past him.

Having gained the edge of the barge's deck, they found it would be necessary to climb the mountain of coal in order to reach the intermediary barge. The crossing was laborious rather than difficult. Between the first barge and the next, was a narrow space of the racing tide. Over this blackness and this sinister movement, it was necessary to leap with no certainty of a good footing on the next deck. They let Bianca jump, having the advantage of an elevated lantern. Then Pietro smashed the lantern, and the others took their chances in the thick gloom. One might as well fall into the river, as be seen leaping from deck to deck.

The second barge was gained. There was another mountain of coal requiring further efforts at expert scrambling, and increased need of caution. It seemed to Irving an eternity before all stood on the third and last barge; and to Bianca it doubtless seemed as long. His thought was that now, only a last heap of coal separated him from the chance of meeting his father. Her thought was that now, only the last heap of coal divided her from the certainty of her revenge.

They made the ascent, cautious not to alarm the enemy. At last, from the peak of the coal-heap, they looked down upon the two Italians. Good! They

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were still heaving basketful after basketful into the boat, with methodical leisureliness. Pietro had no need to demolish other lanterns. The thieves had spared him the trouble. Nevertheless, dark as it was, there was no mistaking the identity of the Italian nearer the boat; it was Agostino. Irving looked with breathless intentness, but it was evident that the boat was deserted, and that only two Italians stood below. His father was not there.

Bianca, lying flat upon her breast, by Irving's side, watched the coal-heavers with glittering eyes. It was for Pietro to give the command for a fierce and simultaneous charge upon the unsuspecting Italians. The little party of five were suspended, as it were, upon Pietro's very breathing. Why did he hesitate?

No need to ask — one word would tell all. Out of the swaying river-mists, had loomed a dreaded form — the patrol-boat. Its glaring eye looked steadily down upon the coal-thieves. It came like some vast black river-beast, with eye of white fury.

Agostino found himself discovered. He flung his basket overboard. His companion imitated his example. Both leaped for the boat and gained it in two bounds. Instantly the patrol-boat began lowering its gasoline launch. In an inconceivably short time the launch was ready for action. Several officers appeared in it, as by magic.

"*Che!*" exclaimed Bianca, furiously. "He getta 'way, he escape-a, ah-ah!" Again Irving heard that clicking of teeth and tongue that had sickened him.

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The gasoline launch pushed off, intent upon investigation.

At that moment, a small skiff shot out of the darkness, on the side of the pirate-boat that was farthest from the searchlight. A man leaped from the skiff, to snatch at a dangling rope at the boat's stern. The empty skiff danced past the barge and was lost. The newcomer gained the deck of Agostino's boat.

"It's Dick Arnold," Bianca whispered. "He come to give-a Agostino de tip. But 'e might as well not. Agostino getta 'way anyhow. But I fix 'im some day."

"Get away, *nothin'*!" retorted Pietro. "How dey get away? Look, *now!*"

Irving groaned, in his impotence. "He will be taken with the others," he exclaimed. Then he started up with the rash thought of rushing to the boat, to do he knew not what. But Pietro clutched his arm.

"Wait," whispered Pietro, joy in his voice — "Dey come, all three — look!"

It was true. Not only Agostino and his fellow-thief, but Dick Arnold as well, jumped from the boat upon the rear barge. Hardly had their feet sounded upon the boards, when they were throwing off the grappling-hooks. The boat, already heavily laden with coal stolen from Captain Payne's charge, began to sink. It settled rapidly. Evidently Agostino had cut a hole in the bottom, and hoped to escape pursuit by hiding under the flooring of one of the barges.

Irving, kneeling beside Bianca's prone form, kept his eyes fastened upon his father, eager to rush to his help,

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but fearful of precipitating a bloody encounter by revealing himself.

The gasoline launch cut a white line across the black water; but the scuttled vessel was going down so rapidly that the launch was obliged to swerve aside, to avoid the danger of suction. In making the deflection, the officer in charge shouted,

“What are you doing on that barge?”

The fugitives were desirous of reaching the foremost barge. On they came, as swiftly as the coal-dust would permit. Arnold was the second of the straggling line. Agostino was the one closest to Pietro's ambushade behind the coal-peak. He was so near, that Irving might almost have touched his head as it bobbed beneath him.

Pietro said sharply —“*Now!*”

Instantly Pietro, Irving and Bianca flung themselves down from their advantageous position which, up to that time, had not only shielded them from Agostino, but from the police. As they went half-rolling down the slant, Giacomo and his two companions threw themselves upon the spot just vacated, and lay waiting, their arms extended, their pistol-barrels touched in white lines by the sudden glare of the searchlight.

Bianca met Agostino, breast to breast. He had drawn a revolver, but it was pushed to one side by the body of the woman whom he had deserted.

“*Folle ch'io fui!*” snarled Agostino, trying to recover his balance. Down he went before her tigerish impact. They rolled along the slope of the coal-heap,



Panting, cursing, grappling each other in a black fury

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over and over, panting, cursing, grappling each other in a black fury.

Irving, in the meantime, had darted straight toward Dick Arnold, with no other thought than to save his father. Pietro had run after the rolling bodies of his rival and his sweetheart, eager to add the strength of his hatred to the woman's weakness.

Irving reached Arnold. He caught his arm. "This way," he cried. "Up the slant. We have a boat waiting."

Arnold recognized him, though he must have found his presence marvellous. "Good comrade!" cried Arnold, heartily. "Good comrade! It is my very dear Monsieur 'Irvilonne Paynos!'"

"Surrender!" came a trumpet-voice from the launch. "Surrender, or we fire!"

Arnold, little dreaming that Irving had penetrated the secret of their relationship, was all excited gayety. He made a burly and rather swaggering cavalier. "Who'd have thought," he exclaimed, panting up the declivity with Irving's assistance, "that you and I should ever meet in the very heart of an adventure!"

From the hill's crest blazed the three weapons of Giacomo and his companions. The bullets fell short of the launch.

Instantly was heard the sharp command of an officer: "Fire!"

Again the river-mists were streaked with crimson; spangled splashes of blood-red blurs showed against the floating curtain of white.

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Arnold fell to his knees, gave a low groan, then lurched forward upon his face.

"Father!" cried Irving, kneeling over him. "Father!" Why had he not called him so, when the other was conscious? Arnold, but a moment before, had been so full of life — there had seemed before him many robust years promising rich and careless joys of hearty living. Irving had only waited a time more fitting for the revelation. Now, was it too late? He looked frantically about.

Bianco and Pietro were running toward him from the lower margin of the slant. In Bianca's hand was a dripping knife.

"Help me carry him," cried Irving, trying to bear up the limp form.

Bianca stared at the stained knife, as if wondering how it came in her hand. She flung it into the river. "I helpa," she muttered. She lifted the limbs of the prostrate man. Irving held his body. She put her ear to his breast. "He iss not mort," she said, dully.

Giacomo and his friends fired again. From a sudden commotion in the launch, it appeared that the volley had not been without effect.

The searchlight quivered like a throbbing pulse upon the group at the base of the highest peak. There was the bleeding form of Arnold, there were Irving and Bianca stumbling upward with their insensible burden, there was Pietro coming after, and steadying them by turns.

But a diversion happily occurred. Agostino's ac-

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complice had leaped overboard, and the glaring light was shifted in search of him. He was seen battling with the waves. The gasoline launch turned aside to capture him, and it was due to this loss of time to the police, that escape became a possibility to Pietro's party.

Even so, Irving did not realize how safety was attained. The next day, when he sought to bring back the various incidents in their order, he found his mind baffled by confused fragments of memory. His consuming desire to get his father, dead or alive, safely into Pietro's boat — that, at any rate, he would remember as long as he lived. But the wild scramble down the coal-heap, the difficult passage from one barge to the next — how was the lifeless form thus borne? It seemed that in leaping from one deck to the black uncertainty of the other, Arnold must have been lifted up by the sheer force of his son's thought!

Again, he held fast-engraved upon his recollection, the dark figures of the Italians as they defiled before him, their shoulders humped forward to avoid pursuing bullets, their arms swinging as if hung upon wires, jerking with the unevenness of their footsteps. And always, he and Bianca were carrying the form which momentarily grew heavier, and always, when he stumbled, the quick hand of Pietro was under his elbow. And once, when the searchlight streamed toward them, it revealed nothing in all the murky night but one blackened face from which dully gleamed a yellow tooth.

Such details were forever fastened upon his mind,

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while larger facts were lost. The red cloth that covered Bianca's coarse hair, was like the red hand she held against Arnold's side. Only one of her hands was red, the hand that had flung the knife into the river. Irving could never forget that hand. But how they descended from the foremost barge into Pietro's boat,—that was all vague. It seemed that, at one moment, he was about to sink under the leaden weight of Arnold; and, at the next, all were seated in the boat that had brought them from Manhattan.

Suddenly he found that he was bleeding from a severe fall on the coal; suddenly he found the world reeling in a mad chaos of dizzy spaces. But presently all was peaceful, like any other night on the Bay, as if nothing had happened. He sat in the bottom of the boat, holding his father's motionless head upon his knee. The Italians rowed desperately. The cool breeze was in his face.

Occasionally Irving was aware of Bianca's drawing a tarpaulin over his father's form. Scarcely would she do so, when a sudden blinding light would reveal the nearness of a vessel, perhaps a great ship, and this vessel would be looking down upon them. There was still danger, then, it appeared. But Irving thought little of it; and, as soon as the light had moved on, he would mechanically throw aside the tarpaulin, waiting, but with little hope, for some movement to prove that his father still lived. The flow of blood had been checked, but the wound appeared a mortal one. Inex-

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perienced as he was, the young man could not think that the other would survive; but he hoped for at least a brief period of rallying forces, that might enable them to speak to each other as father and son.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE FATHER

AS the noises grew less strident, and later, as a solemn peace came up from the sea, there was mingled, with Irving's heaviness of heart, a sense of passionate relief. It was not likely that the patrol-boat would again be encountered; danger of discovery was surely past.

These sturdy oarsmen, silent, grim, capable, had brought him, with the insensible form of his father, out of the shadow of disgrace. To them he owed this body in his arms, to them he owed the faint sigh from Arnold's lips. Criminals they were, past all doubt, since Agostino had not risen from the dust. They might never enter the Kingdom of Heaven, these murderers — perhaps they would not feel at home there; but, soiled as they were by many a dark deed, they had entered the kingdom of Irving's heart.

“Pietro,” said Irving, speaking as to a companion-in-arms, “have you any whiskey?”

Whiskey Pietro had; more than was good for him, perhaps. He stopped rowing long enough to unpocket his flask. Irving held it to Arnold's lips.

The breathing of the prone form grew more pronounced.

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Irving bent over the cold face, seeking to restore consciousness by the vehemence of speech: "Do you know me, father? Listen — do you know me? I can't tell you what my name is — I have none, I suppose. They call me Irving Payne. You knew me as Irving Payne. Do you remember? Can you hear me, father?"

A faint whisper answered, uncertainly, "Some one is calling me 'father.'"

"Yes," said Irving, valiantly, "I am calling you father."

After a brief pause, Arnold whispered, "I would hear that in the grave."

Irving lifted the heavy head, that the breeze might help to revive the scattered senses. But when the wounded man again spoke, he proved that he comprehended all, and was passing from facts to causes. "Who told you?" he asked, barely audible.

Irving spoke practically, as if to make light of the other's condition, and as if to make nothing of the consequences to himself — without apparent emotion, without heroics. "Mrs. Wyse — the woman who took me to the Paynes to be adopted — when I was an infant. She knew all about you."

"All about me?" repeated Arnold, with something like his old manner. "Then what a wonderful woman, that Mrs. Wyse!" He added, "But you were never to be told, you were never to know. It's too bad!" Presently Arnold continued, gathering strength. After brief pauses for rallying fresh power, he would go on

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with a determined forcibleness that trailed off, pathetically, into silent lapses:

“Agostino found out, and it made him rather arbitrary, at times. But he was a useful friend in the bitter cold, when I had not a penny in the world. Of course, I would n’t help him in his thieving, but I’ve stood guard more than once, to whistle the policeman’s coming. Man is very weak, my boy. I tried to save Agostino’s life, to-night; I heard he was in danger; came too late. And so you not only know that I am your father, but — you call me so! I’ve often wondered what you would say — how you’d act — if you could know. But to know the truth does n’t kill, does it? You are still you, I am still I. You understand, I could n’t tell you before to-night — before this moment, because — Oh, *you* see! I’d have died, to have the secret buried with me.— Dying, now, but for nothing, just as my living was no good to you.— But I’m glad you know.— When one is dying, everything seems changed. One cares only for things that count. Somehow, what I thought most important, simply seems *nothing*. Only God matters. I thought I’d lost Him. But he’s been waiting for me all this time. The world’s slipping from under me — all is space — but I’m holding to Something — God’s mighty patient!”

Irving asked if a changed position would bring comfort, but the other listened to the voice rather than to the meaning of the words.

“But I must tell you what you’ve a right to know — and time is so short. But was n’t it gay on the barge,

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until that fatal bullet! I'll tell you now: you are my son, but not —"

There was silence, so long and so profound, that Irving, in spite of his anxiety to hear the truth about himself, found his attention caught by the monotonous voice of Bianca, as she muttered, "His las' words wass, '*Come confonde!* Donta kill me, Bianca, donta kill me!'"

"Is that Bianca talking?" inquired Arnold, eagerly. "She's often promised to bury me in the sand on Plum Island, where I went every summer of my last years. We'll not reach it too soon. I feel the blood dripping in my lungs. It smothers me. I think I'll have time to tell. A handkerchief! — Bianca!"

Irving bathed, with a dampened handkerchief, the face which the fog hid from his straining eyes.

Bianca was roused by the feeble call. "Yaas, I keepa de promise," she assured Arnold. "Die easy. You ver' good to me, w'en I wass a kid. You keepa me from bein' beat, I guess a t'ousan' time-a. Pietro swear dey not hurta you, an', if you come-a to be kill', dey bury you, like-a you say."

"But where are we going now, poor Bianca?" asked Arnold, as if for the first time he was conscious of the splash of oars.

"To Coney. Only, if you not live-a, we go on to de islan'."

"To bury me there?"

"Yaas, like-a you say."

"Good Bianca!" Arnold turned his head toward

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Irving. "You know my other son," he said, in a stronger voice. "Think of me at his age, as Claude is now. But he is more steadfast, I hope. I married at about his age. My wife was — you know her as Mrs. Vandever. Our tastes were utterly unlike — but it does n't seem any use to talk about all that, does it? — Can you hear me, my boy? I am heartily ashamed of my weak little whispering thread of a voice. But it seems all I have left."

The oars beat an accompaniment to the words of the dying man. On their left were strung the lights of an invisible land, to guide them through the thick vapors. From the crouching form of the woman in the stern came the dull voice — "'Donta kill me, Bianca.' Dey wass his las' word."

"One day," Arnold resumed, "I discovered — the other. She was not more than seventeen. Bonjour was her name. Her mother was a Frenchwoman; her father was an artist; you know him; I found you in his studio the night I went there to accompany Du Pays. Yes, Bonjour's father was — Mr. Burl."

There flashed before Irving's memory the scene, not of the night to which Arnold referred, but of the day of the mysterious kiss. The bicycle-lamp in the window was meant to warn Irving away, lest he discover Mr. Burl's strange visitor; and that strange visitor, who sometimes slept in the house — that woman who had kissed the young man in his sleep — she was Mr. Burl's daughter; she was Arnold's Bonjour! Irving

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felt suffocated. He caught at the collar that seemed about to strangle him, and tore it away.

Arnold continued. "How the Burls loved that girl! 'Bonjour,' they had named her. To look into her face, was to hear a voice say, 'Good-morning.' She was — but my strength is gone — what shall I do? — Can't you do something for me, my boy? I'd like to tell you what she was like. The name itself must tell you all. She was just — Bonjour."

Irving bathed the other's wrists and temples, using the handkerchief. He said slowly, "Are you speaking of — of my mother?"

"Yes, your mother. She was so young. The greater my blame, the less hers. Neither had a thought of wrong-doing. I had already left my wife. We were living apart. I had brought suit for divorce. I desired to make honorable love to Bonjour. She regarded me as already free. But Mrs. Burl was not only French; she was Catholic French. They discovered that I loved Bonjour. To tell them that I would soon be divorced was useless. To them, divorce was merely a word. To them, I was bound forever to my wife. They could n't understand that Bonjour cared for me — well, as she *did* care. They would n't believe. So they were to sail with her to Europe, to bury her in some convent until she should forget. As if she would have forgotten! The night before they were to sail, — we went away, Bonjour and I. Mind you, my boy, I excuse nothing — I only explain. If you can't ex-

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cuse, then there is no excuse. That is not all, however.”

A tremor shook Irving's cramped frame. The hand that had been reviving his father, was suddenly withdrawn, automatically. The band on a Coney Island steamer, bound for South Ferry, clashed with mocking mirth against the rebellious emotions of the rigid listener.

“We were in the West, a year and more,” said Arnold, faintly. “Then you were born, and all was changed. Up to that time, we had the hope that a divorce might be obtained. When you came, there was the ultimatum from New York; no divorce for me — only for my wife. It was horrible — the effect upon Bonjour. We had up, to that time, regarded ourselves as really married, you understand. But after that, poor Bonjour felt only shame. It ate into her heart. She shuddered when I came near. She brooded until it seemed her mind was deranged. She could think of nothing but that — that I was not her husband. One morning she went away with you. For almost twenty years I sought for some clue — all in vain. Pretty lonely sort of life, don't you think? I've tramped in every city of the Union, it seems to me, and among country places by thousands, always looking, never finding.”

“But Mrs. Wyse told me that you came to her house almost as soon as —”

“Mrs. Wyse!” said Arnold, not without a faint energy, born of contempt. “She thought she'd make

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money out of you by holding back the facts — but, it seems, you had none at that time. How she ever found me, I don't know. She's a genius, doubtless. At any rate, she discovered me loafing about New York — I'd long since concluded that more likely than not, poor Bonjour was dead. That devil of an intriguer — *Milady Wyse* — had discovered Bonjour — knew where she was — would tell me for a certain sum. I sold myself to Agostino to get that sum, and — I found her. We met, after twenty years. Ah, Monsieur Irvilonne, do not blame me if I die before I tell all. The wish is mine to tell. The wish, the — the prayer." The voice ceased.

Irving spoke with a catch in his voice: "Can't you go on with the rest?"

The whisper came: "I think — I could go on, if — if the hand that rested against my lips and brow a little while ago — would come again."

"Father!" exclaimed Irving, with a broken sob.

"Good Irvilonne!" murmured Arnold, pressing his lips to the repentant hand. "We might have been such good comrades — I can't tell you about the meeting — time presses. So I wished to marry Bonjour, that you might know, if you ever heard of us, that we were legally man and wife. It was a bold step, to sue Mrs. Vandever after twenty years, she whom I had sued as Mrs. Arnold, for my divorce. But she made no defence. You remember how I took you to the court house? Then I married Bonjour — there was only the ceremony; we were never to live together — the old

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threads were all snarled, or broken — and she had her atonement to complete. She was so patient and uncomplaining. And she said all had turned out so much better than we deserved, for you had grown up strong and good —”

“Is she in need?” Irving asked, with constraint.

“She needs nothing except you — the one thing she cannot have — the only thing I’ve wanted. Make Mr. Burl tell you her story — or better yet, ask Dr. Adams, who knows it all. And think well of Bonjour. Hear a dying man, my boy: When a sin is committed, it is committed; but if it is atoned for, then it is atoned for. What took place twenty-one years ago was one thing. But it was only one thing. Is sin eternal? — or God? You are living to-day — not twenty-one years ago. So, your mother. Forgive her.”

“But oh, father,” Irving groaned, “it is not whether I forgive her —”

“Yes, that is all it is — whether *you* forgive her. Why, my boy, God forgave her years and years ago! Has n’t she prayed for forgiveness for twenty years? Christ forgave his enemies before they had offered one prayer.”

Irving said, “I forgive her.”

“Ah!” whispered Arnold, with infinite content. “My sorrow is as light as air, dear boy, because a friend is at this end of it, and God at the other. Good-bye.”

Irving’s ear was held to the cold lips. He no longer felt the beating of Arnold’s heart. He thought him

The Father

quite gone, when there came a lingering whisper in which love lent an accent to each syllable: "Bonjour — Irvilonne."

Irving spoke to him tenderly, and, somewhat revived, Arnold murmured, "They did n't give out — there were still seven."

Irving repeated in anxious inquiry, "Still seven?" He thought perhaps his father had a last command to give him.

Arnold explained by the one word, whimsically pronounced — "*Doom-iss.*"

Seven volumes by Dumas, still unread. Truly all life had not been sapped of its sweetness for this wanderer!

According to his wish, he was buried in the sands of Plum Island, at the mouth of Sheephead's Bay. It was that bit of waste earth cast up, in recent years, by the sea, to be possessed by a colony of disreputables who had drifted no one knew whence. There had come Arnold, for a season every year, lounging in his hut of driftwood, reading his favorite books, and — dreaming of Bonjour.

Only a few days ago, the tramps had been driven away, their saloons had been demolished, and a detachment of soldiers from Fort Hamilton had come to possess the land. It had seemed to Arnold that the island, formed of drifted waste from the far-away beach, should be peopled and owned by men who were themselves drifted wrecks from a far-away social continent. And

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what more fitting than that he, to whom no one belonged, should be buried in the barren wastes of No Man's Land?

Even at his burial, the arm of the law must be eluded; even those who dug his grave with their stiletos, were obliged to exercise great caution, not only on their own account, but for the sake of the dead man. Not far from the margin of the spit, burned a great red camp-fire, with edges of curling white smoke. The light revealed phantom shapes rising like peaks of snow from out the crawling fog. These were the tents of the soldiers. The erect figure that paced back and forth between the fire and the stealthy grave, was that of the sentinel.

At last Irving's father, wrapped in the tarpaulin, was laid in his final resting-place. The sand was carefully smoothed, then scattered with shells and stones.

As Irving lingered at the spot, his heart oppressed, his mind unable to fathom the future or to weigh the past, Bianca slipped to him. "Yo' *padre ver'* good to me, him," she said softly.

Irving's sudden tears were caused not so much by his father's desolate fate, as by the sympathy of the creature who had thrown aside the tyrannous grip of remorse, to speak a kind word for his dead. It seemed to him that he felt much of what he should not feel, little of what he should. Life had become for him, a series of perplexing riddles; but he had the feeling that behind every riddle of the universe, is God.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MOTHER

THE next morning found Irving standing before the residence off Madison Square. He learned that Mr. Burl had gone back to his Weehawken studio, on the preceding evening. This information was received from Williams with distinct relief. Without troubling himself to ascertain the cause of the artist's departure, the young man was encouraged by the prospect of hearing from Dr. Adams all he wished to know, before meeting his mother's father.

Yes, Dr. Adams was at home; Williams was sure of that, since breakfast was only half an hour ago. The doctor must be in the library. Irving ascended.

When he passed through the door, some one at the distant mullioned window was laughing. Irving stood, transfixed. He had believed Winifred in Italy; yet it was Winifred who laughed, seated with her back toward the door, and an open book upon her knee.

A great deal had happened since Irving had last seen her, but her face and form were as of yesterday. When she suddenly became aware of his presence, the look upon her face was but a deepened expression of that last turned upon him, in Mr. Burl's studio.

"I beg your pardon," Irving said, awkwardly.

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“Williams told me I should find your grandfather here.”

“Is n’t it something to find me?” returned Winifred, gayly. She let the book slip to the floor, as she rose to greet him. Her hand was frankly outstretched; the music of her voice, like rippling water, seemed, after her lips grew mute, to purl along through the shaded glen of silence.

She had disembarked only the day before, and was not yet used to the joy of being in town. She was so glad to be here, it seemed that others also should reflect her light.

“It is a great surprise,” said Irving, simply. In the counteraction of his emotions, he seemed neither glad nor sorry.

“But tell me,” said Winifred, fastening her bright, sincere eyes upon his face, “why you have not taken my hand.”

“Because,” he slowly answered, “we are — strangers. You do not know me.”

Winifred glanced at her outstretched hand, as if wondering — but without displeasure — to find it so ill-used. She clasped her hands before her, waiting. There was a faint flush of embarrassment, a slight quiver of the slightly shortened under lip, but from her generous height and well-developed body, as well as from her speaking brown eyes, came an impress of sturdy independence, of perfect health.

It was from no deliberate intention that Irving had turned away his head. He felt a passionate desire to

The Mother

clasp her hand, for it seemed the reaching forth of human sympathy; but some instinctive prompting held him rigid.

“You are ill,” said Winifred, as he did not speak. But she looked beyond his care-marked face, deep into the hollow eyes that stared at her from purple shadows, and saw the wound in his heart. Her unerring intuition leaped beyond the meaning of her own words, as she cried, “I *do* know you.”

“No one can know me,” said Irving, holding his head high, and retreating toward the threshold, “who does not know my mother.”

Winifred’s eyes burned through tears. “I do know your mother,” she returned tenderly. “I do know your mother, Irving. And here is my hand.” Again her hand was held out to him, this time from half the space of the wide room.

Irving hurried forward, and grasped her hand impulsively. Could she really know all? Dr. Adams must have told her the story. She was in the studio when his mother kissed him, sleeping. She must have known, after all, about that stolen kiss. She must have known that Mr. Burl’s mysterious visitor was his mother! Doubtless in his overwrought nervous state, this hand-clasp was a sort of ceremonial rite; it gave him recognition in Winifred’s sweet, pure world.

His manner was more contained, when he spoke: “I was sent here to learn about — her — from Dr. Adams. My father sent me; just before he died,— for he is dead; he told me that Dr. Adams could explain about

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my mother. Since my father's burial — yes, I was at the burial — I have thought intently, and everything seems opening up to me. Last night — I spent last night in the streets, just as I did months ago, after I became convinced that I was not what I ought to be. Do you remember? I don't know who my mother is, or where I can find her. Do you know? Will you help? Can I have the story from you?"

"I will tell you everything I know," said Winifred, with the same exquisite gentleness of touch upon his wounded spirit that he thought assumed for his sake. "And, if you add what you have discovered, we'll have the whole story. Shall we tell it together? Maybe I'll seem a little nearer to you, in that way. You are feeling very lonely, I think." She paused to look at him thoughtfully, from the depths of her luminous eyes.

"Very lonely!" exclaimed Irving, as if the words were a great sigh. Her statement of the fact seemed to visualize the desolation he had felt. Had felt — for now, with her eyes upon him — "But not with you," said Irving, suddenly, as a timid smile stole through the cloud.

"Think of that day in the studio," said Winifred, gently.

"Yes," said Irving, his brightness deepening, "the first time I ever saw you —"

"No, no, I mean the day you were asleep, and some one kissed you — your mother. Let that teach you

The Mother

at the beginning of the story, that your mother loves you.”

Irving's transitory brightness was gone. “Loves me!” he exclaimed, not without bitterness. But he caught himself. Why distress Winifred? His desire was to learn the truth, not to make accusations of indifference and neglect.

Moreover, his sudden feeling of hot protest against his mother, had been succeeded by another feeling. He could not think of that day in the studio without remembering Winifred, as she stood beside the blue-and-gold vase. His mind was animated by a recollection of their swift interchange of confidences on that eve of her departure for Italy, and the intimate drawing-together of their souls. He had never fully known Winifred until that day of his mother's kiss. Would he ever be able to separate them in thought?

“Where shall I begin?” Winifred inquired.

“I know this much of the beginning,” said Irving, slowly. “My father was married to the present Mrs. Vandever. But he became acquainted with a young girl, the daughter of Mr. Burl — and so — Mr. Burl is my grandfather.”

“Yes,” she answered quietly, “that's why he hunted you up, and found a place for you in the railroad office.”

Irving responded, but this time without bitterness, “It seems that everybody knows about me, except myself. I thought the meeting with Mr. Burl purely ac-

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cidental; I thought the same of — of my father. And of Mrs. Wyse. But all were seeking me, it seems.”

Winifred returned to the story: “Your father — Mr. Arnold — had left his wife, at that time. He expected soon to get a divorce. He was interested in art, in an amateur fashion, and that took him to Mr. Burl’s — whom I claim as ‘Uncle Christopher,’ for he has been my grandfather’s friend all his life. That is how your father met — her.”

“And,” said Irving, “although she knew that my father was married, she listened to him!”

Winifred drooped her glorious head. “But she was so young, Irving. And he had already left his wife. And her mother, being a Catholic, did n’t believe in divorces; while she — while she only — loved.”

“They were out West more than a year,” Irving took up the story. “When they found that no divorce was to be had, and that they could n’t be married, she slipped away from him, one morning — with me — and came to New York, to throw herself upon her father’s mercy.”

“But Uncle Christopher’s wife had been dead only a few weeks, when she came to his door,” said Winifred. “She had died of a broken heart. Uncle Christopher could n’t forgive, at that time. He regarded his daughter as — but sorrow had hardened him, it had made him like stone. He was like stone for years. In the meantime, your mother had been sheltered by a poor working-woman of the tenements. But you were just a baby. You could n’t be kept in that crowded

The Mother

room, already over-full. And you could n't be raised in the streets. Your mother was very ill; her money was soon all spent. There came the chance to place you with a respectable family. Your mother thought that the interest the Paynes took in you was providential. So it was. Years passed before your mother was able to save up enough to support you and herself. While she was working desperately, you were being cared for. Long before she could have supported you, she had been persuaded that it was best for you never to know about your parents. So you were allowed to think them dead. The Paynes believed them dead also."

"Did she ever see me, after parting from me, until the day in the studio?"

"Irving, she was always near you, from the very first. Wherever the Paynes went, she followed, without their suspecting her identity. At first, she worked at the hardest tasks, for she had never been taught to do anything. But she contrived to live and to see you from a distance. That was her only happiness — sometimes to see you."

"But in that case, surely I have seen her?"

"When you were sent to school," Winifred continued, "she lodged in a building which you passed, on your way to and from school. By that time, she had managed to save a little. All this was before Uncle Christopher knew of her affairs. After refusing to see her several times, he did not hear of her again, until age and solitude had touched his heart. When she brought

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herself again to his attention, she had already bought a little place — had already paid the first payment; the property was, of course, near that of the Paynes; it consisted of a cottage and a greenhouse —”

Irving cried out, “Winifred! It is our ‘Little Neighbor.’”

“Yes,” Winifred answered, looking at him, through tears, “the ‘Little Neighbor.’ Her one happiness in life, is to live where she may sometimes see you.”

Irving repeated, softly, “The ‘Little Neighbor’!” He turned aside his face.

“And, oh! how she longed for you to visit the Paynes!” cried Winifred, impetuously, her hands clasped, her eyes sparkling with tears. “So she could see you come driving up to their door! Irving! She has been feeding, for twenty years and more, on the crumbs from the rich love-table of others.”

“I wish I had visited home oftener!” Irving exclaimed, incoherently. “And that is why Mr. Burl put the lamp in the window during her visits —”

“Yes, you were never, never to meet her. But when she saw you asleep, although I warned her with a gesture, she could n’t help — she —”

“And when she gave us those flowers,” murmured Irving —

“Don’t you understand,” exclaimed Winifred, not trying to hide her eyes, “that the reason you went back to the greenhouse — it was because you were being drawn by the mother-love!”

It was all very strange to Irving; strange and sad,

The Mother

and yet, though sad, in a way, infinitely sweet, this new phase of soul-life, into which he had been borne. It seemed to him that all the sorrow that had been, was not too much to have purchased the preciousness of Winifred's tears. He tried to tell her, stammeringly, how he had felt about his mother, as he walked the city streets at midnight; but the rough words made terrible tangles of the gossamer threads of his emotions. Fortunately she who heard him, listened with gossamer ears.

"Yes, I understand you," she said, after his failure. "I used to think those very thoughts. But does not our judgment of others lighten, as our experience deepens?"

He tried, again, to put his feeling into words: "I'd always thought that after such — an experience — as that, — a trampling under foot of the laws that hold society intact — well, but you know; I'd thought everything *ended*, or should end. It made a wreck of poor father's life, and yet he went on — somehow. And there is — the 'Little Neighbor.' What shall I say! You know my heart, Winifred. And here I am. Do you know, I seem to be just what I've always been? To others I must always be different, now. But to myself, — just the same!"

"And to me," said Winifred, steadfastly.

"Because *you* understand," Irving returned. "But what must Mrs. Vandever think? How could it ever be straightened out for her? Kindness to my father would mean an insult to her. To defend my mother would be

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to mock — Claude, for instance; Claude, my half-brother.”

“Irving,” she interrupted, with persuasive gentleness, “it is n’t your duty, or any one’s, to straighten it out. We are to soothe, as best we may, all pitiful deformities, whether of body, or soul. We meet some natures, every day that are drawn like paralytic limbs; we must n’t pull them out straight,—just help them over the crossings, and along the way; must n’t scold them for being weak and helpless; must be glad if *we* are strong and able to bear.”

“Yes, Winifred, but — you see — but it is *my* mother.”

“Yes, Irving, and your strength!”

“Thank you for saying that,” cried Irving from a full heart, “for if there’s any good in me,—if I ever attain anything worth while, much of it I’ll owe to you! It is because of you that I don’t seem to mind so deeply as I feel I ought. When I think of the — ‘Little Neighbor’—always watching over me, as you have described — always keeping herself hidden from the world, letting every one think her dead — I feel as my father told me, when he was dying: What took place twenty-odd years ago, can’t outweigh what has happened since — it is almost the same as if it had not been; it *is* atoned for, it is *finished*. Nothing of all the history matters — except that I should go to her, and tell her —”

There was a breathless pause. Then Winifred said, huskily, “It would never do for you to go and claim

The Mother

her as your mother, without preparation; she's very delicate; the shock might kill her. But I became acquainted with her in Uncle Christopher's studio; she knows that I understand. Irving! Let *me* go with you!" She looked at him, as in entreaty, through her streaming tears.

"*Let* you go? Would you? Will you? Oh, Winifred!"

And, in a short time, Irving and Winifred were being driven from the old-fashioned house off Madison Square. How well he remembered their former trip to the Jersey shore! Now, as they rode on the car, and afterwards, as the carriage bore them through country fields, the brightness of that other day came back, but how softened, how full of an ever-strange peace!

He lingered out of sight, while Winifred performed her mission. Winifred found Mrs. Hurt in the greenhouse; Irving waited on the farther side of the cottage, a little uneasy lest mother Payne spy him from her window, and intervene.

Although he was at some distance from the greenhouse, he heard his mother's sudden cry. It was so strong and wild, so full of hope and terror — could it have issued from the slender frame of the Little Neighbor? He waited, burning with impatience. Incredible as it must have seemed to him even a day ago, he felt an eagerness to go to his mother far greater than had been his dread of facing her.

At last Winifred came swiftly from around the house. Her feet were more eloquent than her lips. Tears

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streamed down her cheeks. She tried to say, "Come!" — but her lips moved in vain. She could only beckon; she could only speak "Come" with her tremulous smile.

But Irving needed no spoken word. He ran to the greenhouse. Winifred stayed behind.

A little figure, all in black, was huddled, weeping, upon the rustic bench among the flowers. When she heard Irving's footsteps upon the gravel, she hid her face, and slipped forward, that she might kneel before him. She did, indeed, fall upon her knees, holding her arm across her face.

But Irving lifted her up in his strong arms, and held her against his breast, thus not to straighten, but to help over the crossings of life.

"I have come to you, for always," he said, trying to still her sobs. "And you are always to be my 'Little Neighbor'—my mother!" Then he remembered the dying words of his father, and repeated them. "So this is Bonjour? Mother! To look into your face, is to hear one say, 'Good-morning'!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

IRVING AND WINIFRED

ALL of which took place some years ago. It would be possible to bring events down to the present day, which is a sad temptation; in that case one might display his powers of description upon the wedding of Jerry Vandever and her step-brother. In that case, too, he might point out Mrs. Sadie Wyse slowly making her way along the Bridge of Sighs, pointing thus an excellent moral to an adventurous tale.

But to enter into to-day's affairs would be to draw aside the disguise under which the hero has been presented. One could not speak of the Irving Payne of to-day as disassociated from certain gigantic industrial enterprises; even to hint at those enterprises, however guardedly, must lead the reader to the knowledge of his real name. For his real name is known from Dan to Beersheba — or, we should say, from Maine to California — while his early history has never been made public: he has stayed out of politics.

It is unfortunate for our purposes as *raconteur*, that one may not mention a new tunnel under the river, or a new bridge over it, without revealing our hero as everybody knows him to-day. See what it is to have a

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famous hero! Therefore it is from no lack of knowledge, but from a sense of discretion, that the brilliant wedding of Jerry and Claude — with its attendant circumstances of prying kodaks and gaping crowds — is left to the imagination. If the reader stood in that crowd, away from the velvet carpet, beyond the cordon of policemen, he probably saw Irving, shaking the hands of the bridal pair, at the carriage door.

Was Jessie in that uninvited host of spectators? Does she still entertain sentimental regrets for the handsome "Duke de Vandever"? Does she still see him standing always among lights, always among flowers? Fortunately Wedging is doing well on Wall Street. He is now his own broker. All that figuring against the future was not for nothing. That is doubly fortunate for Jessie, if she still dreams of her New Year's hero. If she entertains regrets they are sweet, no doubt. One can ill afford a broken heart on a broken credit.

As for the new interest that has come into Irving's life, mysterious, shy, marvellously sensitive, and shrinkingly elusive, little need be said. His mother's nature was morbidly self-conscious, it was imbued with a sense of the need of sacrifice. Few men could have come into contact with such a spirit without either deepening its sense of guilt, or inflicting equal pain by seeming to be unresponsive, or unsympathetic. That Irving was able to impart peace, and derive content, in this association, was doubtless due to the different phases of soul-de-

Irving and Winifred

velopment whereby he had attained to the perfect sympathy of full understanding.

The Paynes had accepted Irving's mother for Irving's sake, but there was almost no intercourse between the women. Mrs. Payne could understand her own feelings of forgiveness, but not the feelings of the Little Neighbor. To Mrs. Payne, the little woman in black was perennially the girl of seventeen; she was always eloping with somebody else's husband. Mrs. Payne was willing to admit the other's repentance. But how had she ever done it? That was the mystery. A young girl so carefully raised, and only seventeen —

“She's paid for it, many times over,” the captain sometimes suggested — but never with much hope of being heeded. “Think of her solitary life, over yonder among her flowers and vegetables. She might have stayed with her father, living an easy and quiet life. But, for the sake of seeing her son occasionally, she was willing to hoe, and grub, and stay all by herself.”

Mrs. Payne caught at the first words, and, as for the others, merely waited until they had ceased. Then she cried —

“And she *ought* to have paid for it, many times over! How is a thing like that *ever* to be paid for? How can you live long enough to pay for it? Stay all alone? She *ought* to have stayed by herself.” Mother Payne lowered her voice to the whispering accent of intensity: “And she ought to be staying by herself *right now!*”

“But it was n't in her mind any more than in yours

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that she could pay for it," Captain Silas retorted. "It was her intention that Irv should n't ever learn the secret. It is n't her fault that he did. She expected to go down into her grave simply as our 'Little Neighbor.' Irving would very probably never have thought of coming to see her buried. Does n't that seem a sort of awfully lonesome thought? I believe Providence wanted to give her a little happiness before she died."

"Please, Captain, *don't* lay it on Providence. Providence does n't make such mistakes. Providence is n't a man, but you are, or you would n't talk so!"

Irving, being a man, shared the Captain's opinion. The past — but if there had not been that past, there would now be no Irving. He could not think of the past as dead, since he lived. So it was not a problem of slaying the past, or burying it forever, but of turning the very wrong-doing of the past into a sort of blessing. This was not to do evil that good might come, but to take the evil, after it was done, and turn it to good. Why not? From the blood of an innocent Man sprung our Gospel of Love. These thoughts were not vague fantasies to Irving, they were deep convictions. Is it Heaven, or earth, he would have asked, that keeps the sin of the woman strapped to her back? It is man who drags her to the stoning, while the finger of God eternally writes.

As we have indicated, nothing may be said of Irving's part in the development of Greater New York, without betraying his identity. We must content ourselves with a word touching that part of his private life unknown

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to the world at large, unknown even to his partner, J. S. Vandever.

In the first place, there are his mother and grandfather, whose home-life in obscure Greenwich Village occupies a corner of his life-scene, charmingly simple and quiet. On his excursions to the Paynes, whom he visits more regularly, he finds a second home, no less congenial because distinct from the first. And then, the gentle refinement of the house near Madison Square with its studio of growing fame, and its white-haired physician of the boyish heart — is this not a third home? It is not given to every one, to have three homes.

And Winifred Adams?

Is fame sufficient for her? Does she crave nothing beyond the recognition of critics, the lavish praise of the public, and the consciousness of work well done? There is her grandfather, to be sure; but how large a place in a maiden's soul may a grandfather occupy? This was precisely the point for Irving to clear up — hence his presence, one December afternoon, in Christopher Burl's studio, where Winifred, and only Winifred, was discovered.

They met without restraint, as friends who see each other so often that conventionality wears to shreds; and yet with frank pleasure, as if something bright and strong were showing through the tatters of a formality that has been worn too long.

She had just heard of his greatest opportunity — his securing the complete management of one of New York's giant enterprises. To ward off her eulogies,

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he desperately bombarded her with the latest comments — laudatory, but not judicious — concerning one of her paintings.

Laughingly, she burst through his stream of lurid adjectives, and continued her enthusiastic acclaim. He was so famous, he was so great, she was afraid of him. She wondered he condescended — and so forth, all half in earnest, and half in merry teasing.

Irving fortified himself behind — “I’d never have been worth killing, if you had n’t taken me in hand!”

“What an expression! *I* take you in hand, Mr. Payne? That would be like trying to pick up the Brooklyn Bridge. I have almost ceased to think of you as flesh and blood. No; you’re steel, and concrete, and oil —”

“Oil! O Winifred! Don’t!” He laughed despairingly, and insisted, “But it was because of you, it is because of you, Winifred. You remember how I had no aims in life —”

Winifred grew more serious. She was rather red, too, perhaps from the great hearth-fire — or from his tone of voice. “I can’t think it’s because of me, and I won’t. Because — because if I thought so — well! It might make me think less of you. I will admit that maybe — mind you, I say *maybe*, Irving — maybe I woke you up. But your strength comes from yourself, not from another. You were just asleep, that was all.”

Irving asked soberly, “Would it, truly, make you think less of me, to know that you share in the partnership of — of myself?”

Irving and Winifred

It was a most unwonted thing for Winifred's gaze to droop. "No — not to *share*," she admitted, softly.

"Winifred —" He came to her, and held out both hands. "How much do you think of me? I've been waiting these years, to tell you of my love. Shall I wait longer? You can silence me with a word, if your art is more to you than I am, or if it seems too short a time since I was — nothing. You can silence me until I have given greater proofs. But if you will hear me *now* — if you *can!* — Winifred! Time flies, with you — but with me, it seems so long, this waiting! Shall I wait longer before I tell you of my love?"

Winifred's face and neck seemed to have caught the deep glow of the fierce hearth-coals. She looked into his eyes, and then away, and then into his eyes again. Then a sudden flashing light passed over her face of softly moulded loveliness. She said, unsteadily —

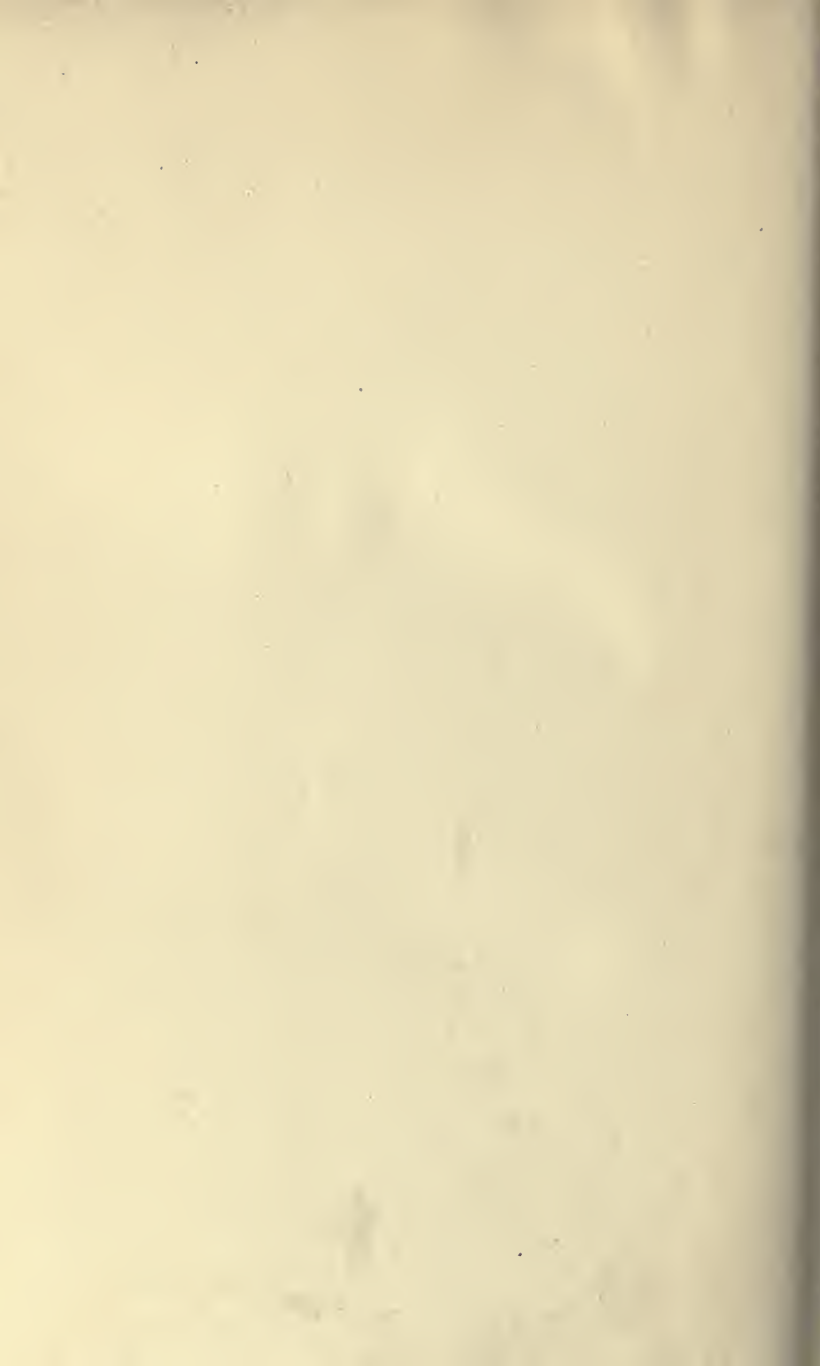
"Do you remember the day of — of the mysterious kiss, in this very room?"

How well he remembered every event of life associated, in any way, with Winifred!

"Well!" said Winifred, still more uncertainly, still more brightly flashing, and still more deeply crimson, "if another kiss should come to you, would it find you — sleeping?"

"Winifred! Winifred!" He held her in his arms.

"Because," Winifred whispered, "it would be so long, you know, if I waited for you to build another Subway!"



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