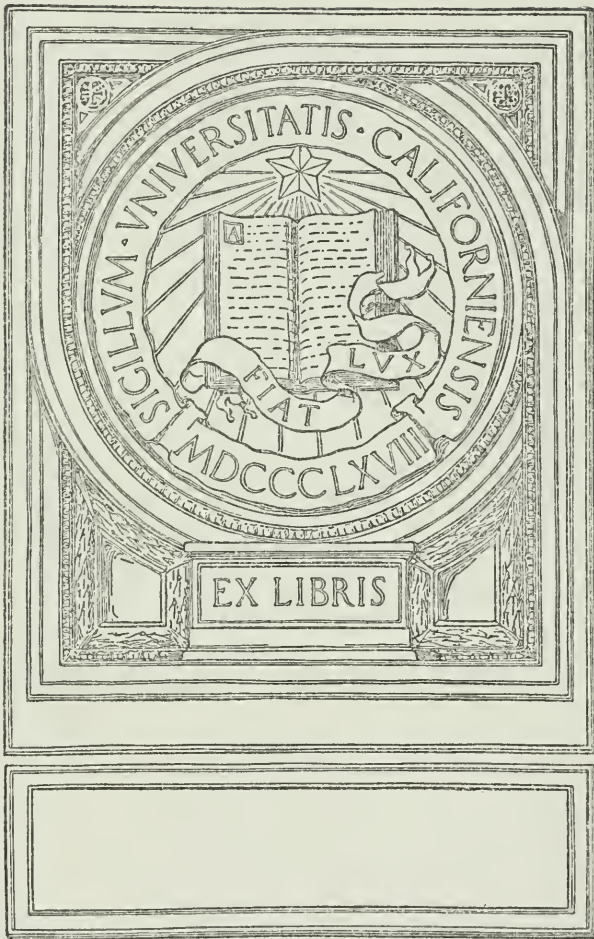


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# BABE MURPHY



PATIENCE  
STAPLETON  
AUTHOR OF  
"KADY"



BELFORD-CLARKE CO.  
PUBLISHERS CHICAGO





# BABE MURPHY.

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BY

PATIENCE STAPLETON.

//  
AUTHOR OF "KADY."

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# BABE MURPHY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### I RECEIVE MY LEGACY AND RESOLVE TO GO A JUNKETING.

It seemed to me when brother Nathan died and left me \$3,000 that all at once I knew what it was to be rich and to feel like Vanderbilt. Nathan had never married, and had divided what he earned by tailoring, between his landlady and me. She, that wrote me of Nathan's death, and hoped I wouldn't go into lawing, for if I'd any idea what Nathan's disposition was, I'd know she earned it. She was a widow with a John Rodgersy sort of family, nine children like I used to read about in the primer, but her's were older. I knew what she looked like pretty well, without ever seeing her—thin and wrinkled, with red eyes, large and bony hands and faded black gowns. "My dear woman," I wrote to her, "you are welcome to half; you deserved the whole, for Nathan Wilder was all Sproul, taking after mother's side of the family, and not a mite like the Wilders. He must have been a trial, and dear me, him and me haven't spoken to each other for twenty years, nor writ a line." She wrote back to me, "Could she?"—and meant she would, too—keep my precious letter to show folks, as some had been low down enough to say,

and such of her neighbors, indeed, whose white complexions and cropped hair might mean they had been in the law's clutches, not that she'd mention names nor jails, but they had insinuated she had coaxed and wheedled Nathan Wilder, whereas she had treated him as a Christian woman should."

I answered in a spirit of levity, my fun not quite extinct in my bleak life: "As long as there could be nothing said against Nathan's morals or hers, etc. (and I willfully put etc., to aggravate her to frenzy regarding my meaning), I thought it all right. My reply to this was a solemn document from a parson in Boston, certifying the high character, as Christian and woman, of Mrs. Joseph Hart."

Well, enough of that. I got my legacy the first of June, and, as I locked the schoolhouse door for the last time, the little place where, off and on, I had taught for thirty years, I would not have been human if I did not feel a tugging at my heart-strings. I watched the children run homeward on the familiar road, the river, winding through the trees, and I pondered over the long buried hopes that had come to life again. I knew one old soul, at rest these long years in the shady, neglected graveyard at Southport, whose only ambition was to see the world. "No heaven for me, sir, nor everlasting glory," she said to the minister, on her death bed, "I've never been outer Southport all my days, an' now I'm free of airth, I'm goin' to travel. I don't wanter to be shet up in no place." That was what I said now. Oh, hateful burden of peaceful hills, of placid river, of homely duties to my recent dead father

and mother, of bare bread-getting. My cage is opened with a key of gold, and I, Lydia Ann Wilder, fifty years old, am going a junketing. I looked that word up, and I see though we use it for traveling down a long shore, it means a private feast or entertainment. Well, that is just what I expect to get. I mean to feast my soul on other scenes and folks. When I was a child and desired to go along the dusty road outside our stone wall, I was sternly called home and forbid to go a trapesing—a word also a Southport phrase, now I had no one to call me back, and means to go, and a trapesing I would go.

Yet, it seemed like a dream when I was fairly off, after renting my house to Captain Stinson and his wife, who promised to look after things, and she's a tidy woman and good housekeeper. But here I was at last, in a decent black gown on my small body, a neat shawl and bonnet, and a carpet bag—had been father's—as big as I could lug. My horse-hair trunk was along, too, and when there was time, and it was possible, I got out at stations and peeked in the baggage car to see it was all right. Where was I going? Oh, to Denver 'way out in Colorado. One of our neighbor's boys had been there, Mrs. Somses' John, and he did well and talked of nothing else when he was home on a visit, especially about the climate. I says to myself, I've been "froze up" for forty-nine winters, as the Indians say, and I'll try a spell of warmer weather. I had half a mind for California, but he said Denver was a grēat plāce fōr women, and they were well treated there, particularly in the mountain towns. I ain't a bad looking woman, for our folks

is fresh complected and have good features, and my light hair is hardly gray. Then, as this is a true story, I might as well tell just what I did think, I might have had some sort of a hope I'd fall in with a middle-aged man not more averse to matrimony than I was. And I do wonder if a woman ever outgrows the idea of getting married until she is most a hundred.

There was a pretty crowded train from Chicago to Denver, but I took a ticket for the palace car. I just wanted to feel rich for once. I've pinched so all my life I have lost the faculty of enjoying spending money. The first day out I surveyed the male person who was to climb in the bunk over me. Just here I do want to protest against the uncomfortableness of sleeping cars to women like myself. I can stand other women keeping the dressing room for hours 'way beyond their needs, I know their natures so well, and I can get along with bay rum to wash my face, and my hair curls naturally, if theirs don't; but the spectacle of a great, live man, in his stocking feet, clambering over my head and groaning and tossing and coming down unexpected in the morning, will always send a cold chill along my spine.

I knew by experience that the person riding facing me, his back to the engine, was the one to climb over my head, so I took a good long look at this latest one. He was tall and bony, clean-shaved, except a pair of thin side whiskers. He had cold, blue eyes, a sort of sickly, white complexion, thin, unpleasant lips, and I don't know why, but I kept noticing his white hands with their large jointed fingers, and wondering if he used to crack 'em when he was a boy, like my scholars did. His



clothes were dull-colored but fine material, and his watch chain solid but neat, just as spic and span he was as if he'd been kept in a band box. After a few moments he drew out a black silk scull cap, put it on his thin gray hair, and buried himself in a book of statistics. Dear me, how I do hate figures, and arithmetic never was my forte. My life has been one long deceit, fearing the committee or big boys would find out how little I knew, or catch the key in my desk where I kept it hid, to peek at after the sums were done.

Somehow, though this man looked dreadful respectable, I liked much better the college lad who had had the berth over mine the night before. He and his chums were guying me all the way, and I knew it perfectly well, and just after I had retired, I heard 'em giggling across the aisle, so I poked my head out, keeping the curtains close about my neck, and says:

“Boys, enjoy your fun, but don't think I'm unconscious of it. I've taught lads for thirty years, and somehow, if your jokes are at my expense, I'm in sympathy with you.”

They quieted mighty quick, and my young man carried my carpet bag when I changed cars and saw me aboard all right, as polite as a basket of chips.

Well, I studied my *vis-à-vis*, and he read the statistics, and after a time he drew a black-looking cigar out of his pocket, laid it beside his nose and then went out to smoke in that mysterious car where women are not allowed. I know that by experience, for I blundered into one by mistake, and a scared-looking man, acting as if I was a woman suffragist and meant to take his

rights away, or share 'em, rushed at me and says: "Madam you must go out of here." "Only too quick," I answers, short enough, "unless I was a human ham," so I fancy I was ahead on that.

When the stranger was gone I peeked at the book he'd left. I forgot the title, but I shall always remember the name in legible writing on it. "Henry Dubois Beach." A dignified, straight-up name in similar handwriting, not H. Dubois Beach, which parting a name always seemed to me like parting a man's hair in the middle, and both habits to belong to Miss Nancy's.

I grew sort of tired, so I left my bonnet on the seat, and having a chance, the last infant in the car being thoroughly watered, I went out to the dressing-room to brush my hair and slick up, as we say down East. When I got back, Mr. Beach—as I supposed from his book—was sitting in my place, reading, as calm as you please. I gave him one look—that he did not see—and sat down to ride backwards, though I've been told in case of accident the shock is more apt to break the neck. I sat there awhile, putting things to rights in a little hand reticule I carried and thinking how dreadful dear traveling was, when suddenly I missed something. I kept a worrying, when all at once I put my hand to my head. Then in my most ugly voice, in my chilliest manner, I leaned forward to that Mr. Beach:

"Sir," I said, "I am sorry to trouble you, but you are not only occupying the place I paid for, but you are sitting on my bonnet!"

## CHAPTER II.

### MR. BEACH IS VERY POLITE.

He looked at me coldly. "Madam, did you address me?" he said, in a frosty sort of voice that went well with his face and manner.

"That I did," I snapped, "and the longer you sit on that bonnet the harder it will be to get into shape."

He rose stiffly, looking sort of surprised, and sure enough—I'd died if it hadn't been there—he was on my bonnet that I'd paid five dollars for in Bath, Maine, and it was all mussed out of shape. He handed it to me in his stiff, but polite way.

"I fear, madam, the damage is excessive—beyond repair."

"Straw ain't so brittle," I said, cheerfully, for the moment he began to act sorry, womanlike, I forgave him, "that's the benefit of good material, it bends right back into shape."

"And I occupy your place," he went on, "really I am sadly forgetful, so many business cares—permit me to change with you. I am used to a lower berth, I never rode backwards before. This time, as usual, I telegraphed ahead, but was informed by the insolent negro porter, the lower berth was engaged by—a person," he finished, with a slight hesitation.

"Me," I said, promptly, "but I didn't telegraph, the young man that helped me aboard the car gave the porter a dollar to secure this place for me."

“Oh, indeed,” said Mr. Beach, “have you the young man’s name?”

“I don’t—don’t,” says I, “know it, I met him ‘en voyage,’ as the French say. But I am, Mr. Beach (as your book names you), of an age when introductions don’t count.”

“Certainly,” he answered absently, and though that was true, his agreeing with me did not please me none too well.

After that we talked considerable, and he was real polite about helping me on and off the train. I noticed at meal stations, where the victuals were pretty bad, he would neither eat nor complain, only looking about him with a stony disgust. In fact, he assured me, “that there might be people who liked ‘roughing it,’ to use an Americanism, but he was not of that class. Even yachting was a weariness his stomach revolted, as for fishing, he preferred to eat fish with which he had had no previous acquaintance, nor did their death struggles, impaled on a hook, give zest to his appetite.”

Somehow the next day, though he paid but a sort of abstracted attention, I found myself telling him my history.

“But, Miss Wilder,” he says, solemnly, “why not have put that \$3,000 at interest, even in government bonds? you would have had some little income.”

“I was sick of being chained in by circumstance, I wanted to see the world and go a junketing.”

“You have singular ideas,” he said in his frozen way, not unkindly at all, but regarding me as some strange animal, “now what do you propose to do when you are

weary of, or forced by financial reasons to abandon—to use your expression, your junketing?”

“Teach, or nurse, or something. I can drag along the years left if I have had one good time. If your life had been like mine, as barren as those plains,” I said, looking out on those never-ending stretches of level land, olive tinted, glimmering here and there with a gorgeously colored flower, “like me, you would barter the future for a glorious to-day, for the good time that comes so easy to some favored folks.”

I saw him look at my wrinkled face and old-maidish appearing self with a sort of surprise.

“You are a Christian woman I hope?” he says.

“As much as any of us are.”

Still surprised, he buried himself in his book, and I glanced out the window not a bit sorry I had waked him up.

“Do you know,” he said, after a pause, laying down the book, as if his human interest had got the better of his dignity, and looking kindly at me, “you have interested me.”

La, how condescending he was. “I suppose you have wondered,” he went on, impressively, “where I live. Let me tell you. Imagine a town of log-houses set up in the Rocky Mountains, nine thousand feet above the sea. Imagine those houses grouped about a big wooden building, where a tall chimney sends forth poisonous smoke night and day. Imagine a great hill of grey ore about the mouth of a dark, deep shaft, and over this hill, while daylight lasts, numbers of human ants scrambling and tugging, hurrying to fill the rapacious mouth of the mill-monster that turns the grey

ore into shining silver bars. Picture a deep gorge, for the village lies on the mountain side and straggles down a winding road along the brink of a precipice, forest everywhere, and laden trains of mules and wagons, or on distant mountain sides, tiny donkeys—burros we call them—pack-weighted. Picture great towering mountains all around you, and across the purple shadows shining, snow-clad peaks, while in every gorge are brown and noisy brooks, and in our valley the Unca-pahgre rushes madly to the distant sea-hastening rivers of the plains. That is my home, the town of Erin, made famous and populous by the Maid of Erin mine, of which I am the superintendent and part owner. A little world in itself, is our mountain town, thirty miles from any other place, approached only by a dangerous road.”

“I’d like to go there,” I said, “I do long to see real mountains.”

“In a pretty grove away from the town I have a pleasant home, and below the mine, nearer the river, is the church and school house. Do you know, despite my brief acquaintance with you, I almost feel like suggesting you come and try to teach our school for a period. I think it has been quite three months since we had a session. You see,” he went on, slowly, “we find great difficulty in keeping a female teacher—”

“Is it so lawless?” I asked. I have heard and read Western stories, but somehow I could not place that cold-blooded, precise gentleman in any of them.

“Decidedly not, I can assure you, thanks to my influence and laws, but the trouble with our young lady

teachers is they enter into the bonds of matrimony with the men employed in the mine. Do not misunderstand me, I am thoroughly a believer in marriage, necessary to the development and morality of a country, but admit that it is vexatious to import a teacher at considerable expense from Denver and have her do as the last one did, marry my foreman a month after her arrival. I do not believe in celibacy at all, I have a very charming wife at Erin. I would like Mrs. Beach to know you, but you must not talk of junketing to her, young minds, Miss Wilder (and I did think then what on earth induced a young woman to marry you?) now what do you think of my plan?"

"I might try for a term (I hesitated, remembering fractions and compound interest that I never was sure of, and this man would find it out too, by a few questions), if the boys are small."

"The smallest; the older children become toilers very early, and you will find all sadly backward, for I infer, by some examinations that I have attended, that the teachers have given more attention to the vanities of toilet than to the cultivation of their own or scholars' minds."

So it was, after a day's longer journey through such scenery that fills my heart yet with joy, that I did junket and cut loose from old traditions, and that filled my heart with awe and admiration of the glory of God, I found myself in Silver City.

In the hotel parlor I sat and looked out on twenty-five saloons across the road, with a population, as I watched, of five to six drinking men to each. Land! I says, what a thirst these mountain altitudes gives to

human beings ! It seemed strange to me, coming from a temperance State where liquor comes in barrels marked kerosene, and is retailed at drug store back doors, or consumed in cellars and barns. While I sat there, a girl about fifteen came in, carrying a crying baby about stifled in cloaks and wraps.

"Seems to me, miss," I says, "your little sister is mostly smothered in clothes. I'd take off that flannel cloak if I was you, and give the little thing some air."

"'Tain't my sister, it's my baby," she snaps, "an' I guess I kin run it better than a old maid kin, an' it's bin colicky sence it was borned."

La, thinks I, they get married dreadful young out here, and what a land it is, and unconsciously I thought, looking at her, where every prospect pleases and only manners is vile. Then Beach came for me, and, waiting at the door was a fine carriage, made extra strong and hung pretty low, and drawn by a pair of stout, chunky horses, cream colored, and known as bronchos, containing more ugliness than any other animals I ever saw harnessed up.

"Your baggage has already gone," said Mr. Beach, and I could imagine the look he cast on that brass-nailed, frowsy trunk of mine. I got in the back seat and he took the front. "I hope the parcels do not inconvenience you," he says. "Not at all," I answered, though I was most buried in them. I noticed he was not liked about the hotel, that everybody served him unwillingly, flinging things around, and, as we drove off I heard a great creature in a big hat and his pants tucked in his boots say:



“Git onto that old chromo; Beach has got a school marm that will stay this time.”

Oh that ride along chasms, abysses, and precipices, when every hair of my curls seemed to rise and I would have given a year of my life to fetch one screech, but was quieted by that dignity driving. But then again, such vistas through the evergreens, such shady spots under the aspens by mountains' cascades, such views of shining distant peaks and far purple hills. Once he whipped up the yellow bronchos and says:

“Miss Wilder, the road ahead, around this bend, has a sheer fall of nine hundred feet, is cut out of the solid rock, and cost \$40,000 to the mile.”

Then he actually whipped up the horses, right on the brink of that awful precipice. I said, “Lord a mercy me,” and held tight to the seat. It was so awful, that away, away, down, and the glint of a river so far below you couldn't hear it ripple. I felt all at once I had been a trifling, wicked woman, and junketing might be sinful.

Soon after that we reached the town that was just as he had described, and he let me out at a neat cottage kept by the widow Finnerty, whose husband had been lost in the mine, and who had the rusty clothes and big knuckles of all the afflicted. I wondered if letting rooms and keeping boarders isn't a kind of penance a woman pays for losing a husband; most widows is in that business, sort of like those misguided females in India who used to be burned alive after their husbands' funerals.

The sitting room that was to be my bedroom was quite neat and tasty, and the supper was not bad, but

afterwards I did get tired of beans and canned victuals. After this, and some conversation with Mrs. Finnerty, principally about "him," the general subject of relicts, (and there's one comfort that word can't be put on my tombstone, as if I was a scrap of human kind) I went out for a walk. I went away from the town, near the river and the school house; the path was pleasant and shady, and in the clearing by the school house—not much different from ours in Southport, but built of logs—I got a fine view of the sunset on the mountains. I stayed quite a spell, absorbed in the beauty of the glow on the snowy peaks, and the quick-falling purple twilight, that it was considerable late when I started back, and the stars were out in the great black vault above. I kept a sharp lookout for cows, having my umbrella along, but of men I never thought at all. But as I went along, standing in a side path as if waiting for me, was a monstrous looking man in a flannel shirt, trowsers tucked in his boots and one of those big hats on his head. He may not have been so awful big, but looked so in my scared condition, a real Western Buffalo Bill sort of creature. I was minding my business and hoped he would do likewise, so I went calmly ahead, but lo and behold, he steps after me, quicker as I hurried, till, fairly drove to it, I turned and faced him.

"Man," I said, "what are your intentions?"

"You're the new school marm, ain't you?" he says, familiar enough.

"If I am, I haven't been introduced to you," I said, with scorn.

“You have a trim look, if you are done up in that veil,” he says, coming closer to me; “I saw you walking this way and thought you might want company.”

“I generally pick my own,” I sneered.

“Oh pshaw,” he says, “don’t be offish,” and made a lunge at me. I raised my umbrella and whacked at him, and though I struck considerable hard, he didn’t seem to mind it at all.

“I’ll kiss you for that,” he says, and catches my umbrella (it was only cotton and was replaced with a ten-dollar silk one later, and I took it too, as any one would) and breaks it and grabs me. My weapon gone, I gave a screech that fairly woke the echoes. It seemed the condensed misery of all my experiences on that ride along precipices when I dassent say a word. I yelled a second time and mercifully, some one heard, for there was the sound of a horse’s galloping hoofs, and horse and rider came dashing almost over us!

## CHAPTER III.

### 'BABE MURPHY TO THE RESCUE.

"Save me!" I screeched, while the man let go of me, and then I saw my rescuer was only another female like myself, riding a horse. "Goodness, go get a man," I says, "some one to attend to this creature."

"Why, Jim Dunn, ain't you ashamed," says a pleasant sort of voice, don't be scared, ma'am, he don't mean any harm."

"Don't indeed," I snapped, "I hope to gracious his behavior ain't common in this country."

"Did you try to kiss her, Jim?" says that sweet voice, and I could see in the half-light the speaker was tall and straight, sitting her horse well and fearlessly.

"None of your business," mumbles Jim.

"And you broke my umbrella," I put in, vicious enough.

"Oh, Jim, come now, that was a mean way to treat the new teacher."

"Well, you see," says the villain Jim, "the other fellers always cut me out with the teachers, and I heard a new one had come, and I see her all veiled and fixed up, prancing out for a walk, and I made up my mind I'd be ahead this time, and get acquainted with her the first."

"You went about it in a nice way," laughs my rescuer.

"You needn't giggle, if she didn't want to be followed, what did she go out for?"

“Oh, indeed!” I said. “So no one can set foot outdoors in this land of savages!”

Suddenly a match flared up, and the lady leaned forward from her horse, and snatched off my veil. “Jim, I’m ashamed of you!”

“A woman old enough to be your mother,” I put in, but I was mad at the girl’s impudence. Minx, I could have boxed her ears. Well, I shall never forget that man’s face seen for a second by the fading light.

“Cork-screw curls and all,” he says with a kind of groan, “and I was bent on kissing that. Babe Murphy, if you ever tell on me you’ll be sorry. Say, old lady, I’ll give you a ten-dollar umbrella, and dern me, but you are the trimmest old gal I ever see. I’m sorry I scared you—apologize, but I’ll be—(somewhat of a profane expression that I found rather common in the locality, but won’t print) if I was your age I’d catawaul if a fellow wanted to kiss me. Might have known you were an old maid by your screeches.”

With that he slouches by, but the girl flared another match in his face as he passed, and if he didn’t look cheap.

“I’d like to wring you neck,” he says.

“For stopping you, Jim?” she answers, pert enough, and bursts into a peal of rippling laughter. I giggled, too, even at my own expense, and he went away grumbling, “Don’t you dare tell. Pretty badly sold, if the boys knew,” and when he was some ways off, we heard him roar, too.

“Your manners are none too good, Miss,” I says, “and if you are a respectable girl, I can’t see why your

folks allow you to galivate around at this time of night alone for."

"My manner ain't good," she says with another peal of laughter, "and bless your heart the men here at Erin know me. I was raised here, place called after my mother's birthplace, that mine was called after her, she was a maid of Erin. Like to see anyone insult me. I saw you riding with old Beach to-day, did he freeze you on the way? They say since he came winter sets in a month earlier, and there's frost every day in the year. Don't get mad about the veil, it was such a dandy on Jim. Are you going to Mrs. Finnerty's? Of course you are, all the teachers stop there. I'll go 'long with you."

At that she jumps off her horse, pulls his bridle through her arm, grabs up her long skirt, and walks with me.

"If you have a mind to go, you can," I said, stiff enough; for I was not sure she was a proper kind of a person.

"You needn't be so distant," she said, still laughing, "I wanted to know you since I've set eyes on you. I was up mountain when you passed with Beach. I never liked the other teachers, nor they me. They were a silly, man-hunting crowd, as for going to their school, I never thought of it. I don't know much, but they couldn't teach me nothing. I read, that's the way I learn. See, here we are at Finnerty's. She's gone to bed. I'll go in and see how you are fixed. "I say," she went on, "there's your trunk, lend a hand and I'll help you in with it."

I found myself actually carrying my trunk with her. It had been carelessly left outside. The lamp was lit in my room, but turned down and smelling awful; I turned it up and looked at the girl. Mercy, what a tall creature she was, five foot seven, slim, long-armed, and broad shouldered, too lean now, with a sort of coltishness of gait and manner, but might, if she fattened, be a magnificent looking woman. She hadn't stays on, I could see, and her riding habit, green braided with gold in a circusy sort of way, was worn and faded. But what a charm her face had, a straight nose, a scornful red mouth with an oddly short upper lip, that I've read in English novels was a sign of good blood, bright gray eyes, looking almost black at night, dark hair, heavy eyebrows, long lashes, and a rosy complexion, some freckled, but pure and healthy looking. I did like her looks as she stood there, towering a head and shoulders above me.

"Well," she grinned, showing her pretty teeth, "I'm all-fired tall, ain't I?"

"Tall for a woman, yes, but better than runty like me."

"My father is six foot two, they call him the handsomest man in the Rockies. Land, I'd like to be shorter, I'm so awkward, and was the comicallest leggy girl, they used to call me the sand crane, when my dresses were short. Thank heaven I'm eighteen now and done growing. What a dear little soul you are, so sort of Easterny and respectable, as if it came natural to you, and you didn't have to fight to be it like me. Can I sit down?"

“Of course you can,” I says, warming to her at once, “I wasn’t very mannerly not to ask you.”

Somehow those big gray eyes, the pretty mouth and her sort of boyish way won me at once. She sprawled herself into a chair and began whipping her skirt with a ugly whip she carried.

“That’s a quirt we call ’em,” she said, seeing me looking at it, “if you rode a broncho you’d need one. Say, what’s your name?”

“Lydia Ann Wilder.”

“Just like yourself. Mine’s a spud. Oh, you ain’t up to Western slang, a Murphy then. Really Murphy, slang for potato. I’m of Irish distraction, as Mrs. Finnerty says. They call me Babe around here. I was brought up here and the name they gave me when I was a toddler has stuck; I’m a rather big infant though. When I was fourteen Pa had a streak of good luck, sold a mine of his to a sucker from Boston and I was sent to a convent in Denver. It was nice there really, those prim little sisters, and then to be called Beatrice. That’s my name, but it don’t hitch with Murphy somehow. Two years of being civilized, then back here to go into wildness again with a pain always in my heart, that I couldn’t be like other girls.” She was talking earnestly now, her sweet face grave and sad.

“You see, ten years ago Pa discovered the Maid of Erin mine, but hadn’t the rhino to work it, and Beach, who was a shyster lawyer in Denver, living by people’s misfortunes, like the vultures on carrion, took a mortgage on it of \$30,000, pretending he was awful friendly to Pa. Most of the money went down the shaft and down



Pa's throat, and one day the mortgage came due, and though Pa moved heaven and earth, somehow Beach and his capitalistic friends couldn't wait, and the mine was sold for forty thousand, and a hundred thousand dollars worth of ore in sight, and Pa's partner, Dick Daggett, who went to New York for money, telegraphing too late he'd got it. So by some shyster tricks, Beach got Pa out of the mine, and flung him a sop of \$10,000. Corporation against a corpse, I guess, for all the good Pa is when he's full, and Pa took the ten thousand and stayed here staking a claim up mountain, and swearing to kill Beach. I would have flung the money in his face and killed him instead of talking about it."

"So would I," I cried, "anything but treachery from a friend."

"Bless you for that," she says, coming over to me, and actually hugging me, an entire stranger. "But the backers of Beach got bit, too; he ousted them, and is almost the only owner; case of dog eat dog, as most mining deals are when a lawyer gets his clutches on them." She looked up in my face with her bright eyes. "I've been just dying to kiss your pretty, wrinkled cheek, with that pink tint, and your dear little curls; can I?" I smiling at her, she kissed me twice. "How in the world did you ever blow in here?" she said, soberly. I patted her hair softly, and told her about myself and Southport, and my travels, and Mr. Beach.

"There isn't much fun in anybody's life," she sighed, "and you and me, both being lone ones, ought to be friends. I've had ups and downs, good clothes and rags, some teaching, some worse than none, and live

now, in my poverty, up above timber line. Figuratively and literally I won't come down from my solitudes, and you can bet Pa and I ain't none too friendly since he's got stuck on Beach's wife."

"Land of mercy, tut, tut!" I said, aghast. "That isn't pretty talk for you. You ought not to even know of such things."

"Then I'd be deaf, dumb and blind," she answered, wearily, "and what a sight you'll learn in this place. The world about here is so grand and majestic, it dwarfs human souls, and they don't care; but, Miss Wilder," and there was real pathos in her face and voice now, "you believe in me. Even when you know how I've lived, and about Daggett's wife and Pa, don't you think but I'm straight. All the miners will tell you so, and I've kept myself so when there wasn't a soul to care whether I was or not."

"I know that, my dear, if straight means good. Your face tells me, and your mother, now, she looks after you?"

"She died when I was born, that's the worst of it. There hasn't been a good woman in my father's house since she was carried out in her coffin. Oh, I could make your heart ache, and your dear, old face blush if I tell you half that I have seen. But it wouldn't be square to Pa, and he's been pretty decent since I came back from Denver, but, till I saw you and fell in love with you, there wasn't a soul I had to care for but my dog, Doc, he's a thoroughbred greyhound, and a dandy to run. Doc Thorn gave him to me two years ago. He was the mine doctor here, and made Pa send me to

school. He died, three months ago, of consumption; come up here for it. And it does seem to me if a man is ever real gentle and good, lung complaint carries him off. He gave me books, and used to talk to me. 'Keep white, Babe,' he used to say, 'it pays best.' I was with him when he died," she choked a little now, "and he said he honored me, that I made him think of a lily growing in the mire. He had no need to ask me to promise to be good, for I would always be; 'and be proud, too,' he added, 'devilish proud; hold your head high, and, above all, don't let women down you as they will, for you are going to be handsome, and women haven't much charity for a good-looking, unprotected girl.' You can bet the boys here are mighty nice to me," she said, getting up and straightening herself. "You wonder I'm not afraid to ride alone nights? Because every miner is my brother, to guard me and to tell new men who I am; because in the heart of the roughest man, unless he be a besotted brute, is a respect and chivalry for a girl who is good, and means to be so. Now, good night, you dear soul; you, with your little womanly ways, that reticule, your knitting, that black silk apron, try and like me a little, won't you? Let's be friends."

She held out a well-shaped hand, bronzed, and roughened some in the palm, a strange hand for a woman, and I took it in my small, wrinkled hands, and then and there we began a friendship that only death will end.

I listened to the sound of her horse's hoofs dying away in the darkness, for she was a mad, reckless rider, and I sort of prayed she would get home all right, and

blessed her bonnie face. When I was getting ready for bed, I saw she'd left her whip, and picked it up. A braided thong of leather, with an iron handle, a blow from which would kill a man. Well, of all things for a girl to carry, I thought, and laid it carefully aside, meaning to ask her about it some day.

## CHAPTER IV.

BABE MURPHY THINKS I'M "A GOOD SAM-SOMETHING."

They had decided to have a summer term, so the next day a solemn-looking man with a chin beard that made him look like a sedate goat, came and accompanied me to the school house. Here this man, Eli Hartman by name, introduced me to about thirty boys and girls, all mischievous and bright-eyed, and I digress here to say that the genuine boy is the same in the mountains of Colorado as on the Maine coast, he is just boy. The school house had the regulation blackboards, the desks, and the teacher's place on a raised platform; but for the mountains outside I might have imagined myself in Southport. What a time I had with those unruly souls, who had fun enough over my ways and curls and difference from any other teacher. I was pretty nigh beat out when I heard a horse outside, and in trips my lady in her green habit, and walks up on the platform.

"How are you getting on, Miss Wilder?" she says, with her pretty smile.

"Badly; they are mischievous and don't mind me. Some, I think, are deceiving me, for they say, the biggest of 'em, they don't know their letters; several have crawled out the door under the desks, one threw a spitball, and I have quite a number of pictures of a female with curls that, though badly drawn, force me to believe are meant for myself."

She listened, then turned suddenly to the giggling school. "What do you think of your teacher?" she says. A chorus of ironical snorts for answer. "Now, look here, boys," she said, earnestly, "I won't speak to the girls, for they don't need it, but, unless you want to grow up like—like Chinamen (they, I found, were generally disliked in the camp), you've got to go to school, and this time you have a real lady for a teacher. I know when you think she is gentle and kind, and could not strike you like a dog, you'll be square with her. You know your fathers take care of your mothers, and carry baby, and bring the wood and water as men should, and here is a dear old lady who has no one to do for her, and I put it to your honor to treat her well. If one of you acts bad I'll settle with him," she finished, sternly.

"You ain't our teacher," said one rebellious voice.

"Well, I'm going to run the school all the same, Charley Dunn, and I'll get Jim to lick you for that if you don't be good, so there."

Charley subsided, and discipline was easy after that. She came in almost every day to see how I was getting along, and every Saturday afternoon she and I took long walks up in the mountains. Friday afternoons she used to come to school and read the children a story, and once Mr. Hartman, very stiff and uneasy in his Sunday clothes, appeared to object. "Depewted," he said, "by a number of prominent citizens," with the usual meddlesomeness of the P. C. in all communities. He said, "readin' story-books wan't in the direction of edication, and he was depewted to interfere."

"I'm getting your boy above the level of the saloon and faro bank," says my girl, standing there in that old habit (she never wore anything else, and looking very pale and bright-eyed), "and I am giving your girl new thoughts and brighter hopes to make her a better wife and mother some day. If you are against that, write your name to a protest then. Schools ought to be something besides stuffing young heads with names and dates and figures. Life means more than that. Honor and virtue, fairness and truth ought to be taught beside. Now just sit there and listen while I read this story of Miss Alcott's, the truest child-lover I know, and then ask those eager children if their minds have not a higher ideal of what good children are and can be. Ask them if they don't want to be manlier and better because Jo's boys were, and the girls, because Little Women were noble girls?"

So she went on and read, and I saw his eyes dim, heard him cough once or twice, and noted he twisted his work-hardened hands uneasily. When she finished and all those eager young eyes were on him, those famished little souls who might after these few years never know the blessing of books again, or dreams of better things, he rose stiffly and said, slowly:

"Babe, Miss Murphy, I mean, if you want a man to swar by, mention Eli Hartman. Ef you let up on that idee o' yourn of eddicatin' them young ones you ain't no fren to the camp, and I'll see them books is brought here by wholesale by——"

Much overcome, he bowed himself out, and our school after that met only commendation. My holidays were

happy ones with Babe, for I called her that too. We used to start at daylight and go miles up some mountain trail and spend the day together. What a companion she was, so bright, so merry, boyish in her ways, and protecting me like a man. She'd got me to ride that broncho of hers if she led him, and she leading, I riding, carrying the basket, was the way we came home after our trips. Never in our intimacy did she speak of her father or her home again, nor did I ask her, seeing it sort of spoiled her pleasure to think of the past. The Beaches were in Silver City, and I had not seen him since I came.

The last Saturday in July we were going home along the Silver City road, in our usual fashion, and I was none too comfortable on that animal, suffering mortal terror, when he lopped his ears back, as he generally did when any one passed, when I heard the rattle of wheels and saw the cream-colored bronchos coming. I made Babe draw the animal up to the side of the road for the carriage to pass. Mr. Beach, as cold and impressive as ever, was driving, and in the back seat, not made uncomfortable by bundles I can tell you, was a lady shading her face with a costly parasol of black lace lined with scarlet. Beach reigned in his horses.

“Good evening, Miss Wilder, Miss Murphy,” with a bow so stiff I fancied his neck must creak; “I have heard favorable accounts of the school, very satisfactory to me, indeed. Only the reading story books, Miss Wilder, I do not exactly approve of that. Do not fill the minds of our miners' children with ideas beyond their station. The future of your scholars is hard work



and lives devoid of romance. Mrs. Beach, this is our new teacher, she has, you see, accepted the customs of our country and is becoming a horsewoman."

I looked at Mrs. Beach then. A slight lady-like figure, gowned in a costly black lace put on in willful disregard of the dust and ruin of a journey, in defiance of cost. I saw her face was rather thin, with handsome features, a white skin, ghastly almost against her blue-black hair, and that her eyes were large and brilliant, but cold and unfeeling. Her eyebrows and lashes were jet black also, and the only life in her face, strangely at variance with her expression, were her pouting rosy lips, rather full, but partly disguised now with a droop at the corners. In fact, her downcast lashes and repellent mouth seemed like a mask. With that impassive face and listless manner, she seemed like a woman over thirty-five instead of barely twenty-five. I noticed her exquisitely fitting gloves, her diamond earrings, her costly bonnet and toilet, and wondered how such a woman endured life in Erin. She bowed distantly to me, barely raising her eyes, but shot one glance of hatred to Babe that gave her face a sudden and charming life. She made me think of a snake with her bright flashes of glances.

"You will find it dull and dreary here, the people commonplace; you will soon tire of Quixotic ideas of elevating them, Miss Wilder," she drawled, but her voice, with all its languor, had an irritated metallic sound.

"Clara, that is hardly fair," corrected Mr. Beach, and he did seem to take pleasure in giving his opinions

to down everybody else's. "Do not prejudice the new teacher. I am sure we enjoy life in our eyrie in the hills among the clouds."

Her face did not relax from its coldness, she leaned back with a slightly bored air, and Beach, with a chilly good evening, drove on.

"What do you think of her?" said Babe, abruptly. She had not glanced either at Beach or his wife, but stood looking the other way while they were talking.

"Very ladylike," I ventured.

"So that's a lady," muttered Babe, "A living lie." She raised her sad eyes and looked along the dusty road where a cloud rising betokened some new comer, "H'm I thought so." I did not think my dear girl could look so ugly if I must say it. Her short lip curled, her eyes grew lighter colored and her black brows met in a disagreeable wrinkle.

"What is the matter, dear?" I asked, "I never saw you look that way before. It's like a sudden storm cloud on a bright day."

She did not answer, but hung her head, her hands loosely clasped—something pathetic and hopeless in her manner. I saw close upon us a large bay horse, marked with a white strip down his nose, and three white feet. His rider, a big, broad-shouldered man, was dressed in corduroy, with a sombrero drawn down over his eyes. When he saw us, he took off this hat, and I saw he'd a ruddy complexion, curling bronze beard and hair, fine features, and the gray eyes that looked at us with a sort of mocking light were Babe's very own, but land, what

a handsome man he was, the likeliest looking I ever saw in that State of fine-appearing men.

"Hullo, Babe," he said, in a pleasant, mellow voice, "I did not expect to meet you."

"Hullo, Pa," she answered, without glancing at him, "Here is our new teacher, Miss Wilder."

"Pleased to meet you," he said, politely, "I hope you will tame my wild, big girl. Ta, ta, dear." He whipped up his horse and went galloping on. "Has he been away, Babe?" I asked, as she started the broncho with a jerk and walked sullenly along with that ugly expression still on her face.

"As long as the Beaches have, four weeks. What do you think of him?"

"The handsomest man I ever saw," I answered, and he was. A fine physique, a marvelously beautiful face, a winning voice and manner—every gift of nature, but morally depraved. A gambler, drinking hard, but polite even then to those outside of his intimates, unscrupulous, false and wicked, and yet winning the friendship easily of honest men. I've seen lots like him since, and what mischief such can make in a wicked world!

"Yes, he is handsome," muttered Babe, after a long pause, "but I hate handsome men. That poor, frozen old fool, he never will see." And after that speech she wouldn't talk, leaving me in sulky silence. For two weeks after that she never came near me, and one Sunday afternoon, though she had forbidden me, with dark insinuations as to what I might see, never to go near her home, I boldly mustered up my courage and went. It was a long, tiresome climb up a narrow trail

on a mountain, but at last, ahead in a clearing, I saw a log cabin, and near it a heap of that gray ore that marks a mine. A tall, lank greyhound, that I knew to be Doc, rose from the doorstep and came to meet me. He is a dignified animal and never leaps on a person to tear one's clothing or scare those not used to behavior of the sort, so he merely licked my hand in a friendly way as I good doggied him timorously. I knocked and a hard-faced woman with bleached yellow hair opened the door.

"I was looking for Miss Murphy," I said, coolly, I'm not afraid of women at all, and her brazen ways did not intimidate me.

"Oh you're the school marm," she grins, impudent enough, "Babe's been sick, come in. Not there—" as I turned into a handsome room, its oiled floor covered with fine bear and wolf skins set with costly furniture, and fine paintings on the walls—"that's Con's room, hers is t'other side." I opened the other door, and went into such a shabby place, with roughly plastered walls, rickety furniture, one broken-down chair and a dingy cot bed. On a nail on the wall hung the faded green habit and some nondescript clothes, on a table were some dusty books and across the window a newspaper was pinned for a curtain. The place was hot, and there were a lot of flies buzzing about, and dear me what misery to be sick in such surroundings. Under the dirty coverlid, tossing about with fevered cheeks and bright, unnatural eyes, was my dear girl.

"Why did you come, Miss Wilder, to see me like this?" she cried, bitterly.

"I could not live without you, you dear thing," I says, and took her in my arms. How hot her poor head was, and her beautiful hair all in a tangle. "Now let me fix you a bit and beat up your pillow and get you a clean gown and sheets."

"There ain't any more," she laughs, miserably, "this is all the gown I've got—worn it two weeks. Oh, I'm a savage. Go away, I tell you, or you'll hate me."

I cast my eye around for cologne or something to bathe her head with, but there was nothing, not even a water-pitcher.

"I wash in the kitchen," she explained, reading my thoughts. "Oh, I do wash once in a while. There isn't anything here, so go away and leave me alone. I've got mountain fever, and you'll catch it."

"Well, of all forlorn places and girls," I thought, and went out to the woman who I saw was listening outside. "Marm, could you get me a pitcher of water?" I asked, politely enough.

"You can find a basin in the kitchen," the person answers, and flounces her stiff petticoats away.

She did not upset me a mite, for I went to that kitchen, the dirtiest place I ever saw, and found a filthy tin basin that I carefully washed and filled with cool water from a spring near the back door. Not a towel could I find, and Babe only said "Pa kept his for himself, and must not get one," but I did all the same, invading that fine room and finding plenty of good damask towels, and then I washed her dirty face and hands.

“How good the water feels,” she said, gratefully, eyeing me as I pinned my dress skirt up. “Your petticoat looks like you, so neat and precise; must have more than one, too, because that’s tucked—your other had edging on it. I haven’t but one. I always think when I do my washing of that Irishman, who had to stay abed and have his one shirt washed, and his wonderfully philosophical reply when his wife told him the goat had eaten that one, ‘Them as have must lose.’ Condensed sunniness and unthrift of our race! I washed in the spring till I was too sick to crawl out; face hasn’t been clean for a week. They’d let me rot for care. Say, for Heaven’s sake, don’t try to comb out my hair; you never can.”

I did not mind her talk. I said, “I won’t hurt you, dear,” and discovered a broken-toothed comb and went gently to work smoothing that beautiful, neglected hair, and, when it was all braided nice, she leaned back with a happy sigh and took my hand and kissed it.

“La, don’t do that,” I says, “and now can’t you eat a bite, dear.”

“How good you are, Miss Wilder. I do believe you like me,” she said, looking at me lovingly. “No, no, if you saw Em’s cooking you couldn’t eat, either. Pa gets his meals at the gambler’s club in town, or has them sent up. I live anyhow on what I can get for myself, so as I can’t eat now, don’t you bother yourself, and Em’s cooking is rank poison.”

“Is Em your hired girl?” I asked, and Babe burst into a fit of wild laughter.

"She's Pa's partner's wife. She is always on the brink of becoming a millionairess, and so she don't work for anyone. She used to be a dance-house girl in Leadville. Her husband is a decent fellow, though how he came to marry her is his own affair, but he treats her well, sticks to his work and expects to win some day. There, don't dig up any more skeletons, for I'll tell you more than I want to. Just go along home, you good, Sam—something—who was that fellow, anyway?"

"If you mean Samaritan, my dear," I said, "it wasn't Sam at all, and you clearly never went to Sunday-school." I fixed her comfortable and went out then, but not home, at all—only down to Hartman's, a mile away. When I told him about her, he hitched up his team and we went back for her. She tried to object, when I said I had come for her, but she was fairly trembling with delight. I got that green habit on her—all the whole gown she had—and Hartman helped her in the wagon, where she could lie at full length, her head in my lap. Mrs. Finnerty was mightily pleased to have her with us.

"I'd lay down my life for Babe-Murphy," she says to me, when I went out in the kitchen to make a cup of tea, Mrs. Finnerty having some insane idea it must boil half an hour, "didn't she, when my man was killed in the Maid of Erin, go to that shaft right after the blast an' tell them min if they wouldn't go down to see if Mick was alive she would herself! They wasn't sure the blast was all off or what was wrong, but they wint and brought him out dead, God rist his sowl."

“Don’t you worry about asking Pa,” said Babe, when I brought her the tea, after fixing her in my bed. “He don’t care where I am.”

“Not whether you are home nights or not?” I asked, rather shocked.

“Never troubles his head about me.”

“The poor, neglected child, with that harlot living there,” said Mrs. Finnerty, but Babe silenced her with an angry look. They need not have been so careful; I knew what Mrs. Daggett was at a glance, and I would like, before I took Babe away, to have given that Em my opinion of her and her kind, but she kept out of the way.

That evening, when Babe was asleep, feeling uneasy for fear Mr. Murphy might be worried—land! wasn’t the man her father, and didn’t he have any affections at all?—I went out along the road where I often saw him ride since he came back. I didn’t see anything of him, and was returning along a shady path in the trees when, just ahead, I saw a tall man walking with a woman. As far as I could make out, he had his arm around her; the stars were all the light there was, but I can see pretty well. Then I heard her laugh, such a low, sweet laugh, full of joy and passion, of clear happiness, that made it very pleasant to hearken to.

“Oh, you wicked Con,” she says. “Now, I must go no further. Bid me good night.” Bid or kiss, I could not make out, for belief in the goodness of humankind I will say bid, though I think the other word most likely.

Good land! they wheeled around suddenly, and there I was, face to face with Con Murphy and Mrs. Beach.



## CHAPTER V.

### MR. BEACH AIRS HIS SENTIMENTS FREELY.

Trust a woman for being cool, and she was. She drew away from him not a mite flustered, and before I could prevent, was actually shaking my hand, and I'd as soon touched a striped adder. I may be over liberal for a New England woman, but a wife who is galivanting with other men and living meantime secure in the trust and affection of her husband and on his money, strikes me as the meanest creature that cumpers the earth. Be done with one man first, I always say.

“Good evening, Miss Wilder,” Mrs. Beach said, as polite and easy; “you startled me some, I admit. Why do you never come up to my house. Mr. Beach speaks of you so often, we have made our plans a number of times to visit that school you manage so well, but something has always prevented our going.”

I could not get my hand away from her cool, soft fingers and I was fairly dazed at the change in her, and how chatty and pleasant she had become, but I will say for Murphy that he did look sheepish.

“Thank you, ma'am,” I answered, stiffly, “but I must go home now,” and if a person can believe me, I actually felt just because I had seen those two that I was being drawn into their wickedness, and, true enough, afterwards by some trick of fate and my own weak-mindedness, I did lend them the favor of countenance, me a woman in whose life there had never been a breath of

scandal. "I came out," I continued, "to find Mr. Murphy and ask him to let that forsaken child of his stop with me till she is well, for she would have died for lack of care at her home."

"Is Babe sick?" said Mrs. Beach, kindly, "now that's too bad. Of course she will stop with you if you want her, and how sweet and good of you, Miss Wilder."

"I was asking her Pa," I said, coolly, "not you, ma'am."

"What I say goes," she laughed in that soft, pleasant way, "don't it, Con. That pattern father never knows whether she is dead or alive. The result of an early marriage. He was only nineteen when he ran away from college with the pretty daughter of the janitor. Early marriages are deplorable, don't you think so?" She laughed wickedly, "Of course you do. Con, Babe must have some money," with a pretty little air of anxiety, "Mrs. Finnerty must be paid for her board."

"She is no burden to me, and I never thought of money," I snapped.

At last Mrs. Beach had let go my hand and taken Murphy's arm. I can't swear it, but I verily believe she gave him the roll of bills he handed me. They were done up neat as a woman carries money, while a man generally rumples it up in a wad like it had been chewed.

"Take this, Miss Wilder," he said, seriously, "and do the best you can for my poor girl, and I am sure the Lord will bless you."

"I wouldn't take your money at all," I answered stiffly, "if it were not that that poor child hasn't a

decent stitch to her back, and as for that blessing it don't hardly sound as if you meant it. I'm not sure I'm right in taking the money, but I do want her to feel easy in her mind, and she won't if she thinks she's costing me anything. I advise you, Mr. Murphy, to ask the Lord to soften your heart to your own flesh and blood, a blessing you need badly." With that parting shot, I departed, clutching the bills for fear some tramp might snatch 'em from me down some side trail. After me, in the starlight, floated the sweet, musical laugh and his deeper tones.

Babe was feverish and fretful, Mrs. Finnerty said, so I hurried in, fixed her bed comfortable and beat her pillows up. She raised her long lashes and looked at me gratefully.

"Now, dear, I know you are fretting about stopping here, so I went out and asked your father—"

"As if he cared," she interrupted, wearily.

"And asked him for money, so you could stop a long time and feel independent a-doing it."

"Which you didn't get," she sneered.

"Don't jump at conclusions, Miss Impatience," I continued. I turned up the lamp, and, sitting on the bed, laid the bills out in my lap, smoothing each one, for I had crumpled them small in my hand. Two twenties and two five-dollar bills. "Fifty dollars, Babe."

She sat up in bed, looking at the money eagerly, then she gave me a sharp, quick glance.

"Where did you see Pa?"

"Out doors, a quarter of a mile or so away from here."

“What was he doing?”

“Sorter of meandering along,” I answered, evasively.

“H’m, don’t deceive me, you sly old thing. Wasn’t Mrs. Beach with him, and didn’t she give you the money. If she did, Lydia Ann Wilder, I’ll get out of this bed, go straight to her house and throw it in her face.”

“I’ve got your clothes so you can’t, Miss, and she did not give me the money, your father did.” That might not have been exactly what I thought, but she should never know otherwise. “But I will admit she was with him, and I should like to know if she thinks it proper a galivating about, she a married woman, with a widower at this time of night.”

“I’m not sure of that money,” persisted Babe, “I can’t see where Pa got it.”

“Maybe won a jack pot,” I suggested. At that Babe screeched with laughter. She had taught me to play poker, we using pebbles for chips, and not betting money, and she used to tease me about saying I had two pairs, and betting five pebbles one time I had four of those contrary-looking queens.

“He never wins, but I’ll believe you and let it go.”

“You had better,” I said, composedly, “for out of that money comes some decent clothes for you, made by me, for I’m a good seamstress, and some underclothes, for I tell you, my dear, the first attribute of a lady is attention to the niceties of her wardrobe.”

“What can you do if you have neither clothes nor money to buy them?”

“That shan’t happen again,” and then I went on discouraging of what I should make.

“Oh, put lace on my petticoats, Miss Wilder,” said Babe, with a bright, eager look, sort of catching her breath, a childish way she had when anything pleased her, “if you knew how I have envied Mrs. Beech, for hers are so dainty and fine. I would be so proud. Oh, I just love good clothes.”

“The fault of our sex, Miss Vanity,” I laughed, but I own the same weakness, and that poor girl had never anything nice in her life.

I did not tell her about just how I saw Mrs. Beech and her father walking that night for a long time afterwards, though I won't deny I was dying to, and to say what I thought of them. Babe got well fast, and the poor dear tried to help me sew, very patient and clumsy, and me giving her the overcasting and sewing on buttons. I can see her yet, working so hard, her pretty face flushed and her eyes bent on the work. But one day Mrs. Beech herself made me a call, and of course I had to talk about it to some one.

I heard a gentle knock just after reading class on Thursday afternoon, and in came the superintendent's wife, in the daintiest of cream-colored muslins trimmed with fine lace and made up in the latest style. Her bonnet was to match, and costly, I warrant, as all those fairy-like things are, and she had a cream lace parasol, and tan gloves, and brought a perfume of violets that lingered long after she was gone. How smiling and pleasant she was, so interested, so flattering, that I began to thaw and be polite, and actually promised to go and see her. Think of that, after what I had seen. Is it in the air here, I thought, with a kind of

inward groan. Does such grandeur of nature, of mountain and clouds, make human beings lenient to sin, being as we are such minute objects in the face of such massive and majestic scenery. I heard, as she sat there chatting, my eyes seldom lifted from her dainty French heeled boots, for I felt the guilty one and could not look her in the face—the sound of a horse's hoofs coming along the sun-baked road. Past the window trotted that big bay with the white face, and his rider, the handsomest man in the Rockies, lifted his sombrero as he looked in. A slight rose tint crossed the pale face of my visitor, and with a fluttering of skirts she arose, picked up her parasol, pressed my hand in her delicate glove and tripped out right after him. I could only look after her in silent wonder and keep up some considerable thinking. When I went home that evening, I was so gloomy and thoughtful that Babe pulled me down on the sofa beside her to pet me. "Now, what troubles you?" she asked. She has a way of taking my face in her two hands, kissing my cheeks till they burn, twisting my curls to suit her fancy, then holding me off to admire her work and calling me an old-fashioned darling. Somehow I up and told her about my visit, and Mrs. Beach's behavior that night I met her.

"She is so dreadful polite I can't say a word," I went on, "and despite myself I feel that I am being dragged into countenancing their wicked, flirtatious ways. Then again, sometimes, I find myself excusing her for being tired of Beach, he is such a frozen, stiff creature; but that is downright evil."

“You dear sinner. You will get as helpless as I am, but we will do our best though, as they say, they are a hard pair to draw to.” And so indeed I found them.

Well, Babe improved in health and clothes too, and I did take real comfort in making her pretty things, she was so pleased. I made her two cambric gowns, a pink and a blue one, and in these, with a wide hat lined with black velvet and trimmed with roses, she was a very picture. She stayed with me until she was quite well, and then insisted on going home. I let her go this time, but I planned a day when I would try to get her to live with me, but as her father might be mad with me I could not ask him then. The afternoon she went, up drove Mr. Beach to my door, for me to go to his house to dinner. There was no evading it, so while he waited in solemn state, I hurried on my best black silk and fixed myself in my Sunday style. He was fond of driving if he liked anything, so on this occasion came himself instead of sending the coachman, so he explained as we went along, I lolling in the back seat always thinking to my inner consciousness that I must look like Mrs. Wilder “as if one’s under petticoat was a back-board.” He was very kind in his impressive way, asking me if my salary was sufficient, if I was suited, and saying he was really proud to have introduced me to Erin.

He turned around, as the horses painfully climbed the steep road that led to his home, to say.

“Mrs. Beach has taken quite a fancy to you, Miss Wilder. She has indeed,” he repeated, slowly, as if the condescension might be too much for me to grasp.

“You see she is very undemonstrative, makes no acquaintances here at all, nor do I wish her to. The people here are not of her station in life, though we are Americans, I fancy, like the rest of the world, we are obliged to recognize distinctions—castes. She has been highly educated, carefully guarded always. Her father died when she was quite young, but her mother was both parents in one. Truly a most remarkable woman, (and I thought to myself, you are just the man to eulogize your mother-in-law) Clara is young, only twenty when we were married five years ago, but always discreet and decorous. As her mother said, she but changed a mother’s care for a husband’s protection and affection. She is absolutely ignorant of the world’s wickedness. When you see us, our happy home life, her innocent dependence on my judgment, her stately dignity and reserve, the greatest charm a lady can have, her pleasures ordered as I direct, her entire reliance on my wiser and riper opinions, you will admit my choice was a fitting one. And that, though I am nearly twice her age, our union is a very suitable one.”

“It is, I am sure,” I had to say, out of politeness, but somehow that sweet, mocking laugh kept ringing in my ears, and that night under the pines. A great pity came into my heart for that blind, trusting man, into whose cold face, as he talked of her, came a sort of light, for he loved her.

“She did object, I may say, to coming here,” he explained, though goodness knows why he took me into his confidence. “You see, her mother and I thought it wiser not to tell her her home would be in the mount-



ains; we let her surmise she would live in New York City. She was disappointed at first, and unhappy here, but after a few months grew more contented, and now hardly wishes to go away, even to visit her mother." (I wondered, in my wicked way, if Con made the difference, if she grew more contented after she knew him. I'll ask Babe how long that flirtation has been going on, I mentally resolved.)

He turned the horses into a pleasant avenue under the mountain pines, up to a clearing where a picturesque cottage, gay with bright paint and vines, stood. Around it were flower beds and a neat lawn, and a rustling, noisy brook had been trained from its course to run through the grounds. It always seemed to me if I built a home it should be near a stream of running water, the most peaceful and content-giving sound on earth. The house had two stories, a wide verandah all around it, and its handsome, plate-glass windows were hung with costly lace, and though it was hidden away up in the Rockies, the furnishing was the finest I ever saw.

Mrs. Beach was sitting on the porch, some scarlet wool in her lap, her ivory needles moving languidly in her white hands. She rose to meet me with polite but distant welcome, made me remove my bonnet, while Beach brought me a chair. I noticed her rich gown, of some soft, silky material, a pale rose tint, trimmed with the rich lace she seemed to care most about, using it with almost prodigality, when it comes so high by the yard. She sparkled with diamonds, as usual, and they seemed, somehow, to suit her bright, flashing glances,

as cold and brilliant as herself. Dear me, I thought, looking about, why on earth can't you be contented and behave? Have you not all heart could wish for?

"That is Clara," said Beach, sitting stiffly down in a porch chair, and regarding his wife with that sort of light in his cold face, "the most exquisite femininity marks her always. A bit of woman's pretty work, a dainty presence, the most delightful part of a man's home life, a perfect wife."

She knitted slowly, her eyes on her work, her long lashes on her pale cheeks.

"There are literary women," continued Mr. Beach, pompously leaning back in his chair and putting his thin forefingers together, "dear me, am I treading on delicate ground, Miss Wilder?"

"Not at all, unless supervising very doubtful school compositions may be literary, sir."

"A portion of your duties, eh? Well, literary women, I have been led to believe, have not that regard for personal attractiveness that marks a true woman—those little vanities of dress and jewelry that we may smile about, as men do, but, nevertheless, admire and like to see. At least, barring this, women who presume on intellect are apt to be argumentative. Now I hold, for material happiness, a wife should have no opinion but her husband's."

"For peace in the house, yes," I says.

"I beg your pardon; oh, I understand, you mean for amicable understanding; certainly, certainly. Woman," with a sort of pause, as if he were condemning our race forever and ever, amen, as we children

used to say, "can not reason. That is a very trite argument, I know, but her affections, her little loves and hates, dislikes, I mean, are sure to control her. She is a creature of emotion, of dependence, to be guarded and cared for always."

"Yet," I snapped, "widows and orphans only dread men—lawyers, I mean, for they are always worsted by men who take advantage of women's ignorance of life and rights. As for me, the world would be a paradise if it were not for men. You say they are to guard and protect us women, but what am I scared of, what keeps me indoors, in beaten paths, from seeing the world as men see it, without dread or fear? Why, just men, tramps and others like them! But," I went on, wickedly, seeing how terrible shocked he looked, "Women's voting may change things, perhaps make discord if a wife is a Democrat and her husband on the other side."

"Do not, I implore you, refer to woman suffrage before Clara," said Beach, earnestly, "not that the persons advocating it are not—he hesitated for a word not to offend her delicate sensibilities—not worthy and respectable, but they are persons one would not wish his wife to know."

"They are very tiresome," said Mrs. Beach, still downcast, and dear me, what an awful botch she made of this knitting; a child ten years old could have done better.

"As a study in humanity, they interest a man," he explained, "but a woman should not vex her pretty head with ideas outside her station. No man wishes to

be bothered at home with business cares, nor to talk over the affairs of the nation (pompously, as if it was a property of his own), along with domestic happenings and the fashions. (I kept feeling as if some one was sticking pins in me, and said, then and there, I believe I'd go galivanting, too, just to feel like a live woman once in a while.) It interests and pleases a man to find a new and serene life at home, to chat with his wife on the little happenings in her day, the calls, the troubles in domestic affairs, the last book she has read, her pretty ideas about it. The atmosphere of purity and unworldliness is a rest to him, and he smokes his after-dinner cigar in perfect freedom from thought and anxiety, listening to her cheerful conversation. I never see a lady with her dainty work, her gentle ways, her delicate hands, but I think how much devolves upon men to guard and protect her. Really, Miss Wilder, so thoroughly a womanly person as yourself is greatly to be praised for taking an interest in so singular a young girl as Miss Murphy. She is totally unrestrained and untaught."

"She has the making of a noble woman in her," I said, "and your idea of bringing a woman up to be a helpless doll is a bad one for her future, if she must ever battle with the world. It ends in the lunatic asylum or poorhouse."

"I differ with you in regard to Miss Murphy," he said, with that aggravating arrogance there was no gainsaying, and entirely ignoring my last remark, "but I honor your charity. Permit me to make myself presentable for dinner."

Though there was not a speck of dust on him, he creaked stiffly into the house. When he was gone, Mrs. Beach, with a sigh of impatience, dropped her needles, and, by a series of quick jerks, unraveled all she had knitted. She gathered up the crumpled worsted and flung it into the brook below the porch, where it sailed merrily away on the swift current.

“You were mentally making fun of it,” she said, with that mocking look. “I hate fancy work, but it serves to pull wool over a fool’s eyes. He will never know whether I finish anything or not, as long as I am feminine.”

When he returned she laid her work down, and with her chilly smile invited me into a daintily served dinner, where I ate off the most elegant china and silver I ever saw. They had champagne, and Mr. Beach had his wife and me served with the tinniest glasses of it.

“A woman’s eating is almost a poem,” he smiled, blandly. “They never have gross appetites like men. (Dear me, I was hungry, but I dare not eat after that, but remembered Mrs. Finnerty had some cold beans in the pantry, and made my plans accordingly for a raid when I got home.) Merely a sup of wine satisfies Clara, and I have to insist on her taking that.”

Later, he assured me that Clara and he had had an argument over riding, but he had been compelled to refuse her wish for a saddle horse. Ladies did ride with perfect propriety, it was quite a fashion in England, but Clara was too timid and delicate, and he could not spare the time to be her cavalier. All through his talk she sat in her quiet, downcast way, never opposing him by

look or word. When he discoursed on the porch, smoking his cigar, she listened attentively, her ringed hands in her lap, her long lashes veiling those brilliant eyes. But he tired me to death, froze every healthy idea I had, and seemed, in his placid way, to grind down every hope I ever had, to condense into a conversation my lifelong bitterness, beginning when my mother told me a hot July day, it wasn't proper for little girls to go in swimming, and the boys went and gloated over it to me. But that is very long ago, and now little girls can go on the beach, in the waves, and big girls, too, in shocking costumes, and that dreary "not ladylike" does not come up like Banquo's ghost to spoil every pleasure in a female's life.

I did pity that husband though, for his face changed when he looked at his wife, he loved her, if he did stifle her, and I kept wondering if a tragedy would ever happen in the purple shadows of those towering, gloomy mountains, and if, under that icy exterior that Mrs. Beach had assumed, there were not hidden fires that some day would burst forth with terrible force.

She made some request to be allowed to drive down with me. "You were speaking of a headache, Clara," he said, solemnly, "when I asked you to drive this afternoon," and she replied, "Yes, Henry," and said no more.

The coachman, Lewis Jones, a good-looking mulatto, drove me home, and when we turned down a quiet, shady lane, I saw, waiting for us at a side trail, that white-faced horse. I saw his rider, Con Murphy, take a letter from the coachman, and give one in return that the

negro buttoned carefully in his inside pocket. I thought as we drove on, Murphy not appearing to see me, of the dangerous path those two were treading, and the constant menace that servant's knowledge was, the cost and insecurity of it. I began to feel a curious presentiment that never left me until the end. Superstition is heightened by a weird, mountain-walled country with all its strange stories of the past, and its terrible convulsions of nature, and I dreaded more and more the time to come.

I saw her standing with her self-repressed look by the side of that unconscious, absorbed and arrogant man, in the glare of light streaming from the open door of their pretty home. It seemed so fair and serene a picture, but in contrast I remembered a shady path under the stars, a woman's sweet, mocking laughter, a voice that said, "Oh, you wicked Con," and I groaned as I watched the carriage go away from my door, "Verily, I have fallen into strange places." Then I went in, and satisfied my material appetite, their troubles were none of my making or helping, and despite Mr. Beach's remark, my eating was not a poem.

## CHAPTER VI.

### BABE MURPHY HOLDS HER OWN.

After that, circumstances forced me to go to the Beaches often. It was sort of pathetic how Beach wanted me to come because I was quiet and ladylike and he hoped Clara would be amused by my visit.

“But she is satisfied with so little and we are so contented,” he would add, with that brighter gleam in his cold eyes.

One day she asked me to post a letter to Murphy who had gone to Denver, when I refused with the scorn of an honest woman, she only laughed.

“You would find me a good friend if you helped me, Miss Wilder, if you did not need favors I could aid that wild protegé of yours. Don’t make me an enemy.”

“She wouldn’t take your help.”

“But all the same you know those new gowns of hers were paid for with my money. Con never has a cent. Don’t look so outraged, you knew it that night, but I’ll try to believe she does not. She is a good, consistent hater.”

“So am I,” I said, “and I am not a mite afraid of you. Nor do I respect your opinion, you deceiving a good husband, and though I don’t know whether you are indulging in a silly school-girl flirtation or something worse, I have my thoughts of your conduct, not flattering at all to you ma’am.”

“It’s the school-girl kind yet,” she said slowly, not a bit mad with me, “you strait-laced old Puritan are



all the time wondering how I endure Beach, you are chilled and I, seeing him every day, have frozen to death long ago. You have a sneaking desire to excuse me a little when you wrestle with that elastic conscience of yours."

"You may be a smart woman, with impish ways of knowing thoughts," I said, "but sometimes after these long cold winters, where freezing to death is common, there comes a moving mountain, an avalanche that carries all away with it."

"Sinners like me?"

"You are like to be," I answered, thinking of my presentiment, "and you had better look to your ways."

"You are a good soul, Wilder," she laughed, "keep to your narrow little path, but don't get mad and not come here, you are the only chance of salvation I have."

"But I feel like an accessory to your wickedness," I says.

"What are you going to do about it?" she mocked at me, laughing merrily for her, and then Beach came out, we were sitting on the porch, and she froze up again.

"I like to see you smiling and happy, dear," he beamed on her, "our little friend must come often, she cheers you so."

When the carriage whirled me home that evening, Jones carrying a letter to post to Murphy, I clenched my small fist in silent despair. "Oh, you fool man," I said, "Why don't you see? Is it the way you are to be punished for self righteousness and conceit? Just because she is your wife she can't be a mortal woman.

Drat you there, I groaned, just go your senseless way, I won't bother my head any more."

Con Murphy got back a week later and brought four Englishmen with him, who were going to put some money in that hole in the ground he called his mine, the Englishman being a natural prey, for his thick-headedness, for any miner that has the chance to work him. Mrs. Beach after my talk, and I don't say it with self conceit, had what she called a conscience spell and was huffy with Murphy, acting like a respectable married woman.

"You had better keep mad all the time," I said to her one evening when she drove down to see me, "It will save your soul."

"Don't flatter yourself it is your talk," she says; "I am angry that he has got that crowd of men up there and he is drinking all the time. He don't need their money, he knows he can get plenty for all he needs from me."

"He may dislike being fed by Beach," I said, as ugly as I could.

"Not he, and I charge it to housekeeping expenses," she laughed. "It costs us so much to live. Con hasn't a scruple, I would not care about him if he had. Say (hesitating) would you mind asking Babe, for yourself you know, and you really ought for her comfort, if there are any women up there--Mrs. Daggett's friends you know?"

It was jealousy, now I saw plain enough. I heard in the village Con was on a big spree, and he and his friends rode so recklessly it wasn't safe to be out on the

roads at night, for one would be run down. Most men when they drink must abuse some animal, if they ain't married to a broken-spirited creature to aggravate instead.

"Do your own spying, ma'am," I snapped, "but the Lord pity that poor child up there."

As usual, she made me go home to dinner with her, and I will say right here I did like Clara Beach. I can't explain it and never shall, but I did. That night when the carriage came to take me home, she left her husband and went down the steps with me.

"You said 'the Lord pity Babe,' this afternoon, Wilder, you may well say it, fair and square that is a dreadful place for her, but (maliciously), she is used to it. I was asking Miss Wilder for a pattern, Henry, a table scarf," she said, coolly, "she has so much taste." He smiled very condescendingly on us both, as if, in our feeble feminine way, we amused him.

On the road I had a mean kind of a thought that it was really fair sport to hoodwink that aggravating man, but I was worried about my dear girl, and when we reached the trail that led to her home, I told Jones to let me out. He kind of grinned, as I saw plain in the moonlight, when he stopped his horses, and I drew myself up and looked at him.

"Jones, none of that suspicioning," I said, sternly, "I'm a decent woman, as decent as Beach. I can't be bought to no messaging ways. If you sell your chances of salvation, I don't need to, and I am going to look after Murphy's daughter, that I have not seen for three days, I ain't right in my mind about her."

“Deed, Miss, I’se sorry I grinned, guess I was tinkin’ of sumthin’ pleasant, thought you was gittin’ terrible mysterious all of a sudden. Babe’s a good girl, and Hartman will tell you there’s lots of times when she’s run down to his house in her nightgown when there was a row up there, don’t take but a bottle to make a fool of Con Murphy, and about three to make him fighting ugly.”

I picked up a stout club and went along the trail, I was afraid of mountain lions and all sorts of creatures. It was very dark and still under the trees, and Hartman’s house, when I passed, was shut up and everybody gone to bed. So I gave up the idea of asking him to go along. At the cabin Babe’s room was dark, but her father’s brilliantly lighted and the door stood open. I did not see the dog anywhere, as I crept nearer the house, and surmised she was out on one of those daring gallops of hers. At a card table in Con’s room was Dick Daggett, a heavy-set, sullen-looking man, playing cards with two of the Englishmen. The side-board was covered with bottles, lots of empty ones on the floor, and by the stacks of chips on the tables, were glasses of whisky, I surmised. The guests at the game were sort of red-faced and heavy-eyed, but Daggett was cool and alert, and I saw his wife making signs to him, about the hands held I suppose, as she fixed a lunch on a side table. In a big chair that was covered by a grizzly bear skin lay Con Murphy, asleep. What a handsome man he was, even when he wasn’t sober, as graceful as could be in position, his long lashes on his pale cheeks, for liquor never made him red, only ghastly, and one

slender hand lying careless on the arm of the chair. Hard work did not hurt those hands much, nor dim the diamond on his little finger, that brazen Clara Beach told me she gave him, and that he flaunted it in Beach's face, and that poor soul never knew he had given it to his wife.

"I tell you, Marsh," said a voice, so close to the bushes where I was that I was sure I would be seen, "she was the finest looking specimen of womankind I have seen in the West. About eight I noticed the door across the hall open and a woman in a riding habit come out. She went along in the shadow, a fine greyhound following her, and a moment after I heard her ride away. I quit the game a half hour ago, been waiting for her to come back. I asked Murphy if he had any lodgers here and he only glared at me, and Daggett said—a cur, that fellow—none that you'll know—so I mean to solve the mystery myself."

I was glad for once that I was small, and crouched lower in the bushes, the smoke of their cigars floated right in my face, they were so near. A moment later I heard a rustling beside me, and the greyhound put his cold nose against my cheek. I was glad he was not the barking kind, I tell you. I patted him softly, and above the beating of my heart I heard the sound of a horse's hoofs. They stopped in the woods, and there was the clink of straps being unbuckled, something, a saddle, flung in the bushes, and then, looking unreally tall and strange in the moonlight, my dear girl passed close beside me. Don't misjudge me that I did not warn her. I was in a strange country among people who had queer

ideas of morals, a good many of them, and I wanted to see what manner of a girl Babe was. I loved her dearly, but her life had not been the kind to make a woman true and good, and I did want the last lingering doubt I had of her, not her present, but her past, to be dispelled. I would not raise my hand to save her from herself, but I knew from Daggett's honest, ugly face he would protect her, if she needed it.

"I have been waiting for you," said the man, his friend called Preston, stepping up beside her; "I saw you go out." She did not speak to him, but stood up very straight and proud, looking at him with her bright, fearless eyes. He had been drinking some, for his speech was thick, and I lay his rudeness to the liquor. "I asked Murphy who you were," he went on, familiarly, "but he wasn't inclined to answer. A pretty girl like you ought to have a cavalier. Are you not afraid to ride alone so late?"

"Our miners are gentlemen," she said, scornfully, "only from men of your stamp do I fear insult." In the quiet hand that held the folds of her skirt, she held that ugly whip, and I watched it with a strange fascination. Her dog sprang up and stood beside her, and if those two men had been sober, they must have seen, that in all England, there was not a truer, sweeter woman than that poor girl, brought up, or not brought up but growing wild, in a lawless mining camp.

"That is idle talk from a woman living here," said Preston, "can't one see what Daggett's wife is. Pshaw, we know the world, and, my dear girl, I am ever so much richer than that fool with his mine that never will pay a dollar."

“Kindly allow me to pass,” she said, coolly, not a tremor in her voice, her very courage a challenge.

“After that speech, indeed not. Oh, come now, what do you gain with that drunken fool? You are too handsome a girl to be shut up in this mining camp. Don’t fancy we are so green, as you Americans say, that we don’t know what kind of a place this is, and the sort of people that are trying to rob us. Only where have you been all the time, why were you not in the other night?”

“It was jolly fun, don’t you know,” said the other man.

She was too proud to say Con Murphy was her father, the man so lost to all honor that he could not protect her. “Please let me pass?” she said, quietly.

“By — no,” said Preston, “your talk don’t deceive me at all, you might as well listen to reason.” He put out his arm to bar her way. I saw her hand tremble a moment in the folds of her skirt, she stepped back, and then I heard something swish in the air, followed by an ugly thud, and she had struck him fair in the face with that whip handle. Then, womanlike, she caught up her skirts and ran to the house. Both the men followed, and the language of one of them was not pleasant to hear.

“What kind of a she-devil have you got here?” said Preston, bursting into the room, that livid mark across his face. “By — Murphy, you’ll answer to me for this.”

Con opened his handsome eyes. “Some of Babe’s work,” he muttered, “why can’t she keep out of the way. I say it’s too bad and she’ll apologize.” He staggered to his feet and crossed the hall.

“Con, let her alone,” called Dick, anxiously. He had a good hand in the game and did not want to lose a bet.

“I say she’ll apologize to my fren’,” persisted Con, shaking her door, and she suddenly flung it open and passed him.

“Dick, I appeal to your protection,” she said, piteously; and how white she was now, her pretty eyes so frightened and bright, her hair, loosened by her ride, falling about her shoulders, “when my father is so lost to decency he forces me into the presence of his friends.” The strangers looked at her in a sort of confused surprise, the two players with a quiet amusement.

“Don’t make a scene, Babe?” pleaded Dick, intent on the game.

“Why don’t you stay in your room?” growled Con.

“There is no safety there now,” she cried, miserably, “nor anywhere with you, father, when your companions are men like these.”

“Well, go somewhere else,” he muttered.

“That she will,” said I, for I was waiting by the front door for her, “after this her father has no claim upon her. Come my dear,” I went on, taking her hand, “I can offer you protection and a safe refuge, and I would like these strangers to know that you are a true, good girl, which they must have seen if they were not blinded by liquor, and if they are not sorry, the two that insulted you, men must have deteriorated sadly, and the English gentleman must exist only in novels.”

“Why don’t you go, Babe?” said Dick, quickly, for Murphy had taken a glass of brandy and was turning



with blazing eyes and angry lips to say something to her.

“I will, Dick,” she said, firmly, “and so help me Heaven, I will never set foot in my father’s house again.”

“Your daughter, Murphy?” said Marsh, as we went away, “why in — did you not tell us?”

“Let the subject drop,” put in Dick, hastily, eager for his game, “Let Con alone, when he’s drunk if you don’t want a fight. She’s a good girl, I’ll stake my life on it, and this ain’t no place for her, I’m glad she’s out of it.”

“I say, Miss Murphy,” called Preston, hurrying after her, “I’m sorry—I didn’t know, ’pon honor.”

“Have you got any honor?” she said, quietly. “Miss Wilder asked me once why I carried a whip like that; she has had an illustration. This is not the first time I have had to resent the cowardice of men. I hope it will be a lesson to you.”

She hurried me off before he could reply, and we three, she, the dog and I, went down the mountain path together, and from that time till a husband claimed her, and took her to his home and love, my dear girl found shelter, and I may say happiness, under my poor roof.

## CHAPTER VII.

### WE MAKE A DISCOVERY IN THE WOOD.

I soon made Babe think that it cost less to keep two than one, and after a few days I found a neat cottage on the Silver City road, that I hired, all furnished, from a man and his wife, who were going East for a year. With much regret I left Mrs. Finnerty, who, if she did boil the tea and talk of "him," was a worthy woman. The school was not too far away for a pleasant walk, and we were nicely situated. Babe tried hard to learn to cook, and kept the house neat, and we were thoroughly happy. Not for a fortnight did I see Mr. Murphy, and Mr. and Mrs. Beach had gone to Silver City, so we had no troubles at all. Some time during the first of September an event happened that had a curious effect on our lives' story. One Saturday morning we started to have a real long, pleasant day in the woods. We packed a big basket of good things, tying it on the broncho's back, for Hartman had brought him to Babe, expressing much joy that she was living with me and was out of the "godless place."

We went on the road towards Silver City for some miles, and then turned to the left, up a trail that led to an abandoned mine. All the way Babe told me histories of the place—of that spot where a snowslide had carried away a cabin; of a horse that fell over that precipice, and was not killed, or a mule, I believe, and she

asked me that question, did I ever see a dead one, and I had not, and none alive till I came out West and passed through Missouri; of a heap of gray ore that meant a mine that failed, or one too high up to work at a profit. Finally we reached a grove of aspens by a brook, that cascaded over rocks foaming and frothing, and here we sat down and tied the animal so he could eat while we did, and laid out our lunch. From our place we could look down on the road and see the passers and the trains of pack-laden mules and burros or heavy freight wagons from the city. With a guilty look, Babe produced a bottle of beer out of the basket and set it to cool in the stream. It was mighty refreshing, and I took my share if I did come from Maine. Then lying at my feet, the dog on her gown, that green habit, she told me stories of the mountains, that gave them new and awful meaning in my eyes; of lost men and lost mines; of a cannibal who wandered in hidden paths with five companions, and hungry and feeble they laid helpless, and he murdered them and ate of their flesh, and robbed the dead and made his way to a town at last, where he spent their money, but like all murderers he was caught by some silly device of his own, that marks most criminals, exhibiting a watch that was identified, and all the horrible story and horrible dead were brought to light; of the story of an abused child in a sequestered town, and how the populace rose and lynched the man and woman brutally and without mercy; of old time wars with Indians; of miners' quarrels, and mines bought with blood; of great snow slides moving softly from the

mountain tops, unheralded by sound, and carrying death and destruction in their awful swath.

“Is it a wonder we who are brought up in the shadow of the mountains hold human life so idle and worthless a thing?” said Babe. “Their histories are written in blood, and the steps to our wealth and comfort are along the brink of terrible peril. Every golden secret guarded by those mighty walls must be wrested with our best years, and guarded then with tireless patience, defended with our lives. Murder and greed and oppression are the stories of our mines.”

She laid back against my knee, loosening her heavy hair that won't stay done up, and I smoothed it softly till she fell asleep. I waved a pine branch to and fro to keep the flies away, and looking down on her fair, sweet face, I realized how dear she was to me, and that had she been my own child I could not have loved her more.

I had a book in my lap, but did not read much, glancing often at the road or far across the cañon below that, or the afternoon shadows on the mountains. I saw the stage whirl along, some wagons, a horseman now and then. After awhile, I noted the cream-colored bronchos, and saw Beach driving, and his wife in her costly gown, shading her impassive face with her sunshade, and I fell to thinking of them, and what love was and meant. I know full well there is such a thing, but oh, how it dies as time goes on in married life, and troubles come. Those two had none of it to begin with, I will not say he had natural love. Love must lie in equality, belief in one another. It is the one bit of heaven, on earth, and so rare and priceless I

wonder wives and husbands do not strive to keep it in their homes, and whose fault is it, when domestic bickering drives it away never to return until a death-bed calls, and it appears for a brief glimpse beside the pale spectre that must come for us all.

When Babe awoke, the sun was setting, and soon the purple curtain of night would fall, after the glory and light. We started homewards, but as the air was so beautiful, Babe insisted on going a little further along the road. What a tireless creature she was, and as I was riding the broncho, I had to submit. She leads him, for I am timid, and strangely enough, she led me along to her fate.

The first thing that attracted our attention, as we went on turning a corner in the road, was the dog snuffing at something in the dust. Babe let go the bridle, and stooped down where the dog was. She looked white and scared when she came back to me.

“There’s a dark spot in the dust that looks like blood,” she said, and I felt a chill creep over me—that speech right in the shadow of those grim, dark mountains.

“Lawful sakes, let’s get back,” I cried, “not a step further will I go.”

“Some one may need our help,” she said, solemnly. “Come.” Of course I followed, like a scared hen squawking at every sound.

“Here is a broken whip,” she called, picking up something at her feet. It looked sort of pathetic, that broken whalebone with the gold handle, it was a costly thing, too, not like our mountain folks use. “Faugh,

it's wet," I said, and what a sick feeling I had, for my hand was all blood. I nearly fainted.

"Some one has been dragged along the dust," said Babe, stooping down. "My God, can it be murder! There is blood all the way. Follow me." She caught up her habit and ran like a deer, the dog galloping after her.

"Don't leave me," I screeched, and followed, scolding all the way, terrified at the horse, and not daring to get him out of a walk. When I caught up with her, she was standing looking into the bushes at the side of the road, where, a long ways below, the river roared, and below the trees was a straight rocky wall, a hundred feet high.

"The marks end here," she said, "but the horse went back toward the city, see the hoof tracks, unshod too. Go find him, Doc," she went on, pushing the dog into the brush. I got off the horse, trembling in every limb, and peered cautiously into the trees. Suddenly the gruesome quiet was broken by a howl from the dog. Oh, what a sound it was, echoing up the cañon and along the towering mountain heights. No other sound so weird to me, for I hold a dog can see spirits, and I never hear them howl that long, mournful way, but I think of the night my father died, when the old hound he loved gave, at midnight, a bitter, wailing cry, and then we, who thought the sick man sleeping peacefully, found him with meaningless wide eyes—dead. That fearless girl plunged into the bushes following the cry, and I hitched the animal and waited at the brink of the precipice. "Come," she called, and I went to her.

There, in a clump of firs, along a heap of drift scattered from a snow slide years before, lay a man, face downward, as if flung in headlong flight, over the rocks. Under the hidden face oozed a dark sluggish stream that filled me with sickening horror.

“Don’t faint,” said Babe’s voice, quick and stern, “Ann, do you hear, we need our senses. See how he lies, head down and bleeding so.” She went on her knees and lifted the big fellow into her lap, holding his head on her arm. “He would have bled to death soon that way, oh it is terrible.” When I looked at him, helping her to get him easier fixed, I saw his clothing, corduroy, was rich and fine, but he’d long boots, and a wide sombrero hat, stained with blood, lay beside him.

“A cowboy,” I says.

“No, no, see how fine his clothing is, the gold whip belonged to him and his flannel shirt is city made, he is probably an amateur one and can’t ride, for his horse must have thrown and dragged him.”

She was sopping the blood in that great, gaping wound on his forehead. What a sight his head was, all grimed with blood and dirt. “Give me your handkerchief, Ann, mine is all wet already, and run, get some water from the spring along the road. Bring it in the pickle bottle and our cups full and your bay rum, he can smell of that, he isn’t dead, for his heart beats.”

I felt the faint flickering of the heart, and, close as I was, I could not make out whether he was old or young, hardly whether black or white. I hurried back with the water, and we tore our table cloth up and washed his poor face and matted hair. He was bronzed, almost as

dark as an Indian, had a large nose and a sort of square chin, a sickly-looking mustache, lighter than his skin, and fair, curly hair. His eyelashes were long and curly too, and lay on his cheek that took on a queer putty color under the brown from loss of blood. A fine, gold watch, sadly broken, hung from his belt, and I put it carefully back in his pocket.

“How that wound bleeds,” she says; “what can we do?”

Now I own I know very little of surgery but remembered in some blind way that my mother put salt on a wound of hers made with broken glass once and that stopped the flow of blood.

“Cobwebs are good,” I hesitated, “but no sensible spider would build here, I wonder if salt would do any harm?” I had the basket with me and I took a pinch out in my hand laying it lightly on the edge of the wound.

“What in h—I are you doing to me?” calls our dead man, opening a pair of bright, brown eyes and making me jump more than a foot clear off the ground. Then he falls back in a dead faint.

“Oh, you hurt him!” cried Babe.

“You are dreadful fearful about a strange cowboy,” I said, scornfully, scared, I’ll own, of my doing, “it was the smart brought him to life.”

If he had been old and ugly Babe would have taken just as good care of him, but would she have held him as gently on her young arm and looked at him with such tender pity? H’m, I do not know, and after events proved she was rather pleased he was not old and ugly.



She kept wetting his face, and the blood stopped flowing so fast, and then I held bay rum to his nose (I always carry it on our picnics for headache, for I am subject to them, I mean headaches, though the picnics are common enough), and after considerable of a spell he opens his eyes, shivers a little and looks straight into Babe's sweet face. I am glad to say, even in that dim light, she had the manners to blush.

"Guess I had a fall," he says, coolly, not seeming to hurry any, for she could not get her arm from under his head, and if she had let him go he would have rolled on the rocks, "that — bucking broncho threw me, caught my foot in the stirrup—cursed bad saddle."

"You should not have tried to ride," she said, gravely; "these mountain roads are very dangerous."

"If you think I can't ride you are off, Miss, been a cowboy two years in Wyoming. Thank you for finding me, rode horses before you were born. Lord, how my head hurts, that Colorado whisky—never could drink the stuff, anyway. Phew! what's on my face, blood?"

"Your head is hurt."

"I know it (feeling the wound with a big brown hand), a nasty one. Here take that rag, and you and the old lady tie it hard around my head."

Babe and I made a bandage of the table cloth, and followed his directions. "Hard, I tell you, can't you?" he ordered, and we tried our best, but suddenly the cloth broke, being an old ragged one we only took for picnics, and I fell backwards.

"H—," says that awful young man, "and I'll bleed to death!"

"Wait," said Babe. She stooped her head, tore a place in her habit with her pretty teeth, and from that slit pulled a long breadth. "This will do." It did, and we fixed a tight bandage on the stranger's forehead.

"Awfully sorry, you had to tear your gown," he says, looking straight in her face with his handsome eyes. "Am I terribly heavy?"

"You must try to get up," she replied, blushing furiously. "This is a bad place, and you might fall. Ann, give him your hand, to steady him."

I pulled, and he honestly tried; but he was dreadfully weak.

"Got any brandy?" he panted.

"No."

"Might know women wouldn't have it. Whew, I can't see when I raise my head, black things across my eyes. Everything is whirling around. Give me that bay rum; it's got rum in it."

"Sakes alive! no," I says. "Here, drink the water, it only tastes a little pickley, the bottle's clean."

"It's a bottle anyway," he grins, showing strong white teeth, and then lurches up into a sitting position. I pulled him, and Babe lifted his shoulders, and we got him on his feet. A big, broad-shouldered young fellow, seeming, in his helpless state, terrible tall and unwieldy.

"You are an awfully tall girl," he said, dazedly, to Babe. "Wonder if I ain't dreaming you, saw all sorts of devils when I was laying down there, kept coming to and getting looney again, bet a dollar that brute kicked me in the head. Give me your shoulder now, and don't yell if I grip hard; steady and slow now."

Leaning on Babe, me dragging him, we got him into the road, and to the horse. Land! what a time we had getting him on the animal! How he ordered us about like a prince, swore and struggled manfully with his weakness! Then Babe led the broncho, and I followed behind with the dog. Not a soul did we meet to help us, and at last, as we neared our cottage, the stranger said, hoarsely:

“Can’t hang on much longer; get me in somewhere; got to flop!”

I ran ahead, opened our door, and lit the lamp, and then Babe and I got him in, and on her bed. Luckily we had brandy; I got him some, he came to himself a moment.

“Plucky girl,” he muttered, “can’t move, awful queer! Get a doctor!”

“Look after him!” called Babe, and, tired as she was, ran out. The broncho had taken advantage of our trouble, and departed. So she had to go on foot all the way to town. She seemed gone a long time, especially so as the young man had grown very white and still, and I feared he was dying, his breathing was so faint. At last there came the rattle of carriage wheels, and I heard a slow and pompous voice I thought I knew, saying:

“Really, doctor, that was most thoughtful of Miss Murphy, a singular occurrence, Clara will be so grateful, her affections are so strong.”

Then into my house, followed by Doctor Hooper, the pleasant old physician, who had tended Babe in her illness, stalked Mr. Beach.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A VISIT FROM MRS. BEACH AND TOM.

Doctor Hooper hurried in and went to the bed. He removed our bandage, sponged the wound which I helped him sew up. "It is lucky he is a man," he said, "it will make a scar, must have lost a good deal of blood too, seems a healthy young fellow, so he will come out all right; can move him in the morning."

"He is Mrs. Beach's cousin," Mr. Beach explained when the doctor was mixing some medicine, "an odd happening. We have been expecting a visit from him for some time. He has never been here before. When Miss Murphy ran into the Doctor's office and told of the accident I was there and thought at once the stranger, from her description, might be Mr. Thomas—Thomas Ballinger. His mother is a sister of Clara's mother and a very fine lady too, but Thomas has been what I may say rather wild. On that account has been temporarily banished to a ranch in Wyoming the past two years. He will be very wealthy some day, and therefore his mother wished him to change his habits before assuming a responsible position. He was some trouble to her while he was at College, Yale, I think, and afterwards in Boston. The property in the family is the result of a second marriage. Mr. Thomas' father was a dissipated person, careless in money matters and left his family in poor circumstances, but a few years after his death Mrs. Ballinger married Amory Howard, of

Boston, one of the Beacon Street aristocracy, and he willed her at his death an immense fortune, without reservations or commands, entirely hers to bequeath as she saw fit." I wondered why he was telling me all this, but had a glimmering idea when he said, "So if Thomas displeases her she can leave him nothing and force him to a life of hard work and poverty of which he knows nothing. You must allow me, Miss Wilder to remunerate you and Miss Murphy for the trouble you have taken for Clara's cousin."

"Wouldn't take a cent," I snapped, "do as much for an Indian."

That offended him greatly, and away he stalked, leaving Jones to assist the Doctor, and a nice time they had with the young man who was out of his head, raving all night, driving cattle and riding bronchos, swearing at men and ordering imaginary people about. Babe, who would not ride home in Beach's carriage went to bed after her walk and was sound asleep when they took the young man away. We talked of him and the accident the next day when we were setting the house to rights and looked over Babe's habit that was utterly ruined with the tear and the blood-stains.

"You shall have another, dear, that was badly worn anyway."

"You must not waste your money on me," she said, soberly. "I wore that so long it got to be an old friend."

"H'm," I says, and wrote to Denver for material, and in two weeks she had another one, a rich myrtle green made plain, but fitting like a glove. I can dress-make

when I set my mind to it, and I am satisfied when she is pleased, she is the most grateful creature. How pretty she did look in it, and had just put it on and was promenading up and down the porch to show me the style and becomingness of my work when I saw the cream-colored bronchos coming, with Jones driving, and in the back seat was Mrs. Beach and her cousin. Mr. Ballinger looked very pale and thin, but neat and well dressed, in his store clothes, as Babe says.

“Don’t run away, Babe,” Mrs. Beach called, “my husband is not with me and Tom has come, on his first day out, to thank you for saving his life.”

“I am sure it was nothing,” said Babe, stiffly, but she could not escape, as they were already at the steps and Ballinger had alighted and was holding out his hand.

“I value my life more than you do then,” he laughs, “can’t take off my hat or the bandages will come off. The hat covers the rags. Otherwise I am recovered, but for you the vultures would be picking my bones down that cañon now.”

“Some one else would have found you,” she answered, coldly.

“You don’t ask me in, impolite Miss Wilder,” said Mrs. Beach, tripping up the steps, “but I am going to come, if Babe don’t like me, she can at least let me thank her for saving my favorite cousin’s life.”

“I never could see why women quarrel so,” said Ballinger; “men don’t, nor they with men.”

“You are the rudest boy,” laughed Mrs. Beach; “ranch manners, I suppose.”

I brought out chairs, as there was nothing else to do, and they sat down, Babe with an undecided air.

"You were awfully brave," said Mr. Ballinger admiringly, "and how strong for a girl, you just about carried me up to that horse. You looked awfully tall too, in that uncertain light. Say, that isn't the gown you had on then, the other had gilt braid on it, this is ever so much nicer looking."

"How could you tell what she had on, Tom, when you were out of your head?" Mrs. Beach asked, innocently.

He blushed, actually he did, for he was a decent young fellow as I ever knew, and Babe flushed a royal red, while Mrs. Beach looked at them with that wicked little smile of hers.

"I infer you were near that habit, Tom."

"The braid er—scratched my face," he stammered, and Babe tried to look as if she did not hear him, but failed lamentably, "I did not mean that," he went on, uncomfortably, "I always make a mess of a thing. I am sure I was out of my head most of the time, but I do know Miss Murphy saved my life, and was awfully good to me and I shall always be grateful. By Jove now, that gown was spoiled, and you tore out a big piece to tie up my head."

"You certainly dreamed that," said Babe, coolly.

"Don't worry, Babe," said Mrs. Beach with a slight sneer, "Unlike Mr. Beach, he will not offer you pay. Tom is not quite all cowboy."

"Thanks, Clara," he said, merrily, "but this habit is ever so much nicer, the new one. Don't you think so Miss Wilder?"

"She ought to, she made it," laughed Babe, and then

the conversation became general. I never saw Mrs. Beach kinder and more agreeable. I liked Ballinger, too, he was bright, frank almost to rudeness, had been a spoiled child, I inferred, but was redeemed from being a cub by his manliness and love of fun. He was very fond of Clara, respected Mr. Beach, winced at her little sneers about him, and spoke well of everybody. He seemed to have taken a great liking to Babe, for he rode over almost every day after that, bringing her flowers and books and getting her to ride with him, on the pretense he did not know the roads about Erin. Mrs. Beach did not come again for some time, and the calls were more delightful without her and the constraint her presence always put on Babe. How changed my dear girl became, so merry and happy, so rosy and bright-eyed, and so particular about her clothes and ribbons. I had my own ideas, maybe I was wrong, but her joy was mine, and I would not be the croaker to cast the first shadow over her sunshine. The little boyishness of her manner pleased Ballinger, and they had a great deal of fun teaching the dog tricks, and teasing me and racing their horses up and down the road, Babe always winning, for that hateful broncho of hers seemed possessed of the speed of the evil one when he wanted to go, and just skimmed along, his teeth showing, his ears pinned back, as ugly an animal as one would wish not to see, but dear me, when I get on his back he acts as if he could hardly drag one foot after another, and I think he is tired, and make Babe help me off.

“I never saw a girl like you,” Ballinger said one day, when he stopped to tea, and ate of a fine cake Babe had



made (the better because she thought he would eat it no doubt) "you are full of surprises. I would not have missed that fall of mine for the world, though I did feel like going way to Silver City to thrash the man that let me the ugliest brute I ever rode on. He actually sent me a bill the other day, I'll make him eat it, by Jove. Say I guess I swore at you, Miss Wilder, didn't I? But what in thunder made you put salt on me, to keep me from flying away like I used to try to catch birds taught by a sinful old grandmother they could be snared that way?"

"You are not very grateful," I laughed, "and you never quit your bad language all the way home, but Babe got the worst of it, for she led the horse."

The next day was Sunday, and Babe and I were both at home, sort of expecting some one, so when we heard a horse coming we thought it was our young man, but in this we were disappointed. The horse was a big bay with a white strip down his nose and three white feet, and his rider was Con Murphy, looking pale and dejected, his eyes bloodshot and his clothing neglected. Even the horse ambled slowly along as if he too had been dissipating and was worn out. He rode up to the porch, threw his rein over a stump, patted the greyhound, who went to meet him, and came up the steps.

"Is Babe in, Miss Wilder?" he said, meekly. She ran into the house when she saw him coming.

I took off my glasses, I had been reading, wiped them slowly, and looked at him severely. "She is, but does not want to see you, Mr. Murphy."

“I will not trouble her,” he went on, mournfully, and sat down with a sigh, looking so lonesome and sad my heart softened to him. I would like to know why good looks affect us so, if he had been a homely man I should have told him to go long about his business. The same way with Ballinger, who is big and manly, though not so fine looking, and I know should not come to our house, but I have not the strength of mind to tell him so.

“I’ll go see Babe,” I says, and actually went in and coaxed her out.

“Did you want to see me, father?” she said, quietly going up to him.

“Sit down,” he muttered, pushing a chair beside his; “I haven’t been square with you, Babe, I know it, wasn’t fit to have you with me, want you to stay here with that good soul. I’ll help you out when I can. The mine sale fell through, they were on, at the start, but Dick and I cleaned them out at poker the other night and they are gone. No good, any of them, the one you struck apologized, only one of them worth any thing, he not much. I was going to shoot him, but Dick said it was my fault. I did not tell who you were, and I was too drunk to know anything about it. You can live here, never up there again. See I’m flush, there’s a hundred dollars (dividing a roll of bills) be a good girl, dear, and forgive me.”

She took the money with trembling hands, her beautiful eyes wet with tears. “Father, I’m sorry if I was mean. I want to be friends with you, and if it’s my duty to go back——”

“It’s not,” he said, promptly, “and don’t cry, it isn’t

your style nor becoming to you, and by — you're a mighty handsome girl. Of course I don't want you, told you so, and pay the old lady with the money. I am a poor devil, anyhow, don't care what becomes of me, like to think you are straight. I suppose you think that this penitence is a sobering-up fit after a spree, it partly is, but I've got a terrible fit of the blues."

"Is there anything I can do to help you, father?"

"No, nor any other woman," he muttered, with an oath; "I hate the whole race of you."

She went to him and kissed his forehead, lightly laying her cheek close to his. "Don't, Babe," he said, fretfully, but as she drew back, hurt and grieved, he reached out and drew her to him, "you poor child, don't be angry, I'm not fit to kiss you. I am lying, and you know it. You guess well enough. I am not given to remorse, and you know you were always a small factor in my life. It's another woman. Sit down," he finished, angrily, as Babe, with white face and blazing eyes, sought to escape from him, "you shall stay here, curse you, when she comes."

I followed the direction of Babe's eyes, and saw Mrs. Beach and her cousin coming in the carriage, Jones driving, as usual.

"Father," cried the girl with white lips, "it is not right to have that woman come to Miss Wilder's house, and meet you."

"She don't know I'm here," he answered, with a bitter laugh, and, as the carriage drew nearer, went down to meet it. "I have not seen you for a long

time, Mrs. Beach," he said, holding his sombrero in his left hand, and extending his right, fixing his fierce eyes on her. She gave him a quick, scared look, and put, reluctantly, her delicate glove in his big hand. He would not notice Ballinger, who glared at him from the other side, but went on swiftly, "I feared you might have left town, had thought of asking Mr. Beach if you were at home and calling on you."

"I did not think of getting out," she said, nervously, as he kept hold of her hand with brutal force.

"I think you will change your mind," he muttered with a fierce look.

"I hope you will introduce me to the gentleman who seems so desirous of forcing you to alight," burst out Ballinger, turning an angry red under his bronze.

"Certainly," stammered Mrs. Beach, not her cool self at all, "this is my cousin Tom, Mr. Murphy, Babe's father, Tom." Very miserable and pale, she got stiffly out of the carriage, and Con, with exaggerated politeness, still retained her hand until he got her a chair on the porch. Then he sat down at her feet, looking into her face with his eager, angry eyes.

I half pitied Mrs. Beach then, for the avalanche seemed very real and near. She had more on her hands than she dreamed of, and whatever she had meant by her idle flirtation, Con Murphy was terribly in earnest.

## CHAPTER IX.

### MRS. BEACH IS A CONUNDRUM.

Bullinger and my girl, she with that white, set look on her face, strolled away from the porch. "I can't breathe there, let's go down the road," she cried, and began to talk of ordinary things, hardly knowing what she said, while he seemed depressed and uncomfortable at his cousin's strange conduct. Jones was walking the horses up and down, waiting for his mistress, and I, uneasy enough, made a futile attempt to steal into the house.

"Please stay, Miss Wilder," said Mrs. Beach, pitifully, and I had to stay then, though Murphy glared at me ugly enough.

"I hope Clara, you are not afraid of me," he says, with a disagreeable sneer, "I fancy Miss Wilder would not believe you were, she and too many others have seen us together late at night for any one to believe in your sudden timidity."

"But before my cousin do not so, Com."

"Are you in love with him?"

"The idea, a mere boy."

"Just about your age," he went on with rising jealousy, "and I have heard nothing of you for weeks, could not see you, did not know where you were. I have been tortured day and night."

“I did not know you were sober enough to miss me,” she sneered.

“Who drove me to drink but yourself. Think of the five years you have tormented me with your caprices, bewitched, fooled me until that flirtation I began with you, seeing you were reckless and unhappy, and meaning to hit Beach, to strike him to his heart through you, has turned against me. I can't live without you, I love you. I am so bound by you I'd commit murder if you told me to. No thought of revenge now to Beach who wronged me, but only of my love for you. Let him go, I am sick of my past folly, Clara, I wish to God you were not his wife, that we were free of that revenge business—you with your hatred of him, me with my past wrongs, and that you and I could marry like honest folks.”

“These conscience spells are natural to you, Con,” she said with a little yawn behind her fan, “but honest poverty don't suit me or you either. It was your own drunken conduct disgusted me. I can not be disgusted much longer, I tell you, frankly, without letting you go once and forever.”

“Which you shall never do and live,” he muttered.

“Don't try to scare me, it is too silly from you. But I tell you, Con, I live in terrible dread of Beach, I do believe if he knew, he would kill me, and I am afraid to die. The world is so pleasant since I knew you. Now be nice, you look so unshaven and neglected, go fix up and look like yourself, you handsome thing. I am sure I have a right to be angry at the way you

treated Babe, the whole town is talking of it, and if Beach thought I ever even looked at you he would take me to my awful mother. I am not ready to let go yet, what time may bring I don't know, but now I cling to good clothes and the luxury of my life. Let us wait for fate and be as careful as we have been."

"And I am to dangle along like a charm on your watch chain in the haze of a school-girl mystery with its hidden notes and meetings by moonlight. I've a mind to quit you and go away."

"You can't," with that mocking laugh, "now I am going and no more dragging, please. If you act rough and rude, take the consequences—my dislike. I have had too much driving in my life, I want to be coaxed. Be yourself, Con, my jolly friend and companion, and some day we'll fly out of our troubles, when the mine pays you or I fall heir to a million or become a widow."

She let her little hand lay in his a moment, looking into his happy eyes. How easy it was for her to sway him and bend him to her will now. He smiled at her, breathing a bit faster, then took his sombrero, hurried down to his horse, and galloped away without looking back. She sighed and glanced at me.

"It's a strange world, Wilder; I have been playing with fire, and I know, sooner or later, I shall be consumed. I hold him in check now, but for how long? I live in dread; the slam of a door makes me sick with fear. Sometimes I say, let the worst come, if I get away unharmed with him. I don't care what the world says. As Con talks, strip our flesh off our bones, and

who knows us to be sinners or saints? Who cares aught of our brittle bones? Why care for consequences on earth or hereafter? My conscience has always been the fear of being found out, and it troubles me now. I look at my husband, his cold eyes, his self-possessed ways, and the chill he brings with him by merely living, and I think some day how awful will be his awakening! I fancy him, pallid and dreadful, condemning me, killing me with those great, clammy hands of his! Heavens! I scream in my sleep often, feeling my hour has come. There is Con, a menace always, utterly reckless and mad when he drinks, and blind to all danger. Then Tom, wondering what it means, a spy on me, Babe, with her stern disapproval, and you almost driven to tell my secrets because you want to help Babe."

"Mrs. Beach, not from my lips," I said, firmly, "will your behavior ever be known to the man who trusts you. But I pray you, before it is too late, to turn back."

She shook her head. "I can't, and you know it," she said, miserably. "Have you not just seen and heard Con? Come, Tom," she called, shaking her parasol at him, "come, or dinner will be late."

He obeyed her, helping her into the carriage. "I have been scolding Miss Murphy about that ridiculous name of hers, Miss Wilder," he said to me. "A big, tall girl, like her, called Babe!"

"One can't shake off those names so easy," I answered. "In Southport I shall always be called Lyd Wilder. We always had some queer nickname or



other until marriage tacked a Mrs. on names, giving respectability, I suppose."

"We will have to get Babe married, then," smiled Mrs. Beach. "But Tom needn't talk; he was called Buster till he was big enough to lick his tormentors."

"I am sure Beatrice Murphy has a queer sound," said Babe, scornfully. "The Murphy tacked on to the style of the front name."

"What's in a name?" began Mrs. Beach.

"Rats!" said Ballinger, who was not very polite. "I am going to call her Diana, goddess of the woods, the chase. With her slim greyhound by her side, she roams the forest and finds tramps and succors them. Was there not some fellow who spied Diana and her nymphs and got caught and was changed into a tree or beast?"

"Called a beast no doubt by the delighted ladies," said Mrs. Beach, "but you are in deep water, Tom, swim to shore while you have time, and don't display how little you learned at Yale if you were stroke oar in the race."

"Farewell Diana," he called, as he drove away, and my dear girl looking so bright and happy, I wisely kept to myself that interview I heard between her father and Mrs. Beach.

Looking back, I can realize I was a sinfully weak old woman, but then I let fate take us along nor ever interposed to prevent one wrong step. When the idea of right against circumstance and our own pleasure first comes to us, it is a giant, strong armed and mighty,

taken then it saves us, but argued with and thrust back with easy prevarication and perversion of our own sense of good, it gradually dwindles into a dwarf so small it sinks into insignificance beside the vice that is so alluring, and right is forever gone from us before we know it. This sort of a Pilgrim's Progress digression can be easily explained in the events that followed.

Just at that time, by some wickedness of fate, Mr. Beach was called to New York by important business, and his wife, not being ready to go, and having her cousin to entertain, was left in Erin.

He passed my house in the afternoon stage, and just as he was gone Mrs. Beach drove up. "Come here," she called, and I went down to her. "A man as blind as that, Miss Wilder, ought to be punished," she said, earnestly, and I noted she looked worn and haggard. "I know once I let go I am gone forever, and so at the last moment I went to him. I did try hard with myself, for I love Con, and you know I am not a common woman, and my love for him is my very life. You know me best, Wilder."

"My poor dear," I said, patting her hand, wondering some why she cared so little for Jones hearing, "but what did you do, you should have gone."

"I know that," despairingly, "and I went to that senseless dolt. 'Henry,' I cried, 'only wait till morning, so I can get ready, and take me with you. I don't ask much of you, but this time let me go along. I will not bother you, I will be ever so little trouble.' 'Why, Clara, you really must be ill,' he said in that way of

his, and I felt the ice forming over my heart, and that sullen anger he always rouses in me. 'Really, I could not think of taking you. You are too delicate, then my business is important, I can not wait, and you have hardly a fit wardrobe now to take to New York. Our friends must not think us savages up here. You must be nervous (me who never had an ache or pain in my life)—you certainly are ill. Go, lie down, my dear, and rest.' 'Rest? have I had anything else but rest?' 'This is some little feminine vagary,' he finished in that pompous way, and I almost cried, and a wife's shame! Oh, I loathe him! so confident, so secure, so sure he is right, if all the world be wrong! I don't care now; the end has come."

She pushed my restraining hand away, for I saw the tears in her eyes, and she did not want me to see them; then drove away, and never again did I see Clara Beach in that mood, her last struggle with the better way.

The next morning she drove out, Ballinger following on his horse, and wanted us to go on a picnic up the mountain. I was a silly old fool, but Babe wanted to go, and so I went too. When she and the young man rode ahead, I felt paid for my struggles with my better sense, for they did look so young and happy. I drove with Mrs. Beach, who was chatty and pleasant, flattering me with that quiet skill of hers, and making me think I was of so much consequence.

But it looked all fair that sunny October day, and as we went swiftly along over the brittle leaves in the soft, chill air that puts new life in the veins with its frosty

kiss, I felt the good things in this life to make us lenient to sin. That easy carriage and the fast horses were already smothering my inward objections.

“It is easy for folks in barren places and dreary lives to be good,” I says. “Our hard-working fishermen and farmers and their wives are honest and virtuous. The very ruggedness of surroundings makes purity of morals, as it was among the Spartans; but, dear me! I expect in Rome they had the best time, if they did fall a prey to their luxury and ungodly ways and decay as a nation.”

“You are a queer woman, Wilder,” she said, smiling, “always engaged in terrific moral battles, with a leaning to naughtiness in people you don’t like. I know you just revel in naughty novels, and then beam on your own virtues. You say it is easy to be bad if one is rich, how about poverty and degradation?”

“The slums,” I said slowly, “breed vice as they do disease. It springs from uncleanness, from want of water and a place to wash in, from slatternliness that kills self-respect. From no place to dress in, that helps to preserve personal modesty, from hunger and cold. In the slums, vice is a commodity; in your case, my fine lady, it is a disease of the mind. There is no excuse for you, there are all excuses for the women and girls in poverty.”

“How about love? Because we rich have full stomachs and warm houses and clothes, are we to be just human animals? Do you deny us hearts and souls?”

“Love can be stifled by honest effort, and a few hun-

dred miles of distance. Seeing the trouble that love has made, I am more inclined to think it is a viper instead of a blessing."

"You have never loved?"

"Have you, ma'am, outside of the lowest form of it? It's a handsome man, that's all, if he was homely you wouldn't look at him."

"Nor you either and let him sit on the porch and abuse me."

"You are mighty smart, Mrs. Beach," I said, some disgruntled, "and whether you are good or bad I don't know, even if I try to think that little walk of yours that I interrupted so long ago was a very harmless thing in a lawful, married woman."

"Give me the benefit of the doubt, Wilder, even if you look behind," she said, that wicked smile on her lips.

I looked, and there, following us on the big bay, was Mr. Con Murphy, looking very handsome and smiling. Somehow at that moment I felt a shadow over my sunshine. I was so angry that I looked at her in speechless amazement.

## CHAPTER X.

### A MOUNTAIN PICNIC.

“Control yourself, Wilder,” said Mrs. Beach, coolly. “Con is Babe’s father and Tom is my cousin and there is no one but you to raise up a Banquo at our feast.”

“Babe won’t stay,” I said, firmly.

“Babe is in love,” she laughed, softly, “now be a dear old soul. If she goes home, well and good, I’ll take my snub like a little man; if she don’t, you must lend us your countenance and your pleasantest manner. Is it a bargain?”

“Am I selling my soul to the evil one?”

“Thanks, but a woman in love, my dear Wilder, is no criterion of conduct. She is very human.”

Murphy joined us then in the gayest mood and entertained us until we left the traveled road, following an old trail down the cañon that led to the sound of rushing water. We reached a grove of pines and a wide, brown brook that ended in a glorious waterfall all of fifty feet high. I got out of the carriage and went straight to Babe, but Ballinger had read her distress.

“Diana, don’t be silly,” he said, in that commanding way of his, “if I don’t kick why should you. Why imagine evil when there is none. My cousin is unhappy and I am on her side and don’t you make a scene.” I saw her lip quiver and her eyes fill with tears, and then

he took her arm gently and walked with her a little ways from me to plead with her. The woman who hesitates is lost, said I to myself, and went along by the stream. I am always soothed by the sound of rushing water and I thought idly, what matters it, as Con says, are we not all skeletons and go back to dust? When we are buried a hundred years that brook will still ripple over the rocks and the sunlight flicker through the pines? Why spoil a lovely day with human beings anyway? I was too near the grave to be particular.

Jones unharnessed the horses while we sat and talked as nice as you please, and I never knew before what a finely educated man Con Murphy was, and how dangerously winning he could be. Ballinger was merry enough too, Mrs. Beach joking him about building a railroad to Erin, for it seems though he spent his days in idleness, he was educated to be a civil engineer. Babe, under the spell of his presence, grew very sweet and bright, meeting his gaze with sweet, shy blushes, looking so radiant that I saw Con give her a deep soul-reading look and turn away with a sigh. That day was one of those stolen moments in life, that, though we may regret them afterwards and their consequences, are marvelously beautiful in the passing.

After an hour, Jones and Mrs. Beach unpacked the hamper, and what a spread, as Ballinger said, we had. There was cold turkey, ham, chicken, all sorts of potted meats, bread, cakes, pickles, luscious berries and fruit, and champagne, and ice for it in a pail. I remembered we were pretty well buried in bundles, but

the carriage was roomy. I watched Mrs. Beach, to see if she had brought those little glasses, thinking of her delicate taste, but, dear me, these were generous and large, I can tell you. I have a partiality for champagne, myself. I never tasted it until I was fifty, and I am not ashamed to say that it is the nearest to love and moonshine I shall ever get. Dear me, how polite and flattering they all were to me, and I found I was smirking and chatting too, merry enough, though my New England conscience gave a twinge now and then.

Babe barely touched her glass. "Pa brought me up on it," she laughed, when Ballinger pressed her to drink, "I have no taste for any liquor."

"Tired of champagne at eighteen," said Ballinger; "you mountain princess."

"We have had periods of champagne followed by skim milk," said Murphy, "latterly very skim milk."

Mrs. Beach, after the champagne, of which she took a plenty, I assure you, got very witty and chatty. She had Jones come get his dinner, that he ate sitting at a proper distance, she sang songs, some in French, and told stories all perfectly proper and was so merry, Ballinger said, "Why, Clara, you act like a girl out of school."

I liked it in her that she never mentioned Beach at all, it would have hurt my sense of right and decency; still, there we all sat and ate and drank what his money had paid for, like a lot of ghouls in a graveyard, jesting in our hearts at the corpse that furnished the meal. I think it must have been the drink that made me think of such uncanny things.



After we had feasted with no handwriting on the wall like Belshazzar saw, nor no wall either, only the rustling trees and musical brook, Con Murphy drew out a silver case and tossed it in Clara's lap.

"You taught me, Tom," she said with a little appealing look, and drew out a cigarette. She lit it at the cigar Con had lighted, and began to smoke as gracefully as a Spanish woman, as if it was no new thing.

"Does it shock you?" Ballinger asked Babe.

"I have seen papa's friends smoke before," she said, demurely, giving Clara a real womanly stab.

"A second Daniel come to judgment," sneered Con.

"Bless the girl's heart," laughed Mrs. Beach, "what a sour old thing she tries to be. You must break her of that, Tom, there are too many bitter women with barbed tongues. Men would be more faithful if their wives were more agreeable and not so femininely spiteful. I was only afraid I would shock Wilder."

"You don't," I said, slowly, "there are lots of good souls in Southport who smoke pipes and take a sight of comfort in it. I don't know what I may do myself, when I'm a bit older. I don't see why men should have all the pleasures in life, and tobacco does seem agreeable. Maybe some cross, nervous women would be better to smoke."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Wilder," said Con, soberly, "but did you come out of Maine?" I had to giggle then like the rest of the light-minded creatures.

"I never dare smoke when some folks are at home," said Mrs. Beach, "but Tom and I used to when we

were kids. I read once, in a newspaper article written by a man, a pathetic picture of a man's distress at smelling smoke in his lady-love's hair. Better than onions and cheap cologne, and certainly the bad whisky in his own breath."

"But all the same," said Con, wickedly, "you dare not let the smoke odor be about your pretty self a week from now."

She held her chin in her hand and looked at him saucily.

"You think you are witty, Con, but you are only aggravating, sort of stumping me, as Tom used to, and I would break my neck rather than take a stump. Do you know I have not been on a horse for five years, and Tom and I were so fond of it. I am now supposed to be too frail and to be a womanly woman. Lord, I believe a man could talk a healthy wife into being a life-long invalid. Tom used to teach me to be gritty. I want to be gritty now, Con, and ride that big horse of yours."

"That you shall," he said, jumping up, a strange, bright look in his eyes. He threw away his cigar and helped her to her feet. They walked over to the horses and he put Babe's saddle on the big bay, taking Balingler's horse for himself.

"I haven't any habit, but my gown is limpy and long," she said, "and you can all shut your eyes if I look too disgraceful."

She put out a pretty foot and Murphy lifted her, light as a bird, into the saddle, and I must say she sat the horse well. What a changed woman she was this

day, her eyes sparkling with fun, her rosy lips tremulous with happiness, a faint, pink tint in her cheeks and a reckless daring in look and manner so utterly different from her cold repellent way with Beach. I wondered, as I watched her, why it is naughty women are so much better company than those good domestic souls with no thoughts beyond their husbands, homes and children, and their little narrow-mindedness that makes them think with sour envy a bright woman must be bad, and treat her with disdain. I know one wife with intellect, and good, too, and she told me on her word she had to make other men fall in love with her to make her husband think she was of any attractiveness, and ever after he admired her. In that case, though, it was rather dangerous, I think, and it was a merciful thing the husband did not do any shooting before he found out his wife's laudable intentions. When Murphy and Mrs. Beach rode off, he very near her, with that eager look in his face, living in her smile, knowing nothing on earth or in the life to follow but that she was with him and was happy, I told Babe to stay beside me and I would take a nap. She made me comfortable with shawls, and, as I drifted away into dreamland, I saw she was sitting with her back against an old pine and Tom was lying at her feet, his elbow on the skirt of her habit, reading a book he had brought with him. He seemed to have taken up at some place they had been reading, and I listened to the poetry of Elaine's story, in Tennyson's beautiful language that seems to suit young love and summer time best of all written words:

“Sweet is true love, tho’ given in vain, in vain,  
 And sweet is death who puts an end to pain.  
 I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

“Love art thou sweet? then bitter death must be:  
 Love, thou art bitter; sweet is death to me  
 O Love, if death be sweeter let me die.”

His voice was pleasant and mellow, and his reading, touching, I thought, because he loved. None ever read of love so well as those who love. When I awoke, after a short time, he had half closed the book and was talking to her, watching her face with those beautiful brown eyes of his—his only handsome feature, I think. I do believe eyes are windows of the soul, and I like a bright, honest gaze like his.

“So groaned Sir Launcelot in remorseful pain:  
 Not knowing he should die a holy man.”

“How little any of us know how we shall die and when,” he said, “I might think as your father does, we have only the present, we can not help the future or blot out the past. Live as we like, for we die the morrow.”

“But we don’t die,” persisted Babe; “we live and grow old and suffer the consequences of our misdeeds.”

“Where did you learn your wisdom, you wild girl of the mountains? You don’t believe it either, and you think as I do that Launcelot might have stayed with Elaine’s relations and won her love and taken her with him, instead of running away as he did.”

“If he had not loved her enough to wed with her, she would have died broken-hearted.”

“She died anyway.”

“But she died a lily-maid. Her innocent love cast a shadow over the guilty soul of the queen, and Launcelot, if he did not love Elaine, must have thought her love beautiful and pure.”

“But girls do not die of love,” said Mr. Ballinger, decidedly, “I believe they used in old-fashioned books of the Clarissa and Pamela age. Nowadays we want to read of such loves as Launcelot’s and Guinevere’s. Don’t you read Ouida and Braddon and the rest of them and know of modern plays? Why the world runs mad over ‘Camille,’ ‘Forget Me Not,’ ‘Frou Frou,’ ‘La-Belle Russe’ and those. Oh, I don’t mean but that we want a moral sentiment sandwiched in, but we go to have our nerves thrilled and our blood stirred and to see other people naughty, if we dare not be. Perhaps you have not seen those plays?”

“I know the stories, father’s books are all that kind.”

“High seasoned, eh? Maybe like an aunt of mine you read ‘Zola,’ and keep the awful books hidden under the mattress.

“I read him openly,” she said, wearily; “he is the only one who tells the truth, he and the medical books. I have read novels and been intoxicated with the glory of sin, the splendor of its surroundings, and I felt how grand it would be to be beautiful and soulless and all that, but Zola always brought me to reason. In his books I see what I myself have seen. The vice that ends in low dance houses, the police station and starvation in the gutter, and sin never could be attractive to those who are forced to see the ending. But I hate Zola, and all

the rest. Live all your life in a mining camp, forced into its worst side as I have been, and then wonder why such books make me utterly weary. I seem like some old rouè, give me buttercups and daises and spring water. I am soul-tired of hot-house flowers and scorched with absinthe. I am only eighteen and I talk like this. So I beg you read of Elaine, of Enid, of the sweet princess and her University, not of Guinevere, Vivien and Ettarre, there are no nice distinctions in sin to me."

"Do you never fear that you judge too harshly, and may fall from your high position?" he said, quietly. "You are so young."

"I am not young, I never was," she cried, bitterly. "I never had an innocent childhood. Oh, it is a wicked thing to soil the white soul of a child."

"You talk so bitterly, if one did not know you—you—"

"Hush," she said, imperiously, "don't give me a stab like the rest."

He reached up and took her hand and drew it to his lips. I knew by her start and blush it was his first caress. Still keeping her hand, he said :

"Shall I read you some more? What a pretty hand you have for such a big girl. It is so well shaped, with rosy nails, pink and soft. What ever possessed your father to bury himself here?"

"He dissipated his fortune, ran away from college without finishing his studies, and equipped with no profession, found, when his money was gone, nothing to do, drifted into mining, and is where you see him. Like

all who wait for dead men's shoes, the wealth brings little blessing, it may give joy while it lasts, but gives no promise of future good when it is gone. Better a thousand times a man earn his fortune."

He flung her hand away and sat up. "Who are you driving at? I would like you to know I graduated as a civil engineer."

"It don't make you civil, it seems."

"Old and mossy thy jest fair maid. I would like you to know that my mother is rich and don't want me to work. Suppose I did, and took a job away from some poor fellow that needed it? You may curl your short upper lip, and scorn comes mighty easy to you, but I like money and good clothes, and twenty centers when I'm flush, cigars I mean, and I don't like grubbing. I have been slimy poor, went barefooted and had my father's trousers cut over for me and envied the boys who had store-made clothes that were not mother-cut and looking sawed-off like mine. The fellows that work when they don't have to, live only in books. I'm not going to get wobble-legged and bow-shouldered for theories. Did you ever see a middle-aged man who had worked at manual labor all his life that wasn't weary-eyed, and that did not walk tired, whose sinews and muscles were not distorted and misshapen. I've watched the tin-pail brigade go by at daylight, and, God, I've pitied them." He straightened his handsome figure, looking at her very soberly.

"I am not discussing dudes, if you please, I am talking of Americans, dudes are a remnant of the idiotic

period of the century, and will soon go and meet the dodo, but honestly, if mother hadn't married old Howard I would be a railroad engineer now; made up my mind to be one when I was a kid. By Jove, they are nery fellows too, always the first to be killed, expected to be a hero and stick to his post to save a train and get hardly a line in the paper about it, not much comfort though to him in it, but if some railroad owner who has grabbed, cheated and gulled millions out of the public, gets his toe hurt, the papers slop over columns about it. The grimy fellow in the flannel shirt gets ground up and mangled and everybody says, only the engineer, and he ought to have stuck by his post. The fellow that dies with his hand on the throttle-valve is the only hero left nowadays, say I."

"You really like work, you know it," she said eagerly, her sweet face glowing with pleasure and pride in him.

"No, I don't. Say now," sitting by her side, "those miners told me about you when Finnerty was killed, was going down to look for him yourself. You are gritty, as Clara says. Hartman told me about that Englishman, too—"

"Oh," she cried pitifully, "never that, it is too hard."

"It makes me like you more, and if I ever meet him I'll smash his head. I don't believe I was unconscious all the time down that cañon either. You were nery then, and that salt—" He laughed and looked at her.

"Miners are brave men," she said, uneasily looking away; "they work underground where an accident will



suffocate them in an instant. Think of those stopes where a man works with a pick by the light of a candle in a little rock chamber like a grave, and where his only egress is a hole just big enough for his body."

"I remember an accident at Crested Butte in a coal mine; was out there with a friend of mine, a reporter. The poor dead men were all blackened and burnt, and each held his arm before his eyes—the last unconscious act in his agony. It is a horrible world to some, this of ours, and to some how easy and happy. No 'jestice in it. Why did you draw away when I touched you? You are offish enough."

"You are silly," with a vivid blush.

"You ought to see some of the girls I know in Boston with their seaside manners on, and waltz with them. Here, you brought up here in the wilderness, keep a fellow at arm's length."

"Well?" She looked at him, mischievously.

"You hugged me that day I was hurt, Missy?"

"I thought you were a tramp."

"I'll take to the road, then, at once. That faded green habit of yours I shall always remember, and that circusy trimming that scratched my cheek. See here," opening a pocket book, and taking out a slip of green cloth, "here is a piece of it, didn't think I was so soft, did you?"

She blushed then, looking wonderfully sweet and pretty. He drew nearer to her, a sort of light in his face. He had lost much of his bluffness and boyish ways under his cousin's influence, and the change was

not pleasant to me. I hated to think he would grow like her, I liked his manliness and openness far better than his new manner, but, after all, possibly the last mood was the most natural.

"Please read some more," she said, timidly, meeting his eager gaze and turning her head away.

"You coward," he hissed with intense scorn, and clutched the book, beginning to read in a droning voice:

"Queen Guinevere had fled the court, and sat  
There in the holy house at Almesbury  
Weeping, none with her save a little maid,"

"Don't read of King Arthur, please."

"H'm," looking at her severely, "rather hear of Launcelot?"

"I pity Arthur. He was so good and true, and how can a woman be false to a man who loves and trusts her? Yet, he must have made her weary, he might have been a cold-mannered, good man, who did not know how to flatter and pet her. Perhaps he held her to the narrow circle of his wishes, enclosed her with his nobleness and stifled her woman's soul."

"She fell in love, and that's all the answer there is, and you can't think of Clara and your father, and pity Beach and all in that underhand way. I know what you mean. There used to be a big lubberly boy lived neighbor to me, and every time I had pie, he stole it, he could lick me, and he used to say, as he sat coolly on his own steps and ate my pie, 'What are you going to do about it?'"

"Why don't you do something?"

“They can all steal my pie, that’s why. But I try to watch over Clara, and you ought to over your father.”

“I hate her and Beach ; I wish her husband any evil but that.”

“But what?”

“You know, well enough.”

“A queer world this, old Beach stole your father’s mine and the world applauds him, he won, you know. Let Murphy steal Beach’s wife and everything is terrible and Beach the most abused man. Poor Clara, her mother is an old fiend and she married Beach to get away, they were nearly broke, the old lady tried to catch Beach herself, no go and Clara took him. She thought she’d have things like wives do in English novels, a city home and all she wanted. She was brought to this forsaken hole and penned up here and I can’t blame her for getting desperate. The only sensible thing Beach did was to bundle the old lady off the premises and pay her to stay away.”

“Let’s quit scandal and read some more. Let’s forget people and go into fairyland.”

“If I went into fairyland,” he said, quickly, his breath coming fast, his eyes darkening, his lips tremulous, “I would not read books, I would make love to you. You proud, beautiful thing, the only woman I ever loved. No, no I’ve got your hand, you shall not draw it away. Give in to my superior strength. I tell you I love you, your eyes are beautiful, your mouth the sweetest in the world, you are the dearest loveliest girl, and I talk like a fool because I am mad over you. I have no

sense where you are, I only know I love you, I love you. Now don't you cackle and wake the old lady. Bless her old cork-screw curls I'd make an ally of her easy enough. I could make anyone like me but you, you icicle."

He flung his arm around her and drew her close to him and it did strike me she did not struggle very hard. He held her chin tight and looked into her eyes. "Are you mad, tell me? You can't look at me (triumphantly). You are as red as a beet, but prettier than ever. You have got a dimple in your left cheek when you smile like that and how hard you try to look cross."

"You are unmanly."

"I thought otherwise, I would be a dead man not to love you. Say you hate me."

"I do."

"Say you despise me."

"I do, let me go."

"Well, just look at me and say it. Oh, I know your eyelashes are fine. All girls like to look like that, it's fetching. Say honestly, had you rather I would not kiss you? and look me straight in the eye."

I did not see any considerable effort on her part to accomplish a very simple thing. She only hung her head and looked dangerously sweet. For pity's sakes, I thought, why don't you kiss her, you would if you were not a wooden man. There was a silence for a moment, and then I knew he'd kissed her and she did not object. All right, my lady, thought I, you are like all the rest, just let the right man come along and where are you? It was quite time, I thought, that I was waking up, so I

discreetly coughed and stirred under the shawl. Babe, very blushing and tremulous about the lips, came tripping over to me.

“Did you sleep well, dear?” asked that arch hypocrite.

“I hope you did,” grinned Ballinger, lighting a cigar.

“I may have dreamed of silly people,” I said, glumly, “but all can’t be young, nor all days like this. Somehow or other I have been thinking of a sea-faring man I used to know, Captain McCrate of the schooner *Clarinda*, lost on the banks thirty years ago. He is one of those skeletons you talk about now, Babe, and I am a wrinkled old hag.”

“Never, you dear thing,” she says, kissing me, “with your rose-leaf skin, your bright eyes, your dear little curls,” and then he too began to flatter me, until I said, severely :

“I suppose you two think I can be bamboozled into anything. I shall be tired of being an accessory bymeby I tell you, so there.”

Soon I heard Mrs. Beach’s laugh, and she and Murphy rode down the glen. She was flushed and bright-eyed, her hair all disordered, her laugh louder than I ever heard, looking like a rosy hoiden, then shortly we all went home.

Of course I had not sense enough to stop then, there were picnics and junketings almost every day, and every evening Mrs. Beach, Tom and Murphy were at my house. It was lively and pleasant, and my dear girl

was so happy with her lover. She seemed to live in a kind of dream, smiling always, her eyes bright and beautiful, bits of song on her lips, and a new attention to her dress and ribbons. His was the stronger will, and he swayed her more than I ever thought she would give in to any one, still I never feared, for he loved her passionately, he was manly and good, and, dear me, how pleasant their love-making was to me, a contrast to Mrs. Beach and Con. I am partial myself to those old-time books that ended, they were married, and lived happy ever afterwards. I don't like the modern novel that begins, they were married and lived unhappy ever afterwards, and broke several of the commandments.

## CHAPTER XI.

“SWEET IS TRUE LOVE.”

I felt, right along, the life in these few weeks was unreal and unnatural, and what troubled me most now was the change in Mrs. Beach that her husband must see when he returned. Her gowns were gorgeous in color and texture, she flashed with jewels, and every trace of her quiet manner was utterly gone. She was gay with a mad recklessness of word and look, radiant and witty, and a new life shone in her eyes and colored her cheeks. Con, on the other hand, had grown silent, seldom speaking, absorbed in her, devouring her always with his passionate eyes, obeying her slightest command, slave entirely to her will. Oh, I was weary of them, why should they sully my darling's love story with their sin? Folks in town had begun to talk, and Mrs. Finnerty told me Con had been seen at Beach's house late at night and that they, Con and Mrs. Beach had lost all caution. I could understand Clara better now. It is more a woman's nature to tire of restraint and deceit, to fling to the winds all subterfuge when she loves. She has, too, a desire to hurt the man who holds her captive, that a man never has, he is always looking for consequences and what the world will say. So I was right glad on the evening of the 31st of October to see the yellow bronchos coming and Jones bringing Mr. Beach

home. Beach was in the back seat, and he stopped the horses to speak with me and shook hands very cordially for him, in his clammy way.

“I hope that you have enlivened Clara’s loneliness,” he said, kindly, “she must have felt the time very long. I should never leave her were it not for the pressure of business.”

Jones gave me a sort of comical look, and I got red in the face and uncomfortable.

“I should think,” I blurted out, “you were most rich enough to enjoy yourself, Mr. Beach.”

“We can not outlive a habit,” he said, blandly; “you have had a little vacation I hear. I am glad of it, and you have done so well with the school, really most praiseworthy. Looking remarkably well, too, our Colorado climate is marvelous. I am always glad to be back in my little eyrie in the hills, so I will bid you good evening, as Clara must be expecting me.”

Oh, that cold, queer, senseless man, and I did feel pitiful and mean-spirited, like, I told Babe, I’d been stealing from him. She came and hid her face in my lap, and I saw she had one of her temper spells on, so wisely let her alone. I felt her shoulders shake with her sobs, those deep, dry, pent-in sobs, as if her heart was breaking, I patted her hair softly and put my arm about her. It was quite dark, but Ballinger knew us as he came along the road and called out a cheerful good evening.

“Is Diana crying?” he said, sitting down near her, “I didn’t know she ever gave in. Headache or something, I suppose?” She would not speak, and he, like



all men, when a woman is in tears, began to whistle softly under his breath and kick his feet restlessly.

"Guess I'd better go."

"She will be all right in a few moments, this is a clearing-up shower," I said.

"Shall I go, Diana?"

"N—no."

"Oh, before I forget it, will you give this note to your father. The goodly king has returned, saw you not the passing of Arthur?"

"I won't give it to him," said Babe, angrily, raising her tear-wet face, "and I am ashamed of you for asking me. I won't aid them, and you ought to be decent enough to guard your cousin instead of helping her in her wickedness. So there!"

"Whew! You went with us enough behind his back all the same, now he's home you are awfully goody. Say, don't be cranky, the note is nothing, Clara let me see it, let Wilder give it to him."

"She shall not," cried Babe, jumping up, in a fine passion. "She has suffered enough from you all. Go, take your note yourself, and I thought you were manly and good, and I find you as mean—as mean—as they are, I—I almost hate you."

"Thanks," he said, coldly, getting up in a temper, also, "I will take myself off. I must say you are a very rude young person."

So he departed, whistling in an aggravating manner, and stayed away for a week. Poor Babe looked pale and woe-begone enough, and Mrs. Beach's behavior

almost made her ill. My lady came every day to meet Con Murphy at my house, when I was absent at school, and Babe would cry and storm about it, but I kept her within bounds by telling her I did not care, and for us to be patient, that it would come out all right. "We brought it on ourselves, my dear," I said, "we should never have gone with them as we did; let us take our punishment, for it is in good part."

Sunday evening, Babe, who had been in bed all day with a sick headache, concluded she would be better on the porch. She put on her best wrapper, a delicate cream-colored cashmere, trimmed with fine lace, and I braided her pretty hair for her and fixed her up comfortably in the rocking chair. I knew well enough what that gown was for, and why she had that wistful, expectant look, but I never said a word. I looked back and saw the dog was with her, for once the pesky creature actually followed me into the meeting house, and mortified I was. The church bells sounded rarely sweet in the quiet air, echoing against the purple-shrouded mountains, and all the earth seemed buried in the sweet silence of a Sunday evening. The church was well filled when I got there, and folks all smiled kindly on me, for I think I was generally liked. Mr. Beach was buried in his big prayer book, with its golden monogram, H. D. B., and his wife trying to look downcast, but really making a mockery of it, for she was fairly brilliant with happiness, thinking, I surmised, of Con. I saw Beach's cold eyes rest on her once with a sort of pride, and, as I watched his face

light up, I found my lips saying, "Lord, have mercy upon us miserable sinners, and incline our hearts to keep thy laws," all jumbled up and bothered.

As I went home in a kind of maze, thinking of the sermon and that man and his wife, I saw ahead a tall, familiar figure, walking in a reckless sort of way, slashing the trees with a cane. So Mr. Ballinger was coming at last. I did not want my presence to upset them, so slipped home on a side path and went in the back door. If the window was open behind the closed blinds I could not help it, the noise of closing it would have betrayed me. I saw Babe walking up and down the porch, her long gown trailing after her, her braid of hair falling down her back and her dog walking solemnly beside her. She was so white and worn she looked like a ghost in the moonlight in that pale gown.

"I thought you were a ghost," said Ballinger, stopping at the foot of the steps. "May I come in?"

"Yes," carelessly.

"I am better company than a dog."

"I never need a friend when I have Doc," she answered, coolly.

He got himself a chair. "Thanks, I will sit down," he said, mockingly, "won't you?" He pushed a chair towards her that she sat in unwillingly. "How ill you look," he said, suddenly, looking into her face, "and so odd with your hair brushed off your face. I like the little curls over your forehead better. You're a human girl then, now you look like a priestess, a Norma." He began to hum an air, I suppose, from

that opera. "Will you hear me, Norma?" he said, abruptly.

"It is late," she stammered, "I must not keep Miss Wilder up; I have made her home uncomfortable enough already."

"Not you, Diana, but others, and I guess your meaning. Oh, my love," taking her reluctant hand, "forgive me. From my soul I am sorry and ashamed. I am a cad, a fool, anything you will, only forgive me."

She lifted his hand to her soft cheek and held it there a moment. "I knew you were different, Tom," she said, gently, "and forgive me for being so angry that day."

"Don't rate me higher than I am," he said, irritably, "I am only a man, and some time you may hate me. What sort of a girl are you, so hard to read? Your eyes mock your prim ways, and your theories and your bringing up give the lie to your purity and truth."

"Is that kind, Tom?"

"Kind. It's brutal, but I say it because I love you. I have lived in a hell the past week. Clara has gone crazy, I believe. She has lost all guard over herself, says slang words before Beach, drinks more wine at dinner than is good for her, laughs at her work, plays nothing but dance music, sings only naughty songs. He looks at her as if he were in a horrible dream. He asked me last night if I thought the altitude was making her too nervous. 'They say ladies can not live here a long time without change of climate on account of nerves,' and I felt a fiendish desire to say women and

cats can't, as they do say can't in Leadville, but I blurted out, 'why don't you take her away?' He would think about it, he answered, so gentlemanly, and such a fool that I give him up. Clara laughs at me, and your father gallops by the house on Beach's own land. Beach said the other night in that slow way of his, 'I wonder if that intoxicated person realizes he is trespassing,' and I had to pinch Clara to keep her from saying something mean."

"Ann and I are thinking of going away as soon as this term is over," said Babe, "we can't help the troubles, and we are going to fly from them."

"I am going away myself, came to bid you good-bye," he said, earnestly, "and now don't speak till I'm through, I want to explain matters to you. You know," taking both her hands and drawing close to her, "that I am dependent on my mother. You will own a person can not live without money."

"I suppose not," bewildered.

"Well, she allows me three thousand a year, paid in small installments, and I am a thousand in debt now, suppose I make her mad, why she shuts down on me, don't she?"

"I suppose so," she said, wearily, her eyes on the bright moon rising over the trees across the road, bringing a kindly silver light into the shadow.

"There are lots of old catamarans around her all the time to tell on me," he said, hurriedly, "and she is terribly unforgiving. Suppose I tried to get work, it would be a year before I could get straightened out,

now here are you, and I, I love you, and you, you think something of me."

"I—I don't know."

"But I do, and I know you are sick and miserable because I did not come last week, and I kicked myself every day because I didn't, but I wanted you to feel how you would enjoy life without me, but it seems as if we couldn't get married."

"Not for years and years."

"The old lady, my mother, would never forgive me if I married without her consent. She's had a bitter experience that sets her against matrimony any way. Then her pet brother married a servant girl, and when his daughter got to be a young lady we had her on to visit us in Boston. A regular hoodlum of a girl, brought up in a little railroad town, and mashed on all the brakemen. She used to slip out nights and go to shows with our coachman. Well, we fired her home, and paid the rest to keep away from us. Then my own father wasn't any too pleasant to live with, they were poor, and he took to drinking, and it was only when the Duchess—mother—married old Howard that she ever had any happiness. She's told me, she can forgive anything but my marrying without her consent. I was pretty wild at college, and the old doctor told me then, if I wanted to kill my mother, I couldn't go about a quicker way than to shock her a few more times and make her grieved—I believe she has heart disease, for the time I got hurt in the gymnasium she wasn't told till I was well."

"Why do you tell me all this?" said Babe, coldly.

"For God's sake be human," he said, fiercely, "you are a woman—act like one. She has written me she wants me to go abroad and will give me all the money I need, and if I go I shall not go alone. Do you hear, pet?"

"Yes," in a quiet voice.

"You can go to New York and wait for me and if I see the Duchess can't be moved we will get married on the sly and go to Europe and trust to time to make her forgive us, though she must not know until she is well prepared."

"She would soon find out, Tom, and in her anger leave you none of the money you prize so. Your wife would have ruined you, and some day you would tell me so and hate me. Poverty brings such cares and weakens love, it tries the strongest natures, and you, who have to begin to work late, would never have the hope and energy of a lad. I would rather never see you from this moment than to have a day come when you should say I had spoiled your future and made you lose all life had offered so lavishly once. Then to come between mother and son. You will find me firmer than those mount-ains, Tom, I will not marry you."

"Some things you say may be true," he said, slowly, "I am only human, and I have poverty and the worrying over the next meal, and the shabby clothes, and the weary eyes and wrinkles it gives to women and men. Then I do love my mother, she has been awfully good to me, hasn't had any too much sunshine in her life.

Suppose I go to her and tell her about you, oh, forgive me for saying this, my own, she will speak of your life, ask about you, and, unreasoning, in anger refuse to hear of you or see you."

"I know all that," said Babe, quietly, "she will not believe I am a good girl."

They were silent a moment, then he spoke, hoarsely: "what are you going to do? Sooner or later Clara will make trouble, Miss Wilder will lose the school through your being Murphy's daughter, and Wilder will stick to you I know, what will become of you?"

"I can work."

"What can you do, pet?" half ironically.

"I don't know," she sighed, "I don't know."

"Do you remember a talk we had once," he said, putting his arm over her shoulder, "when you told me about the beliefs of your lonely childhood? When no one loved you or cared about you, and when your father went away or had his queer company there, you, a frightened little child, hid away and read old books and wanted to be dead, Babe. You told me then that you thought as we went back to dust it mattered little how soon and when. You had seen men die so easily, you said, had known those stoical Chinaman, had seen in a riot once how quietly they met the end. You told me of the millions of dead and living, and you said, 'why should I care about me, Babe Murphy, when I am only a passing shadow.'"

"I have said silly, senseless things, Tom," piteously, "don't repeat them, please do not."



"But is it not so, who cares about the dust lain, buried for a hundred years, whether it loved, or sinned, or was good? When I get old I shall not sit and mope over the sins of my youth. Even if Launcelot died a holy man, I will wager my soul he did not forget the Queen's kisses."

"I'm not old, though, and the skeleton doctrine was only a child's fancy. I was so near to one you know," with a hysterical laugh, "I grew so fast."

"Don't joke with me, I can't bear it. Come, walk, I want to talk to you."

"No."

"What are you afraid of?"

"Of myself, Tom, don't talk to me any more. Go home, for Miss Wilder will come soon and I don't want her troubled."

"Well, sit there, you sour, old maid, then, and grow like Wilder and have corkscrew curls, but you will be a gaunt old hag when you are old."

He began to walk up and down the porch, she sitting there watching him, her dog beside her, his long head on her knee. Then she rose and went to him. "Tom, I love you," she said, softly; "you will always believe that?"

"No, I will not. If you do, and believe in your theories that we are only dust, and have nothing to lose—family, I mean, and that—for sooner or later your father will elope with Clara, why can't you come with me, any way, wife or no wife? Some time, when my mother is dead—mind you, I'm not banking on that—or has forgiven me, I will marry you, dear."

She drew away from him, looking stern and cold, but he caught her to his heart, kissing her face, her hair, and holding both her hands.

“Don’t look at me so; is there any other way? Oh, love, we are young and we care for each other; we only have to-day; we may be dead to-morrow. Oh, I love you, I love you, ‘the one fair woman beneath the sun,’ as that fellow says. What do you care for the world; it looks down on you; it says you were brought up in a mining-camp, lived with a woman like Mrs. Daggett—says, look at what your father is, a gambler, a man who defies every law.”

“Have pity on me,” she cried, miserably.

“I meant to show you the truth; you are an outlaw, anyway. The world is cruel and hard and life is evil. Don’t the stories tell us a life lost for love is a beautiful one? Aren’t the books that teach old-fashioned goodness and honor little read? Why should you and I go against the current? This is an age of Sunday-school superintendents and bank cashiers fleeing to Canada with ill-gotten gains; there is no honesty anywhere nor honest men. Every man has his price. It is a time when broken vows don’t count, when we read of married women’s love affairs, not innocent girls, and we welcome back those who have run away with their neighbors’ wives, and don’t blame them after a discreet time.”

“Never the women, Tom.”

“They can be actresses then, and the public will go mad to see them, or they can write of their sins and the

good public will buy their books. We look on and laugh at the King Arthurs, and we long to be Launcelot and love as he did. It is a time of commonplace happenings, but of minds at high pressure, and evil a relief from monotony. It's a Sodom and Gomorrah, and I talk like a madman, for I see your beautiful eyes and your tremulous mouth, and I know you will fling every thought to the winds and be my own. They say men change, but I never could with you, my wife always.”

“If you have any mercy, let me go,” she panted, “do not talk to me like that.”

I heard all, but I would not stir a finger to stop her. If she yielded, there was no faith in any woman, and I wanted my love for her to die right then.

“You can't refuse me when I hold you like this and look into your eyes. Oh, you fair, sweet thing, you neglected, friendless girl, let my love make you happy. Let us not strive against fate.”

Suddenly she freed herself from him and started back, looking so white and noble, so true a woman, that he let her go from his arms and hung his head. “It is all wrong, and you know it,” she said, pitifully, “and I, though I have lived through insult and all kinds of sore wounds, have never been hurt like this. The man I loved thought I could be like that. Yet I long for you, oh, I love you —” He started towards her — “No, don't, please; I am weary—worn out. I could almost go with you, Tom, after all, but I know the other side. I won't go down, never, I will break my heart first. I have seen the ending, the waifs from

country towns led by love, the unfaithful wives from the pages of novels; I knew them in the dance-houses, the women with painted faces and blonded hair, all vulgar, utterly vulgar. Vice is not pretty, attractive; it has no charm; it is utterly, utterly low. I know 'the wages of sin is death.' Not even my love for you could drag me to their level, and how," with infinite pathos, "could you ask me?"

"Because I loved you."

"And that was what your love meant? And I—I shall love you always. Let that content you, dear, and go away and never come back. Drift out into the world and forget me, that is the only way. A woman is only a small part of a man's life, but a man is often a woman's world."

"You are all of my life," he said, quietly, "and though I am stung into shame and misery, I won't give you up. If you despise me, you only do what I do myself. Me a Don Juan, I must have been mad. You made me so, for I intended to be square. Don't talk to other people as you have to me of being dust and nothing mattering, but you shan't, for I am coming back to marry you. You are like that flower that blooms above timber-line on the mountains, the storms of life only make you purer and more beautiful in soul. O, my love, be patient with me, wait for me to work out the problem of our happiness, that is, if you love me," fiercely.

She laid her head on his breast. "I know you do," he went on, brokenly, "there are tears in my eyes, like a kid,

pshaw. But I'm hit hard, it kills me to let you go, what can I do?"

"Only wait, dear."

"I'll go now, for I shall be saying things I should not——"

"It is best, for, for——" tremulously, "I can't be always like this. Oh, I want to go with you."

"Now you are a real girl," he said, smiling, "you did look so white and injured and that hair off your face changes you so. Let me rumple it up like you generally wear it, now smile at me. That is the remembrance of you I want to carry away. There is lots of love and laughter in life, and some day we'll be steady, old married folks, quarreling over my going out nights and you waiting for me with a club, you're most too strong for a real obedient wife. We won't be skeletons yet awhile, we'll keep the flesh on our bones and be patient. Look at Wilder, she's waited fifty years for a husband and hasn't given up hope yet."

"Thank you," I said, walking right out and looking at him severe enough, "she had better wait fifty years before she marries a scamp like you."

"And you heard all, you old listener?" he said, angrily.

"Why don't you say, old sneak, you meant it. I did hear all, Tom," I went on, filling up a little, "I was glad to see my dear girl is good and true and that you are ashamed of yourself; and my blessing on you both, and my promise to take my best care of her till you claim her from me. Dear she is to me as if I had found that

husband you said I was waiting for, and she was my child."

He stooped and kissed my wrinkled cheek. "Good-bye, you dear old soul," he said, "think well of me, if you can. Be sure I will come back for her." He turned to Babe and put his arm around her, "walk to the road with me dear, my lady love, I'll be your true knight all my life. I'll go find the holy Grail, but whether in this case it means the Duchess' consent or a permanent job, I don't know. You two help King Arthur if you can, I give it up, I can do nothing. Don't call to me in the morning when I pass in my armor with my war horse, or I'll turn back like a coward." He turned and wrung my hand, something shining in his bonnie, brown eyes, the manly, good, young fellow. I did like him. I watched him and his love walk away together, but went in before they parted.

"My heart is broken, Ann," my darling sobbed when she came in and knelt beside me, hiding her face in my lap, "if he should never come back. Life can not be so cruel, and he was not bad, Ann, in what you heard, I led him on I know."

"My dear," I said, "If I were a man I should have talked much the same; you are a strange woman in a strange place, and I don't misdoubt most men would think as he did of you, that you would go."

"But he would never have respected me."

"Never, my dear, and I know him well enough, that, had you consented, he would not have taken you."

"Are you sure of it?" eagerly.

"Quite, my dear, he is a good man, and he loves you."

She did not sleep that night and made me repeat praises of Ballinger until I was almost worn out. At daybreak we heard his horse's hoofs and caught a glimpse of him waving his hat as he vanished up the road, and then my lady, with a little cry, staggered wildly with outstretched arms, and fainted dead away.

## CHAPTER XII.

### BABE PLEADS WITH HER FATHER.

The day after Ballinger went away, Babe came into my school-room looking pale and anxious. At recess, while the children were playing outside, merry enough, and I was glad there was something that did not have troubles, though they probably did in childland, she told me what was worrying her. Jones, the negro, had been drinking a good deal lately, and had been talking about Mrs. Beach and Con Murphy in the saloons. Mrs. Finnerty had come to her and begged her to go warn the poor lady, for her name was on everybody's tongue, and the darky, who was insolent when in liquor, might tell Beach any time. Well, after school, who should we meet but Mrs. Beach herself, and Babe, blushing painfully, and awkward enough, went up to her and told her what Mrs. Finnerty said.

"We have no liking for each other, Mrs. Beach," stammered Babe, "but in this case I warn you to save Miss Wilder. It is not right to trouble her with affairs like yours and my father's. I think you ought to send that Jones away, for if my father ever heard him talk ill of you he would kill him."

"I'd best tell Con then," said Mrs. Beach, carelessly.

"Oh, Mrs. Beach, you would not make my father a murderer," cried Babe, her eyes filling with tears, "you



could not be so wicked. There was a shooting scrape over cards long ago, and, though I was a little child then, I can remember it ever so plain, and how that dead man used to haunt me. I used to wonder if my father slept well after it. I heard the shots, and ran in in my night-gown, and there was the man on the floor, the blood all over his face, and my father standing looking white and dazed, the smoking pistol in his hand. Dick Daggett caught me up, and took me screaming away, and the next day the children pointed to the coroner's and said, the man my father made dead was in there. Oh, the shame and sorrow I suffered—"

"Don't fret, Babe," said Mrs. Beach, not unkindly, "I fancy I think more of your father than you do, and Jones shall be sent away. By the way, my cousin has gone."

Babe winced, but did not speak.

"His mother would never have let him marry you. She is as heartless as my mother—as unforgiving. It is terrible to come of a race of ugly-tempered, virtuous women. Well, well, you are a queer girl, I'd have run away with the boy, he loved you with all his manly, honest heart, I can't but respect you. Good heavens, there comes Beach." She gave a little cry and clutched the book she held to steady her trembling hands. He came suddenly out of the bank building, near where we were standing, and, looking very white and angry, strode up to us.

"Clara," he said, coldly, "I did not know that you were acquainted with this person."

"Only a little while," she stammered.

"You know well enough," he went on, with increasing anger, "what my opinion is of her and her father. In the kindness of your innocent heart you have taken pity on her, and wish, perhaps, to make her better, but, though your intentions are good, only failure must follow. You are not acquainted with the young woman of the frontier. Do not tell me, Clara, that this person participated in the little jaunts you enjoyed with Mr. Thomas and Miss Wilder?"

"I went with them, Mr. Beach," said Babe, curling that short lip of hers, "I am sorry for it, I ate the bread that was paid for with the money you robbed my father of. I wonder it did not choke me."

"Clara you have not answered me," he said, commandingly, not noticing Babe's speech at all.

"Why yes, Henry, sometimes."

"And your cousin Thomas, a young, unmarried man too. Clara, when will you ever learn worldly wisdom. Tut, tut, this has made me quite angry. Here is the carriage, luckily. Miss Wilder I bear no ill will to you, but, of course, if you persist in your strange friendships, I must bar you from my home. I have noticed with intense regret and grief, a change in Clara, a want of courtesy, and impatience in manner, a disregard of her feminine tasks, almost an unladylike dislike for the conventionalities of life. I see now how she has been contaminated by evil influences. Allow me to wish you good afternoon." He helped his wife into the carriage with stately dignity, touched his shiny hat to us and creaked stiffly away.

“And that is King Arthur,” sneered Babe, “I don’t know that I pity any of them if they are like him. They may go their way, my father and that man’s wife, I’ll do no more.”

I said what I thought of Mrs. Beach’s standing by and letting Babe be blamed.

“I gave her a look to be still,” said my dear girl, “What good would it have done for her to try to clear me? he would never have heard anything but that I was my father’s daughter.”

For the next two weeks we saw little of the Beaches or Murphy, but Mrs. Finnerty told us the lovers were often seen at night, and that Mrs. Beach rode then with Murphy, as reckless and mad a rider as he was. We got a letter from Ballinger about this time, written from Denver. It was quite short, but I remember he said, “I did not mean to break my silence, dear, (written to Babe of course) but I must tell you this. A young Englishman I met here told me he had just come from Erin, been up to look at Daggett’s mine, and at the cottage, Sunday night, he met and played cards with a handsome black-eyed woman, and described Clara to the very life; said she was the jolliest kind, but was stuck on the big Irishman. I did not hit him, though I wanted to, for what was the use, but for Heaven’s sake, write me if that was Clara. If she has lost all decency I’ll come up there and drag her away, if I have to kill Beach to do it. Can’t you warn him, dear? Telegraph me if I can do any good.”

“Her room is in another part of the house from

Beach's," I said, "and she told me once how easy it was to slip down from the porch roof, said she had often done it, and walked in the garden when she could not sleep. Here is everybody knowing about her, but her husband."

"And no one to tell him," she sighed.

"Who'd dare to?" I quaked, thinking of the look he'd give one, and, as I spoke, Con Murphy came galloping along the road. He had not been near us for quite a while, nor were we particularly glad to see him now. He looked worn and ill, Daggett said he drank hard and got no sleep at all, and hinted he was, in Western vernacular, 'playing his streak out,' meaning, I suppose, he was wearing out body and mind. I noticed he had grown much thinner, but more handsome, if that could be, and his eyes, bright and beautiful, had a new expression, while the pallor of sleepless nights was becoming to him. He spoke irritably and made me think his nerves were strung tight and his soul utterly weary of life.

"Did that old fool insult you, Babe?" he asked, as she went to his side.

"Who told you, father?"

"Clara, curse him, that's one more against him when a day of reckoning comes."

"Why do you tell that to every one?" she said, fearlessly. "They say you go around threatening Beach as you did once years ago when you took his money and let him rob you of a fortune. They laughed at your talk then, but now that you are trying to rob him of

his wife, they begin to believe you will have to kill him or he you."

"You are a pleasant daughter," he sneered, "perhaps people talk of you and the cub that jilted you or—"

"Please not from your lips, father," she cried, pitiously, "don't let me ever hear what you were going to say. It isn't fair."

"Well let me alone then."

"Oh for your good, father, let me speak," she pleaded, going close to him and clinging to his arm. "Go away and leave Mrs. Beach, the whole town knows it and he must find out soon! He is an old man not your match, it wouldn't be a fair fight, nor has it been. She is a wicked woman, and what will become of you both? Think of my mother who died so long ago, you loved her, your honest wife, don't sully her memory, don't be weak and led; a man should be strong and brave."

"My dear," he said, coolly, a half laugh in his eyes, "you talk very prettily, but your mother was a wild, young Irish girl, sweet and innocent, but a child, died a child, too, that was only a boy's love, her very memory is gone from me, except when you look like her once in a while. But Clara is a woman a man could die for, she never wearies one, like Cleopatra, she is a woman of infinite variety. It is childish and good to talk of quitting, bah, if you ever love you will reason differently. I owe the world nothing, it has downed me, and her too, and until the breath has gone from me I will stay by her. Here, I've got a letter for Wilder

to give her, haven't seen her for three days, maybe something is up, Wilder can go to her house, can't she?"

"She shall not take the letter," said Babe, firmly, "nor any message. She shall not be mixed up in your affairs, because she has been my only friend. Go, do as you will, but let us alone, neither you nor Mrs. Beach shall ever come here again, if I have to go and tell Beach of you, and I would rather die than do that."

"If she wants to keep you with her, curse you," he cried, white with passion, "she shall be on my side."

"She shall not," said that fearless girl, and he, in a fit of fury, struck her straight in the face. She fell back, and without looking at her, he galloped away like mad. She recovered herself and ran into the house, where I found her sopping water on the bruise.

"He never struck me before in my life," she panted, "oh, my father, my father. Say will the mark wear off, Ann, I don't want it there to make me remember, he is so strong, he does not know how hard he struck me. Oh, never, never remember what you saw."

"I won't, dear," I answered, and left her to herself most of that day, for she likes to be alone in her grief. "Like a dog, when I'm hurt, I crawl away by myself," she said, but after supper acted more like herself, and we went for a walk toward Silver City. Coming home, we met Beach alone driving out, he was going to pass us with his chilly bow, but Babe suddenly walked up to him. "I will speak," she said to me, quickly, "Mr. Beach, I believe you are a gentleman, you can not refuse to listen to me for one moment."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### “KING ARTHUR NEEDS A MODRED.”

If she had not stood so close to the wheels, I verily believe that he would have driven on, but he was forced to stop or run over her. “You know very well,” she said, nervously, the color flooding her face, her voice trembling, “that I have no reason to like you or have any interest in your welfare, but I must tell you this. You don’t go much in the village, you are so proud and cold you have no friends to warn you, and everyone is talking of her—”

“Is this anything of importance, Miss Murphy?” he said, greatly offended, trying to chill her with his dignity. “I have an important engagement down the road about the site of a new smelter. Really, my time is very precious. If you wish to complain of Mr. Balingier, I believe I heard he had been showing you some attention, I must decline to listen. His affairs are not mine—”

“I wish to tell you about your wife,” she cried, stung into anger.

“How dare you have the effrontery to mention her?” he said, in supreme disgust. “You—my wife.” It seemed the very idea choked him with rage.

“Her name is on every tongue, why not mine?” went on Babe, determinedly, “though Heaven knows why

I tell you this when I hate you. Ask Miss Wilder if I am not speaking the truth. You robbed my father, you scorn me, you have insulted me, but I am too fair to see you laughed at and scorned by everybody. For your wife's sake take her away from here, be good to her, don't freeze her soul and make her desperate. She is only a woman, not a lay figure. If shame and sorrow come to you now, you shall not say you were not warned. Be blind, if you will, say anything mean you like to me, I don't care, I have freed my soul from the stain of cowardice."

She flung the reins she had been holding to detain him back into the carriage and walked proudly away. He looked old and worn, putting his hand to his head confusedly. It seemed some haunting suspicion of his wife that he had put aside as unworthy and dishonorable had suddenly come to light and confronted him.

"Miss Wilder," he said, with a curious hesitancy for him, "is there, has there been any scandal about my wife, as this young person says? I believe Miss Murphy to be a good woman, I will admit that she is spoken highly of, but perhaps Thomas has been attentive to his cousin, they were always like brother and sister, and she is jealous, on that account takes this underhand method of revenge. Her father is a very revengeful man."

"Folks are not talking about Mrs. Beach and her cousin," I said, boldly, "but another man, not him at all."

He looked at me as if he doubted my sanity, then he



said, with awful coldness, frozen into a fierce anger, "There is no other man. From this moment, madam, I refuse to listen to any idle stories. Do not insult me with village gossip, you presume on my kindness to you. It is outrageous. No one is above talk, the highest in authority, the men we make our presidents. It is a penance for being good and great. Guard my wife as I will, the envious tongues of scandal-mongers will wag. Fie, Miss Wilder, a sister woman, and you allow yourself to repeat such talk. I do begin to believe that maiden ladies are tale-bearing and malicious, as they are said to be. Tut, tut," and raising that hat of his he drove on, leaving me feeling like I had been slapped in the face.

"Go, then, you poor, blind fool," I said, but Babe took my arm and dragged me down to the village. "I can't help but like his trust in her, his loyalty to her," she said, bravely; "there is no credit in being fair to good folks, let's save him in spite of himself."

"How, certainly not by influencing your father?"

"No, Miss Spiteful, but by telegraphing to Tom."

"And the operator will tell all over town you sent for your beau, and folks will talk nice about you."

"I begin to believe, she said, solemnly, "that maiden ladies are tale-bearing and malicious. There now, darling, I'll write a cypher that will puzzle that operator all his days." She got a blank and wrote a few moments and then brought it to me. "King Arthur needs a Modred. Come." This I signed with my name, knowing well he would guess the secret and

help us in our trouble. But alas! I know now he never got our warning, and once more fate intervened, the shadow of the avalanche was horribly near, but never did I dream of its awful woe and misery. Yet, looking back, I think my dear girl and I did all we could, and who can blame us, if, after that warning to Mr. Beach, we kept within our doors and let the world go by.

The next Sunday, my dear girl being so low-spirited, I suggested we go to evening service. "I haven't been what you may call a religious woman, Babe," I said, "but there is always comfort to me in a church. I don't think I ever enter into the spirit of it, I am not pious—I want to reason for myself too much—but I like to look at good folks and listen to the hymns, and just 'Rock of Ages' is better to me than a sermon. Oh, the time comes to all of us when we want something to cling to, to feel in a great heartless world there is some one who loves us."

She got her hat and went with me, and during the sermon I stole my hand in hers and held it there. Oh, my dear girl, with your wistful eyes, your noble face, must you break your heart, must your young life be darkened? I thought of Elaine, for she read to me often now the poetry she and her young lover read, and I wondered if she, too, like that fair maid that loved Lancelot, would die of love. I saw, glancing across the church, that Beach was alone in his pew; that he looked sort of haggard and worn, his hair much whiter. He kept trying to keep his eyes on the preacher, but they would wander off, and people looked at him with

pitying glances. Oh, you lonely man, I thought; you lone, lone creature. Shut in, in your wall of ice, in your pride. You are a very target for fate. Yet you think yourself invulnerable! Dombey felt the hand of God in the death of Little Paul, dynasties change by the thrust of a lance, the speed of a bullet—who is secure in life? Whose house is not built on shifting sand?"

"Church is over, dear," whispered Babe, and there I had not stood up during the benediction, and folks must have thought I was a heathen. She left me a moment outside to go speak with Mrs. Hartman, and I started along home by myself. "Oh, Miss Babe," I heard Mrs. Hartman say, "go to your father, dear, and beg him on your knees to go away. Their goings-on is awful, Eli says, and Dick Daggett tells me he's afraid of his life to speak to Con."

Discouraged and sad, I went ahead past the lights of homes and families; there might be quarreling and jarring behind those shut doors, but, on the whole, the life was happy and good, as near as we can have it. The future of vice seldom has love and care, no shelter nor protection. It dies unlamented, unmourned; it is followed by no tears from innocent eyes, no praise from good souls; it leaves no benediction of noble days and helpfulness to those that look to it for a solving of the weary problem of human affairs. "If I was one of those beautiful and naughty women, I'd die when I was young and had my looks," I said to myself, "if I had to take the morphine route, as they say here."

“Miss Wilder,” said a metallic voice close behind me, and, like all folks thinking sinful thoughts, and on Sunday evening, too, I started guiltily. It was Mr. Beach. He lifted his hat in a shame-faced sort of way and said, slowly:

“I believe I owe you an apology. I was hasty that day you stopped me on the road; you probably meant kindly. I now ask you to come and see Clara. I realize she has no friends, no women friends. Perhaps I do not understand her as you could. She keeps her room, will not see me, looks and acts unlike herself. Perhaps she did care for her cousin, and I have ruined her young life. I was too old, near twice her age, to understand her. We can not reason with those things, strive as we may, Miss Wilder, yet she should have told me if she cared for Thomas. I could have been her good friend, if not her husband.”

“I think that,” I said, “and I wish you had been content with being only her friend, but not only you became her husband, but you ceased to be her friend.”

“Tell me what you mean?” he said, pathetically.

“Only that you stifled all her hopes, her wants, you shut her up here and denied her pleasures. You have been to blame, Mr. Beach, whatever happens, try and think some of the fault is yours.”

“Nature means youth should only wed youth,” he said, sadly, “and my young days were spent in money getting and the habit clung to me, but she never complained, she seemed contented.”

I felt a choke in my throat, oh, you kind, loveless

man, I thought, what can I say to you, how make you see even when it is so late, things you might try to do. "Why not take her to Europe, Mr. Beach, she would like that. This is a dull place for a beautiful and bright woman like her."

"Because," he said, with almost agonized impatience, "she will not go. She refuses me, she who never had an idea opposed to mine. I fancy she is not well, her looks are different, her laugh unnatural, her eyes strangely bright. I asked the doctor—he acts odd, very odd, said for Heaven's sake take her away, that I would regret it all my life if I did not. I will not believe anything but that he meant her health, not her honor required it. Miss Wilder, my wife's name is above reproach."

He was loyal and true to her, his face kindling, his manner growing more decided when he spoke of her. I could not speak, I hung my head and listened, feeling so mean and wicked as if I, not his wife, were deceiving him.

"She always liked you," he went on, eagerly, "your frankness and odd ways pleased her, I may have condemned your kindness to Mr. Murphy's daughter, but I respect you for it."

"Some day you will know, Mr. Beach," I said, firmly, and I little knew how soon, "how true and noble a woman that poor girl is. I can tell you she would not marry that cousin of your wife's, though he was mad for her. She would not come between mother and son, and she sent him away though her heart is breaking. She is a

woman who could not lie, and who to help you, to warn you, her father's enemy, stifled her pride, her maiden shyness, and told you of your danger. Think well of her, for she has tried to help you more than you will ever know."

"I do not understand you," he answered, "I trust I may if she did try to do me some imagined good. She owes me none. They speak highly of her at the village, especially that very decent man, Hartman. Pray come and see us, will you not. I ask your aid, you will not refuse me."

His pride was humbled, his very voice meek and dispirited, his manner imploring. His heart ached, poor man, and I did promise to come and meant it. I never liked him so well as that moment, he was nearer human. I put my cotton glove in his big, brown kid one and said, "I'll try to cheer her up and talk her into going away for a little trip," and then I heard people talking. Merciful Heaven! there was that mocking laughter, that now thrilled every nerve in me and seemed to choke my very utterance. Nearer and nearer came the sound and then a rarely sweet voice said:

"That was the closest shave yet, Con."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MR. BEACH SORELY SMITTEN.

“I must go back for Babe,” I said, mad with terror lest he should recognize the voice and laugh. “I’m not going this way any further.” I whirled around, but Mr. Beach laid a restraining hand on my arm.

“If this haste is on my account, Miss Wilder, it is quite useless. I recognize Mr. Murphy’s voice, he has a lady with him, so there is no fear of violence. Besides, he and others of his ilk have threatened me for years. I am not afraid of braggarts, in fact, I never go armed.”

“Please, go back,” I cried, wildly, “I tell you, you must,” I spoke up loud to warn them.

“Why, Wilder’s got a beau,” said that mocking voice; “the sly, little thing, and we’ve stumbled on a trysting place, Con. Colorado is a wonderful country for school ma’ams.”

I think her ladyship had been taking too much champagne, but, land! what did I care what she said, poor soul! if I could have warned her, but my arm was gripped with a grasp of iron, and Beach stepped into the bushes out of sight, yet holding me all the time.

“We won’t peek at him, Wilder,” she said, as she passed close in the trail, her skirts brushing mine so near Beach could have touched her where he stood,

"only don't tell tales on us." As they went on, she was smoking, and mischievously puffed up the light on her cigarette, and for a fleeting instant her face showed bright and clear against Con's shoulder, for his arm was around her.

"If you are going to shoot, Mr. Beach," I quaked, "for Heaven's sake! let me run. I hate the noise, I'm scared of fire arms, always was, I will tell on you in the courts, I will—"

"Peace! fool," he says in an awful voice. "How long has this been going on? Tell me the truth." He held me, glaring into my face.

"Folks says years and years, oh, let me go, sir, you are pinching me black and blue."

"Was that what the girl meant? Did she know it?" His voice husky now.

"Yes, it was," he fairly shook the words out of me; "everybody in town knew it but you. She has been breaking her heart about it, Babe can hate honest, but that kind of a revenge sickened her."

"Revenge," he muttered in a horrible tone, "Oh, my God!" He staggered back against the tree, and his silk hat fell off, and rolled in the mud, but I did not dare pick it up. He began tearing off his gloves with feverish haste, and some senseless memory came to me then of how carefully he usually did this, working off the fingers one by one, and smoothing them out. He pushed away his thin gray hair off his forehead, and began picking at his throat. A moment later he had flung his collar off, and his neat white tie that he al-



ways wore Sundays, and breathing hard and fast, stood there, clutching his throat. Then, watching him with scared eyes, I saw he was trying to speak, and could not. Oh, that awful, voiceless agony, that tide of passion that found no channel.

“Only speak,” I pleaded. “Mr. Beach, do not look like that, curse her, if you will, or him, but, for Heaven’s sake, speak.” Mercifully then I heard my dear girl’s voice, calling me, and she came running along the path. “What has happened?” she asked, seeing us. “Is it the worst?”

“We met them,” I sobbed, trembling now in every limb.

She saw the condition of that stricken man, and bravely went up to him. She took that hand of his, that he was clutching his throat with, and held it in hers. “Mr. Beach, you must think,” she said, gently. “Let me share your suffering, he is my father, and I must hate him. I won’t say be calm, but try to steady yourself. It is a blow; you cared for her. Lean on me, you are so weak; you stagger, the road is very rough, too. Now collect yourself, and let me lead you to Doctor Hcoper’s; it is not far.”

“Er,—thank you, Miss, quite ill, yes, collect myself,” he mumbled. “You are his daughter, my enemy’s, very kind.”

“I pity you,” softly. “Ah, I do pity you, let me help you.”

He would have disdained that strong young arm, but he was actually too weak to walk alone. He clutched

at the air, put his trembling hands to his head and then reached out to her. "I am almost blind. I can't think, oh, to my lawyer's, take me there. I had left her everything, come, I tell you to Martin's, you know the house."

She signed to me to go ahead and tell him, and I hurried along and luckily the man was at home. When I told him, he went to the parlor, told his women folks to keep away and leave a light in the dining-room, and seized his hat.

"Go for Hooper," he called as he ran down the road, and, never thinking I was tired and I had walked a good bit, I turned to go, and found the Doctor, walking not far from Martin's house, coming home from a call on a patient. He was a short, chunky man, with a bristling, gray beard and rosy cheeks, real New England blue eyes and a pleasant, honest way with him, and of thinking a body knows something and agreeing with one. I told him what had happened, and he went with me muttering, "I knew it, damn the women and beg your pardon, Miss Wilder, but some of them are the devil."

We did not knock at Martin's, but went direct to the dining-room, where a lamp had been lighted. I was so beat out I had to sit down, and the Doctor, seeing how white I was, got me a glass of brandy out of the cupboard. There are some rooms we have seen in strange days of our lives that are printed on the memory, and that dining-room was one. It was low-ceilinged, the walls covered with gaudy paper, little red balls festooned together with gilt chains. The hanging lamp

had smoked the ceiling over it, and I noticed that. There were four hard, wooden chairs, a table covered with a cheap, red cloth, I never liked them since, there were two chromos on the walls, cows, I believe, morning and night, or something, but pleasant to look at. I had heard Martin was close, and that room showed it. By one of the windows, hung with a paper curtain, was a stand of plants and over it hung a cage with a sleeping canary. A cat came creeping from under the stove, smelled of me and went yawning back. I thought to myself, there are times when one might like to be an animal. Then the gate clicked.

Was that wild-eyed man Beach? I stared in horror. His shirt was unbuttoned at the throat, his hair all awry, he'd been bleeding from the mouth and it had streaked down his pallid face and on his white shirt, his hands too, were covered with it. His coat was dusty and disordered, he stooped in his walk, staggering like a drunken man. His dreadful eyes, were glassy and staring and his nervous hands would not be still. He looked like a murdered man come back for vengeance, and if ever I dream of a ghost it is his, as I saw him that night. He kept hold of Babe's arm and reached out for the glass of brandy the Doctor had filled. Though he was a temperate man he drank that liquor with a fierce gulp and a second glass too.

"Give me some water, you," he said to Babe, in a thick, strange voice, "fancy of mine, from your hand a cup of water, enemy. Some saying I have heard, can't place it." She handed it to him with trembling

hand, he drank, looking at her in that queer way, then he staggered to a chair and fell into it, burying his head on his outstretched arms. We looked at each other and at him and all our eyes were dim and our hearts ached. Oh, that mute, silent agony.

Babe started to go, but he heard her step and raised his ghastly face. "She is a good girl, Hooper?" he asked, querulously. Both men answered for her with warm praise.

"I may have wronged her, hurt her life—business men are unscrupulous. A good girl, and would not lie. Will you say, Miss, you will try and bear me no ill will?"

"I am over that, sir," she said with quivering lips, are we not together in our sorrow? My heart feels only tenderest pity for you."

"I thank you," he said, humbly, then, turning to the lawyer, he went on with strange force, "Am I not in my right mind, Martin, will you and Hooper swear to that?"

"No man is more sensible," said the doctor, "you are a bit upset by the shock, that is all, you will come out all right. A woman is not all there is in life."

"Miss Wilder, I am sorry to have brought you here, made you a sharer in my misfortunes, I thank you for all your kindness. Life is so short I may not see you again, and I want you to remember I appreciated your efforts to help a blind, and worse than senseless man. Good-bye."

His hand that he held to me was as cold as ice. "God pity you and help you," I stammered, and then we went

away, Babe and I, and he, with his invariable courtesy, stood until we had gone, but I looked back and saw him again leaning on the table, his face covered, and the two men looking on in voiceless sympathy.

As we passed through the village street, we saw Jones sitting by a saloon door, and we went across to speak to him.

“Where is my father?” said Babe, blushing painfully.

“Rode by on his horse five minutes ago,” said Jones, and he’d been drinking too, pretty freely.

“He has left her then,” muttered Babe. “Jones, if you have any reason to be grateful to Mrs. Beach, you must help her now. Her husband saw her with—with my father.”

“De old man know!” cried the negro, jumping to his feet, sobering instantly.

“The worst, run to her and warn her, Beach is not in his right mind, tell her to go any where but to meet him, to hide herself. I pity the husband more than her, and I don’t want him, in his agony, to do something terrible that will haunt him forever. As for my father,” with a sudden tightening of her lips, “it may be a sin—unfilial—wicked in me, lay it to my bringing up, to frontier justice, but he shall have no warning from me. He shall abide the consequences of his sin.”

I was too confused to wonder at her white rigid face and that stern morality of hers, I only motioned to the darky to run, and he did, as if his life were at stake. As usual, fate was against us, for, before we could get away, I heard some one come out of the saloon, and

noticed in the trees the bay horse tied, and saw Con Murphy going up to him. Why Jones lied I never knew, out of sheer mischief, I suppose.

“Whatever you think, you wicked girl,” I said, “I shall tell that man his wickedness is found out,” and I turned around and went up to Con Murphy.

## CHAPTER XV.

### A TRAGEDY.

“Wait,” I said, as he started to mount his horse, “I have something to say to you.” He put his arm through the bridle and came to where we were standing.

“You and Babe here,” he said, as she turned her face away, proud and cold, “what has happened?”

“Mr. Beach was with me when you passed to-night. Jones has gone to warn Mrs. Beach, and I tell you for your own good to get out of Erin as quick as you can.”

He drew a deep breath. “Whew, that is rough on the old man,” he laughed, bitterly, “saw us did he? I saw him once sign me a check for ten thousand and rob me of a million. Quits by—, and here he is.”

That poor man was coming along the sidewalk with Doctor Hooper, we had been quite a while on our way, and he evidently had made quick work of what he wanted to tell his lawyer. He was still hatless and staggered, walking feebly leaning on the Doctor’s arm.

“Don’t you dare speak to him, father,” said Babe, pushing herself in front of her father, “don’t be a coward. He is not armed, he is old and feeble, can you not be satisfied with your revenge?”

“Confound you,” he muttered, fiercely, “I’m no assassin—you, do you think me capable of that. It’s his business to shoot, not mine.” He stepped out to meet

Beach as coolly as if he were a friend. "Here Beach," he said, recklessly, "do you want me? They said you knew all; I'm glad of it, had to come some time."

"Mr. Murphy," said the doctor, coldly, "if you have any decency at all, you will not torture this stricken man.

"I won't hurt him," said Con, carelessly, "I only robbed him as he robbed me. Here, Babe, take my revolver and give it to him, or keep it, if you are afraid of shooting. I'm not. I am ready to settle with him any time; this earth is not big enough for both of us."

"I want nothing to do with you," gasped Beach, the great beads of perspiration standing on his forehead, "nothing to do with you." His trembling hand went to his throat then and picked nervously. "Doctor, help me home."

"If you go home, so will I," said Con, fiercely; "you shall not frighten Clara, while I am alive to protect her."

"Has there ever been anything in my life-long courtesy to women," said Beach, with white lips, "to warrant your insinuation that I might abuse my wife? Kindly let me pass, Sir."

"Are you not satisfied," cried Babe, clinging to her father's arm, "is it manly to torture that stricken old man?"

"He made you a pauper and the jest of a mining camp, don't forget that," sneered Con, flinging her aside and jumping on his horse. As we might be needed, I persuaded Babe to follow the doctor and Mr.



Beach. His house looked quite deserted, but, on hearing our steps, a light flashed in the hall, and Mary Ericson, the cook, came out on the porch.

She seemed to know the trouble, for she said, nervously, "Shall I put the lamp in his room? there is no one here."

The doctor nodded, "Come, Beach, straighten up and collect yourself, there is nothing to dread, your wife has gone."

"Gone," he muttered in that queer, dazed way, "gone, I thank God for that."

I watched them go up the steps to the verandah, where she used to sit with her pretty work, and he watching her with that light in his face. Alas, how old and feeble he was now, his pride forever lowered, the edifice of a successful, prosperous life shattered by the hand of her he loved most on earth. We sat outside, and waited for the doctor to come, thinking we might be needed. It was very cold, and I remember yet the chill wind blowing from the mountains, where the new snow of the year lay on the purple shadows like the ermine on the mantle of a king. Above us sparkled myriads of stars, wonderfully bright in the clear atmosphere. I always think of the moonlight in Colorado when I go East, and I seem to see a blur over things there; for it may be some recompense for living near the clouds that we see things in a purer air. Around us the trees rustled and whispered, and seemed alive. Often when I have been alone in the woods I have felt the livingness of the trees, in ghostly stirring and rustling, until I could

most believe souls were shut up in them. I looked at that pretty home he had built for her, where the light in the parlor glimmered on the pictures and costly furniture, and all the things to make life beautiful, and somehow I thought of the starving women in city streets, and what a paradise that home would be to them. There seemed little right in this hard world.

That was a home, I thought, and I can not think it will ever be so again. I wondered if a child would have softened Clara's wayward heart. Think what you will of me, I never can say she was utterly bad, she was only weak-willed and weary, sort of desperate. Would clinging baby fingers have given a tender pity to her face, a better feeling to the man who meant to make her life happy, but made her miserable? Would the pure soul of an innocent child have made her strive to be worthy of it? But better, a thousand times, there was no child if she would still have loved as she did.

At last the doctor came and thanked us for waiting. "He is quite calm now and needs nothing, the girl has promised to look after him, the second girl went to the village to stop the night with her family, but Mary thinks the coachman will be back. Mrs. Beach has gone for good, I am sure, for her room is in disorder, her clothing scattered about as if she had been packing what she needed. That poor husband, my heart bleeds for him. He never made many friends, but his worst enemy would pity him, as he sits there, his eyes vacant, his unquiet hands twisting nervously, thinking, oh God, what horrible thoughts." When we left him at our

road, he shook hands with my dear girl. "We here love you and respect you," he said, kindly; "what your father does will never be visited on you."

I got up at sunrise the next morning, for I could not sleep. Babe had fallen into an uneasy slumber, and I was glad of that, for she looked terribly ill. It was a cold, gray morning, the mists on the mountains lingering long, the road frosty and white, all the trees were bare and leafless, and the brooks, filled to the brim, seemed to try to make up for the loss of summer life in their merry ripple. Mornings in this mountain country are not much like those at Southport. I miss the sight of the water sparkling in the sun, the rattle of cordage, the clank of oars, the voices of the fishermen; here there is a dense stillness below those gloomy heights, where light and joy seem, above timber-line, near eternal snow. I looked at the great wall twixt heaven and earth, with that shut-in sort of feeling I always have. "When I have got on the other side of you I shall breathe again," I muttered. As I turned to go home, I saw in the road at my feet, a mousquetaire glove, tanned and scented with violet. It was Clara's, like all her dainty belongings, costly and fine. I held it in my hand and saw that it had been torn off hastily, all the buttons ripped and on the palm was a stain that looked like blood, there was a black mark on it too, not caused by the bridle reins I thought. Wondering what it meant, I hurried home, where my dear girl had a breakfast waiting that neither of us ate. When she was clearing up the dishes, I took the dog's meal out to

him in front of the house, and as I watched the animal eat, very dainty he was too, no scraps for him, I saw Mr. Beach's carriage coming. I thought most likely he was going to Silver City, possibly to make preparations for a divorce, but lo, and behold, the only occupant of the carriage was Mr. Martin, and he drove straight up to my door. He looked pale and anxious, and before I could speak he said, quickly:

"Can you go with me? We need some woman at the house, some one with sense, Mr. Beach is dead."

"Did Con Murphy kill him?" I cried right out, and could have bitten my tongue for it.

"Don't talk, please; any word of yours will be used against him. It may be suicide, but it looks like murder."

"Murder!" repeated my dear girl. "Oh, Mr. Martin, Mr. Beach is not dead?"

"Last night," the lawyer answered, shortly. "Will you come, Miss Wilder?"

"But my father and her," gasped Babe.

"They went away last night, also, but if there is any law in Colorado, they shall be brought back."

I had no reason for not going, so Babe got me my shawl and bonnet, and I drove away in that carriage that had brought me to Erin nearly five months ago. Where was my driver of that day, and how had he gone on his long journey? All of us are afraid of suicide, that sense of going before our time where we are not wanted, the feeling of imperiling an infinite future by an act of our own. Nor was Beach the kind

of a man to give up beat and let the world say he was a coward.

“I never will believe he committed suicide,” said Martin, “though Hooper thinks so. That fool Swede ran away from the house after the doctor left; was afraid to stay there; came back by daylight this morning with the second girl, made the fires, worked around awhile, and then went up to see how her master was. She’d promised, mind you, to give him medicine if he woke up in the night; she’s got her punishment, though; believe she’ll go crazy. They found his door open, the bed not touched, and his sleeping draught untasted. Fearing something had happened, they crept down the hall to her room, Mrs. Beach’s, and there they saw him, dead.”

I felt a creepy feeling coming over me, “and then?” I asked, in a queer sort of voice.

“They ran like mad for help, and the cook has gone into one fainting fit after another ”

We turned into the open gate and went slowly up the pretty avenue under the evergreens, the swollen stream by the house rushed merrily along, but the flower beds were bare and the shrubs dead, and decay had settled upon the garden that was as desolate as the home. We met some of the miners walking in the path, with that way of folks prying around when the man of a place is dead; for they never dare come when he is alive. There were some sitting on the steps, and the coroner, a solemn-faced man, frowned on them when he opened the door for us.

“I have locked the crowd out,” he said, in a low, funeral-like voice. “We needed you, Miss Wilder; the servants are of no use, and we shall want some of his clothes got for him.” He spoke of the dead man only as “him,” and, I suppose, from long acquaintance with death, had given the dead only a pronoun, not a personality. “Very cold weather we are having,” he went on, showing me into the parlor. Lord, how could he talk of weather; what did it matter to a murdered man? “The coachman can not be found, Mr. Martin, and two of the horses are gone. Now, Miss Wilder, I shall have to ask you to come to the room occupied by him—he is not there—and to look over his clothing. He will be left, until the inquest, where he is.”

Death lurked in the air in that quiet house. The sunlight streaming into the pretty parlor, on her piano, the music still in the rack as she left it, her work in a dainty Chinese basket, had a strange, bright cruelty. There was her lace handkerchief on the table, crumpled up by her hand and smelling of violets, an odor that always brings me back to that day, and will as long as I live. I went and closed the shutters. The ormolu clock on the mantel ticked musically, and then I thought if the master’s hand wound it and it would run until the machinery stopped, while he was still and motionless; yet his personality was there. It made itself apparent in the stiff-backed chair he liked; in his smoking set, where a cigar, half burned, lay as he had left it before going to church; there was his hat in the hall, not the one dropped that night; his ebony

cane, with a gold head, and I wondered if he had put it there, or ever thought that his hand had touched it for the last time. The stairs were carpeted soft, and my footsteps made no sound, and he went wearily up these stairs last night, I thought, little dreaming then he would be brought down in his coffin. The doctor met me in the upper hall.

“You are a sensible woman,” he said, in a low voice; “I think you will be brave enough to stand it. Will you go see him? I want your opinion, and you must, at all events, tell what you know, at the inquest. Bad as Con Murphy was, I will not think he murdered that poor man.”

I took off my hat and shawl, and laid them on a chair, and found myself smoothing my hair, showing how a habit will cling to one always. I followed him into a beautiful room, a soft blue tint in paper, carpet and furniture, a bed with lace shams and spread, exquisite pictures on the walls, and everywhere dainty bric-a-brac. On the floor and chairs were her clothes, scattered in wild confusion, every bureau drawer was wide open, and her jewel boxes emptied and flung down. The gas was still burning, flickering in the wind from the open window. We had gas in Erin, and I must say people in Western towns are far ahead of those in the East, in the way of comforts. I thought of how that light had flickered all night in the ghastly stillness, and far off its glimmer had penetrated the trees, but brought no helping hand. In a jog behind the door, a safe was set in the wall, and, before this, lying on his back, as

they found him, lay the master, dead, never to open his eyes on the world he had fought so bravely, but that had crushed him at last.

I can see yet that decent broadcloth suit, the white shirt-bosom, all stained with blood; the disordered hair, the white face, where, mercifully, the eyes were closed. I thought of the look in them, and what his last glimpse of life had seen. Yet, his expression was calm, the thin lips closed in a quiet way, many of the hard lines smoothed out of his face.

“A face changes after death,” murmured the coroner, who followed me like a horrible shadow, “I never knew why; haven’t been in the business long; looks natural, don’t he?”

My eyes strayed in a strange sort of fascination to those white, bony hands; I saw the waxen fingers were curled into the palm a little, and on one was a mark of powder.

“The shot was fired very close,” went on the coroner, “his vest is blackened with powder.”

I tried to think, with a confused remembrance one has of something that ought to have happened as we wished, if Babe gave her father the pistol back.

“The pistol is beside him, there on the left; his own. I told Hooper I thought Murphy always carried a forty-five calibre, this is only a toy for a Western man, can’t get good aim with it.”

“There are no bruises on him,” whispered the doctor, “and Murphy is a powerful man. In a close struggle as this must have been, Beach would have been hurt.”



Other people coming in then, I went to the master's room, and got out his clothing. Dear me! the waste of good things for the want of a little mending; I do not believe she ever sewed a stitch for him. Those clothes somehow pictured the loneliness and isolation of his life. "You were good to her, you lonely, frozen soul," I said, "and what did she do for you? It seems to me even if I hated a husband, I would attend to his wants. Your room was fine and beautiful enough, but his is so plain and forlorn, and nothing kept neat, the torn handkerchiefs put in with the good ones, dust everywhere; his brushes neglected; nothing in its place. Oh, you poor, dead man! proud as you were, you are pitiful enough. You loved her, selfish and unworthy as she was, and I doubt if a better, more human man than you, would have ever thought of her so well."

The coroner's jury came that afternoon, and after they had viewed the corpse, it was dressed in the suit I had got, and laid on his own bed. Hooper told me afterwards I had got Beach's wedding suit, but he lies in it now, in his last rest, and after all, perhaps his happiest hour was when he wore it and married the woman he loved. The jury poked into every thing, creaking about, talking in low, scared tones, and then we all went down to the parlor where they sat around a table, and questioned those who knew anything about the death. I got the cook up, but she was too upset to answer rationally, and, poor soul, forgot all she knew of the English language, and jabbered away in Swedish, until we sent her away. When I came back from her room

off the kitchen, I heard a sound on the porch as if some one was trying to make a dog be quiet and lie down, and then the coroner opened the hall door to usher in Con Murphy's daughter, summoned as a witness against her father.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### WEARY OF THE MOUNTAIN WALLS.

She came into the room and faced them quite calmly, answering all their questions with quiet dignity. "That was not my father's revolver," she said. "I had his in my possession Sunday night, it was much larger." "At what time?" they asked. "When he met Beach." Did she ask for it, fearing trouble? No, her father gave it to her of his own motion. He said it was Mr. Beach's place to shoot not his. Well they did not care to hear that, but did she not know the dead man's life had been threatened for years by her father? Yes, she did know that, with a weary sort of scorn, did not a great many men talk that way, was it not a custom in the camp? After that speech, that they took kindly, one of the jurymen asked how long the liason had been going on between her father and Mrs. Beach.

"That does not concern the dead man," she said, firmly, "it can do the case no good, and if I knew I would not tell."

They respected her wish to be silent on that painful subject, and soon she was allowed to go, and she came to sit by me. We had just begun to breathe freely, thinking there was no case at all against Murphy, when Eli Hartman was called. He got up, looking pale and anxious, and gave Babe a miserable glance, as if he did not want to speak.

No one had seen Murphy near Beach's house, and the case against him looked well on that account, but now Hartman said he had heard of the trouble and had gone to Daggett's house to get Dick to look after Murphy for fear of bloodshed. He then went to look for Con himself, as Dick was in Denver. They had been partners once in a mine, and he always liked Murphy and would not believe he was cowardly enough to kill an old man like Beach. He was told by the jury his opinions could be dispensed with, and looking angry and insulted he went on. He could not find Murphy and then went to Beach's house, it was late—after twelve, he thought. He saw three horses tied in the trees by the gate and heard footsteps. Not wishing to intrude before he knew who was coming, he hid in the bushes and saw Murphy, Mrs. Beach and the negro, Jones, come down the avenue, mount the horses and ride rapidly away. He was sure they were there, could even tell Mrs. Beach had on some sort of a fur cloak, saw her hand a package to Con. They stopped a moment to tie some bundles on the saddles. He heard nothing they said, did not think they spoke at all. Con swore some, tightening a girth in his saddle, for the horse would not stand, that was all. Did he hear any shots? No, not a sound, and his hearing was good, too, had never been questioned. He sat down, and I could not tell if his testimony had helped or hurt Murphy. The jury went out in the dining room then, and we sat and waited for the verdict. I helped get the cook in a wagon and she was taken away. I think she died in the insane asylum afterwards. Poor

foreign creature, she had not been in this country a year, and her opinions of us as a people and our goings on must have been strange.

At half-past seven Doctor Hooper came to us. "The verdict is, he came to his death from a pistol wound in the hands of a person unknown," he said, cheeringly, "it was the only possible one. I don't believe in the suicide theory myself now, for the position of the body, the pistol and the wound are against it. He was shot by some one who was struggling in his grasp, and hastily too, without aim. No man could hold a weapon and kill himself in that way. I never will believe it was Murphy that did it, he is too powerful a man, Beach would be a child in his hands; now, Babe, you take up heart, this will not hurt you."

"I thank you," she said, sadly, "the time has come when I shall need all my friends."

"I am sorry," said Martin, joining us, looking red and angry, "very sorry to have to act as I shall, but I owe a great deal to Mr. Beach. He took me from an obscure position and made me attorney for the Maid of Erin mine. I intend to push this case and find Mr. Beach's cowardly murderer.

"I suppose you do owe something to Beach?" said Babe, curling that short lip of hers, the ugly look in her eyes, "but I thought he paid you well for aiding him to outwit the rest of the owners in the mine! He certainly made enough to afford it."

"Women have at best a shallow acquaintance with business," said Martin, rudely, "you only see with

your father's eyes. I tell you what I am going to do, for I do not wish the people here who have some senseless liking for Con Murphy to think that I went about proving the murder in any underhand way. The grand jury is in session, the district attorney a friend of mine, and I shall have a charge of murder brought against your father and get out a warrant for his arrest."

"I should think," Babe muttered, "you would wait for Mr. Beach's relatives to do something. I am sure Mr. Ballinger will be here in a day or two when he knows."

"He was telegraphed for, but had left Denver suddenly some days ago, and no one knew where he went. Mr. Beach has only distant connections, so all the affairs of the funeral and property are in my hands. I was left in the dark about his last will, he left orders it was not to be opened for two months, for I think he feared some trouble and wished to give me time to set matters right. For your sake, I hope Murphy may be proven innocent, but I tell you, frankly, it looks very bad for him."

"I am glad I know what you are going to do, and, unjust as you are, I thank you for telling me," said Babe, courteously, and then he went away. "Tom never got our telegram," she said, mournfully, as we walked home. "I can not see anything we can do except to hope and pray my father may not be found."

We did nothing in the case. I kept on with my school, and Babe, growing thinner and paler, took care of the house. Beach's body was sent to his Massachusetts

home for burial, and a host of hungry-looking distant connections flocked into Erin to see if there was anything for them. I hear some of their board bills for the next two months, while they waited for the opening of the will, are not yet paid, and Mrs. Finnerty wrote me long afterwards, "They was sarved right and got their comeuppance" (the last word I taught her, it being a favorite in Southport). It took a couple of days to get out the warrant for Murphy, and that much more time he had to escape, so I hoped, as all the papers were full of the murder, Con had warning enough to keep out of the way. As time went on, we lost our fear that every passer was him brought back, but we were unhappy enough. Babe grew sad and morose under the shame of it, and folks did act a little different towards us. I saw the sentiment of the community was against Murphy. He was so big and strong and the murder such a cowardly one; then Mrs. Beach was always hated, and the fact that she was somewhere, happy, possibly, with the sinful man she loved, made all the dislike come uppermost. At last, when two of the children were taken away from school, because I lived with Murphy's daughter, I sent in my resignation on the spot. Then I went home and told Babe, and we got ready to depart. She was eager to go, and yet heart-broken that I had suffered in some way for my love for her.

"Good land, dear," I said, "I have been dying to get out of here, I am sick of those walls, those eternal, everlasting mountains, I want to get in an open country, I want a horizon in my life, not to be hedged in and no getting away or looking off."

It was the first day in December when we shook the dust, or rather snow, of Erin off our feet, never to see the place again or walk in the shadows of those mighty mountains, already white and drear with the snows of winter. The road was icy and slippery, and that ride haunts me yet. Our belongings filled the stage, and we and the dog were the only passengers. Babe sold her broncho to Hartman, who I know gave the beast good care. Dr. Hooper and Mrs. Finnerty came to see us off, and Hartman came running in his working clothes to say good-bye as we reached the high ground near the mine. The last thing we saw in Erin was that cottage Beach had built for his wife. It looked as pretty as ever, with its gay paint and its fair surroundings but the curtains were down and no blue curl of smoke floated from its chimneys in the frosty air. Deserted and solitary under the pines peopled with ghosts and creeping sounds and strange, pallid faces, filled with remembrances and memories, to stand for years in desolating decay, and then, in time, to bear the reputation of being haunted.

“Looks bad, don’t it?” said our driver, “Lord, Babe, who would have thought Con would have panned out as he done, jolliest kind of a feller once, but after the wimmen too much. Been all right ef they’d let him alone, wimmen makes lots of trouble.”

“You know, well enough, my father did not kill Beach,” Babe cried, angrily, “he was not a coward, and he was the best shot for miles, and, if it does sound wicked, the shot that killed Beach was bungling work and none of his.”



“It wan’t Con’s style,” said the driver, thoughtfully, “he was allus quick to get the drop on a man and done a neat job, but mebbe he was cornered, man or dog wun’t fight fair when cornered, Babe.”

She did not reply, and there was little talk on the way. The weather was bitterly cold and we went slewing along the edges of precipices and abysses until I made a vow I’d keep on a level country the rest of my life. It was no comfort to me, either, when I gave a little screech at particularly bad places, to have that driver look around—not minding the horses at the time too—and say, scornfully, “That’s nawthin’, come over here a month from now.” To which I would answer, “I hope never to set foot in this wilderness again.” At Silver City our driver, and grumpy he had been, surprised us by refusing to take a cent for our fare.

“Been driving that stage fifteen year; Con Murphy’s made thet town and his girl shall git a free ride outer it. Them corporations ain’t got no feelings (with quite a series of rumbling oaths). Let ’em come to me for their pay, say I, and they’ll git it in talk.” He got quite red in the face, for he was short-necked and apoplectic. He hurled our trunks out and commanded the hotel porter to give us the best in the house and no big bills neither, then he patted the dog with his big mitten, looking slyly at me.

“Say, old lady,” he said, mysteriously, Babe having gone into the hotel, “tell her I’ll eat my heart and liver fore I’d believe Con done that killing, but appearances has to be kep up, biz is biz, an’ the sentiments of

the town is agin Con, and outwardly I has to tramp along with the percession."

Babe came towards us then with a box in her hand.

"Take it from me, Tony, many's the ride you have given me free before and the talks I've had with you bruising my broncho's knees against the stage wheels, while you were telling of 'Injuuns.' I know your weakness and every one of these you smoke will make you think kindly of my father and me."

"Wal now, wal, wal," he said, quite upset, opening the box of cigars and smelling of them with a satisfied grunt, "ten centers, I'll be derved."

"I didn't want to poison you," she laughed, "Good-bye," the slim hand lay in the big mitten a moment, "and, Tony, when time goes on you will speak a good word for me now and then. The old place will never see Con Murphy's daughter again, and I was born there and grew to womanhood there. I was the maid of Erin more than the mine."

"There isn't a miner there, Babe," he said, solemnly, "but speaks the highest praise of you. This is only a cloud as 'twere, bless your sweet face, Babe, if that 'ere hed been a fair fight, or two pistols found, or Con got limbed, he'd a been acquitted unanimous."

He climbed up on the stage with great haste, caught up his reins, slipped the brake with a creaking noise and with a great flourish drove up the street, all because, good, honest man, there was something dimming his kind eyes. I insisted we should have our supper served in our room, though Babe objected on account of cost.

“Land child,” I says, “I’ve got three thousand in ready cash, and you a hundred, and we don’t want to be gawked at by those galoots down stairs.” It was real cosy in our room, and eating at a little table, sort of Bohemian and jolly, and she ate more than since Beach died. We’d smuggled the dog in, and covered him with shawls, when the waiter came in, and the animal lay quiet, as if he knew deceiving was necessary for his comfort. We gave him the scraps before the victuals were carried out, and after the waiter had gone, I carefully examined the mattress, Babe laughing at me, but I wanted to sleep in peace. There is something worse than the plagues of Egypt, I have found out in my travels. Then I sat down and Babe beside me, her head in my lap. I took her hair pins out and smoothed her hair for her, as I usually did to comfort her.

“Ain’t it good to be away?” I says. “I feel like I was out of school, as I am. Now, what do you say for a trip to Southport, and a living there in my house, two old maids together.”

“Oh, you dear thing, but this old maid is a sour, gloomy one with a pain in her heart.”

“Ballinger is too old to get lost, my dear, he has cut his teeth, and struck me as uncommonly fitted to get along. To use slang he was cheeky enough too. But don’t you get into mooning ways. La me, I feel like the children of Israel, and what a foolish time they were getting through the desert, forty years in the wilderness, and most of them dying by the wayside. Wandering in a circle like one does in Boston, and bringing up where one started out.”

She gave me a little squeeze. "But I think, Ann, I may never see him again, because he will not want to come."

"In that case, my dear, good riddance to bad rubbish. If you are thinking he will be different because of the murder, set your heart at rest, his own folks ain't none too well behaved. To my mind, though, I don't like to be against a woman, but I do think Clara was more to blame than your father, for if she had not had flirtatious ways he would never have dared speak to her, and a woman does have to begin such affairs herself. That I know."

At that moment there sounded a brisk business like knock on our door, and thinking of sheriffs, and the law and that we were pursued, though what we did, I could not know, I jumped to my feet. The person did not wait for me to answer the knock, but boldly opened the door and stalked in.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### DICK DAGGETT TALKS.

“It’s only Dick Daggett,” said Babe, much relieved, laying her head back on my knee, “you and I act like criminals.”

“I don’t know but what we are accessories,” I answered, thinking of a glove in the pocket of a certain gown of mine. I recollected I had not mentioned finding it to that jury, but I wasn’t paid for my testimony as they and the lawyer would be. I felt like a sensible man in a street fight, I just kept along and minded my own business, it was nothing to me if the law got worsted, and, as is often the case, in being called on to help the police, one gets hurt and no thanks for it. Dick sat down, his hat on the back of his head, a big cigar in his mouth and tilted his chair against the wall, keeping one foot on the rung.

“This is the h— of a bad business, Babe,” he says.

She seemed used to his ways and only nodded wearily, I gave that hat a withering look, which he chose not to see

“I got home a week ago, Em told me about it, see it too in the Denver papers. Kind of mean of you, Babe, never to come to say good-bye, you’d saved me a trip here if you had.”

“I never wanted to see the old house again, Dick, and I guess you were not worrying much about me.”

“Say everything right out like you used to,” he laughed, “but honest, Babe, I rode here after you just out of friendship. You can’t deny I was square with you in old times.”

“But for you, Dick, where might I have been?” she said with a shudder. “Oh, I never want to think of it. Did you really care to see me enough to come all this way to say good-bye?”

“I’ll be honest, too, Babe, I come mostly to give you a message. You see I met Con in Denver, they got away from here by the early train Monday morning, and I met them Tuesday night. Con was full of spirits, not rum, I mean, but lively and glad to get out of Erin. Only, he says, with some swearing, “I made up my mind for a trip abroad, but blank me I’ve got a bit in my teeth. It’s rough, after a long life of having your own way, to have a little woman you could crush with one hand drive over you rough shod. Clara’s got the boodle too, and I’m broke, as usual, and we are going to Texas, cuss the luck.”

“Texas,” Babe repeated.

“Yop. They went off that night, and I paid Con five hundred in cash for his share in the mine. Honest, Babe, if it ever pans out I’ll do fair by you, Em can say what she wants to.”

“Pa’s mines always were N. G. after the Maid of Erin,” she laughed, “keep all you get, Em can spend it for you. So they got off all right?”

“That very evening I think. I saw Mrs. Beach in the hall she was dressed in black with a widow’s veil and she was one, by—, but no one knowed it, and they are in,” he brought his chair down with a thump, lowering his tone, “in a little town called Corpus Christi. Never mind how I know it, I sticks by an old pard and never had no stock in Beach. He robbed me too and had oughter been shot, but, dern me, if Con done it, it was his first bad work. That’s what made the sentiment agin him. They are at that place with the name that if it wan’t in Spanish would be wicked to say, like there’s an engine I see in Denver, Sangre de Christo, and yet them Spanish was said to be religious. I may as well tell you Con’s on his last legs. He has been going a pretty rapid pace for months, for years, more like, and it may be malaria, or Texas whisky that is finishing him, or a general break-up, but he writ he was on his death-bed and wanted to see you. He said Clara kept him so close he had to steal the letter out by a boy. I burned it—don’t want no troublesome doocriments found on me. I keep a close mouth too and I am pretty sure Mrs. Beach has fixed the detectives, she’s a mighty smart woman, and Martin’s mean enough to lay his family graveyard inter building lots, or stake a claim on his mother’s burying place, he’s a skin, and sometimes in law as in poker, it’s a matter of who puts up the most on a bluff. Con says he wants to see you and get friendly with you ’fore he chips in, and that you are the h— of a fine girl, not his exact langwige maybe, for he was college larned, but near enough to it to swear by.”

"You are very kind to tell me, Dick."

"Well, I wanted to be square, and you can believe me, for Con must be pretty far gone to be afraid of a woman as he is of Mrs. Beach. I'd make up with the old man if I was you, Babe, he's your father, won't hurt you none, may have young ones of your own some day."

"I will go, Dick," she said, earnestly, walking up and down the room, her long hair streaming over her shoulders, "But, oh, I wish I knew about the murder, that it would not come between my father and me."

"Let it alone," said Dick, bluntly, "a man on his death-bed don't want to be twitted with little mistakes like that. Best keep that mum and don't drag up any more ghosts than will come naturally."

"But I know my father did not do that," cried Babe, pitifully.

"Well, some one killed him, and Con had the biggest account to settle. More like a woman's work, though, dern me if it wan't, but I'll bank on your finding out, for you generally light on both feet."

A woman's work! I thought of that blood-stained glove. Babe's eyes were strangely bright when she bade Dick good-bye.

"If it was her, Dick," a sudden firmness in her young face, "she shall find no mercy in me."

"She can tie a honest-hearted girl like you up in hard knots, Babe. Let sleeping dogs lie like the pup you've smuggled in and hid under the bed."

"I will not be the daughter of a murderer, I will clear his name," she said.



“Ought to have begun earlier then,” he said, coolly, “Con’s been mining a good while and accidents happens uncommon easy, when there’s a cuss trying to do you out of a claim. Him and me was in Montany once, when you was a kid, and Con’s got a derved unpleasant habit of calling a bluff or of filling a draw, and though he never cheated—he’s a square feller—he was quick to see it in others, and to state his opinion with a gun; Lord, him and me was vigilantes once, reg’lar picnics of killing; and Injuns, if they counted. Of course the name’s got around, but you can change that, maybe, to Ballinger. Good stuff in that cub, Babe. Jest keep cool and after you’re married, if he ever twits you of your father, you up and give him a racket about his cousin, I’ll give you some astonishing facts about Mrs. Beach. Don’t look glum on me, I guess I know more’n you do about gitting married and fighting; hain’t you seen me and Em? Well a good road to you and fair traveling, say good-bye to the old man for me, wonder what sort of a country him and me will stake our next claim in. S’ long.”

Just a week from that evening Babe and I found ourselves in a Pullman car, nearing the quaint, old city of San Antonio. I am over tired of writing, my hand, unused to the pen, and stiff and old, but like the brook I could go on forever about Texas. That country of wide lands and clear skies, of boundless prairie and spring sunsh.in The home of the south wind, its languid air balmy and beautiful, but cleared now and then by a breath from the north that brings health and purity,

like our New England winters. In the Pan-handle alone, there is room for future generations, and, though I shall leave none after me, I am glad there is a home for other people's descendants. I fancied I would grow young again, in that land of perpetual summer, that in these December days had hardly a touch of the chill of winter. After all, eternal summer has always been in my heart. I will never grow old, I said, and join the groaning ones, I will keep all my hope and joy. I won't be a moss-killed oak, but a green and strong old tree. I will be a cheerful pilgrim on my progress, as all ought to be if they can.

I looked at Babe, who is rosier now, and acts a bit like her old self. "Is it not much better, my dear," I said, "to travel first-class?"

"But I feel like an adventuress, me with seventy-five dollars in the world and dependent on your kindness."

"Keep your best foot foremost, my dear. The world treats you by your looks. Ink the worn places on your black silk, metaphorically speaking, for you haven't one. Never patch. Some book said once a patch is premeditated poverty, a rip may be the accident of a moment. Here am I in my second best gown, on the shady side, that I procured by giving the porter a dollar, and everybody thinks I am well-to-do and treats me accordingly. In the common car the seats are not so comfortable, it's dusty and not clean. The cup is rusty, the water warm, the men spit tobacco juice on the floor and the women have famished and clamorous babies that, poor little souls, give one only an idea of the

repulsiveness of childhood, never its clean, white loveliness. I've quit going second-class. As they say in Erin, dern me, but I want the gilt-edge."

"Oh, you old sinner, if you were twenty years younger you'd be at Monaco bucking the tiger."

"Your language is not elegant, my dear, but I think I would. I shall go there when you are a respectable married woman. Goodness! what thoughts I used to think in meeting at Southport, of meanderings, and time went on and I only had my thoughts, but at last I could put them in action. Like Christopher Columbus, I am on a voyage of discovery, and shall never settle down again. I may be an old lunatic, but I'll have my fun. Land, I've a mind to get some red paint and what are those things, plumpers, and blonde my hair and start out on the war path. I tell you, Babe, I shan't never rest satisfied until I marry a Texas colonel. They are the only men I ever hankered after."

We both laughed then, for she knew what I meant. A certain Colonel Neil Latham, of Corpus Christi, had made our trip delightful. We got acquainted with him at the start, when he insisted on his giving up his lower berth to Babe the moment he found she had an upper one, and after that he was all attention. He helped us on and off the cars at eating stations, and explained the scenery all along the line and kept us fairly distressed with oranges and bananas and literature. He was not a young colonel at all, and had honestly won his title in the Confederate army. I think the prettiest sight on that whole trip was him and a Union

soldier talking ever old times and battles with perfect good will and courtesy.

“When the blatant noises in Congress and conventions and the ward bummers in the beer halls quit war talk, the late unpleasantness will be forgotten, my dear,” I said. “There is no animosity nor bitterness in the talk of those two gentlemen nor ever is in the reminiscences of soldiers of either side when they meet. I am terrible tired of men that want to make stepping stones to political honors of dead men’s names, of live men’s hearts.”

“It is pleasant to hear those two,” she whispered, watching them, leaning her pretty cheek on her hand, and then they told her stories of the war. One of the Colonel’s, about a cook he had and a banquet he gave where there was gopher soup, and fried, boiled, stewed, roast, only the flesh of that animal, all gotten up by an ignorant foreigner because the Colonel suggested he make the gopher the center of the feast.

“Why didn’t you gopher him?” said Babe, and I was ashamed of her, for the Colonel could not think a lady could joke, and regarded her with grave politeness as if she had made some serious suggestion.

I notice Texas gentlemen are not quick to see wit in ladies, they have a way of making us out angelic beings that must be hard on the female population to live up to. If the younger men have a way of taking one’s arm to aid one over most trivial difficulties as up-stairs and the like, and may be sit a bit nearer, I like it better than the frozen North and Boston. If I was a young girl and a handsome, dark-eyed son of the South squeezed

my hand a little more than I was used too, or grew tender and melancholy when we parted, I would never glare at him, I would think I might live in Boston a great many years before I could make an impression so easily. A man's admiration is always a compliment anyway; somehow I remembered that Jim Dunn's saying I'd a trim figure, and being more than ever careful of the set of my basques.

Speaking of Boston, reminds me of a day when I sauntered into an art gallery, where I saw a young lady with eye-glasses, sitting with her beau in front of a statue, not remarkable for its apparel, and calmly reading about it in a catalogue. I suppose every nation has its customs, but the sight of those two young creatures gave me a shock; I wasn't cultured, and I did quit that gallery some uncomfortable, thinking if any of the Southport folk knew I'd been there what they would say. Still, there's hope for Boston, now; all its government is in the hands of the sons of the soil, while the sons of first families are writing biographies and essays on civil service, and lots of little trash that keeps them out of mischief and don't do anybody any harm.

Our colonel is all of fifty-five; he has sandy hair and beard, thickly streaked with gray; his eyes are sort of hazel and have a weary expression, for the world has been cruel to that good man. His idolized wife and daughter have died in the last two years, and he has no one to care about him. I think he remembers his daughter when he looks at my dear girl, and she tries to

be very lady-like and nice, not to shock him. He calls her Miss Wilder, thinks her my niece and I tell her let it be so. There's lots of good citizens in this country that came out here with *nom de plumes*; I kind of wish I'd taken the name of a first family of somewhere, an Adams or a Biddle, something so I could have blood if I didn't have beauty.

We arrived in San Antonio very late at night, but our Colonel got us a carriage, and at the hotel had a good room secured for us and the best attention. In the morning, as we had time, he insisted on taking us driving. Oh, that quaint and beautiful city, where the San Antonio winds through street and lane, under rustic bridges, through tangled undergrowth, by meadows and quiet homes. It is crystal clear, with a soft, greenish tinge, and mirrors, on its quiet waters, many old-time scenes, rare in this day of progress—that hateful progress that means removing the ancient landmarks, against the Scripture and good taste. We passed through narrow streets, where the adobe houses crowded the very sky from showing. Here there were Mexican señoritas and odd musical language that sounds like poetry, but may mean just the old-time, “Come in out of the sun, Mary Ann,” or like domestic calls. We passed fine old manor houses hidden in the trees, or stately city homes, the fine cathedral of San Fernando, the Alamo, a great adobe building, its quaint chapel standing as it used, but stripped of all the associations of the past—a mere shell. I think the fort was used as a storage house or grocery warehouse, but, all the same,

the ghosts of Santa Anna's band are there, and the brave men who fought them so fiercely. Then we drove down the river to the other missions through a fertile country.

Some of the ruins were enough to show us the graceful outlines of those, I suppose they were meant to be, meeting houses, built in the early part of seventeen hundred, and I could not but think that those good fathers had a fine idea of location, for their land, within the sound of the Angelus, was the best around the country. Somehow the Catholics always got along well with the Indians, in a William Penn sort of way, but nowadays our government only blunders, and fire water and greed of settlers is quietly working out the problem of extermination, and nothing said to trouble anybody. We drove back and across the Plaza, they call it, a sort of square where there were market things and loads of mesquite drawn by lean oxen. Wood is queer in Texas; they have whole groves of trees that fool the tenderfoot, for they look like fine young orchards, but are only good for fuel, and the roots are burned at that. At night the Plaza is animated and gay; there are songs and dances, and the *senoritas* that we saw very dirty and lazy, smarten up and come here to sell *chili con carne*—I believe that is right—which is, in spite of its name, only a sort of pepper hash, the meat not nice, to my taste, and choking me. The Colonel told us all this, and got us some at a restaurant. We finished by a tour of the military post and a look at the fat, well-fed soldiers—such lazy creatures! I am glad there

are no more of them. I do think Europe would be better off, a good deal, if the standing armies had to work for a living.

The colonel put us aboard of our train, and, after saying he hoped he would see us soon, stood with his hat off while we were in sight.

“Bless the man,” I said, “did you ever see prettier manners? I have been reading of Southern gentlemen all my life, and there is the Simon-pure, only with the great heart this generous big State gives to all of its men.”

“You’ll never get out of Texas a single woman.” laughs Babe.

“Well, I don’t want to,” I answer.

Then we go on, jiggerty-jig, jiggerty-jig, and my thoughts go traveling with the train. We fly through silent woods, by endless fields, white with cotton in summer time, by plantation, and cabins, Uncle Toms everywhere, and mammals, fat and comfortable, and black babies, playing in the sun; past swamps, bayous, sluggish and slow, half hid in cypress shadows; past towns and hamlets, jiggerty-jig. Then on again, by great oaks, bearded with moss, that means malaria, but that looks beautiful, and, as I don’t live there, I don’t care how unhealthy they may be, and I think of old men in majestic bearded age. Then clank-erty-clank, and we cross a wooden bridge. I look in some terror at the length of it and the waves soughing against the piles, but Babe laughs, and says the water is only two or three feet deep, that we are



on the coast now, and a county road is actually laid out under the sea. We go out on the platform, the salt air blowing in our faces and my eyes fill with homesick tears, for, far ahead, lies the blue and sparkling sea, lit by a pale, young moon, and saying to me those old, old words, I loved in my youth: "Life is like the sea, men go as the waves go, and beyond that far blue line is joy eternal." Aye, it said all that to me in my childhood, and I thought some day I might sail away into the enchanted world, beyond the far horizon, but that was never to be.

We reach a stretch of sand, and the train stops at a little station. Corpus Christi, the porter says, and we send our baggage to the hotel, that is far off, where the glimmering lights shine across the distance. Then, sent by the porter, we set out for Mrs. Jones' cottage, following Dick's directions. We come to a long beach, where a gentle surf breaks, and whispers, and comes and goes forever, and has for so many endless years. Far ahead we see the glimmer of a light that shines a bright pathway on the sea. It has a friendly look, and the cottage, quaint and small, is set close by the shore on a little bluff. At the door are two bushes that make me think of the lilacs in Southport, and the shells bordering the walk bring me back to my own home, where I was born and lived my young life. The sound of the waves follows us, and the wind sighs and the light flickers on the sea, but the voices I have always heard tell me we are not too late.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

CLARA AND CON.

At the click of the gate the door of the house opened suddenly, and a slight, graceful woman stepped out in the path. It was Mrs. Beach, sadly altered, grown pale and worn, with circles under her bright eyes, and a strange nervousness in her manner. She quickly closed the door, and then pulled Babe away from the house.

“Come out on the beach,” she said, with trembling lips. “Oh, I beg you listen to me. He must be prepared. I only knew to-day you were coming.”

“I must see my father at once,” said Babe, stubbornly.

“Oh, have pity! Babe,” pleaded Mrs. Beach, “come away from the house, don’t awaken him, he just fell asleep after such dreadful pain. Spare him further suffering if you can.”

We went with her a little distance from the house, and she, much easier in her manner, asked how we knew where they were, and all about the doings after the murder was discovered. She seemed to know so much, I had a shrewd suspicion she had been tampering with the law or its officers, and felt pretty safe in her hiding place. I saw that she was terribly nervous, catching two or three times before she could gather up the trail of her wrapper, a soft crimson, but lace and

all much worn and soiled. In fact, she looked as if she no longer cared to be "fixed up," as we say in Southport. She pushed back the heavy hair from her face, holding both hands behind her head as if she were utterly weary. We went on where a log lay half buried in the sand, and here she sat down.

"I'm worn out," she sighed, "night and day, since we came, I have waited upon him, watching over him every moment, sleeping little, eating nothing. I seem to be a woman now, if I never was before. I don't know, Wilder, but I might have been good, and this would never have happened, had I been given a chance. I tried to act right at first, but my husband stifled all the goodness in me. He cared nothing for caresses, and those little acts of affection women like, and I had been starved for love all my life. He denied every wish of mine, I had no horse to ride, no young company, no pleasure at all, no society but his. I was buried in that dreary place, shut into a round of duties and days that never changed. I felt I should go mad from the monotony. Were there not domestic, mindless women for him, why should fate have thrust such a life upon me? The wife he fancied I was would have been a dead woman or an idiot. One day, smarting under the humiliations that man put upon me, beating my helpless wings against the cage he made for me, I met Con, and then my life changed. Look upon me as you will, Babe, your father meant to drag me down, and, God knows, I was easy to lead. I loved him from the first, and for years our friendship was—was not wicked. I

was closely watched by my husband, for my mother had warned him I might rebel at first. So time went on, and I studied my part carefully, and I got letter perfect. I made a fool of that man who read other people so well. He could find no flaw in me, and by degrees his watch relaxed.

Nights, when I played my piano—it was not for him, sleeping stolidly through Mendelssohn and Mozart, but for my lover outside. Oh, the moon-lit walks we took; the daring journeys up those lonely mountains where a misstep might bring us the death we reckless souls feared not if we could die together. The joy of a companionship with a bright man who allowed me intellect; who liked to talk to me; who found in me a friend and fellow traveler, as daring as he was, asking his aid only at times when climbing was beyond any woman's strength. At first he strove for baseness and revenge, to win me from Beach, but afterwards he loved me. Have pity on me, you two, for, at the last, when the world is free to Con, to me who love him so, he is to be taken from me.

“You know, Wilder,” piteously, “how beautiful he is, perfect as man I ever dreamed of, do we not all love beauty? Did he not sway you by it, you who wanted to hate him? Then think of me, I loved him, and he ah, God, he did love me. I could die in prison as calmly as I lived with that dead man, for when the breath leaves Con's body my heart dies. Babe, you are his child, you have his eyes, a sort of nameless likeness to him that used to make me mad with jealousy because

you were his child. You made me think there was another woman in his life, a memory only, but just as hateful to me. But he loves me, never cared for your dead mother, and I can see you now without anger. You are young, you love too, can you stand there and condemn me? Can any woman with a heart in her bosom? Be gentle and pitiful to me, for he, my love, my only love, is dying."

Babe went to her then and put her arm around that bowed figure and laid the weary head on her breast.

"I can pity and forgive," she said, oh, how tenderly, "I have been cruel, perhaps, I do not know how sorely you were tempted. But why did my father act the coward, was that poor man's life necessary for your happiness."

"Oh, in pity hush," cried Clara, raising her tear-wet face, "do not drive me mad. Con did not kill Beach, I swear it on my soul. He would not have stooped to that, he was brave and hated our deceit, begging me always to go away. He is innocent and he does not even know my husband is dead."

"If that is so, I can hold up my head again," said Babe, earnestly, "oh, the shame and sorrow I have endured!"

"I brought you here to warn you not to tell him," went on Clara, sadly. "Oh, my love, so soon to be torn from my care, denied the life that beggars fling away, that suicides hold so idle. Denied the right to live when we can be happy. Think well of me, do not know by some strange sense in your dying hours the

truth I have kept from you. If you should turn from me then, I would die, too, in agony. They say," with a jarring laugh, "that the wages of sin is death," he repeats it, and so it seems with us, but I can only see my evil fate that mocks me now as it ever has."

Babe lifted her gently and they went together to the house, my dear girl murmuring comforting words of forgiveness and pity. We are sinners all, and who shall judge those who do what we may think to do, or who fall as we may never fall because we are never tempted. In what world, thought I, will those two enemies meet, can any heaven ever hold them both, or if both be barred from that, any place of punishment? For my part I carry some old animosities to my grave with me and I don't want to give them up afterwards.

"Come, dear," said Babe, waiting at the gate for me, and then we went softly into the kitchen where a gloomy-faced, old, negro woman, much blacker than her son, got us some tea. Jones looking shabby and seedy waited on us.

"H'm," I says, "if it ain't in a good cause, you're a faithful fellow any way."

"Mis' Beach allus good to me," he answered, seeming pleased, "I done stay by her."

"Those is wicked days," groaned the old woman, whose gloomy face looked like that of a prophetess and foreteller of evil, and yet I think she must have been a light-minded young colored girl in her day and certainly her son was a mighty gentlemanly fellow. "De Lawd ain't gwine to furgive ye, Lewis, yo' done trifling with

Satan. De Lawd ain't got no use fur them that helps the evil one." She rocked to and fro, and I thought her a fitting servitor to Con Murphy in his last hours on earth, for she seemed sincere repentance for a light-minded youth.

"He is awake now," said Clara, softly, and we crossed the little hall to a bedroom facing the bay, where the salt air would fan the cheek of the sick man, the spray when the wind blew, tapping softly on the window pane, where he might lie and hear the voices calling, as little Paul heard, calling to drift with them to oblivion and death. To die as a wave dies, swept back into the mighty ocean of eternity. Oh, it is easy to lie on one's death-bed by the sea, dying is pleasant, or if that be denied me, I would like to lie in the shade of those mighty tree monarchs in the Yosemite; by their 3,000 years my little personality is nothing—the passing of a summer zephyr.

I looked at him sadly, that handsome, powerful man, brought so low and helpless. His beautiful eyes were more like Babe's now, for their mocking light had faded forever. He was white and thin, wasted to a shadow of himself, but retaining his wonderful comeliness and the winning smile, that I saw last on his dead lips, and marveled that fate could be kind to him at the end and make his death so peaceful.

"These are the wages," he said to Babe, and smiled, but I saw something glisten in his eyes and his lips trembled. He put out his hand and she knelt beside him.

“My father! my father!” she repeated, softly.

“I played a trick on Clara, she watches me sharp, but I was not so weak I’d lost my old skill at decavin’. I wanted to see my big, handsome girl before I quit the game. A bad father I’ve been, but never a time there wasn’t in my heart a liking for you.”

“I loved and hated you,” she sobbed, “my dear, dear dad.”

“That sounds like old times, when we were pards, before you got above timber-line and I went into the valley.” He smoothed her hair softly, then looked across to me. “Well, I declare, there you are, old Wilder, not a hair of those curls awry. You’ve been the salvation of Babe. Saint Ann in the wilderness.” He pressed my hand, looking at me quizzically.

“We dragged you into our deviltries,” he went on, “now you are lending your New England conscience and countenance to an elopement, and one of the parties a married woman. Fie, fie, and is the old man bearing it well? Damn it, I can’t but pity him.”

“He is very calm,” I said, thinking with a horrible mirth how calm he was, “I fancy he will not trouble much,” and as Clara gave me an imploring look, “he never was one to give in beat.”

“You are a fair, old maid, if there ever was one, and I know you pity Clara and me, for you’ve got a man’s soul in that small body. A heart as big as a Colorado mountain, that’s pretty steep, but I never knew a woman like you. You are as a cup of cold water to a thirsty soul. Keep with my girl, and keep her good till



her lover comes, as he will, Babe. Women like you are not so many in this world that he can let you go. Lying here, looking out on the sea, I fall to thinking of my life, and the ghosts of what I might have done come trooping forth, and the one that haunts me most is that of a little, neglected child that I might have loved and cared for. I think of your dead mother, and of the day I struck you; she never had to say that I was cruel to her, she died loving me, and then I was only a boy too, but you, a part of her life and mine. Oh Babe, forgive that blow, it is written on my soul."

"I tried you, dear," she murmured, "I told Ann then we would never, never remember it. It is forgotten."

"I like to think, Babe, you came out all right, that your soul is pure and white, that your ruined life is not on my heart now, as I have Clara's and the dread of her future."

She was standing at the foot of the bed, seeming shut out by us for the moment. "There will be no future, Con, and we have been happy. Could I ever sully your memory? We have been wicked, our love was a sin, but it was true love, and will be so through all eternity."

"For both," he smiled. "Now Babe, say you forgive your unworthy father, lay your soft cheek close to mine, say as you used to when you were a long-legged, spider of a child, 'Dad let's make up and be everlasting friends.' Everlasting now; your bitterness to me must end at my grave."

“I have never ceased to love you, father,” she sobbed, and put her arm around his neck. Then Clara and I went away and left them to make their peace alone. The negro woman who had taken a great liking to Babe, came to tell me our room was ready; while she spoke, Babe, looking pale and red-eyed, came swiftly out, and went away by herself to cry.

“Can’t I sit up with you?” I asked, looking into the sick room, “and save your——” Good gracious, I nearly said wife!

“I know what you were going to say,” he laughed, bitterly.

“Well,” I said, severely, “I wish she could have been such, all fair and honest in the sight of God.”

“All fair and honest in the sight of God,” he repeated, as if my poor words were ringing in his heart, “Ah, if it could. Won’t you rest, Clara.”

“I have not left you yet,” she cried, miserably, “Con, could you sleep without me?”

He fastened his brilliant eyes on her face, looking at her with that tender smile, “Not in my grave, my love, not even in my grave if you forget me. Do you remember long ago I read you once,

‘My heart would hear her and beat,  
Were it earth in an earthy bed ;  
My dust would hear her and beat,  
Had I lain for a century dead.’

“Only a few hours of life, my love, of happiness together. Come close and talk to me, let us two sinners be together to the end.”

As Clara went to him, my eyes, blinded with tears, could no longer look on them and condemn. Sadly confused, pitying that poor, wronged husband, pitying them, a straw blown by every wind, I went softly away and left them, wondering if, in this case because she loved much she could be forgiven. Not by this world, but by a better. And yet it was all wrong, bitterly, wofully wrong.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE DEATH OF CON.

“I never,” said that old colored woman, “sets here o’ nights a listening to the waves, but what I prays fur him. De good Lawd, furgive his wicked ways and be mussiful to a poo’, misruble sinner.”

“I shall pray that, too,” I said, “and it is not for long, the signs of death are in his face. If this were Southport I should think he would go out with the tide. I never knew a soul to go when the flood was coming in, though they say in Boston the idea ain’t so, but, dear me, after all, I think culture is proving everybody but yourself wrong.”

“Folks thinks thater way here, ma’am, it’s a seafaring place, there’s big schooners down by the wharves in de town, and deep water beyond the bar outside. Ay, there’s terrible waves comes here sometime, a raisin’ of the sea so slow you cayen’t see it, but de fust you know the waves is over eberyting.”

“I hope it may be the prayers of us two honest, old women will help his journey, Drinda, I think they call you. La me, a strong man withers away like a flower, and lies low when his strength fails, then on that last narrow bed, a bad life comes to haunt and make miserable the few hours left.”

“An’ him talkin’ that we done skel’tons,” said the old woman with shrill anger, “ay, he say to me, ‘Drinda,

strip off yo' bones, no one tell yo' bones is dem of a church member's, or jist a wicked woman. Der ain't room in Hebben fur all dem that's died, nohow, or de bad place neither, deys moren de waves in de sea, an' the leaves in the forest, de Lawd done furgit all 'bout you.' Oh, Miss, dem ain't no salvation thoughts, dem's dreful trifling ways."

Clara, looking ghastly and frightened, came into my room at sunrise. "He is asleep," she said, hoarsely, "I sent Jones for the doctor; oh, I am afraid, Miss Wilder, there is a change in his face, for Heaven's sake come."

Babe and I rose and dressed and went softly into the sick room. Over the wide, blue water, glinted the morning light, and every wave dimpled and sparkled; far off sounded the crowing of a cock, the bark of a dog and the rippling laughter of a child. The world seemed more alive with brightness and color now that death was so near. And yet I wonder, be it ever so fair a morning, if, when our time comes, we shall not be ready and willing to go. Jones came hurrying across the sand followed by a short, stout man, who went in to the sick room without ceremony.

"Madam, I can do nothing here," he said to Clara, "why did not you send for me before? He is dying."

"He would not have a physician," she stammered, "he has been ill a long time. I—I thought you might make his last hours easier."

"I doubt it," answered the little man, briskly. He felt the flickering pulse, listened to the faint throbs of

the heart. "He will pass away quietly in his sleep, ma'am."

"And never know me again?" she cried, wildly.

"Would you try to awaken him and bring him back to pain? I doubt even if you could. Let the end be peaceful and happy in sleep."

"Only stay," she sobbed, "keep him a little longer; is there no drug that will—can money pay you to make him see me once more—to speak to me? Oh, think his voice must die and through all my life I shall never—never hear it again. For God's sake, have pity on me!"

"You will be ill yourself, madam, here, drink this brandy, now if you can not control yourself you must leave the room."

"Ah, I will be very still," she moaned, and knelt by the bed, laying her hand on that quiet one."

"Had you looked on death as I have," the Doctor went on, not unkindly, "you would think as I do, it is only a passing, the flicker of a light, a happy release from suffering. Have you ever lost a loved child, and after all its weariness and pain have said, 'it is best, I would not call it back?'"

"I never had a child," she said. "I never saw death before; and to him, to me, there is no future, we lived only in this life. Oh, my love, my love, open your dear eyes once more, just to look—one look. Oh, fate can not be so bitter, so unjust."

"Have mercy on him?" said the Doctor, solemnly, "and do not bring him back."

She grew quiet then, and the clock seemed to tick

louder and more cheerily than ever one did before. The soft splash of the sea against the sand chimed with the solemn moment. I heard the old woman sobbing, Jones whispering to her, the creaking of the Doctor's shoes. The moments were passing, and time to him would soon be no more; of all the wasted hours of his life there was not now a second given him to say fare-well.

Suddenly into his pallid face there came the change, the awful seal of death. His drawn muscles relaxed, the lines of pain smoothed away and a smile came upon his lips. There was a sigh, "a sound so fine there's naught that lives 'twixt it and silence," the passing of a human soul. Then the peace that is beyond our understanding came to him.

And thus he died, that man of a black, sad past, as quietly and peacefully as an innocent child drifting into dreamland. Since that time the mystery called death has been to me more marvelous, more beautiful than I ever imagined it could be.

"It is the end," whispered the Doctor, laying his hand on Clara's bowed head. It seemed that soul, already far on its way, must have heard her cry of agony and lingered in sad sympathy, and gone on, forced by invincible power, but unwillingly. The Doctor and my dear girl carried Clara to her bed where for two days she lay in a stupor. But when I went to her the third morning to tell her he must be buried that day, and did she wished to see him once more, she got up with strange strength and went about the duties

forced on her, with calmness and care. She stood by his grave and watched the clods fall when his daughter had gone sobbing away. She closed the coffin herself allowing no one to see him after that. I saw there at his grave her old manner had come back, she had that impassive look, that cold indifference she had worn when I saw her first. So we went away and left him lying in that far land, in that hillside burying ground by captains and sailors, Indians and Mexicans with their musical Spanish names, side by side with that strange company under the scattered grass, unshaded by any generous trees or shrubs, in that dreary, sandy land by the sea.

A fortnight after the funeral Clara came to me to ask about Mr. Beach's will. Babe was out on the beach that morning, she had a great liking for the sea, and she and her dog could always be found close by the shore, she lying looking at the blue distance with that wistful look, so often on her dear face since he went away. As for me, I liked the town better, its quaint streets paved by nature's hand with sea shells ground to powder, its homey houses hidden in trees, its generous folks, its views of blue water and the balmy air that always whispered of Paradise.

I told Clara, sitting there in the room where Con died, all about the trouble at Erin and the feeling against him. "It does not hurt the dead," she said, rebelliously, looking so white and worn, so utterly miserable, that from my heart I pitied her.

"It hurts the living, Clara." I could not call her



Mrs. Beach. "Babe will never marry your cousin while the world says her father is a cowardly murderer.

"His mother would never consent, anyway."

"H'm," I says, a man of twenty-six has outgrown apron strings, I hope. Your marriage was made by some heartless old creature, and how has it turned out?"

"You are partly right, but much of the blame must be laid on me, I married to get rid of an unhappy home, so there is no excuse for me. Tom's mother is a kinder woman than mine, but is soured by trouble. I would rather face the yellow fever or that dead husband come to life, than to meet my mother now, yet a mother heart should have some mercy. She will be my cruellest judge, the Lord preserve any erring women from ever having to be judged by women, good, narrow-minded women, of shut-in-lives and homely faces.

"Men are easily won over to a woman's cause if she is fair to look upon, Clara, and on that account it would be perfectly safe for you to go to Erin and clear up that mystery about Beach's death." She gave me a murderous look, and I know by her black eyes her temper is something awful, but I am not afraid of women, so, though I trembled some, I went sturdily on: "If you loved Con Murphy, you would not let those people say he was a coward and an assassin; then Babe has treated you nobly, why should you repay her by letting that crime be put upon her father. Prove Con Murphy's innocence."

"How?" in a queer, constrained voice.

I went into the other room and fetched back something done up in paper. "By telling the story of the murder as you know it, as Dick Daggett (like all women I was eager to drag in a man to back me up) says you know, and soon the whole town will find out. By explaining how this glove came stained with powder and blood, Clara, for no other woman I ever knew but you would have vanity enough to put on gloves and other foolishness when she was eloping and like to get killed any moment."

"You are trying hard to make a dangerous enemy, Wilder."

"Maybe, but I come of good fighting stock myself, my men relations that existed before I did, were mostly drowned fighting, as sailors fight the sea, or on battle fields, beginning with the Revolution; they wasn't given to dying in their beds. My brother Nathan was the meekest of the lot, and I suppose he had skirmishes with his landlady, to judge from that person's letters, that was as near war as a man could get in times of peace. I have a suspicion, my lady, that you went back for your jewels and was caught by Beach, and that Jones knows more than he will tell, unless he's made to."

"He won't be made to."

"Let poverty pinch him a little and see."

"I shall be rich, the Colorado law gives me half the property."

"You will have to spend most of it in hush money and be eternally dogged by the men you paid not to find you here. You used to brag how brave you were, and

yet, loving that dead man out on the hill as you do, you let the world cry him down and heap disgrace on his name."

"What would you have me do?"

I laid my hand on her knee and looked straight in her eyes: "Go tell the district attorney that Beach's death was an accident, ask for a trial, take Jones with you, and tell the whole story. Hooper whispered to me, Beach was shot in a scuffle, and he said the person who fired the pistol never meant to kill."

"Let's go out on the sands," she said, abruptly. So we went along by the sea to an old log, a gnarled tree-trunk that had floated from some far Pacific isle, hoary with age and decay before some storm crashed it down, and some swollen river whirled it along its swift current to the sea, there to float how many, many years before it found a resting place in this far land. I wasn't given to poetry, but that log suggested queer thoughts.

"Jones told me that night," said Mrs. Beach, sitting down and drawing her black shawl around her. "In horrible fear I got together all my things that I wanted to take, sent him to tell Con, and then ran out of the house before Beach came. Outside, hiding in the trees, I kept thinking of things I ought to have taken. I had my diamond earrings, but my bracelets and pin and fifty dollars in money were in my safe. I knew Con was always hard up and that we should need all the money we could find and jewels we could sell. I saw the doctor and Beach come, watched you and Babe, and at last saw the doctor go away with you. I thought

Beach must be in his room, possibly given some opiate, so I told Jones to follow me, and we climbed up the porch to my room. I opened the long, French window noiselessly, and crept across the room. I never lived through such fear as when I crossed the floor in the darkness, thinking that man might be crouching to spring on me, yet you say I am not brave. When I lit the gas I stumbled over a chair, and the slight sound seemed to stop the beating of my heart. No one came, and I went over to the safe, opened it with the key I always carried in my pocket, and took my jewels, wrapping them in a handkerchief, putting them in the bosom of my gown. There was a red pocket-book in the safe, and I took it to see if it held money or anything I could use. It was full of bills, and though I felt mean and hateful at stealing, I felt it was the last I would ever get from my husband, and I had given him five years of my life. I don't think I ever was honest any way. I stuffed this money into my dress and got up on my feet with a kind of elation that I had been so successful. Oh, my God! the horror of that moment, the door was slowly opening behind me, shutting me into the jog beside the safe. Like a person in a nightmare, I could not cry out, my lips made no sound. Into my heart dawned a faint hope he would look in, and, not seeing any one, go away; but he had heard the noise and knew I was there. He closed the door and looked at me with those glassy eyes, one hand tearing at his bleeding throat, the other holding a pistol. His gray hair was all disordered, his coat dusty, covered with twigs and leaves where he had

fallen, for I think he must have gone out around the grounds to hunt for Con or me. I don't think I cared after the first shock, I wanted to die and end those awful moments that I stood there."

" 'I've been out to see him,' he mumbled, his mouth working, that awful hand clutching. 'You were robbing my safe for him.'

" 'I took what I am entitled to; you robbed him enough, years ago.'

" 'I could not find him,' he said, irritably, and then I knew that my husband was insane, and I was face to face with a madman. 'There seemed to be people, a great many, following me about, but not him. Strange! strange!' He stopped and looked at my clothing scattered about, noted I had my cloak and hat on, then he stepped toward me. 'You are going with him?' He reached out and caught my shoulder, and I could not scream nor move. Then, there was a sound, I know now it was Jones, creeping away in the darkness, leaving me to my fate, but, in my agony, I thought it was Con, coming to save me.

" 'He is there now,' yelled the madman, and leaped forward, and I, given a strength I never dreamed, made desperate by my love, held his arm that clutched the pistol, and clung to him. I tell you, I was blind; I saw nothing, I heard nothing; only in some horrible way I thought I must cling to him, and stop what he meant to do. He beat me away from him, but I came back and renewed my hold. My hands were gloved, and I could not retain my grasp. Then I fell, and caught his knees,

holding him from moving. I raised myself, and reached for the pistol. At last I had it, if it was to kill me, I did not care. There was an awful crash, seeming in my very face, a blinding flash, and I felt myself freed, while he fell heavily down by my side. Jones ran in, he had seen the struggle, and carried me out, and I tell you I did not know Beach was dead until I saw it in the paper.

“Soon after that, when I lay on the ground, and Jones bathed my bleeding face, Con whistled, and we went to meet him. He asked us if we heard a shot, and we denied it, and he cried, fiercely: ‘I hear shots everywhere, I must be going mad. I never felt I had a conscience before, to make me a coward.’ He wondered afterward what made me so bruised, but I said I fell from the porch, and Jones swore I did. That is my story, Wilder. I lived through that and Con’s death, and must finish my allotted time, for I am too guilty a soul to commit suicide.”

“Then give your years to others,” I said, “have you not lived for self long enough, and have you not been punished? Your first step to better things will be to set this matter right. You owe something to my dear girl, surely she has been noble and good to you.”

She did not reply, but went on by herself to the graveyard, and did not return until midnight. Jones said, he often saw her there, lying on Con’s grave late at night, at a time when I, with all my good, common sense, would not dare invade that place, nor walk among those graves with their strange occupants.

Early in the morning she came into our room, and woke me up. I saw she was dressed for traveling, and had a set, determined look.

“I am going to Erin, Wilder,” she said, pitifully, “don’t get up, Mrs. Jones has my breakfast ready, and I would rather be alone. I shall take Lewis, and set matters right, even if it goes hard with me. I don’t fancy I shall ever see you two again. You don’t like me, Babe, but I am doing this for your sake and his, my dear love’s. You were his child, and have a likeness to him that softens me now, and he, that bonny face hid away forever, and you, and the rest left above ground, and you a link with him. You are his child and I love him in you. Show me some kindness, for I am giving myself up to justice for your sake.”

“For the love you bore my father,” said Babe, sitting up and drawing Clara to her, “oh, Clara, if it could have been right and honest, if it had not been a sin, if you were not married, and what you did ruined that poor man’s life, I could have loved you.”

She laid her cheek against Babe’s with one of her rare caresses that I never saw her show to any one but Con. “My poor husband trusted me and that was against your sense of fairness, Babe, but life has been kinder to you than to me, for all your trials in the past. Tom will be good to you, he is faithful and generous, some day you two will meet again, the happier for the parting, and your life will run in pleasant paths, and all you know of me will make you gentler and more tender to the girl baby that may lay in you arms some day.

You look at me with his dear eyes—those wide, gray eyes, and almost I seem to see his old expression, as if he spoke to me through you. Oh, Babe, Babe, those dear eyes shut forever and me—me left here to bear all the woe and loneliness. Not even the happiness of being where he lies. Never until I come in my coffin shall I enter this far country where he left me. Good-bye.”

She pressed my hand, kissed Babe softly, on my dear girl’s tear-wet eyes, and then went away. I saw her slight, black figure cross the sands to the graveyard, and then I saw her no more, nor ever will while we walk along this world that has so many far lands where broken hearts may hide.

The last of January she sent us a slip cut from a newspaper, telling about her trial and acquittal. There was a mention of Con Murphy, too, in a kindly spirit. “The discoverer of the Maid of Erin mine, the daring spirit whose energy and courage had opened many a region in the mountains considered inaccessible, who enriched others, failing himself by some strange irony of fortune to gather the fruit of his discoveries. In time,” ran the article, “he will only be remembered for his nobler qualities, that, had he willed, would have given him an honored name in the State, and positions of trust and esteem that he, with his education and brilliancy, was qualified to fill.”

“I am going to Europe,” Clara wrote, “I shall never return to America. I take Lewis with me and my mother also. Miracle of miracles, my mother met me in Erin, looking old and ill, very shabby, too, poor soul,



but forgiving and kind. She blamed herself, and has not rebuked me once nor mentioned that sad act of mine, that now I see more clearly, and that strikes me to the heart for the ruin I have wrought. I shall take care of her and keep her with me, so you see this pilgrim has his burden, a dreary, gloomy, old woman. The only Delectable mountain for me in this world is a mound in that seaport town where some day I shall lie. You have known one woman who gave all and lost all for love.

“I did my best for Babe, but she played me false, there is no truth in any woman but you, Wilder, you old Bohemian, with your New England conscience, Con used to joke about. My poor, poor Con, how merry he was, and how he hated shams and deceit, and how hard I tried to keep him in Erin when he would have dragged me away, long, long ago. We two, Con and I, take all the punishment; Beach, in his grave, is praised as a good man, and a public-spirited citizen, and the other things they say, and no one remembers he robbed poor Con; and Babe will marry Tom and be happy on her ill-gotten gains, and you, too, but, after all, Wilder, you have a good heart. I take off my hat to your unobtrusive excellence, as Con used to say, taking his sombrero off behind your back; then we would laugh; and I did laugh once, but like the king, I shall never smile again. You told me once an avalanche would come, has it not? and I bereft of all I loved, come creeping up, after it has passed, crying with bitter anguish, why had it not taken me into oblivion too. Farewell you prophet and thing of evil. CLARA.”

I thought of her sweet, low laugh of that night she said, "you wicked Con," and how far away it all was, and how short had been her happiness in wrong doing.

"What have I done," cried Babe, "and where are our ill-gotten gains?"

"Our property is about the same as we set out with, my dear," I answered, "let us not worry our heads. That poor soul is most crazed, belike, with her grief. It's going back to the scene of a crime that tells on one, and she has been dreadfully tried."

Thus after that we spoke of her with pity and forgiveness and prayed some day her weary heart might find peace and comfort in well-doing and charity, and that she would forget herself and live for others. That is the only sincere repentance in this world.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE COLONEL EXPECTS COMPANY.

And now my dear girl and I saw many peaceful and happy days, we decided to spend the winter in Corpus Christi, for the weather was so fine there, and traveling expensive, besides Mrs. Jones let us the cottage very cheap. She stayed to cook for us, liked Babe mightily, and, barring a gloomy turn of mind, was a good, old soul. Babe went to church with her once in a while, helped her about the work, and was so bright and lively, Drinda was never tired of singing her praises. To help our limited income, I took in sewing, being always handy with my needle, and Babe helped me, running the machine all day, and resting up at night with a walk on the beach. Everybody called her Miss Wilder, too, and I thought it much better, and, dear me, how nice it was to be independent, and to live among good folks, out of the path of avalanches. We seldom saw a newspaper, but read good books and felt like two old, storm-tossed mariners, in a sheltered, winter harbor. We went to the graveyard, once in a while, and talked of Murphy, kindly and pityingly, remembering the good in him, never the evil, as should be done to dead folks, that are not here to defend themselves. We got acquainted some in the town, and went to a few church

sociables, and such village happenings, but not very often. A pleasant surprise in April, was our kind Colonel walking in one day, very glad to see us, and eager to make our life more pleasant.

After that we often visited the big house on the hill; such a beautiful place, standing on a high bluff looking seaward, and all bowered in roses and jessamine, and shaded by fine trees. There was a shadow over the house, two portraits on the wall, a mother's and a daughter's, and they were both such fair, sweet faces, I could understand the Colonel's long mourning, that would last to his grave. I thought it hurt him when he begged Babe to open the piano and play, but after awhile she did, picking up the music she had been taught at the convent, and playing simple pieces with much taste and feeling. We indulged in a game of poker now and then with the Colonel and a burly captain, stranded on the coast, and though we did not play for money, the game was jolly enough, and I found myself quite proficient. When the Colonel got sick, Babe went up and took care of him and read to him the slow days of his convalescence. I wondered, sometimes, if he would fall in love with her, I would get angry at the very idea, but you see I did not know a Texas colonel.

In May, when all that great State is carpeted with flowers, is gorgeous, like the kings of old, in scarlet and purple and gold, I felt again I was in Paradise. Life awoke in the tropic forests, the streams were deep and rapid, the birds sang in the thick foliage, over wide

fields crept the tiny cotton plants or the rich meadow grass, and cattle, sleek and fat, with silky coats, roamed on a thousand plains. The whole air was full of sunshine and laughter of birds, and the joy of living things, human or insect, or beasts. And, speaking of beasts, I came very near calling our Colonel one, in my viperous way, when he asked me if I thought Miss Diana would live single always, and did I not fear to lose her? I thought he was going to ask me if she would have him, and at the idea, my soul revolted; no more ill-assorted unions in my life.

“She is engaged to a young man,” I said, stiffly, “thinks the world of him, and will marry him when their circumstances warrant.”

“Indeed,” he muttered, “I wish I had known that, I am very sorry.”

He never mentioned the subject again, but I saw he looked at her with a new and tender interest in his kind eyes, and was probably planning how he could help her to her happiness.

One night, after a walk across the sands, we went on up to the Colonel's house, he was sitting on the porch, but the house was all lit up and had a holiday air. I surmised, at the start, he was expecting company, and was sure of it, when I saw through one of the windows, the dinner table laid for two.

“You are expecting company, Colonel Latham,” I said, “and, as we only ran up for a moment, Babe, to get that book you were speaking of, I think we must be going.”

“Not for the world, Miss Wilder,” he said, in great distress, “I wanted you to meet my young friend, and Miss Diana, here”—standing at her side and looking very kindly on her—“I wanted her, especially, to meet my guest. Like most silly, old men, I am a sort of match-maker. I had a plan about her, which you, Miss Wilder, dispelled.”

“What did she tell you?” asked Babe, blushing prettily. “Something to make you think less of me, Colonel?”

“To think more of you, my dear, and to hope most earnestly your little romance will end happily. You must tell me all about it some day, and, perhaps, I can aid the young man; I would be so glad to.”

He went and picked her a handful of cape jessamine, and handed it to her with stately courtesy, watching, while she pinned them on the breast of her white gown, with pleased admiration. I looked at her a moment, understanding well why any man’s gaze should rest on her. She appears her best in white gowns, made with severe classic folds; she has filled out a bit, too, and grown more womanly, has less angles. Her wide, gray eyes still look wistful and waiting, but that sort of pathetic expression gives a wondrous charm to her sweet face. She is very rosy now, and the dimple in her left cheek is quite apparent, and she always had the most kissable mouth I ever saw on a woman. Am I a silly, old creature to rave over her? I don’t know. I never had any beauty, nor saw much beyond that fragile, delicate bloom of youth, so fair in our young

girls at home, but so quick to fade. With Babe, her beauty grows each year; if she had homely features I would still adore her for the beauty of the soul in her eyes, and the sweetness of her disposition and her noble patience. You are worthy my life's devotion, my dear, and it is my happiest remembrance that in my poor way I made your life better and more rounded, and helped you to your high pedestal of noble womanhood.

"The carriage went an hour ago," said the Colonel, peering down the street, "but sometimes the train is very late. Ha, there are the wheels!"

"We will only be introduced, then run away," said Babe, coming out with the book, leaving the hall door open behind her, and standing there in the light, looking like a beautiful spirit. The Colonel went down and opened the carriage door. "Ah, Thomas," I heard him say, but his guest made one leap out of the carriage, passed him without a word, and ran up the steps, two at a time.

"My darling, my darling," he cried, in his eager voice, the dear, impetuous boy, hugging her as if it had been years instead of months, since he saw her last, and forgetting we were looking, or that any body lived in this world but the woman he loved and he, who had found her.

"I knew you would come," she sobbed, with one of those passionate gusts of tears.

"Drive to the barn," commanded the Colonel, sternly, much upset because the coachman, a white-

headed old darky, was looking at the scene with intense enjoyment. "Ponce, I am surprised at you. I infer, Miss Wilder," he said, joining me and rubbing his hands excitedly, "that Thomas knows our young lady?"

I giggled rudely. "I should hope so, Colonel, that would be a singular way of meeting her if he didn't. Why, he is the one."

"Is it possible, possible?" rubbing his forehead in a dazed way. "Why, I had him come here to meet her; that was the match I hoped for, and after I had sent for him I learned from you that she was engaged. It was too late to undo what I had done, but never did I imagine what a meeting it would be, and that I could give my dear, young lady such happiness as this. Ah, youth is the time for love, is it not?"

"Yes," I answered, sadly, for once in a while a ghost comes from the fishing banks of Newfoundland, a jolly, curly-haired ghost that used to call me Nan, and tell me I was the only girl he could ever love, and make me feel I was somebody, as a lover will. I wonder if I would have been happy married to him, if I would have been a good wife, a loving mother? Perhaps not, and it is best my romance is only a faint memory, but still, I feel I have been cheated out of something. And here I ramble on, a faded, old maid, with corkscrew curls, and the waves have been rolling over Captain McCrate these thirty years and more. I saw the Colonel go into the parlor with his stiff, soldierly walk, and stand there beneath a portrait, the light falling on his



bowed head and melancholy face with the weary eyes.

I thought there is nothing in this world so beautiful as the love of true husband and true wife. I had seen, and was sadly grieved at that other sinful love. I wanted the pure spring of affection, no more dark streams of vice. In this world we must live up to something better than our human lives, and the tried and steadfast affection of a lifetime is the best thing I have seen, and the only thing that endures and leaves fragrant memories behind it.

“Get plates for four,” ordered the Colonel, opening the dining-room door as the servants were bringing in dinner, and, as some demur arose as to the quantity cooked, he finished with great solemnity, “put everything in the house on the table then.”

“You kindest and best of men,” said Ballinger, going up to him, “I never acted quite so rude before, don’t think I spoke to you at all; but she was there, Colonel, and I have not seen her for so long, and it was such a surprise; and isn’t she the dearest girl in the world? Why, there you are, Miss Wilder, and how good you have been to her, sticking by her always.” Then he made a grab at me and fairly kissed my breath away, “Gracious, am I dreaming, is it real?” he went on, his lips trembling under that faded moustache, ever so much lighter than his skin with the new bronze on it, “it don’t seem possible I’ve struck such a streak of luck.

“You are quite awake, Thomas,” beamed the Colonel, patting Ballinger’s shoulder, “are you sufficiently rested to sit down to dinner?”

“Must brush the dust off first; same room, I suppose? Oh, I say, Colonel, don’t let her fly away while I’m gone; don’t let her out of your sight.”

“He has taken care of me,” said Babe, very blushing and smiling, her eyes beaming with happiness.

“And he always will,” said the Colonel. “I think a great deal of Thomas, also, his mother and I were old, old friends, and no one in this world could be more delighted with his choice than myself.”

Babe’s bright face did not cloud at the mention of his mother’s name, she did not care for the future now, her joy was all in the present. She did not eat anything at the table, looking at Ballinger all the time with eager eyes, noting, as women do, the little changes in his looks and manner. I must say he had a fair appetite, but still he couldn’t keep his eyes off her. The Colonel and I, however, ate a good meal, as elderly folks will when everything is nice and excellently served.

After dinner the Colonel would have given up the porch to the young folks, and was trying to inveigle me in to look at an album, when Ballinger took hold of his arm and got him a chair outside. Then he went and got one for me. “I want to have a family talk,” he said, “and we’ll all be real comfortable about it.” I thought he was particularly so, sitting beside Babe on the settee and stealing his hand into hers, thinking no one could see in the darkness. Then, with a curious hesitancy, he began and told the Colonel Babe’s history.

“Why do you tell him about me,” she said, piteously, “he is different.” I knew she was thinking of the fair,

dead girl, and how innocent and sheltered that pure life had been, how vastly distinct from a childhood and girlhood in a mining camp. He stooped and patted her hand softly.

“Do not misjudge me, my dear child,” he said, earnestly. “I am too old a soldier not to reverence those who have acquitted themselves nobly in the battle of life.”

“When I met you in Denver,” continued Ballinger, “I had just left her, hating my cowardly self, and unable to do anything to get my self-respect back. You saw I was in trouble, and wanted to work out the problem of earning a living, and you gave me a chance in that mine in Mexico, money to go, and promised to keep my hiding place a secret from my mother. I worked hard all that fall and winter, saving my money with only one object—to get my dear girl when I could keep her from want. Then you wrote me to come here, you sly colonel, thinking I might fall in love with Babe, as I should if I had not already. I had money enough saved for my purpose, and I meant to ask your aid to find her. In January I wrote to Martin, and got answer that Murphy, Mrs. Beach and Miss Wilder and Di, were all gone, no one knew where, and, sick at heart, I kept to my work, for, suffer as I did, I had to have funds, and, I believe, half the tragedies in this world come from want of money, to go away, or to go find some one we love, and I can tell you, all the cash I’d wasted used to haunt me. Do you wonder I could not think of anything but her when I saw her on your

steps, looking like an angel, in that white gown, standing in the light? And then I am free now, for my mother wrote me to marry any one I pleased; Clara's marriage had decided her not to interfere with any match; but if I married without her consent, she should reserve the right to disinherit me and leave her money to institutions where the offspring of unhappy and mismated people had to seek refuge. When you forwarded that letter, Colonel, telling her, I suppose, you knew where I was, to save her worry, I just laughed. I guess I can look after the offspring, I said, and the poor, dear old mother some day will forgive me. The awful dignity of that threat shows she worked over the letter a good while, and pictured to herself what sort of a wife I should marry; for I wrote her how lovely you were, and ended, I know, by a good motherly desire to meddle and to scare me into letting her. I shall be married a week from to-night; my savings will come in handy to get us some trash to start with, and Babe don't need any fixings-up in that Mexican country—it's too warm for frills."

The Colonel, who had writhed at the mention of Mrs. Howard's letter and the refuge, now brightened up.

"I think, you are right, Thomas, is he not Miss Wilder? I am sure Mrs. Howard will love this young lady some day, and I think it wise not to put off the present happiness. Life is, at best, so sadly incomplete, so short."

"Di can't object," said Ballinger, "for I have the stronger will, and we are all against her. She can't say

no; look how miserable she was before I came, and how rosy and happy now. Why! it's just wicked to fool with fate, besides, I shan't take any more chances. I've got her, and mean to keep her, and you too, Miss Wilder, you needn't look glum, we've got to have you. We want you to help bring up those offspring into the paths of proper young ladyhood, as you taught that Maid of Erin, and to keep them out of institutions."

The Colonel looked a bit shocked. Dear me! Young America is different. Let him live in a bran-new country, like Colorado, a while, and he won't be so precise. Manners like his went out with the minuet. Yet, after all, that old-fashioned delicacy of speech and sentiment is very pretty to see, and one feels better and of more importance in his company. The chivalry of men is dying out, forced away by the rising of womankind. Just now there are queer divisions in our human affairs; some women who shut themselves in to a narrow circle of life and ideas, and others who go too far outside, but the latter give me the most hope for women's future. They may be unladylike, may even go wrong, may be rude and ugly to men, but they are the first wave in the tide of progress. The time comes when women must work as men, side by side, and, in some future day, both must regard each other with a courteous fairness, the women expecting nothing beyond ordinary courtesy from men, and the men looking upon women as fellow-workers, not to be guarded and protected, but treated civil and kind. These poor waifs and strays are the beginning, they are loud and blatant now, or they are vin-

dictive, struggling for the same pay and privilege as men, but they are all pioneers, and my blessing go with them. I hope the time will be near, when women's work shall be faithful and well done, and women's faces wear no longer a stamp of idle sin, or narrow intelligence and silly vanity.

The walk homeward across the sands was a happy one to us all. The Colonel and I went soberly along discoursing on the tariff, the climate of Texas, the Maine ice crop, and the prospect of deep water off Arkansas pass; but no such talk occupied the young couple ahead. As they went I saw her head droop almost to his shoulder, and his arms clasp her waist.

Oh, rare moments in life, when love is young, and the world is fair! Run slowly, oh, golden sands of time, and you grim, old reaper, pass them by! Give them their fill of love and sunshine, for the waiting was weary, and they are worthy of thy kindness. Let the hours of happiness linger, and give them long life; for their love shall endure to the end!

## CHAPTER XXI.

### A LOOKER-ON IN VIENNA.

While looking over some old papers to aid me in my story, I found a diary of mine where, in my Boswell sort of way, to my dear Doctor Johnson (a feminine one), I came across my account of Babe's wedding. It is none the less interesting, because they have now been married some years, and are happy in the usual commonplace way of wedded folks. I fancy if this were a composition I should mark it seven per cent., though goodness knows why not ten. I think, as I often did about my scholars' compositions, they all ought to be marked according to ability given each, not the merit of the work itself. And, dear me, in all that long procession of children who have passed before me with their grimy papers all blotted and creased with eager work, I never snared one germ of bright thought or one bud of opening genius. Well, here is my poor account of the ceremony where I officiated, as Tom says, as chief mourner:

“June 18, 188—. Such a lovely day this has been; the sky absolutely cloudless, the sea a great azure, dazzling stretch of waving sunshine. My dear girl woke me early with her usual hug.”

“You precious dear,” she said, holding me in her strong, young arms, “never think I don't love you as much and more than I ever did, and swear you will always live with me.”

“Men don’t like a third party, a meddlesome, old maid,” I cautioned.

“Tom thinks the world of you, and he will do just what I tell him.”

“He’ll be the first man then, my dear,” I said, “but I’ll stop till he drives me out.”

We got up and dressed then, Babe in a pink wrapper, her hair carelessly knotted in her neck, and me in my black muslin, seeing its third summer. Drinda had a fine breakfast for us—red fish from the gulf, graham muffins and strawberries. I heard her singing a cheerful Jordany hymn, which means she is pleased, in fact, I had not heard her favorite one on the judgment day for a whole week. She watched us eat, with many ‘bress de Lawds,’ standing with her hands on her comfortable hips and looking at Babe with pleased interest. No matter how old or how black we are, we women do love to see a wedding and to know all about the parties concerned, and to bother over the details and out of the ordinary cares it calls for. After breakfast Babe and I tidied up the sitting-room and the bedroom facing the sea. I had taken a little, back chamber, its window looking upon the sand.

“I like it best,” I explained, when Babe expostulated with me for giving up the best, “the sea makes me feel creepy (which it didn’t at all) and then you know a man wants lots of room to move ‘round in.” She blushed as usual, and went away from my teasing. She did not have any trousseau, but the Colonel insisted on sending to Galveston for the wedding gown. I got an



old basque of hers for a model, and he telegraphed the work must be done as soon as possible. It came the night before and we had admired it enough to satisfy any generous giver. It was a sort of creamy, thick, ribbed silk, very soft and pliant, made much better than I could do, having a style a professional only can give. It needed some trimming to set it off, I thought, "a lace flounce," I suggested.

"I think it lovely enough, I never did like mussy clothes," she said, happily, "and then you know I shall have flowers."

A rap at the door sort of startled me, but there was only a small boy with a basket of flowers from his ma, with her compliments, and he had no sooner gone than a red-bearded man brought a bouquet, from his wife; and as we were in the land of flowers and generous hearts, the ten different calls we had with floral offerings seemed sort of natural and expected after all. The last knock was made by the grimy and warty hand of a small, freckled boy.

"Ma says she'd sent more," he grinned, handing me a bouquet, "but they're usin' 'em over to the church."

"Well, indeed," I says, "what for?"

"Huh, for her gittin' married, you bet we 'uns is all gwine ter be there."

"You are awful good down here," I said.

"You 'uns don't know us Texas folks," he grins and scampered off.

Babe had just finished arranging the flowers when the Colonel came, followed by Ponce carrying a small par-

cel. The dear man stalked in with that stiff way, to say my girl was a rose among roses, and to shake my hand very warmly. Then he wanted to see the wedding gown, if we did not object. "It had been a long time," he smiled, sadly, when he said it, "since a gown had interested him so much." He thought Mrs. Latham's wedding dress was a white brocade. Ponce confirmed this with some details of the event, the Colonel coughing slightly at the reminiscence. Babe brought out the gown, and then he undid the tissue paper around a roll of beautiful old lace.

"I brought you this, my dear, a heirloom in my family. I want you to accept it. It is point and of a fine pattern. My womenkind prized it highly. I have no one to value it now but you, my young friend, who has made many of my lonely hours bright and happy by your kindness."

"My dear friend," she said, brokenly, and then in her own, impetuous way, caught his hand and laid it against her soft cheek.

"My dear," he said, much shocked.

"Kiss my lips, then," she said, that graceless girl, and no man could resist that sweet, blushing face, least of all a Texas colonel. They made a pretty picture, too, he so stately and dignified, his very caress as solemn as a benediction, she blushing and radiant, the flowers everywhere, the wedding gown lying across a chair, and Ponce and I looking on for a background. I went in the bedroom to sew the lace on the gown, and she followed me in a moment, holding a little box.

“The Colonel’s wedding gift,” she stammered, “ought I to take so much from him, and are they not beautiful?” She held out a set of pearls, ear drops and pin, and though I know very little about jewels I could see these were rare and costly.

“He says,” cried Babe, “he thought they would become me best, says, after what he knows of my life, that I am as pure and fair.”

“You would hurt him more to refuse them, my dear,” I said. The Colonel would not have peeped in that bedroom for the world, though I know he wanted to hear my opinion, that stately delicacy of his seemed to shut him out from common folks.

“He wants to see the dress on, Ann, is it bad luck?”

“Land, no, child, it’s got to go on, anyway, so I can drape the lace. So shut the door and I’ll help you.” If ever I saw a girl, if I may use an odd term, blossom into beauty, it was Babe in that white silk. Clothes do make a difference, and that is where poverty cuts the most. Don’t we all want to look nice and have pretty things about us, and isn’t having to buy at cheap stores and wearing cheap ill-fitting gowns enough to sour the sweetest temper? She put the pearls on while I fixed the lace in the neck of her gown. “That was cut rather low in the neck, my dear, that square, and if I must say it, you ain’t built for that fashion.”

“Heroines in books always have such beautiful necks,” sighed Babe, “and though I never cared before, I do wish nature hadn’t been so prodigal in giving me collar bones. Still, like all lean people, I can deserve a reputation for extreme modesty.”

“That’s the result of those French books, Miss,” I said, severely, “your talk is trifling, but really you are not matured yet, you may fill out and be a fine figure of a woman. You never will be dumpy, and that’s what scared me all my life, fat dumpiness, but I guess I’m safe now.”

I saw a flash of color flood her face at that moment. “H’m, he’s come, has he? You needn’t be so upset, you were hoping he would, and see you all fixed up, Miss Vanity.”

“You mean, old mind-reader,” she laughed, and that dimple came into her cheek and stayed there, with a little tremulous smile on her pretty mouth.

“Did you make that dimple with a slate pencil?” I said, patting her cheek.

“It just growed like Topsy.” I opened the door and she swept, as the books say, into the room, and the swish of a silken train is a pleasant sound to my ears, old as I am, and I do love to feel dressed up. “How does she look?” I said. Ballinger was standing by the window, a big bunch of cape jessamine in his hand.

“Charming, beautiful,” said the Colonel, “and the lace is an improvement? I trust, Miss Wilder, as you ladies say, the fit is satisfactory.”

“Sets like a duck’s bill, the lace is elegant, and those pearls the most fitting for her to wear, I agree with you in that.”

I looked at the two lovers, who were afraid almost to look at each other, Babe very rosy and shy, Tom awkward and uncomfortable. His hands trembled when he

handed her the bouquet, and hers when she took it. "Don't you like my gown, Tom?" she asked.

"Oh, you handsome thing," he said, eagerly, "of course, I like it, but you are not the same girl at all, you are a princess, and I've only got my every-day clothes on, I feel like the hired man."

"Princesses don't have hired men, they have retinues," she laughed, "and I hope you will continue to be in awe of me."

"The right way to begin married life," I says, but the dear Colonel only smiled gravely, understanding nothing at all of our joking, but pleased, because we were. Then, as we were to spend the day at his house, he departed, and I told Babe to run get ready, as it was two o'clock, and we were to dine at half past. As she passed him, Ballinger made a grab at her.

"Don't," I fairly screamed, "you must not muss that dress, you can't hug her in that."

"He can kiss me, Miss Wilder," said silly Babe, and he with his hands behind him, gave her a distant kiss on the forehead.

"Bless you, my child; ain't that fatherly, Wilder? Go hurry, Di, you musn't keep his dinner waiting, it's going to be a masterpiece, and us poor paupers won't get many such, but then you know you were *blasé* of champagne at eighteen."

Babe ran in to change her gown, but as I was all ready, I entertained the young man with some sage advice.

"That speech of mine makes me think of a fellow

and girl that dined at our house once," he said; "the girl mighty pretty, fellow a little cad, we had some sort of a frill of a pudding and the fellow says, 'Lizzie you must be prepared to give up all these sort of things, you won't get many puddings in our future life on a Dakota wheat farm.'"

"Well, he was a cheerful soul."

"Wasn't he," laughed Ballinger, "and the joke of it was, the girl ran off with another fellow, a month or so before the wedding."

"And they lived happy ever afterward?"

"No, in five years they got a divorce, though they were rich and had everything, maybe she would have been better off without the pudding, living on the wheat farm. Good gracious, how long does it take a woman to dress?"

"She hasn't been gone five minutes, and what a fidgety creature you are, one would think you were afraid to get married."

"Wouldn't you be?" mischievously.

"No, it's nothing new in the history of humanity."

She came in then, in her pretty blue muslin, with her leghorn hat and drooping plumes, and she had hurried so she had quite a red face, that didn't pale any when he kissed her several times.

"You are an every-day girl now," he said, "and poor old Wilder has to stand all the spooning. Come Birdey, let's go hand-and-hand, like country lovers to a circus." They walked decorously when they came to the town, and tried to act distant and dignified, but,

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la, everybody knew, and one old sailor, calking a boat, looked up as they passed and said, "It's a fine, fair day for the wedding, the Lord bless ye."

Dear me, what a fine dinner the Colonel had for us, such a variety of food and fruit and wine. I did enjoy the champagne, I think I said before, that I have a weakness for it, and the folks in Southport may as well know it first as last. Maybe I took a drop too much for discretion, for I found myself discoursing so eloquently that I wondered at my own ability. "What an orator you'd make, Ann Wilder," I said to myself, "but, la me, women can only talk on temperance, and the fact to do that, I would first have to exhilarate myself on champagne would hardly be proper; as for women's rights, my curls and my age would hurt the cause, giving newspaper men a chance to jibe at it, as they will at my story. La me, though, as old Ben Rines, of Southport, used to say, when the boys sauced him, "Let 'em talk, it don't hurt me none, and it does give 'em a heap of fun."

The Colonel mellowed to pleasant reminiscences, Babe's cheeks grew red, her eyes very bright, but Ballinger became pale and quiet. I do think a man on his wedding day is the forlornest object on earth. What silly, nervous, irritable creatures they are, something the same as if the noose was not matrimonial. After dinner we sat in the parlor and Babe played for us some of her pretty pieces, and then, it being about six o'clock, she and I went upstairs to begin her toilet. The ceremony was to take place at eight. We left the two men chatting over their cigars, Tom still abstracted and ill at ease. Up-

stairs I gave Babe some good advice, as she had no mother to aggravate her with the same. She took what I said, meekly, only getting impudence enough to say:

“How did you know so much, Ann, when you never got married?”

“By keeping awake, my dear, absorbing information like a sponge does water, but mostly by neighbors. Neighbors are a great boon to us old maids. We often live in their lives as I do in yours.”

When she had her gown on, I stood upon a chair and fixed her veil, and the two colored women at the house came in to rave over her, one, Hetty, who had been Mrs. Latham's maid, gave a few deft touches to the flowers and looping better than I could. I ripped the third finger of her left glove open, and, wondering if that wild-acting young man had thought of the wedding ring, stepped across to see. He was tearing about his room in his shirt sleeves, cursing his necktie, so I got on a chair and tied it for him, he standing still, for a wonder, and then I patted his brown cheek with my wrinkled hand.

“You never looked so well in your life, Tom.”

“Nor felt so like a fool—look like a waiter in a second class café. Don't that coat draw across the back?”—with some profanity about a New York tailor.

“It couldn't set better, could it, Ponce,” I said, to the old darky, who had come in to offer his services to Marse Tom.

“Jest melted an' run inter it,” he grinned, and, as there was nothing to do, admired the young man, and



departed to adorn himself for the important position of driver of the wedding carriage. At the door he stopped a moment:

“When the Colonel married Miss Elton, dey wa’ the harnsumest couple in Virginy, de Eltons was way-up folks, and Miss carried her head pretty high I tell yo’, and de Colonel, want he proud too. Iawd, how times change, de Colonel only one left.” He shuffled down the stairs, where I saw the Colonel meet him and pat his shoulder.

“Makes you think of old times, Ponce, eh?”

“Yes, Marse.”

“Long, long ago,” muttered the Colonel, going into the parlor and standing before his wife’s portrait, and thinking, God knows what sad, sad thoughts, and living again, such dear memories of her.

The young couple met in the upper hall, Tom too excited to admire my darling, hardly looking at her. “Have you got the ring?” I snapped, not any too much pleased with him; fixing Babe’s lace handkerchief (my gift) in her dress.

“H—l no,” then he darts back into the room, returning, putting one ring into his pocket, he hands Babe a little case holding a lovely diamond solitaire shining like a star.

“She can’t carry it,” I said, putting it carefully in my pocket. “Seems to me an engagement ring is rather late now.”

“She wouldn’t have one before, and I was too broke to get as nice a one as she ought to have. Do you

know the Colonel gave me a check for five hundred this morning? Wonder how he got into this world anyway, he's too good for it. Curse it, there goes that glove."

"It ain't," I said, "see, it fastens this way; now you are all right, and you might have the courtesy to admire your wife."

"My wife," he says, with a long, sweet look at her, and that was all, but I suppose she saw enough admiration in his eyes to content her. The Colonel helped her in the carriage, tucked her train in carefully, and gave a series of directions to Ponce, who was gotten up quite elegantly with the biggest pair of white cotton gloves I ever saw, and a bow of ribbon on the whip. The Colonel and I climbed into a hired carriage, and then off we went to the little village church. In a room back of the church I fixed Babe's train and settled her veil, and then I slipped out into a front pew, rustling my best black silk, feeling mightily well dressed. The church was a mass of flowers and vines, beautifully decorated, and as there were no invitations nor limitations, most of the folks in town that knew us were there. Soon the organist began the wedding march they always play, and that is so grand and majestic, I always wish the marriage could be as beautiful, and kept up to such a high ideal. But, alas, it seldom is; and coldness, and want of faith, and hatred, and all unkindness too often comes, and love flies away. I heard the swish of Babe's gown, seeing through a mist my darling's blushing face and her radiant eyes. I noticed, as they stood before the minister, how handsome they were, and how

well suited. I don't think Babe would have been happy with any other man than he at her side, and I do believe in affinities. I heard as in a dream the solemn service, that name Beatrice Murphy had a strange, unfamiliar sound; then Thomas Ballinger, that was dignified and stately enough. The Colonel gave the bride away, then there was the usual hunt for the ring, and Babe's hand shook a little, and his voice trembled when he promised to love and care for her till death did them part, but she said she'd obey quite distinctly, meaning it, I suppose, as little as any woman does.

I found myself wondering if he would love her always in the way a woman likes, with caresses and lover's attentions; not many men do. When coldness and indifference comes, God pity the woman, and give her children to fill her heart. When that solemn admonition sounded, if any man knew aught that those two should not be man and wife, or words to that effect, remembering in books how many strange beings had popped up to protest at that time, I turned around timorously, but no one appeared, not even the ghost of Mrs. Howard, or much worse, the lady in the flesh. Well, it was all over now, a kiss from the young husband to his dear wife, a kiss without passion, pure-hearted and reverent, accepting his great responsibility to make or mar a human life. I liked him that in that moment he could remember the solemnity of the time.

We drove back to the Colonel's, where there was a sumptuous banquet—sumptuous having to my ear a rich and oily sound fitting a description of food—and a

number of guests, the Colonel's old-time friends. Babe cut the bride's cake, and everybody took some home—the young folks, I mean, to dream on. I did, slyly, put a piece under my pillow, merely to test the superstition, and had a horrible dream of Mrs. Howard, stern, gigantic in size, sailing into a monstrous church after my young couple, and forbidding the bans; and I know that dream now was probably indigestion, for late eating don't agree with me. After the banquet there were dancing and promenading, and Babe, when she could get away, slipped up-stairs to change her gown. Neither she nor the bridegroom ate or drank anything, so the fine victuals were quite wasted on them; but I suppose they were necessary as a target for long and flowery speeches, growing longer and more florid as the glasses were emptied. I slipped after Babe to help her, for we were going to walk home, and she didn't want to trail that gown along; but I found she was nearly dressed in her blue muslin, aided by the deft fingers of Hetty, the maid. "Just you come along with us," she says, giving me a hug, "don't you creep off by yourself." She picked a few jessamines out of her bouquet and folded them in her handkerchief to press and keep, but she took the rest with her. Hetty promised to fold the dress properly, and then we set out. The Colonel and Ballinger were waiting on the back porch, the latter smoking in that nervous, irritable way of his, peculiar to this day. As we started off, after bidding that kind man good-night, the guests heard us, and flung rice and slippers after us. We escaped these delicate attentions without injury, and hurried on.

What a glorious night it was, the great, sparkling sea alive with moonlight and mystery, the town wrapped in that poetic moon haze that makes everything beautiful. We stopped by the graveyard fence, and Babe went in alone.

“A queer place to go on a wedding night,” grumbled Tom.

She heard him and looked back. “I want to lay my bouquet on his grave,” she said, with trembling lips, “and begin, dear, my new life with kindness and love for him.”

As we waited, Drinda passed, going home from the festivities and a position of observation in the kitchen. She stopped and looked towards my girl’s kneeling figure by the grave.

“De Lawd’s giben you a mighty good wife, Marse Tom.”

“Don’t I know that?” he smiled, “and she shall be a happy one, so help me God!”

I went on home with Drinda, and left the young couple alone; I saw them walking on the beach as I went in, after talking over the day with Drinda. I saw them so close together their shadows were almost one, and I prayed that all their future might be as bright and beautiful as that moonlight night, and all their paths as pleasant and fair as that long stretch of shining sand by the unquiet waves. I wrote all this that I have copied while they walked, and had almost finished when I heard the gate click. I saw him hold it open for her to pass, and followed, flinging away his cigar—I wonder

how many he smoked that day to calm his nervousness, but only making him worse—it glittered a moment, a fiery spark under a bush. I saw him pick a rose and put it in her dress, and stoop to kiss her hair lightly. She ran away from him and came in to me, sitting on the floor beside me, hiding her face in my lap. She is very pale and tremulous, and hugs me close to her beating heart. He stalks in, throws his hat on a chair with an easy sense of ownership. “I wonder if I acted as much like a chump as I looked and felt,” he says. He is full of a mad merriment, his face slightly flushed, his nervousness quite gone.

“Your temper has been worse than anything,” I said, agreeably, “I never saw such a cross-grained creature; I pity your wife.”

“The only flaw in your character, Wilder, is that you are a single woman,” he answered, lightly, going to the window and looking out on the bay. “What a night it is, a beautiful, moonlit world!”

“There is some sentiment in your composition after all,” I said.

“Who would not gush on his wedding night,” he said, coming over to me and patting my shoulder, “you are an old brick, Wilder, and if you ever leave us, I shall drag you back. Come, Babe, you and yours truly are not like literary folks, like Ann. I wonder if she is dissecting us for the public amusement. If you put me into ‘writin’ and it gets into print—ah, there’s the rub—if it does—and tell what a fool I am and have been all day, and how Di and I have spooned, I’ll sue you

for libel, just \$3,000, brother Nathan's legacy, and land you in the poorhouse. But we are not jooks and Merquises, and Babe's a respectable married woman, so you won't find a publisher—lor' child, they can get for nothing much better stuff than you can write, chuck full of the latest foreign immorality."

He raises his wife, rumpling her curly hair from her forehead, to kiss her passionately. "Good-night."

They are gone, and I sit alone, the balmy air blows in from that far, blue gulf, the moonlight flickers on the waves, and in one long, silver shaft falls through the window on the floor, and wavers with the wind. "A looker-on here in Vienna," those words come to me, and I wonder where I heard them. Such have I been all my life. I have seen children grow up to love and mate, and mothers died beloved by children, and grandparents go mourned to their quiet rest, but I have only been a looker-on, and shall be to the end. Somewhere I read of a withered rose found in the ceremonies of an Egyptian princess, dead a thousand years. A traveler, unthinking, laid the rose in water, and, lo, it bloomed again, fragrant and marvelous, so rare and beautiful, the like was never seen. In some far, future life my heart, may, like the rose, come again to the love and passion of my youth, my bereft and widowed youth. Till then, I am content to be the looker-on.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### MR. BEACH'S GRATITUDE.

We had a happy fortnight, those two and I, for they would persist in making me go everywhere with them. The Colonel, who had gone to Galveston, left them his carriage, so we had delightful drives, besides our rows on the bay. They went riding a few times, Babe wearing the habit I made her at Erin. One evening I remember, when we were sitting in her bedroom, she brought out that old habit with the gilt braid, that she says will never be destroyed in her lifetime. When he saw it, of course Tom had to take her and the habit in his arms, and recall their first meeting, as lovers will.

“I pity us poor brides,” laughed Tom, “when we take our honey-moon on a Pullman. Why, the very porter spots us with a fiendish grin when we come aboard in our new finery, and then every one in the car knows it shortly, and discusses us, and some of them without the dis. I have watched such spoons myself; it is immense fun! The poor souls can't steal their hands into one another's, but some cold eye falls on them, all their little love talk freezes on their lips, and looks like this I cast on Di, go astray, intercepted by some sneer of an old wretch in a back seat. If she goes to lean her bridal bonnet on the shoulder of his new coat, the baleful glare of an elderly man or woman stops her



just in the act, and she straightens up and calls him Mr. Jones, instead of 'darling' or 'hubby.' With you for audience, spooning has a new zest, you are so sympathetic."

"Thanks," I say, dryly, "it may be because there is no escaping."

I smile kindly on them as any one would. How pretty Babe has grown, so rosy and happy, so merry and eager to please us both with a sort of pathetic dependence on his judgment, different from her old self reliance. That grave, sweet expression of her eyes has disappeared, and I do not see it again until a little life lies in her arms, and mother love shines in her face.

We used to go in bathing in the Gulf, and Babe made great progress in learning to swim, but I stayed in shore unless Tom took hold of my hand, and then the surf whirled me around like I was nobody at all. It takes great courage—moral courage for a thin person like myself, to wear a bathing suit and get chilled by the water, perhaps the former was the reason I liked bathing best after dark. The junketing we did in those days was pleasant enough, and much happier and better than that at Erin. Dear me, the more I see of married folks, the more mournful it makes me, that they can't be jolly together. Few of them are, after five or six years of married life. The men like to get off by themselves and smoke, and the women are forced to herd together likewise and talk scandal, because they know nothing better to talk about, and some lone soul that escapes the dreary, draught-scared circle, and joins the men, is looked on by her sisters with

stern disapproval. Some of the dismal periods of my life have been passed in the company of married folks, where I became a sort of shuttlecock for their contradictory battledoors.

In about three weeks the Colonel returned. He came one evening when the young couple were out on the beach, and seemed very glad to find me alone. In a perturbed manner, looking quite unlike his kindly, dignified self, he told me he had seen, in an Eastern paper, a reward offered for knowledge of the whereabouts of Beatrice Murphy, also an advertisement requesting her to send her address to George Martin, of Erin, Colorado and learn something to her advantage.

“The world is so full of meanness,” said I, “that I don’t believe in the advantage at all, no one can do anything for the child that I know of unless Dick Daggett. There are no miracles in the nineteenth century, and I doubt if he would be one and give her money if the mine panned out. Besides, he would not employ Martin—he hates him.”

“Mrs. Ballinger can rely on me,” said the Colonel, with great earnestness, “I shall devote my life to her interests, if there is anything cowardly and wrong set against her. The cause of a noble woman is enough to nerve any man.”

“But seldom any man, save a Southern gentleman, would return to a long-abandoned practice, to serve a young woman, as you have.”

“My dear Miss Wilder, any gentleman would. You Northerners are more practical, perhaps, but all men

have a chivalrous regard for a lady in trouble, and are eager to help her, it is the highest privilege to be allowed to do so."

You good soul, I thought, a woman would do much to keep your respect and to deserve your loyalty. I wish there were more of you, and then there would be less sinful women, and a great deal more courtesy in a world that needs it sorely.

We said nothing of the subject of our conversation to the young folks, when they returned, but talked of Mexico, whither we were going the following week. The Colonel, much pained, suggested some of the discomforts Babe would suffer in that strange country, but she shook her pretty head.

"I have always roughed it," she said, "I never was a home body, and all out doors never was too big and great for my soul. Why, I was brought up right in the shadow of those mighty mountains and knew all their lights and shades, lived in their tempests and wild moods. Four walls stifle me. Then, Miss Wilder is not weary of junketing yet, she is a regular path-finder, a crusader, a very Robinson Crusoe."

"Mexico," I said, slowly, "has always been an Arabian Nights to me, an enchanted land in a prosaic century, a place of churches and paintings, of rare silver ornaments, of tropics cenary, of weirdly strange people, of the Aztec aristocrats of this world. What I know of it, that makes me talk in this moon-strack way, was told me by a neighbor, Joe Dodge. He fought in the Mexican war and brought back some fine paintings,

silver vessels, and strange embroideries he had stolen from churches; with these he had learned a wild and reckless way of riding, and a love for the beauty and poetry of that far country that made him a figure apart in our narrow-minded village. I would see him ride by on his great horse, saddleless and bridleless—Tom, don't you grin, I don't mean the man, but the horse—and I would stop him for a chat, and then go in and dream of Mexico, and wish I could send my soul there while my poor body stayed and lived in Southport. Rare company he was, and strange scenes he'd lived through to come at last, liked that water-logged, old tree-trunk out there on the beach, with all its history of growth in tropic forest, and all its voyaging on the seas, to find quiet harbor."

"Was Dodge well fixed?" interrupted Mr. Ballinger, "he could sell his pickings, I suppose."

"He was a married man."

"Oh," then irrelevantly, "why don't you write poetry?"

"She could, if she wanted to," said Babe, earnestly; she does believe in me.

"I am sure of that," said the Colonel, politely.

"I might think it," I answered, "but, counting the feet, like chopping wood with a dull hatchet, takes all the poetry out of it, to me, and running over in my mind the words to rhyme, like blind, find, ghind, and then beginning again—no, poetry is beyond me, but, goodness!" I cried, starting up, "If that man coming isn't Lawyer Martin, of Erin, it's his ghost!"

The person approaching, that we had not noted, being

busy talking, though all sitting on the beach near the cottage, now came up to us.

"I am pleased to find you all here," he said. "My name is Martin, I trust Mrs. Ballinger remembers me. Colonel Latham, I believe, well, I thought best to answer your letter in person."

"Sit down, Di," said Tom, flinging his arm across his wife's knees—she would have risen, looking white and terrified, but he pulled her back in her chair, and resumed his place at her feet, "no one can hurt you, dear, have you not got me?"

The Colonel got up with awful dignity, "Sir," he said, frigidly, "I consider this intrusion an unwarrantable impertinence."

"I appeal to Miss Wilder," said Martin, awful pleasant, and I thinking all the time how mean he acted that day of the inquest; "I always respected Miss Murphy highly, and my news is good news; but, dear me, what a hunt I have had to find you. Perhaps you remember," said Martin, addressing his remarks to me, "that night when Miss Murphy assisted the deceased to my house. You do; well, on that occasion, Mr. Beach revoked his former will, giving all his property to his wife. He knew she was entitled, being still his wife, to half, and even if she had been divorced, I think he would still have given her something. He remembered all of his connections generously, even your humble servant much more than he deserved. I did not write the will, he wrote every line himself, and withholding the reading of it from us, got Doctor Hooper and my-

self to sign it. One of the bequests was the sum of ten thousand dollars to his worthy friend, Lydia Ann Wilder."

"Gracious me!" I gasped, "if I ain't the luckiest woman, I've gone into the legacy business, and, Babe, you shall share it, you dear thing."

"I fancy Mrs. Ballinger will not need your generosity," said Martin, with aggravating slowness, "by the terms of the same will, the sum of two hundred thousand dollars is willed, unconditionally, to Miss Beatrice Murphy."

"He hated—hated me," cried Mrs. Ballinger, "oh, it can not be so!"

"It is, nevertheless; he respected you highly, and told me that night when you were gone, of the delicate and honorable way you tried to warn him of his wife's conduct. His rudeness to you on that occasion seemed to trouble him greatly. He had also a whimsical liking for Miss Wilder, whose honesty and oddity of speech amused and pleased him. He says in his will, he hopes Miss Murphy will accept the money in token of his good will and gratitude to her, and if she has any scruples at all, let her take it then as her right—her lawful due, I think the words were. I fear," said Martin, sadly, "that the poor man had some presentiment of his approaching death when he left commands the will was not to be opened for two months. He spoke very feelingly of you, and I am sure had you heard him, you would have forgiven all the past. The world did not condemn his action in taking your father's

mine, but as far as the moral effect was, it was wrong. Beach was not blind to that at all, and said that night he would always be glad, that, from a neglected, untaught child, you had grown into a gracious, noble woman; but added, had you the advantages the money your father lost would have given you, your life might have been vastly different. I trust, Mr. Ballinger, you will persuade your wife to accept this legacy, odd as it is; I believe, knowing what I do of her, in that rigid justice of hers she will refuse to be benefited by the man her father wronged so cruelly."

"Di, why don't you speak?" cried Tom, going up to his wife, "what makes you look so white and dreadful, it was awfully good of the old man to remember you, he would grieve in his grave if you refuse it, but it shall be as you say. We don't need money to make us happy."

"I can't—can't understand it, Tom—my father's enemy!" she put out her hands blindly, and he caught her as she fell. Dear me, what a fuss he made; but she was not the fainting kind, only once before, I told him, "that day you left her, and then what a time I had to bring her too." She is a woman of great soul, of strong emotions, and can suffer more in a moment than some women can in a day. When she was better, and he was petting and talking to her, I went outside to talk to Martin about Erin and all the folks. The Colonel had turned a sort of mental somersault, and was polite as could be to Martin, and ended by insisting his brother lawyer should become his guest, and away they went together after hearing Mrs. Ballinger was much better.

Before I went to bed I went into Babe's room, where I found her very smiling and bright-eyed, telling her husband what she was going to get him with her wealth.

"It's only a fellow in a novel that gives up a fortune," said Tom, sopping cologne on his wife's head, and nearly putting her eyes out, but never a complaint she made; "we haven't such heroic souls, and then that money is hers, anyway."

"I think so," I said, and wasn't it? "And that was what made Clara mad, knowing you would have half the property, and she swore to Martin you and I were in New York—the little cat."

"Didn't know you could be so severe," laughed Tom, "queer how people will act about money. I know Clara went back there on Babe's account, liking her and wishing to make her happy, but the moment she finds out Babe is going to get some of the old man's cash, whew! her blood's up and she does all she can to prevent it."

The Colonel accompanied Martin to Erin; he would not let Tom go—separating the young couple was not to be thought of, and after a fortnight he returned to deliver her property to his client. He had met Mrs. Finnerty, and his attempts to relate her remarks and blessings on us were as richly funny as anything I ever heard.

"She struck me as a well-meaning, but uneducated, person," he said, in apology.

With some twenty thousand of the money, Tom bought a ranch about ten miles from Denver, situated on the



Platte river, and as sightly a place as one could wish for. The house had been recently built, and bore an odd sort of resemblance to that one of Beach's at Erin, but it was charming all the same and shaded by a grove of cottonwoods, a grateful comfort in that sunny country. Never yet have I looked on those burning sands, glittering under a July sun, but I think of that Scripture phrase, "The shadow of a great rock in a weary land," and how good such a spot must be to a traveler! Tom said he was fit for nothing but farming, he liked it best, and that life suited us all well. Around our ranch were fertile fields, our own the finest, and our stock—for I say ours as if I really was one of the family—was the prize sort, with pedigrees and blue ribbons at fairs. They did say Tom would "bust up," in the expressive vernacular of the region, but he has not yet, and seems to have a natural gift for making farming and stock-raising pay. Mrs. Ballinger fitted the house up in a most costly manner; nothing is too good for her, I notice, and yet I remember when she had but one gown to her back—and such a one, with its gilt braid and faded skirt. We took old Drinda with us; she would not be parted from Mrs. Ballinger, and she is—Drinda, I mean, Mrs. B. never being an extra one—a most marvelous cook. Doctor accompanied us also, and is grown to be quite staid and rheumatic, awing the rest of our collection of dogs by his superior wisdom and, I might add, his greyhound bite, that is effective. After a few months Mrs. Ballinger began to indulge in a wild debauch of pets, and our kennels held a setter, a

pointer, a large mastiff (I was mortally scared of him), a skye terrier and a black-and-tan of a tireless bark that seemed a target for Mr. Ballinger's temper, and slippers, and other articles of wearing apparel. As if there were not enough animals about, a vagabond collie followed me home one day and attached himself to me, and, when I did not watch him, scuttled under my bed at night. Many and wearying were the battles I fought with him to make him know his place, but he never did, and, when I write this, is sneaking up the stairs with sublime assurance, coming into the room inch by inch, so pitifully meek and abject I let him stay. Mrs. Ballinger had a Kentucky mare, too, very spirited and saucy, and I never saw my dear girl ride off but I did worry a little, though Tom was always with her.

So days pass into weeks and weeks into months, and we are as happy as mortal folks can be, with only one shadow over our happiness.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### MRS. BALLINGER'S BABY.

I saw that both Ballinger and his wife grieved that Mrs. Howard would not answer their letters, but Tom first declared he would not care; that his mother was unjust, and let her act hateful then. He would not allow his wife to fret about it—but there! if it wasn't that, it was something else, and Babe got to be a regular torment of a woman. She actually cried because Tom scolded her for feeding the setter too much and spoiling him for hunting, and threatened to tell the Humane Society he was starving the poor brute. She did not care for riding, the mare frightened her, and driving made her weary; she developed nerves, when she never before acknowledged she had any, and I was mortal afraid to say a word to her about her temper; only Drinda was sympathetic and kind, and when that worthy old woman had given me a piece of her mind, I retailed it to Tom, and then we were more gentle with our darling, submissive to her lightest wish.

A time came when she was very ill, and, dear me! how sad our hearts were when she begged us to forgive her if she had been cross and unlike herself! And all those waiting days we wandered about the house, so sadly desolate without her, and knew how much we

loved and missed her with keen anguish. I remember a dreadful night when Tom drove to Denver at a gallop, and two awful days when we did not know she would live an hour, and strange doctors crept up the stairs, and a nurse with a sober face, who scorned my inquiries, no matter how abject I was.

“It’s like a dead person was in the house,” Tom would say, hiding his face in his outstretched arms, caring nothing who saw his grief, sitting on the stairs for the doctor to fall over, or wandering into the kitchen to be comforted by Drinda, and, dear me, she said she’d had nine, but I don’t believe her. I pitied that poor young fellow, though; he neither ate nor slept, sitting outside her door, asking the last news, hardly daring to cross the threshold. She knew none of us; she was back in her mountain home, riding her broncho (that Tom had brought to the ranch to please her, though the animal was worth nothing at all), or babbling of the mountains, the brooks, the people she knew in her childhood—never a word of us. She called often on her father, always with the sweet affection of a child, and once or twice screamed, as if in terror, some recollection of those wild scenes of her youth coming to her.

One morning Drinda came creeping into my room, looking uncanny enough in the gray light. “It’s a fine boy, Miss Wilder, and she’s asking for you.” I wasn’t asleep nor dressed for bed; I don’t think I had my clothes off for a week, so I hurried in. I took her dear head in my arms.

“Hold me, Ann, like you used to,” she said, such a ghost of herself. “I think if I die I would like to drift away with your arms about me; you’d give me courage to go that lonely journey.”

“To get well, my darling, my poor, sick girl,” I said, “surely no woman has more to live for than you have now.” She went quietly to sleep, and Tom, coming to see her, stopped at the door not to wake her. How worn and haggard he was, with sleepless eyes, unshaven chin and neglected clothes. “I—I don’t wonder she hates me,” he groaned; and I did have to smile a little bit, if he was so wretched. Then that majestic nurse brought in a red flannelly bundle and put it in his arms.

“Hold it so,” she said, unbending at his awkwardness.

“What a queer little beast,” he said, “and to think it’s hers and mine—a life just begun, to end how many years from now, and how! Poor little beggar—oh, I say, take it; it’s going to cry.”

“You must get used to that,” I said, cruelly; “and now do go get some sleep; you look awfully miserable, enough to scare any one.”

He obeyed me like a lamb. He was very meek, for him, and I inwardly smiled at it. When he came back, it was a good six hours, and Di was awake, feeling much brighter and better, I sitting by her side, that hateful nurse down stairs. He had shaved and changed his clothes, and looked like his old self. With elaborate caution, he tiptoed over to the tiled hearth, where

the flickering fire Babe loved to watch was burning. Dear me! I ought to break myself of using that nickname, but it is hard to do it.

“Tom,” she called, softly, he turned and went toward her, “I am afraid to come near you, I’m so clumsy,” he said.

She gave him the ghost of a smile, “Isn’t he lovely?” she said, lifting the sheet off that red face on her arm. He was not lovely at all, but Tom said it, with admirable grace and quite the appearance of thinking so, and still with that awed look in his handsome, brown eyes, he knelt beside her, his head close to hers, and then I stole away and left them.

We had a happy summer when Di was well, and I never saw a finer baby than our little Neil Latham—there I say our, again, but I do claim some right to that child; and wasn’t the Colonel pleased because Neil was his namesake?

“It would have been Lydia Ann, if it had been a girl,” said Mrs. Ballinger, “but I do like boys best.”

“A fault of your sex,” I said, “but please remember you were a girl yourself.”

“A very lovely one,” smiled the Colonel, looking perplexedly pleased. It was fun to see him hold the baby; baby screaming and clutching at the Colonel’s whiskers, and that stately gentleman trying to extricate himself without offending Sir Baby.

A pretty scene I remember was in April when Neil was a year old, he was an April boy, like his mother, all smiles and tears. Tom had gone for a ride, but his

wife was entertaining the Colonel, who was making us a visit. We were sitting on the veranda, the baby asleep in his mother's arms.

"Colonel," said my dear girl, softly, "You know—know Mrs. Howard?"

"Yes," uncomfortably.

"She knows very well we are married, we wrote her, but does she know of this?"

"If you refer to the baby," said the Colonel, "I—I think I told her."

"You know it, you kind heart, and she said something dreadful, isn't that so?"

"I did not tax my memory with it, if she did," very stiffly.

"I shall not give her up," went on Mrs. Ballinger, "no, indeed; because," convincingly, "she has never seen Neil. I did not know"—bending her beautiful face to brush baby's forehead lightly with her lips, "how much I loved or could love, until my baby came. A mother can never forget, I will not believe it, she must remember when her baby was given to her, and how he loved her best, his first, dear love, so innocent and beautiful. Colonel, I ask you to help me when I shall call on you, no matter how or when, to soften that unnatural mother's heart and make her forgive my husband for marrying me."

"Whatever you ask I will do," he said, solemnly, "knowing that it will be just and right." He took the hand she held out and raised it to his lips, and they registered that vow then, that afterward I saw carried out to a happy finish.

Dear me, after writing of Mrs. Ballinger as a most angelic woman, I should have to tell what I must on her and to justify myself, as I have the right, and show her her heartless conduct. After various experiences with nurses, the last one being found intoxicated in the cellar, Neil playing with a broken bottle beside her, we decided on making Drinda nurse, and getting another cook; but most of baby's toilet was performed by his mother or me, frequently by both of us. And this all led to a day that was a very Sahara to me. Perhaps I did monopolize baby too much, and may be he did like to go to me pretty well. I think our first quarrel was over taking off his flannels, when I insisted it was too soon.

"He is my own baby," Mrs. Ballinger cried, in a fine temper, "he shan't be roasted to death."

"He will get his death from cold, and it will be your fault," I said, stubbornly. Then, like most silly women, she said:

"I'd like to know how you know anything about babies, anyway."

"It will be murder if they go off before the first of June," I muttered, stalking out of the room. They did come off, and a storm came up, and a cold, drizzling day set in, and that night, at twelve o'clock, a scared, white figure came to my bed and gasped, she just knew baby was dying, he was breathing so, and wouldn't I come and see?

"Those fat babies are always croupy," I said, coolly, acting as if I wasn't scared, mean enough to aggravate, her distress, and then I fixed the poor little fellow more



comfortable, and got him some medicine the doctor had left, and he was all right in no time. Mr. Ballinger, I was pleased to hear, gave his wife a fine scolding on the flannel question, and mostly for not taking my advice.

About a fortnight after that, Mr. Ballinger came into my room and found me packing my trunk.

“Thunder,” he says, standing looking at me, his hands in his pockets. “What’s up? Di is in there crying over the cub, and here you are, white as a ghost, your eyes snapping, your poor little self all trembling, gathering your duds together. Come, speak out, what’s the matter? I know it’s her fault.”

“I won’t say one word, Mr. Ballinger,” I says, trembling all over, “not one word. Your wife is very dear to me. You know that, and I have presumed too much, I know I have. I’ll just go quietly away, and here’s his blue silk socks not finished yet, I been knitting ’em for him, I suppose she’ll let me send ’em by mail, and you’ll write me a line once in a while that he is well, and his croup syrup is most out, that third bottle in the bathroom, I mean, on the third shelf, and, dear, I don’t know what I am talking about.”

Then I just cried as hard as I could, and he sat there on the table, swinging his long legs and whistling under his breath with some profane words—shames and such. Then in she came, very white and red-eyed.

“The truth was,” says she, “Tom, you shan’t look at me like that—but the ba—baby liked her best. He did, of course, he liked me in a selfish way, he had to have me (actually a look of triumph in her eyes), but

he would crow and call for her and try to go to her, and she has just stolen my own child's affection. So there, now!"

"I am going right away," I says, "you shan't never see me again."

"You two, silly things," says Tom, looking at us in great scorn, "you seem to think, Di, that young one is an angel; I should think you'd be glad she loved it. Aren't you ashamed, with all you've got to care for, and Wilder so little, and then acting like a spiteful cat."

"You are hateful and rude," she said, swiftly. "You shan't talk like that, and that baby's all mine, every bit. I guess I suffered for him. I am jealous, and I don't care if you do know it."

"You seem to forget all she has done for you, a true friend when you needed one most. I am ashamed, if you can not be. You were meek enough when the cub had the croup, your fault, too. Oh, I like the way you are acting, I do, I'm proud of you."

"For Heaven's sake, Tom, don't let me be the cause of your first quarrel," I cried, getting up and putting on my bonnet with shaking hands. "I never will forgive myself, now you send for the wagon and get me to town, the trunk can go, Drinda will finish it for me."

"I won't order the wagon," Mr. Ballinger getting sulky now.

"I can walk, then."

At that moment Neil, who evidently wanted a voice in the conflict, began to cry; his mother paid no heed, looking very white and determined.

“Why don't you go get him?” says Tom, glaring angrily.

“Let Miss Wilder get him,” she answered, with that rebellious look I knew so well. I went right in and fetched him out of his crib, he refusing to be comforted, crying for his mother in a real, pitiful way, and she would not even look at him.

“Why don't he stop yelling?” said Tom, stupidly.

“He wants his unnatural mother,” I says, shortly, “and yet she says I've got him away from her.”

“Give him to me,” she cried, suddenly, and then ran off with the baby, slamming the door behind her. Tom resumed that irritating whistling, and I began to fairly hurl my belongings into my trunk. As a consequence, the lid wouldn't shut, and he rudely refused to sit on it, to force it down. I fixed it, finally, and got my shawl out of the cupboard, and then in she came, radiant and smiling, the baby crowing and dancing in her arms. I turned my head away.

“Do take him, Ann,” piteously, “oh, I did not mean to be ugly, please, please, forgive me. You shall have half of him, only love me like you used to; if you go away, it will break my heart.”

I never could resist her, and so, poor, meek, old soul that I was, I sat down on my trunk, and took the baby—I will say he was mighty eager to come to me—and he crowed and pulled at my curls, and Tom took my bonnet and laid it on the bureau, lit a cigar, offering it to both of us, to smoke for a pipe of peace, and then hugged his wife.

“You act like a person of sense now,” he said, graciously, giving her that sweetest look of his. “Let Wilder have Neil, we may have plenty more.”

“I am ashamed of you,” I said, but they both ran out, and left me, and I heard her racing down-stairs with him like a girl again, and ordering Drinda to get up a fine dinner, the best she knew how.

That night Mrs. Ballinger trailed into my room with a white lump of humanity in her arms, and in a gust of generosity and forgiveness, laid little Neil in my bed.

“He can sleep with you till he cries,” she said, urbanely, and pleased with that sop, I fell asleep, as happy as a lamb.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A FALSEHOOD FOR LOVE.

The following June, Mrs. Ballinger, Baby and I started East. We were accompanied by divers trunks, filled with finery, and by Drinda, resplendent in fine calico, with lace-trimmed aprons and a lace cap on her white hair. Mr. Ballinger was to come shortly after various cattle deals had been consummated. We went direct to Old Orchard Beach, much to my disgust, for I wanted to splurge at Mt. Desert.

“Oh, you vanity,” laughed Mrs. Ballinger, when I told her, “but I have an object in coming here, it’s very stylish too, so let that content you, and isn’t the wide, blue sea and the rolling waves on the sand enough to make any one happy? We have left such a dry, dry land, that just to breathe the salt sea air puts new life in one.”

It certainly did, and as we had fine rooms, commanding a view of the ocean and received great attention, I found myself quite happy. Mrs. Ballinger is a very handsome woman, and, I regret to say, flirted a little; the men went wild over her. I did not care at all, I think I am something of a Pharisee, I would rather go about my business than bother with sick travelers by the wayside; I like a quiet life, and, I may add, his mother’s galivanting gave me more of Baby’s

society. Not that she did not always behave perfectly proper, she is a pattern woman, but she did not act the recluse because Tom was absent. I trust I have smoothed that over in case his eye ever falls on it.

How times had changed for me, here was I, worth over ten thousand dollars, living at a fine hotel, trailing in black silk every day and wearing a diamond pin in the costly lace at my neck. I had plumped up with prosperity as most folks do. I remember a girl poet who drifted into Southport and wrote little pieces about the sea and fishermen and was sad and wistful, like Cassius having "a lean and hungry look;" she went away, hardly having money enough to pay her board bill; three years after I met her, and then she was a gracious and beautiful woman, a success herself, advising other people how to bear their trials.

Mrs. Ballinger, Baby and I took a run down to Southport, and how small that town did look to me; it seemed to have shrunk, and how unchanged the folks who had not been junketing. I put on some airs maybe, caught myself saying, with a queer sense that I was an old goose and they knew it, that I wondered how I existed so long in such an isolated place. I fancied how they would talk me over when I was gone and say, "la, ain't Lyd Ann Wilder set up sence she went out West, she furgits when she taught our youngones and was glad of the chance, and I've known her when she was a bare-footed brat driving the cows home from pastur." One can never outlive those recollections.

Mrs. Ballinger was never tired of talking about the

quaint fishermen and the town; "It's so like Corpus Christi, where Tom and I were so happy," she said once, with shining eyes.

"Hm, Missus," says I, "it seemed to me at Old Orchard you forget there was a Tom.

"What do you mean, you cross old thing?" with a pout.

"A married flirt robbing the poor girls of the few male creatures found at a seaside hotel."

"A man is a great deal more in love with his wife if the world calls her charming, as you should know, Madam Macchiavelli, and I wanted Tom to know how lovely I am. In the commonplace ways of married life he might forget to admire me."

"Of all vain women," I gasped, but she only laughed and went out to sit by the sea with a dude from Boston, whose only charm, I found afterwards, was that he was in college with Tom. I remember one night after we returned from Southport, that Mrs. Ballinger got herself up in fine style; I saying to my conscience, take care, my lady, you may go too far when you get to dressing up to please somebody. She is a magnificent woman, matured now, and no longer scraggy, her eyes are brighter than ever, she has a faint rose tint in her cheeks, and all her pretty ways are intensified by our happy life. I think she had on a soft cream-colored gown with a big bunch of red roses on her breast, her waist open at the throat, showing a fair, white neck, with no collar bones to speak of. I watched her putting her diamond earrings in, in grim silence. "What

is this toilet for?" I said, severely. "One would think your husband was coming."

"You mean some one else's husband. Well I do expect the most delightful man, and you shall know him, dear."

"I will not, my lady, no more being accessory for me. Go your flirtatious ways in peace and leave me out, I won't be inveigled into any more surreptitious junketings."

"Well, only come down on the porch and look at him, and then you can tell Tom, you know," she dragged me away, and, unwillingly, I went, too, being tired of that sort of thing.

"There he is now," she cried, a happy light on her face, "a soldier *sans peur et sans reproche*."

There, coming toward us, a smile in his kind, weary eyes, was our Texas Colonel, with his stiff and military walk. He greeted us warmly, inquired after Thomas, and then said, remorsefully,

"Oh, Mrs. Ballinger, must I play a part so foreign to my nature, is there no other way?"

"You know there is none, and this is so plausible—so easy. Wilder, my dear accessory, the Colonel and I are in a deep plot, and he has prepared the way by dwelling on the perfections of his friend Miss Moore, a young Galveston heiress, to Mrs. Howard, who lives in that pretty cottage under the evergreens. You were admiring it the other day. She is very exclusive, knows few people here, and has been ill recently, so in no possible way can she have learned Mrs. Thomas



Ballinger is registered at this hotel. I intend to become a single woman again and win her affections, as the Colonel thinks I can, and you are to take care of Neil, a position that will delight your jealous soul."

"I fancy what it will be to your jealous soul," I said, "but I accept my share in the plot with joy, and, seriously, my dear, I hope the Lord will bless your errand, and bring about that meeting between mother and son you have always hoped for."

When she departed with the Colonel to call at the cottage, I ran up to my room after Sir Baby, dressed him in his very best frock, and paraded up and down the porch with him, where everybody said he was the handsomest child they ever saw. I felt like a small sister fallen heir to a big sister's doll. What rides I took him in our hired carriage, Drinda holding him in much state, what walks on the beach, and the tricks I taught him. He thought there was no one like "Nan," the nearest he could say auntie, and would cry to come to me from his mother; so had time revenged me. But Mrs. Ballinger did not care, she spent all her time at the cottage, and talked of nothing but lovely Mrs. Howard.

"She said to me," said Babe, after this visiting had been going on for a fortnight, "that she wished her son had known me, and that she would be the happiest woman in the world, if he could have married me."

"'Is he married unhappily?' I ventured, 'feeling how much I would give to tell her the truth, but not daring to yet.'

“‘I do not know,’ she answered, sadly, ‘but very much beneath him, and such marriages can not be happy. Until this moment, I have not mentioned his name, nor allowed it to be mentioned in my presence since he wrote me he intended marrying a person named Murphy, the daughter of a gambler. I am not so angry as I was; I think as we grow old, our aversions and hatreds become indistinct, and we put them away in the past. I only dread now the shock of seeing that person or her children, and to know they are a part of our family that the world recognizes. We have had a great many troubles lately; my only sister, ten years my junior, has become an old and helpless woman from grief. She is abroad with her daughter; a very sad fate the daughter had, not fit for your young ears, but my sister writes me Clara is very kind, and her own nature has grown tolerant and forgiving. She realizes she may have forced Clara into a life that led to such a tragedy, I dread even to think of it.’ Just think,” cried Babe, with quivering lips, “how I could sit and listen to that, knowing that tragedy, oh, so terribly well!

“‘The person my son, married,’ continued Mrs. Howard (she is such a stately, lovely lady, Wilder), ‘was the daughter of a man instrumental in the grief and shame that came upon our family, and that itself would forever bar her from my doors. It is too horrible. Imagine, too, my dear Miss Moore, she was brought up in a mining camp, had no education, and the house-keeper, or rather the wife of her father’s partner, was a dreadful woman, the kind you and I can not even mention.’

“Oh,” cried Babe, “I felt like bursting in a fit of wild laughter at the mockery of it, but I only said, ‘Mrs. Howard, do you not think the good is in the person, not in the surroundings?’”

“‘I fear the latter help to form character; my own niece was a sad illustration of it. She was brought up in a railroad town in the West, and though I tried my best when she came to live with us, to elevate her to our station, and teach her to be a lady, it was impossible. She was hopelessly common, would not change her ways with a fatuous vanity, and Thomas insisted she should be sent home. Her mother was one of our housemaids, and my brother’s life was wrecked when he married her.’”

One day when I was walking on the beach, Drinda wheeling Baby, I saw the black horses of Mrs. Howard’s fine carriage approaching, and as Babe and I had agreed on this move, I stopped until they came up. I saw Mrs. Howard then, for the first time; a tall, handsome woman, with those brilliant, brown eyes, Tom’s only good feature, and a high-bred air that words can not do justice to. She was dressed in mourning, a widow’s veil over her snow-white hair. Mrs. Ballinger was with her in gorgeous raiment, as usual, this time I think some sort of a figured silk in soft pink and blue with a wide Gainsborough hat.

“Mrs. Jones,” (the first time I was ever called Mrs., the saucy thing) said Mrs. Ballinger, “let us take your grandchild for a drive, we will take the best of care of him, and Mrs. Howard is so fond of babies.”

“What a beautiful child?” said Mrs. Howard, bowing to me. “I should be delighted to take him, the dear little thing, see he wants to come. My only child was a boy, and I have always loved boy babies best.”

Mrs. Ballinger lifted Neil into the carriage in a real handy way for a supposed single woman, and away they went, Neil tickled to death at seeing new people and his mother’s pretty gown.

After that they frequently borrowed the baby, once I remember Mrs. Howard asked me how his mother could be parted from such a darling, and, with a meaning look at Babe’s laughing eyes, I said, solemnly, “She’s quite an invalid, ma’am,” finding myself a ready liar when occasion warranted. One evening, not long after that, I was driving by the cottage, and Mrs. Howard insisted I should come in, the Colonel and Mrs. Ballinger were on the porch, and the latter gave me a look to come, which I did, making myself comfortable in a rocking chair. Our poor Colonel, he was nearly distracted in his attempts to keep the names right and to avoid Miss Wilder or Mrs. Ballinger, or any references to Colorado.

“I wonder,” he said, abruptly, after a desultory conversation on Boston and culture that kept us in beaten tracks, and avoided dangerous topics, “whether there are ever cases where untruth and deceit are perfectly justifiable.”

“You a lawyer, and say that,” smiled Mrs. Howard, “but you were always so, in dear Nelly’s lifetime (his wife’s, who had been a schoolmate of Mrs. Howard’s).

She used to tell me of your struggles with the harmless fibs society requires. I fear I have erred frequently against the truth; sometimes a lie is kinder far than the truth."

"I hate deceit," said Mrs. Ballinger, blushing furiously, "but if a falsehood is for love, to win forgiveness, surely it might be forgiven."

"I think so," said Mrs. Howard, looking affectionately on that lovely face, with its eager eyes and tremulous mouth, "one might forgive a great many wrong stories from you, my dear."

"Mrs. Howard," she cried, quickly, the roses on her breast quivering with the wild throbbing of her heart, "will you listen to me, then, and let me tell the truth that has been on my lips so long?" She went swiftly to the elder woman, knelt down in that loving way of hers, and holding Mrs. Howard's hand tight, began the story of a girl's life with all its shadows and weary days.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### PATHS OF PEACE.

The Colonel, very pale and nervous, gave her a reassuring smile. I held little Neil, who crowed and pulled at my curls, and rippled into baby laughter. Before us lay the shining sea, and the soft plash of waves chimed with my dear girl's voice. With infinite pathos she told the story of her childhood, the struggles of her girlhood, and all that strange history that led up to a noble womanhood. Only once did the lips of the elder woman speak. "Whose cause are you pleading?" she asked hoarsely, and Mrs. Ballinger cried piteously: "Oh, listen in patience, let me have courage to go on to the end!"

With great delicacy and sweetness she told the story of her temptation, of Tom's departure, her heart-break, and then of the murder up there in the awful shadow of the mountains, and that poor man's sad, blighted life. Then of our flight and Con Murphy's death, then on to happier days, her meeting with her dear love, their wedding, and, at last, of the child born to them, and how at that time both their hearts ached for Mrs. Howard, and longed more than ever before for her forgiveness and love. She spoke of my friendship for her that had made her life pure and good, and oh, rated me far higher than I ever deserved. I hid my face

behind Baby's curly head, and knew my eyes were dim. The Colonel coughed once or twice, and drummed noiselessly on the arm of his chair with his trembling fingers. When she finished, and a hush fell on us all, little Neil, the only unmoved person, he looking at us with innocent, happy eyes, I saw my dear girl's head droop as if she dared not look in that stern face above her, and then I saw, more beautiful than any diamond, a tear fall from Mrs. Howard's eyes down on my darling's dark hair.

"And then," cried Mrs. Ballinger, brokenly. "I persuaded that high-minded, noble gentleman to aid me in deceiving you, to let me know you when you could like me without prejudice. You are my dear husband's mother, he lay in your arms as my baby lies in mine—my baby that has your beautiful eyes. Had you been asked when your baby lay helpless in your young arms, to cast him from you, to refuse ever to see his dear face, would you have done it? could you? Oh, it is woman's duty to forbear and to forgive, we are of finer clay that can be moulded, and our children are our very life."

Still Mrs. Howard did not speak, looking down on my girl with white, strange face, and inscrutable expression.

"If you will not listen to me," cried Mrs. Ballinger, "let your son's child plead for his mother."

She laid Neil in his grandmother's lap, then stood there with heaving bosom and tearful eyes, waiting the verdict.

“My dear, dear child,” said the stately lady, a very tearful, womanly creature, after all, “I can not realize it. I only see my cruelty, my injustice. I only know I loved you before, and now I care for you more than I could believe possible. You beautiful, winsome creature, ah! Colonel, she was worthy the sacrifice of your truth—you flower of chivalry and courtesy; to her noble womanhood all aid must be given, and you acted the honorable, high-minded gentleman you have always been. In this kindly way you have opened the eyes of a bad-hearted old woman to her blindness, her sin; you have made me see myself, and hate myself. Oh! my daughter, kiss me again! let us be friends, and tell me you can forgive, as a woman like you can without thought of the past, with loving joy in the present. And my son’s baby in these poor arms, close to this poor heart, starved for love so long! Can it be real? be possible?”

She was almost in hysterics, as near as people of that nature could get, so I fetched her smelling bottle out, and took the Colonel away, knowing Mrs. Ballinger and baby could bring her to calmness best. I saw as we went down the steps, that the young wife was still kneeling by Mrs. Howard, and Neil lay in his grandmother’s lap, pulling at her watchchain, crowing with delight as she bent over him, doing more with his baby dimpled hands to bring those two women into love and happiness than all the wise counsellors in the world.

“I have perverted the truth,” said the Colonel, offering me his arm with stately courtesy.



“In a good cause, Colonel.”

“Indeed, yes; I do not regret it, nor ever will.”

“Certainly not,” I said, promptly, “the end justifies the means.”

“Hardly, in most cases, I think, especially politics. How unfair and ungenerous are the methods employed in elections now! I would not accept the highest office offered me in the land to-day, if to reach it I must wade in the mire of ill-natured comment, absolute slander and untruth that surrounds every candidate. Nor could I exist in the most exalted position were I constantly denounced and cried down as most officials of the public service are. The wise men to-day keep away from the political arena.”

“When he should be a Hercules sweeping out those stables I never can remember the name of. He ought to be fighting for protection of everything American, honest wages and labor, honest men in office and the old spirit of '76, that the world has not improved on yet. When the world can write a better Declaration of Independence than this country has, and has lived up to, America will be no more.”

“You are quite eloquent, Miss Wilder, but you and I can never agree on protection; we Texans want free trade.”

“Because,” I said, viciously, “you are all too languid down there in that beautiful climate to work; you need Northern grit, that goes with a cold country; you want to buy cheap someone else's work, and get appropriations for deep-water harbors, for ships to bring those goods right to your doors.”

“I never can argue with a lady,” he said, irritatingly, but so dreadful polite I was silenced, “but that person coming has a familiar look—perhaps your eyes are better than mine.”

“In this case, yes, for I expected him. I had a little plot of my own, and telegraphed for that young man.”

We were talking of Mr. Ballinger, who was coming rapidly toward us with that springy gait of his, wearing a light summer suit, and the sombrero he affected to give him the look of a cowboy, though perhaps I ought to say *ranchero*.

“Wilder,” he says, grasping both my hands, then turns to greet the Colonel. I see he is looking pale and anxious.

“Is my wife well and the baby?” he says, nervously; “you only said, ‘Come at once.’ I’ve been nearly crazy about them.”

“Go see,” I said, pointing to the cottage, for he never knew his mother was at Old Orchard, at all, she only having bought the cottage the past summer. “They are both well,” I called, to comfort him, “but your wife has been masquerading as a single woman.”

“How, with a baby?” he turned back to say.

“Oh, I passed Neil off as mine,” I answered, and he went on, laughing merrily, and the Colonel looked a bit shocked, and we resume our conversation on the tariff, which we know as little about as anybody else, and which is, it seems to me, the great fifteen puzzle of the nineteenth century. When we return to the cottage we find Neil asleep on his grandmother’s lap, and

Tom and his wife walking up and down with their arms about each other, like two young lovers, as they have always been. We had a happy walk to the hotel later, after a pleasant chat, when Mrs. Howard promised to spend the winter at the ranch, seeming delighted at the idea, and that fall we were to stop in Boston at her house. At last was I to enter the charmed precincts of a Beacon street mansion, one of those high, narrow houses I had looked at so often, wishing, enviously, my ancestors had come over in the *Mayflower*, or been governors of Massachusetts or modern millionaires, able to buy a mansion, portraits and pedigrees from some extinct family, degenerating as "the property of such and such estate." Though aristocracy to me is only the gang that got there first—I don't mean slang at all—or that drove out the other people as William the Conqueror did, and, as Con used to say, they are all skeletons, anyway. Still I do think, looking out of the plate-glass windows of a Beacon street mansion, my countenance will assume a look of pensive pride, as if I belonged there.

That night, Ballinger, junior, being agreeably weary, retired early—he occupies a crib in my room and sleeps there, unless, when she retires, his mother comes to take him into her bed. I sit up a bit to write my "thorts," as my brother Bill used to say, when he told the neighbors, "Lyd was going to be an arthur," and half of 'em, not understanding his pronunciation, used to say, "Wanter know, and is she cal'latin' on making a livin' on't?"

Then Mrs. Ballinger trailed in, in her white lace wrap-

per, very lovely and rosy, to kiss little Neil, and to say she guessed she would leave him in his crib, he was sleeping so sweetly, and I must be sure to keep the covers on him, he did kick so. Tom, in his shirt sleeves, for the night is hot, comes in and looks at Babe, fondly.

“The sweetest wife in the world, isn’t she, Wilder, May I come in, you are a Bohemian and you’ve got your dressing sack on, and I have always wondered if you did your hair up in paper or if it curled ‘natural.’ I am glad to see it’s natural, Di’s ain’t, she has curling tongs, another piece of deceit. Oh, I forgot, here is a letter for you, from Clara, I think.”

Mrs. Ballinger, who has been kneeling by the crib, gets up with a little frown on her bright face. I take the letter, and Tom goes to his wife laying his hand on her shoulder, “Are you going to be a narrow-hearted woman, my love?” he says. “Did we not agree to think that men and women are equal, is that not our creed? Can you shut your heart to what I can forgive?”

“She said I deceived her,” said Babe, uncomfortably.

“She don’t here, she knows now,” I said, running my eye over the letter, “shall I read it?”

“Dear old strait-laced Wilder, (H’m, flattering, I am sure) you precious, old saint and would-be-sinner, how often I think of you. You had soul enough for a dozen women. Oh me, what a life I lead, my conscience ever present in the sad face of my mother, her fervor for religion and her prayers for my guilty soul. Jones is my faithful servant yet, I dress him in gorgeous livery, for I am very swell and he drives my ponies. I thought

then, of that white-faced bay Con used to ride, I hunted him up in Denver and kind people own him, much, much more respectable folks than he ever knew in his horse life. I have considerable company, the men agreeable, the women shady. I am out of the pale of good society and good women. I suppose I ought to be thankful that anyone comes. Still I do think I find the men more witty and entertaining, than those do who make the home life, for most men keep their dull-wittedness and ill tempers for their wives. I am good, Wilder, dear, if I do talk like a wretch. I never cared but for one man, I lost all for him—and he is dead.

“I mourn in a queer way though, with gayeties and ‘junktetings,’ as you used to say. I’ve taught the men (most of them knew) poker, and I win from their dull, English brains, and their pocket-books, but I will say they are never cads. Like Con, they can lose ‘big money’ and look calm and quiet, perhaps a white line about the mouth—or nothing of the sort. I have camped in London for a time, weary of traveling. I have gambled at Monaco, flirted with a Russian prince in his own land, and, dear me, princes are as common there as colonels in Texas, and not half so nice. I have done Europe and climbed the Alps, and am going up the Nile this winter. My mother, who makes life a penitential pilgrimage like those duffers who wore hair-shirts and visited holy pools (was going to make a joke, but won’t on poor ma), accompanies me. I think she enjoys the beautiful scenes we visit, and the luxury of our life, but she would never tell me so. Jones has married a pretty mulatto

girl, who came over in the steamer with us. She was maid to an actress, and often asks me why I don't go on the stage. I have played one star part in a tragedy, and that is enough, and I could not start with a scandal particularly new, or a divorce. Sometimes I think of that poor man, whose life I ruined, and I am sorry; and the few times in my wanderings I have been near death, I thought of him with terror, and that my hand took from him that dear life we cling to at the end.

“I am not well, as health goes, very thin and feverish, and soon, I think, I shall come home in a narrow box, shunned by sailors when they see me aboard, and the terror of that poor wretch penned up with me in the baggage car. I shall lie beside my love in the sandy land by the sea, for Tom has promised that, and I believe he will respect my wishes. I would not trust my mother, for she would twist my last wish into a sin.

“Martin wrote me about Babe's coming to her own, and knowing all the circumstances now, I see I was cruelly wrong in hating her and thinking she made the price of her warning half my husband's fortune. Now I know fate led me on. Tom wrote me she laid her bridal bouquet, her dearest gift, on her father's grave, going there on her wedding night. I know she has forgiven him, then let her think as kindly of me. Because I am a woman and loved, must I be blamed the most? Oh, pure, noble-souled woman, oh, jasmine of gifts, take from my sinful lips an eager prayer for your happiness, and for your forgiveness. If some-

time a daughter lies in your young arms, resolve then to be fair and kind to her, to bring her up to your goodness, or if she go astray, to forgive and shield her. The world is not just, nor fair, to make us women and give us women's hearts, and then ask so much, so much more than it does of men.

“Tell this to her, Wilder, or read her my letter, and tell dear Tom I am glad he is happy in the good, honest, old-fashioned way. And good-bye to you, Wilder, you honest old maid, you cup of cold water that I have never seen equaled. The people, I know now, are only skeletons—poor Con's skeletons to me. Strip off your flesh, my stately lady, my bloated prince, my matronly, old dowager, with your red, English face, and your brood, your bones are no different from mine. Back to the earth to rot, who shall know you from me. Is dust any better in Westminster, or the potter's field? So I think, and wish my life away, nor care how low the world holds me, for I never can rise to better things here. I only know my heart will not die till it meets his. Pray for me, in your good, old-fashioned prayers, in your skimpy night-gown, trimmed with tatting, with your queer, little curls over your shoulders; some day we will meet out of the skeleton stage, and, till then, farewell.

CLARA.”

“Poor soul,” I say, with quivering lips, “Poor, lonely creature.”

“We have been blessed,” says my dear girl, solemnly, looking down on her sleeping child, “and knowing this and all that past, my heart does ache for her,

none the less, because I pity that poor, wronged husband, or my dead father. We can not condemn now, it is too late, we can only say forgive. When you write to her, tell her if ever my home can be a refuge to her, a place for her to lay her weary head, to be sheltered from the world, my doors are open to her."

"My love, my life," cried her husband, passionately, "my noblest among all your sex, a good woman who can forgive."

And then, forgetful of all, but the dear love they bore each other, they went away and left me. I looked across to see if baby were sleeping comfortably, stooped to kiss his dimpled hand, and then return to close my book, glad at heart, that "all our ways are ways of pleasantness and all our paths are peace."

THE END





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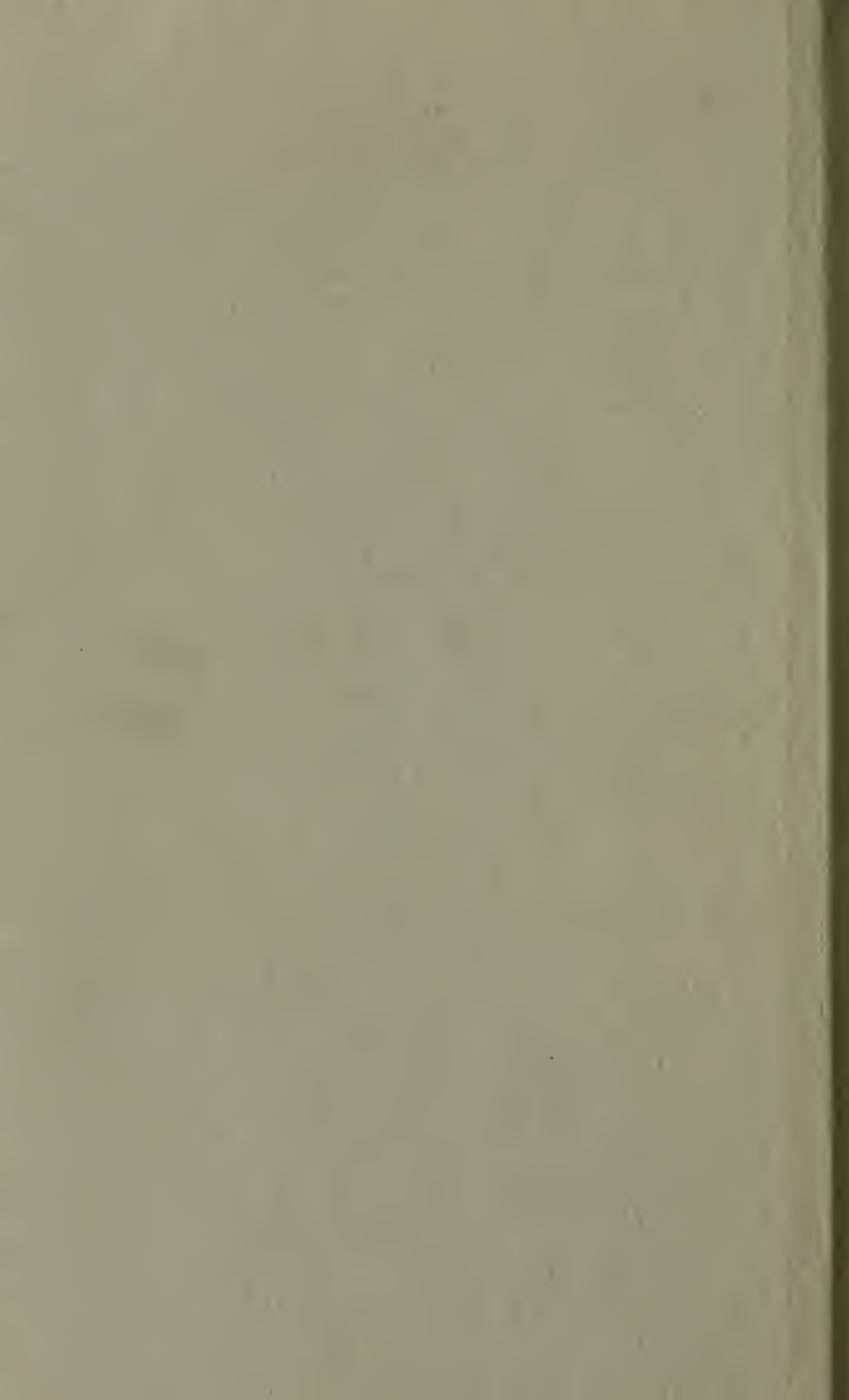
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