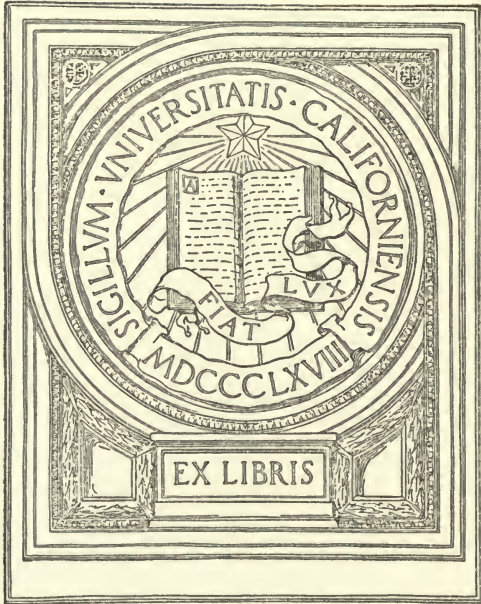


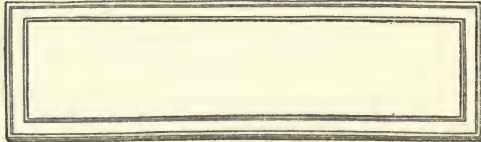
HARD-PAN



GERALDINE BONNER



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A STORY OF BONANZA FORTUNES

BY

GERALDINE BONNER



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I

DINNER was coming to an end. The Chinaman, soft-footed in his immaculate white, had just finished his circuit of the table, leaving a tiny gold-rimmed coffee-cup at each of the four plates. Into hers Letitia was lowering a lump of sugar, when a thought occurred to her, and she dropped the sugar into the cup with a little splash, and looking across at her vis-à-vis, said:

“Oh, John, I ’ve been going to ask you half a dozen of times, and have always forgotten: did you know that Colonel Ramsay Reed had a daughter?”

To see the effect of her question, she stretched forward a plump white hand and tilted to one side one of the pink silk petticoats that veiled the candle-flames. The obstruction removed, she looked with vivacious interest at the person to whom she had addressed her query. He, too,

had just dropped his sugar into his coffee, and was stirring it slowly, watching the little maelstrom in the cup.

“Colonel Ramsay Reed,” he said, without looking up. “Yes, I think I’ve heard something about his having a daughter. But why do you ask me? Is n’t Maud a much better person? She knows everything about everybody.”

He glanced at his sister-in-law, the dark, brown-eyed woman, very splendid in her white-and-yellow dress, who sat at the head of the small table. It was just a family party—Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer Gault, Mrs. Mortimer’s sister, Letitia Mason, and Mortimer’s brother, John Gault. Mrs. Gault, who seemed to be quite oblivious to the impertinence of her brother-in-law’s remark, answered smartly:

“I should n’t be surprised to hear that Colonel Reed had daughters by the dozens. Who knows really anything about those old bonanza men who’ve lost their bonanzas? They drop out of sight, and nobody ever hears of them again. Colonel Reed was in his glory before I was born.”

This was a slight exaggeration. Mrs. Mortimer Gault had been born a full thirty-eight years ago, in a house which now has a bakery beneath and furnished rooms above, in the environs of North Beach. It was quite fitting

and proper that she should have first seen the light there, as in that day North Beach was fashionable. But that this should have occurred thirty-eight years ago was a subject she quietly ignored. She was still so effective in her dark, quick-flashing style, so much admired and so fond of being admired, that she turned her back on and denied the thirty-eight years whenever she had the chance.

Her husband looked at her with indulgent and humorous appreciation of her quickness.

"I don't see, if Colonel Reed has a daughter," he said, "what he keeps her on. She can't live on the memory of his bonanza glories. The old fellow has n't got a cent in the world. White Pine scooped the last dollar he had. When did his wife die?"

Letitia, who was twelve years her sister's junior, and, even if she had not been, would not have felt sensitive about her accumulating birthdays, answered:

"Oh, long ago. Colonel Reed's always been a widower ever since I can remember."

"I remember hearing about his wife when I was a boy," said Mortimer. "She was a young actress, and married the colonel when everything was going his way. Then she died in a year or two of consumption. I did n't know there was a child."

"She must be quite young, then," said Maud

Gault. "What did you hear about her, Letitia?"

"Nothing much; only that she was pretty, and lived in an old ramshackle house somewhere across town, and that nobody knows anything about her. One of the girls was talking about it the other day at Mamie Murray's lunch, and I thought it was so funny, everybody knowing about Colonel Reed, that he should have had a daughter that none of us had ever heard of. That's why I asked John. He knows more of those queer, left-over people than anybody else."

She again tilted the candle-shade and looked at John Gault. For the first time since the conversation had turned on Colonel Reed's daughter, he met her eyes. His were brown and deep-set, and being near-sighted, he generally wore a pince-nez. He had taken this off, and looked at Letitia with his eyes narrowed to mere slits, after the manner of short-sighted people. Having finished his coffee, he was leaning back, the candle-light striking a smooth gleam from his broad expanse of shirt-bosom. The restless fire of diamonds broke the glossy surface, for John Gault, like many rich Californians of a passing era, clung to the splendid habits of the bonanza days. Sitting thus, he looked a spare, muscular man verging on forty, with dark hair and an iron-gray mustache.

“I don’t know whether that ’s meant to be a compliment,” he said, with the lazy smile with which he generally treated Letitia’s sallies. “Have I got a larger collection of freaks than most people?”

“What did *you* hear about Colonel Reed’s daughter?” asked Maud Gault.

“Really, I don’t recollect anything in particular,” he said; “probably just what Letitia heard—that she was pretty and lived somewhere across town.”

“If a man ’s going to remember everything he hears about girls that are pretty and live somewhere across town, he ’d have to get Professor What’s-his-name’s Memory System down by heart,” said Mortimer, pushing back his chair. “Come, Maud, you don’t want to sit here all night, do you?”

They rose, and together, the rustling ladies first, passed through the intervening hall into the drawing-room beyond. It was a warm, glossy, much-upholstered room, with an appearance of overcrowded cheeriness. Lamps casting halos of mellow light through beruffled silk shades like huge primeval flowers, glowed from the corners and sent glistening rays along the leaves of tropical plants. The ornaments disposed upon the tables and mantel-shelves were numerous and interesting enough to have claimed an afternoon’s careful attention. There

were mounds of cushions on the divans, and sudden prolongations of the surroundings in unexpected mirrors. Framed in the folds of the portières was the bright, distant picture of the deserted dining-table, with its bloom of candles and glint of glass and silver.

The small family party all knew one another so well, and so constantly met for these little informal dinners, that when John Gault excused himself on the ground of an evening engagement, no one criticized his defection or urged him to stay. Letitia, who had put on her new pink gauze dinner-dress that evening, was more hurt by the fact that he did not comment upon its splendors than that he left so early. She was used to his unceremonious inclusion of herself in the family party, whom he called by their Christian names and treated with brotherly informality.

This evening, as usual, she went into the hall with him for a last word or two while he put on his coat. Secretly she was hoping that he would notice her dress; for if Letitia had a weakness, it was for rich apparel. Fortunately she could indulge it. She had a fair fortune in her own right, and being an orphan who made her home with her married sister, her income was hers to spend as she pleased.

Standing under the hall light, she regarded Gault with grave attention as he attempted,

alone and unaided, to put on his coat. Then, seeing the unequal nature of the struggle, she said suddenly, "Let me help you, John," and taking the garment from him, shook it and held it out to him by the collar.

He laughed, and thrusting an arm into the sleeve, said over his shoulder:

"You 're not only the most ornamental but the most useful person I know, Letitia."

"Thanks," she responded sedately; "but I would n't have supposed you thought I was so ornamental."

"Why not?" he answered, affecting as dramatic a surprise as was possible in his position, with his second arm just thrust into the sleeve.

"Because you never noticed me to-night at all," said Letitia, giving the collar a settling jerk.

"Never noticed you?" He was able to turn round on her now, and regarded her with exaggerated astonishment. "What do you mean? I noticed you more than I did any one else."

"I did n't mean myself, exactly; I meant my gown."

"That shows how a feeling silence is thrown away on a woman. I noticed it a dozen times; but just because I did n't say so you suppose I was blind to it. How could I be?"

He stepped back and looked critically at Le-

titia standing where the light of the hall lamp fell softly over her.

"But you know," he said, "it would n't be strange for a man not to notice the dress, because the person who has it on is so much better worth looking at than any dress."

Letitia's delight at this compliment could not be disguised. She blushed and tried not to smile, and looked as childishly pleased as a woman can who is five feet nine inches high, and has the massive proportions and noble outlines of a Greek goddess.

She was, in truth, a fine creature, large, statuesque, and handsome, as Californian women are handsome, with the beauty of form and color. Viewed critically, her features were not without defects; but her figure was superb in its type, her skin was flawless, and her naturally rich coloring was still further intensified by the reddish hue that had been imparted to her hair by some artificial means. In the full panoply of evening dress there was something magnificently vivid, almost startling, about her. One could imagine a stranger, who had come suddenly upon her in a doorway or on a staircase, standing mute, with caught breath, staring.

To-night, touched into higher brilliancy by the new pink dress, her beauty even struck Gault's accustomed eye, and his compliment

had more sincerity in it than is usually found in those administered to relations. Then, amused at her girlishly naïve pleasure, he bade her a laughing good night, and without waiting for her response, opened the door and let himself out.

The Mortimer Gaults lived in the newest and most fashionable part of San Francisco. Two years before they had leased one of the houses that have sprung up, alone or in groups of three or four, throughout that quarter of the city where Pacific Avenue runs out along the edges of the sand-hills. Here the undulating lines of the great dunes, dreaming under the ceaseless hush, hush, hush of the wind sweeping through the rank sea-grass, have been hidden under the march of progress. Large new houses, shining with paint and bright with window-boxes, have settled on the slopes, and now hold the sand down. A layer of earth and a hose have transformed the haggard face of the dunes into gardens which would be a mass of vegetation but for the French gardeners' restraining shears.

The house rented by the Gaults, a solid, pale-hued building of the colonial form of architecture, was large, new, and imposing. Flowers drooped over its façade from many window-boxes. Its porch was verdurous with great leafy plants growing in tubs and earthenware

pots. In the front there was a close-clipped strip of lawn, with neat borders and a filamentosa palm, and the lower part of the bulging bay-window was hidden by the close, fine foliage of an ivy geranium.

Faring down the street with a quick step, John Gault passed many such dwellings, the homes of the city's well-to-do and wealthy. Here and there an undrawn blind afforded him a glimpse of a glowing interior, where the tall, shrouded lamp cast its light over a room as gaily brilliant as the one he had just left. But his eye traveled over the illuminated pane with unseeing preoccupation. He walked rapidly, and with the undeviating glance of inward reflection. Once he stopped at a corner lamp and looked at his watch. Then he hastened his steps, and a few blocks farther on boarded a cross-town car.

The part of the city toward which he was going was of a very different aspect and period. His car passed from the quiet gentility of the West Side toward the hum and glare of the business quarter. It swept him through streets full of the rank and ugly sidewalk life of a great city after dark to where Market Street, the town's main artery, throbbed and roared with the traffic of the night.

The line he had taken reached its terminus here, and he alighted, made his way through

the crowd and clangor of the wide thoroughfare, and plunged into the streets beyond.

Here at once the wayfarer feels himself in a locality whence prosperity and fashion have withdrawn themselves. The ill-lit streets, the small and squalid shops, the sordid faces of the passers-by, tell their own tale of a region fallen from grace. John Gault had too often passed this way for the ruinous aspect of the surroundings to possess any interest for him. With a thin thread of cigarette smoke streaming out above his upturned collar, he passed on rapidly through the patches of shadow and garish light from show-windows. People turned and looked at him sharply, his noticeable figure being an unusual one in that locality. To one watching it might have seemed that this curiosity annoyed him, for he quickened his pace, and at the first side street turned off to the left.

There were fewer wayfarers here; the lamps were far apart, and on either hand the dark forms of huge houses, their façades showing only an occasional light in an upper window, loomed vague and forbidding. The dreariness of desertion seemed to hold them in a spell, as they rose, brooding and black, from the dimness of overgrown gardens. This had been one of the great streets in San Francisco's splendid heyday. Here millionairess had built its palaces and held its revels. John Gault remem-

bered some of them, and now his eye passed blankly over the lines of darkened windows and the wide porticos where years before, on his vacations from college, he had entered as a guest.

But his thoughts were elsewhere.

How strange that the conversation should have taken that turn at dinner! Could Letitia have heard anything? Impossible! Even if she had, she was too simple-minded and direct to be so manœuvering. This was the seventh time he had been to see Viola Reed—the seventh time in less than three months. What did he go for? He laughed a little to himself at the question, and throwing his head back, blew a film of cigarette smoke into the night. What did he go for? To pass the evenings, that otherwise would have been idly passed in his own rooms, or dully passed in society, or drearily passed in the pursuit of amusements he had long wearied of, in the society of a girl who pleased his critical taste, beguiled him of his boredom, and piqued his interest and curiosity.

Yes, that was the secret of her attraction for him. She was not like any one he had ever known before. She piqued his curiosity.

A picture of her rose before his mental vision, and with a shamefaced laugh at his own sentiment, he threw his cigarette away. Letitia

had said she was pretty. Undoubtedly she was, but she was something more than pretty. Refined, delicate, poetic—there was no word that described it. If Letitia went about talking of her, other people would want to see her. He resented the idea violently, and felt his anger rising at the thought of the coarse curiosity and comment that would suddenly surround her. Some one ought to stop Letitia from talking that way.

“For,” thought John Gault, as he turned a corner and came within view of Colonel Reed’s abode, “I am the prince who has found the Sleeping Beauty.”

The house, like many in that quarter of the city, was detached, and had once been a dwelling with pretensions to gentility. Time and weather had worked their will of it, and even under the kindly veil of night its haggard dilapidation was visible. It sat back a few feet from the street in a square of garden, where a tall dracæna shook its rustling foliage to every breeze. There was a large flowering jasmine-tree by the gate, that spread a sweet scent through the noisome airs of that old and ill-drained quarter. The visitor softly opened the gate and entered up a pathway flagged with squares of black and white stone that were broken and uneven. From the front window—a wide bay shrouded in vines—the light

squeezed in narrow slits. John Gault pulled the old-fashioned bell and stood listening to its jingling note.

There was a step in the passage within, and the light shone through the two narrow panes of glass that flanked the front door on either side. A key turned and the door was opened. In the aperture Viola Reed stood with a kerosene lamp flickering in her hand. She held a piece of light-colored material in the other hand. As her glance fell on the visitor she made an instinctive movement as if to hide this.

"Oh, is it you?" she said. "Come in. I'm glad you've come!"

She uttered the sentences quickly, and was evidently embarrassed. Even by the light of the smoky lamp Gault could see that she had flushed.

"I never thought of your coming to-night," she said, as she turned to open the parlor door. "It's a great surprise. My father will be delighted."

She held the lamp up while the visitor divested himself of his coat and hung it on the chair that did duty as a hat-rack. In the dim hallway, with its walls from which the paper had peeled in long strips, and the stairway beyond, with the twine showing through the ragged carpet, the man of the world in his well-

groomed, well-dressed, complacent perfection of finish, presented a curiously incongruous appearance.

The girl opened the door, and he followed her into the parlor. It was a long room, divided in the middle by an archway, its lower end now veiled in shadow. On a large table another lamp glowed, a bunch of paper flowers hanging on one side of the globe to subdue the light. The room gave an impression of lofty emptiness. The footsteps of the visitor seemed to be flung back from its high, bare walls. The lamp struck gleams of light from the gilded frame of a large mirror over the chimney-piece, and here and there caught the running gold arabesques which covered the wall-paper. There were a few wicker chairs drawn up to the table, which was covered with the litter of amateur dress-making. In the single upholstered chair that the room boasted sat Colonel Ramsay Reed.

With a loud exclamation of pleasure the colonel rose and greeted his guest. He was a remarkable-looking man of sixty-five or seventy, fully six feet in height, erect, alert, with a striking air of distinction in his narrow, hawk-featured face, and a gaunt, angular figure. His white hair flowed nearly to his shoulders, and his white mustache was in singular contrast to the brown and leathery surface of his thin cheeks. He wore a long wrapper of inde-

terminate hue, patched with materials of different colors and patterns, and a pair of old leather slippers that slipped off his heels when he walked. In his suave and urbane courtesy he seemed to be serenely indifferent to the deficiencies of his costume, folding his dressing-gown round his legs as he subsided into his chair with the deliberate ease that a Roman senator might have displayed in the arrangement of his toga of ceremony.

His daughter did not appear to share his composure; she was nervous and embarrassed. She swept off the evidences of her dressmaking with a few rapid movements, and took them away to the shadows of the far end of the room, hung another paper flower over the blinding glare of the second lamp, and, sitting by the table, let her glance stray furtively about for further details that needed correcting. John Gault, who appeared to be awarding a polite attention to the colonel's conversational amenities, was conscious of her every movement.

Viola Reed was one of those women that nature seems to have intended to make completely and satisfyingly beautiful, the intention having been changed only at the last moment. The upper half of her head was without a fault—the low forehead, the wonderful hair, thick and wavy, and so instinct with life that every separate filament seemed to stand out from its fel-

lows, in color a warm, bright blond, and with shorter hairs about the ears and temples which curled up in golden threads. In strange contrast with this brilliant hair were level, dark-brown eyebrows, that were low over large gray eyes. She had the same dark-brown lashes, which grew wide apart and turned back, a rare beauty, and one which imparts an expression of soft, wistful tenderness to the eyes thus encircled.

Here Viola's beauty ended. Her other features were, at least, inoffensive. She was tall and beautifully formed, but in the slenderest mold. To the Californian ideal she was thin. But her movements were distinguished by a supple grace denied to women of a more stately build and proportion. To-night she wore a shirt-waist, washed out from its original pink to a wan flesh-color, and a scanty black stuff skirt, belted with a black ribbon. Gault, with his eyes fixed on the colonel, was aware of the stealthy rearrangement she made of the ribbon round her neck, and the movements of the investigating hand with which she pushed back her loosened hair-pins.

As was her custom, she made little attempt to join in the conversation. The evening settled down into a replica of its predecessors. The fact that Gault was becoming a familiar figure in the bare front parlor did not seem to

abate the colonel's buoyant appreciation of him as a good listener.

The younger man, with his glance on the floor and an expression of polite attention on his face, found himself wondering, with inward amusement, what his friends would say if they could have had a glimpse of him, listening, silently and submissively, to the reminiscences of Colonel Ramsay Reed. The conjecture called up such a picture of incredulous astonishment and disbelief that a smile broke out on his lips. Aware of its incongruity, he stole a quick, apprehensive look at Viola. She was watching him with a surprise evidently tempered by pain at the thought that his amusement might be evoked by her father's garrulity. Gault's gravity became intense, and the colonel, who was too engrossed in the joy of having secured a victim to notice anything, went gaily on. He was launched on his favorite subject—the men he had assisted to affluence in the early days.

“There 's Jerry McCormick. You know where he is now? No need to ask any one that; has been a member of Congress, can draw his check for a million, his wife a leader of society, and his daughters marrying English lords. You know them, of course?”

The visitor made an affirmative sign, and the colonel continued:

“Well, I made that man. When I first ran against McCormick he was working in the mines up in Tuolumne, with the water squeelching in his boots. In those days a dollar to Jerry looked about as big as a cart-wheel. His wife was glad enough to do a little washing, and his daughter—the youngest ones were n’t born then, but the eldest, the one that married the English lord, was—used to run round bare-foot, and bring her father his dinner in a tin pail.”

“I ’m sure she does n’t know what a tin pail is now,” said Gault, a mental picture rising in his mind of the magnificent Lady Courtley as he had seen her on her last visit to her parents.

“No,” said the old man; “I hear she ’s one of the Vere de Veres. And I can remember her, a little freckled-faced kid with her hair in her eyes, hanging round the tunnel of the Little Bertha, waiting to give her father his dinner.”

“Do you know the younger McCormick girls, Miss Reed? Lady Courtley was before your time,” said Gault, in an attempt to draw Viola into the conversation.

She looked surprised, and then gave a little laugh and shook her head.

“I ’ve never even seen them,” she answered.

“Oh, they don’t know Viola,” said the colonel—not with bitterness, but as one who states a

simple and natural fact; "the old woman 's educated them out of all that. But, as I was saying, I made their father. He 'd managed to scrape together a little pile, put it all in a small prospect, and lost every nickel. He was just about dead broke, and came to me crying—yes, crying—and said, 'Colonel Reed, there 's only one man in California whose advice I 'd follow and whose opinion I 'd trust.' 'Who 's that?' said I, intending to help the poor devil to the best of my ability. 'It 's Ramsay Reed,' said he. 'Well,' said I, 'if you 'll just put yourself in my hands, and do what I tell you, I 'll set you on your feet.' 'Colonel,' said he, 'say the word, and whatever it is, it goes. You 've got more financial ability in your little finger than all the rest of 'em have in their whole bodies.' So I took him in hand."

The colonel paused, a reflective smile wrinkling the skin at the corners of his eyes.

"You certainly seem to have made a success of his case," said Gault, feeling that some comment was expected of him.

"Yes, yes," said the colonel; "I may say a great success. The poor fellow's confidence in me made me determined to do my best. I used to give him points—those were the days when I could give points. Told him if he would follow the lead west of the Little Bertha—people had hardly heard of the Little Bertha then—

he 'd strike it. He was broke, and I gave him the money. Three months later he 'd struck pay dirt. That was the beginning of the Alcade Mine, but he did n't have sense enough to hold on to it, and sold out for a few thousands. I saw then that I 'd have to do more than give him an occasional boost, and stood behind him, off and on, for years. Even when we ran into the Virginia City boom he never bought without my advice. He had n't any discrimination. I 'd just say to him, 'Save your money and buy five feet next to the Best and Belcher,' and he 'd do what I said every time. Without me he 'd have been working in the mines in Tuolumne yet."

In the absorption of his recollections the colonel crossed his knees, bringing one foot, with a torn slipper dropping from the heel, into a position of prominence.

"Oh, those were days worth living in!" he said, running a long, spare hand through his hair—"great days! Men that were n't grown then don't know what life is. I meet Jerry sometimes, but we don't talk much about old times. He knows that he owes everything to me, and it goes against the grain for him to acknowledge it. I hear his daughters are handsome girls."

"Perhaps—I don't know," said Gault, recalling the occasions when he had sat next to

the Miss McCormicks at dinners, and suffered exceedingly in the effort known as "making conversation."

"I heard that they were fine, handsome girls, large, and with black hair like their mother. She was a beauty in her day—a hot-tempered Irish girl that Jerry married from the wash-tub. The youngest daughter is about Viola's age—twenty-three."

John Gault turned and looked at Viola with some surprise.

"You thought I was younger, did n't you?" she said, smiling. "Everybody does."

He was about to answer when the colonel once more took up the thread of his reminiscences.

"Maroney was down then—'way down; not even on the lowest rung of the ladder—he was n't on the ladder at all. I gave him the first lift he had. No one would look at Maroney in those days. He was a thin, consumptive-looking fellow, full of crazy schemes, forever coming to you and borrowing money for some wild-cat stock that was n't worth the paper it was printed on. I took a fancy to him, and every dollar he made was through my help and advice. It was when I had my offices on Montgomery Street, and he 'd have a way of dropping in about lunch-time and hanging round looking poor and sick. I used to take him

out to lunch, and give him a square meal and a few points that he 'd sense enough to follow. He was n't like Jerry; he was smart. Why, I almost fed that man for years. When he 'd get down on his luck—and he was always doing that—I 'd say, 'You know, when you want, my check-book 's at your disposal.' And it was, more times than I can remember."

The colonel paused, smiling at his thoughts. The visitor, who had been looking idly on the ground, raised his eyes and let them dwell in curious scrutiny upon the old man's profile, cut like a cameo against the dim walls with their fine gold traceries. John Gault, like all Californians, knew every vicissitude in the life of Adolphus Maroney, one of the great bonanza kings, a man whose career was quoted as an example of what could be done by brains and energy in the California of the Comstock era.

Wondering, as he had done many times before, what Viola thought of her father's vainglorious imaginings, he turned now and suddenly looked at her. She was sitting with her elbow on the table and her chin resting in the palm of her hand. Her eyes were on the colonel, and her expression was one of appreciative interest. It was possible that she believed in him, absolutely and unquestionably. Yet her face, in its placid, restful gravity, gave no clue to the thoughts within. She was not to

be read by every casual comer. Even the practised eye of the man of much worldly experience was baffled by the quiet reserve of this young girl who was nearly half his age.

“I have n’t seen Maroney for nearly eight or nine years,” continued the colonel. “The last time it was in the lobby of the Palace. He was with some capitalists from England, with a millionaire or two from New York thrown in. He saw me and looked uncomfortable, but he shook hands and introduced me. I got away as quickly as I could. I did n’t want to embarrass him.”

“Why should you embarrass him?” asked Viola.

The colonel looked at Gault, and gave the forbearing laugh of the man who treats with good-humored tolerance the ignorance of the woman.

“Why, he was always uneasy for fear I ’d give away the fact that it was I who made his money for him. But, God bless my soul!” said the old man, throwing back his head and going off into a sonorous laugh, “he need n’t be afraid. I would n’t rob him of any of his glory. Only I took it pretty hard, when Mrs. Maroney was here last winter, that she did n’t go out of her way to be kind to you.”

Viola gave a little exclamation, Gault could

not make out whether of annoyance or protest. That the colonel should have expected his daughter to be the object of Mrs. Maroney's attention and patronage was only another evidence of his painful self-delusion. Mrs. Maroney was a lady who aspired to storm the fashionable citadels of New York and London, and troubled herself little with those of whom she could make no practical use in the campaign.

"You 're unjust to Mrs. Maroney," Viola said gently, and rather weariedly, the visitor thought; "she was only here for two months, and she had quantities of friends to see and people to entertain."

"Oh, my dear, my dear," answered the old man, "that 's just your amiable way of looking at it. She was like her husband—she wanted to forget."

He turned his eyes, still bright under their thick white brows, upon the younger man, and looking at him with an expression of mingled pride and patience, said:

"That is the way with the Californians. Once fall, and the procession passes you, and the men that were beside you don't wait to turn and see where you dropped. You stay where you fall and you watch the others sweep on. That 's what I have done."

"Don't talk that way, father," said Viola;

“Mr. Gault will think you feel unhappy about it.”

The old man smiled, and leaning forward, clasped her hand and held it.

“Mr. Gault,” he said, with quite a grand air, “knows better than that. The opinions of other people don’t affect our happiness. I don’t resent the prosperity of my old mates, nor feel any discouragement at our present—er—temporary embarrassments.”

Viola stirred uneasily, and said quickly:

“No—no; of course not. Why should you?”

John Gault rose here, and she rose, too. Her embarrassment, which had vanished during the evening’s conversation, now returned, and she plucked nervously at the paper flower on the lamp-globe. It seemed to him that she was anxious for him to go.

With the colonel it was otherwise. Rising and standing upright in the patched limpness of his dressing-gown, he affected incredulity at the thought that his guest contemplated such an early departure. Then, being politely assured that this was unavoidable, and that, for the matter of that, it was now close upon eleven, he urged him to repeat the visit at an early date.

“We are always here, Viola and I,” he said. “We have not many engagements, as you see—just a friend here and there. But we value

our friends more highly than the people do who count them by dozens."

He had followed John Gault out into the hall, and from here his voice called:

"The lamp, Viola. Mr. Gault can't put on his overcoat in the dark."

She came out quickly, carrying the smaller of the two lamps, divested once more of its paper-flower shade. To give a better light she held it up and looked at him, smiling a little from under the halo made by her hair. In answer to his good night she gave him her hand, which he pressed with a warm, strong grip.

As he went down the few steps from the porch the colonel stood in the doorway, his figure in sharp silhouette against the light within.

"Don't be a month finding your way down here again," he said. "People say it 's out of the beaten tracks, but we prefer it to any other locality in the city. Viola and I like the old associations, and I 've struck my roots here too deep to have them pulled up. Well, good night! So long!"

The door closed, and as John Gault opened the gate, the light vanished from the two long panes of glass that edged it on both sides, and gleamed out through the cracks and crevices between the blinds of the bay-window.

It was a warm night, soft and still, and Gault

decided to walk. With his head bent down he walked slowly, striking the cracks in the pavement with the tip of his cane. From small gardens still tended and watered in this unkempt wilderness of brick and stucco, whiffs of delicate fragrance drifted out across the pavements, only to be stifled by the sickly odors that rose from the open sewer-mouths.

When he turned into the wide avenues where the old mansions stood, the air was fresher and the silence heavier. Desertion and darkness seemed to claim as their own this relic of a life that had already passed away. The dim, bulky shapes of the great houses stood back from the street, sullen, black, and morose, like the visions in a dream. Vines shrouded their solemn forms, and here and there clung to the support of an iron balcony rail, hanging down in the darkness like a veil that swayed and whispered in the breeze. In one porch a hall lamp was lit, and cast a pale and faltering light over an entrance that looked as full of menace and evil mystery as the opening to some bandit's cavern.

But Gault passed their iron gates, high between supporting pillars, without looking up. A man's dreams held him in a trance-like reverie. A man's perplexities destroyed the content of many serenely selfish years. He had come to what seemed to him the fateful mo-

ment of his destiny. Had he been a younger man he would have said with a rush of reckless ecstasy, "I love her!" Now, walking slowly home under the solemn stars, he queried to himself:

"Shall I let myself love her? Do I dare?"

II

LETITIA'S surprise at the discovery that Colonel Reed had an unknown daughter was an unconscious compliment to the prominence and conspicuousness still enjoyed by that gentleman.

Hundreds of men who had made their fortunes in the great days of the Comstock, and lost them in the depression that followed, had daughters and sons that the friends of their prosperity neither knew nor cared about. The Californian is shy of all sad, unsuccessful things. Failures in the race in which so many won a prize were quickly forgotten, and crept away to hide their chagrin in distant quarters of the city or in the smaller towns. The procession had passed them by, and men who had been underlings when they were kings reigned in their stead. Even their names were no longer heard, and their children grew up separated by the chasm of poverty and obscurity from the children of their old mates.

That Colonel Reed had not been overlooked

was partly accidental and partly owing to his inability to realize that such a state of affairs could be anything but a public misfortune. The colonel had the distinction of having collapsed in a most tremendous and complete manner, and he was proud of it. His case was quoted to inquiring tourist and ambitious native as a star example of money-getting and money-losing in the State of California. His passage from affluence to poverty was still a story worth telling and hearing. It was all in the superlative degree, for the colonel had never done anything by halves. His prosperity had been as extravagantly splendid as his adversity was characteristically complete.

He had made the bulk of his fortune in those years of the fat kine from 1870 to 1875. Before that he had been well-to-do, as every man could be in the San Francisco that developed between the days when "the water came up to Montgomery Street" and the inauguration of the Comstock boom. He had been a figure in the city from the earliest times, had known San Francisco when it was a straggling line of houses edging the muddy shores of the bay, with a trail winding through the chaparral over the dunes to the Mission Dolores. He had climbed the lupine-covered slopes of what is now California Street, and looked down on the hundreds of deserted ships that lay rotting in the

cove. He had seen the city of tents swept by fire, and the city of wood follow it in a few months. He had been one of those who had held a ticket for the Jenny Lind Theater on the night it was burned down. He had witnessed the trial of Jansen's assailants, and had served on the two great Vigilance Committees, and from the windows of Fort Gunnybags had seen Casey and Cora go to their last accounts.

Of his journey across the isthmus in '49 he could tell thrilling stories. Only those of iron physique and reckless courage had the hardihood to accomplish the trip. The weak in health and feeble in spirit were left behind at the Chágres or turned back at Panama. The fittest survived to become those giants of the far West, the California pioneers. Of these the colonel had been a leading figure. Blood ran red in the veins in those days, and ginger was hot in the mouth. The present was too full and tumultuous to allow of even the briefest glimpse of the future. He became a part of the seething life of the city, felt its heart-beats as his own, lived greatly as it lived, loved, hated, sinned, and rejoiced with it.

He often said afterward that at this period of his life money was his last consideration. There was too much outside to make the question of sordid gain an engrossing one. The pecuniary side of things was never one

that had bothered the colonel much. And, true to the old adage, Fortune knocked at the door of him who seemed most indifferent to her. His riches came suddenly. It was toward the seventies, when the Comstock was pouring its streams of wealth into hundreds of purses. The colonel held his open and it was filled. It was dazzling, wonderful, bewildering. His fortune rose by bounds that he could hardly follow. The figures of it seemed to grow overnight. In the wild exhilaration of the period he pressed his luck with unvarying success. He became intoxicated, the fever of money-getting seized him, and he believed equally in his star as a man of destiny and his genius as a financier.

Such a sudden and unexpected rise to opulence might have dazed another man, but the colonel rose to it like a race-horse to the spur. He was born with a natural instinct for luxury. Formerly he had been merely one of a thousand good fellows. Now he became a prince. Nothing was too whimsically extravagant for the pioneer who had crossed the isthmus in 1849. He could be traced by the trail of squandered money. He bought a country place near San Mateo, raised a palace on it, and entertained such celebrities as then drifted to California in a way that made them tell astonishing stories of the "Arabian Nights" existence of the bonanza kings. In the heyday of his prosperity

he had married a young actress, who had enjoyed the splendors of her sudden elevation for three years, and had then died, leaving her husband but one legacy—a baby daughter.

Very shortly after her death the colonel's fortunes began to decline. He put on a bold front and was more lavish in his expenditures than ever, for his belief in himself was unshakable. Then stories of his reverses got abroad, and people said the whole brief span of his glory had been a piece of pure and unmerited luck; as a financier he had no ability. The misfortune which attended all his later investments seemed to prove this assertion. His money melted like wax before fire. He bought largely of land about South Park and Rincon Hill when it was at its highest, refused to sell out, and saw the tide of popularity move to the other side of the city, leaving him overweighted with real estate upon which he could not pay the taxes. He mortgaged it to its full value, speculated with the money, and lost it. Ten years after his wife's death he was ruined. Twenty years after saw him living in the house near South Park, the sole possession left him.

The colonel took his defeat bravely. He held his head as high as ever and accepted patronage from no man. When some one suggested that he should apply for aid to the Society of Pioneers he looked as haughtily amazed as

though they had told him to stand and beg on the corner of Kearney and Sutter streets. Fate had forced him into the little house on the far side of town, but that was no reason why he should remain hidden there. Nearly every day he could be seen striding down Montgomery Street and mingling with the world of men where he had once been a leading figure. He seemed to feel no shame on the score of his old clothes turning green about the shoulders, and greeted his comrades, now lords of the street, with a cheery word and a wave of his hand to his hat-brim.

He always had a busy air as of the man of affairs. Men who did not know him well wondered what scheme he had on hand that caused him so much hurry and preoccupation. But there was no scheme. It was only the colonel's way of defying destiny and satisfying the thirst and longing for the old excitement that carried him back to the scenes of his triumphs. He hung round Pine Street a good deal, telling those who would listen to him stories of the early days—of the men he had made, and of the women who had been the reigning beauties. Sometimes he was accorded an amused attention, for he could be excellent company when he chose, and many of his stories of the ups and downs of 1868 and 1870 had become classics.

There was just one subject upon which, in

his Montgomery Street peregrinations, he preserved silence. This was his daughter. He said to himself, with a sudden squaring of his gaunt shoulders, that he only mentioned her to his intimates, and as his intimates existed mainly in his own imagination, Viola Reed's name was almost unknown.

John Gault, who belonged to a later era of California's prosperity than the colonel, had heard that there was such a person, but had never seen her. He did not fraternize with the old man, whom he regarded as a painful landmark in the city's record of blighted hopes and ruined careers. Like many of his kind, he had an intense, selfish dislike for all that played upon his sympathies or moved him to an uncomfortable and discomposing pity.

One afternoon in the past winter he had gone across town to South Park to see some houses left him by his father, for which he had received a reasonable offer. On the way home, passing through one of the small cross-streets that connect the larger thoroughfares, he had encountered Colonel Reed and a lady. He would have passed them with the ordinary salutation, had not the lady, who had been gazing into the wayside gardens, turned her head as he approached and looked indifferently at him with what he thought were the most beautiful eyes he had ever seen.

He stopped and greeted the colonel with the polite friendliness to be expected of wayfarers who encounter one another in such distant localities. The colonel, who was always childishly flattered by the notice of well-known men, was expansive, and, after a few moments of casual talk, introduced the younger man to his daughter. Then they walked together to the old man's house, which was some little distance away. The colonel, stopping at the gate, invited the stranger in. John Gault noticed that the girl did not second the invitation, and excused himself on the ground of pressing business. But the colonel, who had never got over the hospitable habits of his *beaux jours*, urged him to come some evening.

"Viola," said the old man, smiling proudly on his daughter, "will be glad to see you, too. She's the housewife — runs everything, myself included."

Thus appealed to, she added her invitation to her father's, and Gault said he would come.

As he walked away, he wondered if she wanted him to come. It had seemed to him as if she had spoken under pressure and reluctantly, though she had been perfectly polite. But it was impossible to tell what a woman thought, or when she was pleased or displeased, and the next week he went.

Three months had passed since then. The

visit had been repeated many times, each time under almost exactly similar circumstances. Evening after evening Gault had listened to the colonel, wondering why he came, why he subjected himself to this absurd imposition, why he sat meek and generally mute under the conversational assaults of the garrulous old man. And yet, the day after his seventh visit, he sat in his private office wondering how soon he could go again to the little house near South Park without causing surprise to its inmates or breaking the rules of conventionality and deliberation that governed his life.

In the midst of his cogitations the door was opened by one of his clerks, who acquainted him with the fact that Colonel Reed was without and wanted to see him.

The announcement came upon him so unexpectedly that his color rose, and it was with an effort that he composed his face to greet the visitor. A disturbing presentiment of something unpleasant seized upon him. Never before had Colonel Reed entered or suggested entering his office. "What does the old man want?" he thought testily, as he bade the clerk show him in.

A moment later the colonel entered. He was suave and smiling. There was nothing of the broken financier, the ruined millionaire, in his buoyant and almost patronizing manner. His old black coat, faded and many

years behind the mode, but well brushed and carefully mended, was buttoned up closely, and still sat upon his thin but sinewy figure with something of its old-time elegance. In one hand he carried a little black lacquer cane.

Sitting down opposite John Gault, where the light of the long window fell full upon his face, he had all the assurance of manner of a man whose bonanza has not become a memory and a dream.

"I was going by, and I thought I 'd drop in and pass the time of day," he said. "Things are n't as lively with me just now as they have been. It's an off season."

"It's that with most of us," said the other, regarding him intently and wondering what he had come for.

"All in the same coffin, are we?" said the colonel, airily. "I'm generally on the full jump down here of a morning; but lately—"

He shrugged his shoulders and flung out his hands with a gesture of hopeless acquiescence in unmerited bad luck.

"You're fortunate," said Gault, "to have something to be on the full jump about. We find things pretty slow."

"Oh, of course, in comparison with the past," assented the old man. "Slow? Slow is not the word. Dead, my dear friend! San Francisco is a dead city—dead as Pompeii."

“Well, not quite as bad as that,” said Gault, laughing in spite of himself.

“How should you be able to judge?” retorted the colonel. “You were n’t thought of when we old fellows were laying out the town. There was more life here in a minute then than there is now in a week. Then Portsmouth Square was the plaza and the center of the city, with a line of French boot-blacks along the lower side. We used to try our French on ’em every time we got a shine. And Lord! what smart fellows they were, and how much money they made!”

“So I ’ve heard,” murmured Gault.

“And when I think of this street later on, this street alone, in, say, ’70—how it boiled and bubbled and sizzled with life! Those were the days to live in!”

“Undoubtedly,” acquiesced the listener. He was afraid the colonel had only come to continue the reminiscences on the historic ground of his early gains and losses, and he ran over in his mind the excuses he could use to politely and speedily get rid of the old man.

But the colonel, it appeared, had another end in view.

“I don’t find, however,” he continued, “that my full-jumping pays very well. I ’ve got the energy and the savvy, but the luck is n’t with me. And I ’m too old a Californian not to

know there 's no good bucking against bad luck."

He paused and tapped with the tip of his cane against the side of the desk, evidently expecting his companion to speak. This time, however, Gault vouchsafed no reply, but sat looking at him with a steady and somewhat frowning intentness.

The colonel continued, nothing abashed:

"I 've run into bad-luck belts before, but never as wide a one as this. It 's about the biggest I 've struck yet, and I 've had some experience. Not that it 's knocked me out," he said, looking up and speaking with quick, genuine earnestness—"don't imagine that."

"Nothing is farther from my mind," said Gault; for the old man's look demanded an answer.

"For an old-timer like me, privations, misfortunes, poverty, don't matter. We pioneers who came round the isthmus and across the plains are n't afraid of a little more roughing it to finish up on. A day without dinner don't frighten us, and we don't put our fingers in our mouths and cry because we have n't got sheets to our beds or fires in our stoves. But when you 've women in your corral it 's different—especially women that have n't always seen the rough side of things."

"Of course it makes a difference," the other

said, to fill up the colonel's second and more persistent pause.

"Well, that 's how it is with me. If it was only myself I 'd not think twice of it. But I have to consider my daughter. It 's not the same with her. During her childhood she had every luxury, but lately I 've not been able to give her all that I 'd like to, though, of course, she 's never really suffered. And just now my affairs are in such a devil of a tangle that—well, I was going to ask you if you could oblige me with a temporary loan—just a trifle to tide us over this spell of bad weather—say fifty dollars."

The colonel looked into the younger man's face quite unembarrassed, his old countenance still preserving its expression of debonair self-satisfaction. The money in his hand, he gave it a slight clink, and then dropped it into a worn leather purse with a clasp that snapped, and said gaily:

"This is the best medicine for low spirits. Not that mine are low—no, sir; it takes more than a temporary shortness of funds to knock out a pioneer of '49. Whether it 's champagne or beer or water, there 's no difference when it comes to quenching your thirst, and at my age that 's all you want to drink for."

"You 're a better philosopher than most of the pioneers," said Gault, feeling the embar-

rassment that the old man seemed so complacently free from.

“Philosopher!” said the other, rising. “Why, my dear boy, I could found a school of philosophy—only where would the pupils come from? No, no; philosophy would n’t pay in California; too much blue sky and sunshine here. Well, when are we going to see you again? Soon—don’t forget that. Viola and I have n’t many friends—just an odd one, like yourself, here and there. Viola does n’t go much on society, and so we let the old crowd drop; and we ’re not sorry, not sorry—too many tares in the wheat. What old Solomon said about a dinner of herbs and good company being better than a stalled ox in a wide house with a brawling woman—was n’t that it?—was right. He was a great old chap, Solomon! Brains and experience—that ’s a combination that ’s hard to beat.”

They moved toward the door together, and here the colonel turned on his friend for a last good-by.

“Well, so long,” he said, extending his hand and smiling on the younger man with a bland benignity of aspect that had in it something paternally patronizing. “Don’t forget that we expect you soon. We ’re always at home in the evenings, and always glad to see our friends—our real friends.”

When he had gone, Gault went to the window of the outer office and stood there watching him. The faded old hat, shadowing the fringe of white hair, towered over the heads of the hurrying men who passed in two streams up and down the street.

Gault stood gazing till the tall figure passed out of sight. When he turned back from the window his clerks noticed that he looked moodily preoccupied.

Five days after this the colonel appeared again. He was urbane, affable, and easy as an old shoe, and, with the air of a king honoring a faithful servant, borrowed thirty dollars more.

This was on Saturday. On Sunday afternoon Gault, who had passed a restless night, resolved to escape from the irritation of his own thoughts and seek amusement in the society of Letitia. For this purpose he took an early lunch at his club, and by two o'clock was wending his way up the sunlit streets that run between large houses and blooming gardens through what is known as the Western Addition.

For the past six years it had been an open secret in that small family circle that Mortimer Gault and his wife wished to make a marriage between John and Letitia. Certainly it was a neat combination of the family relationships and properties that might have suggested itself

to any one. The ambition had originated with Maud Gault, who, like most managing, clever women, was a match-maker, and who, with her social successes and pecuniary ambitions, would naturally select as the husband of her only sister this rich, agreeable, and presentable gentleman who was so constantly in their society, and who stood upon that footing of a semi-romantic intimacy which distant relationship gives. But it was difficult to force the two objects of this matrimonial plot into sentimental relations. Letitia was reserved upon the subject of her own feelings. Mrs. Gault, who was not reserved upon any subject except her age, could get nothing out of the girl, either as to what she herself felt for John or as to what she thought he felt for her. Sometimes Letitia laughed a little when the persistent questions of her sister were hard to avoid; sometimes she blushed; and once or twice she had grown angry and rebelled against this intrusive catechizing. It was difficult even for so keen a woman as Maud Gault to read the girl's heart.

John Gault, who was sincerely fond of Letitia, in a steady-going, brotherly way, watched the manœuvres of his sister-in-law with a good deal of inward amusement. He was confident that Letitia entertained the same sort of regard for him that he did for her, and he took an honest and simple pleasure in the frank good-fel-

lowship that existed between them. Now and then, it is true, he had vaguely thought of the young girl as his wife, and had wondered, in an idle way, whether he could win her affection. He thought that no man could ever find a better wife than she would make. But these were aimless speculations, and no one knew of them. Even Maud Gault sometimes felt discouraged — he was so exasperatingly pleased when she told him of Letitia's admirers!

Though it was so early, Gault found one of these rivals already before him. Tod McCormick, the only son of Jerry McCormick, who had been "made" by Colonel Reed, was sitting with Letitia in the drawing-room, to which the umbrella-plants and palms gave an overheated and tropical appearance. The sunlight poured into the room, and, shining through the green of all this juicy and outspreading foliage over the lustrous silks on piled-up cushions and upholstered chairs, gave an impression of radiance and color even more brilliant than that imparted by the lamplight.

In the midst of the rainbow brightness Letitia sat among the cushions. She was very upright, for she was not of the long, lithe order of women who lounge gracefully, but in her tight-drawn silks and pendulating laces she found her habitual attitude of square-shouldered erectness more comfortable.

Her guest, who rose to meet the newcomer, looked as if he must be a changeling in the blooming and lusty brood of Jerry McCormick. While his sisters were women of that richness of coloring and contour peculiar to California, Tod was not five feet and a half high, and was thin, meager, sallow-skinned, and weak-eyed. A thatch of lifeless hair covered his narrow head, and a small and sickly mustache had been coaxed into existence on his upper lip. He was in reality twenty-seven years old, but he looked hardly twenty. Even his clothes, of the most fashionable make and texture, could not impart to him an air of elegance or style. Their very splendor seemed to heighten his insignificance.

“Howdy, Gault,” he said, his small and weazenized countenance lightened by a fleeting and evidently perfunctory smile. “You ’re early, but I ’m earlier.”

“I came to see my brother,” said the older man, rather stiffly, for though he knew Tod to be good-natured and harmless, he did not like him.

“What a pity!” said Letitia. “Maud and Mortimer are both out. They ’re lunching at the Murrays’. But they ’ll be back soon now. Won’t you sit here with us?”

Though Tod’s annoyance at this proposition did not find vent in words, it was plain to be

seen in the dejected and sullen expression that settled on his face. With his hands in his pockets, he stood looking down on his feet in pointed patent-leather shoes, balancing absently on his toes and heels.

"No, thanks," said Gault, whose dislike of the young man did not go far enough to blight his afternoon. "I'll go into the library. I've got some letters to read over and answer, and I'll do it now, while I am waiting."

He turned away and passed through the wide hall-space to the library, a room at the back of the house, where two large windows commanded a view of the Golden Gate and the bay. He had picked up a magazine from a table in the hall, and now, seating himself, prepared to look at it. But he presently threw it aside, and abandoned himself to a dreamy survey of the view.

The magnificent panorama of hills and water lay still and enormous under the afternoon sun. It was not late enough for the summer's drought to have burned the hills, and the nearer ones were a faint, mellow green. Their hollows were filled with clear, amethyst shadows, and the sea lay at their bases, motionless and level like a blue floor. The extraordinary vividness which marks the Californian landscape was softened by the almost imperceptible haze which overlay the scene. The watcher clasped

his hands behind his head, and looked with troubled eyes at this splendid prospect. From the room beyond came the murmur of conversation, every now and then interrupted by the high, cackling laugh of Tod McCormick. Presently there was a break in the voices, they grew louder and decreased, the hall door banged, and Letitia came rustling into the room.

"It's too bad Maud and Mortimer are not back yet," she said. "You'll have to talk to me."

Gault yawned, flung out his arms in a stretch, and looked at her smiling.

"I told a little story in there. It was out of consideration for the feelings of your young man. I did n't come to see Mortimer. I came to see you."

There was no denying the fact that Letitia looked pleased. She tried to hide her satisfaction under an air of curiosity.

"What did you come to see me for?" she asked.

"To take a walk. It's too fine to stay indoors talking to Tod McCormicks. Go upstairs and put on your hat, and let's take a *pasear*."

Letitia needed no urging. She rarely went out alone with Gault, and the prospect of a walk in his society was very attractive.

She was absent some time. When she re-

appeared the cause of her delay was evident. She had changed her dress, and now, in a checked silk of black and white, and trimmed with a wonderful arrangement of black gauze and ribbon, she looked her best. A large black hat with a brim shaded the upper part of her face. In the back it was trimmed with some green flowers which made a delightful harmony with her copper-colored hair. Her cheeks were slightly flushed, and as she entered the room, conscious, perhaps, of her beauty and her vanity in thus decking it, her eyes sought his, asking for admiration.

Unfortunately he was not looking at her, but was turning over the pages in the magazine he had formerly discarded.

“Are you ready?” he said, without looking up, but hearing from the rustle of her dress that she was beside him. “I thought you were never coming.”

Outside the house, they turned to the right and walked slowly up the avenue, conversing with the desultory indifference of old friends. In the bright afternoon sunlight the broad street stretched before them, almost deserted in its Sunday calm. On either side the gardens blazed with color, enameled with blooms of an astonishing richness of tint. Over the tops of fences nasturtiums poured blossoms that danced in the air like tongues of fire. Scarlet

geraniums, topping long stalks, clothed with a royal robe the summit of hedges. Against sunny stretches of wall, heliotrope broke in a purple foam. Climbing roses hung in heavy clusters from vines that were drooping under the weight of such a prodigal over-production. The wide, sumptuous flowers of the purple clematis clung round the balcony posts, completely concealing the dry, thread-like vine that gave them birth.

Between the houses, each one detached in its own square of ground, with that suggestion of space which is peculiar to San Francisco, glimpses of the bay came and went—bits of the gaunt hills, lengths of turquoise sea touched here and there with a patch of white sail, and sudden views of Alcatraz queening it alone on its red-brown rock.

Letitia and Gault walked on, now and then according the customary phrase to the beauty of the landscape. Letitia, who was not an admirer of nature, was much more interested in the occasional couples they met, smart and smiling in their Sunday attire; but, with the complaisance of her amiable spirit, she was always quick to echo her companion's enthusiasm. Presently, after walking in silence for a few minutes, he asked her:

“How would you like to earn your own living, Letitia?”

This was rather an unexpected problem to solve, but Letitia had no doubts on the subject, and answered promptly:

“I would n’t like it at all.”

“But there are lots of women who have to—women like you, who have had everything they wanted, and been well taken care of, and then their parents—relations—guardians lose their money, and they have to work.”

“I think it would be better for them to marry,” said Letitia, sagely. “It’s much better for a woman to marry, and have some one to take care of her, than to have to take care of herself.”

“Well, suppose she does n’t want to marry, or does n’t want to marry the kind of man that asks her, is n’t it better for her to work for her living? Would n’t a proud, self-respecting woman rather work for her living than—than—than not? You see, Letitia,” he said, turning to her with a smile, “how much I think of your opinion.”

“Of course, any woman would rather work than go without things. She’d have to. Why do you want my opinion? Whom do you know that has to work for her living?”

“Oh, no one in especial,” he said, with a careless shrug. “It was just a supposititious case. I was reading a novel about something like that, and I thought I’d get your opinion as an

intelligent, modern, up-to-date young person." He looked at her again with his indulgent and somewhat quizzical smile. "Are n't you all that, Tishy?" he asked, using the family diminutive of her name.

"I don't know," she answered, "whether I'm all that. I may be some of it. But it's so awfully hard for a woman to support herself. They have such a hard time, and get so badly paid, and there are so few things that you make money by soon, you know, without studying for years."

"Why, it seems to me there are lots of things: dressmaking, and type-writing, and — er — trimming hats, and making jam, and reciting poems, and teaching children."

Letitia laughed.

"Why, how could a girl type-write, or trim hats, or even make jam, without knowing how? You've got to learn those things. I've tried to trim hats a dozen times, and always spoiled them; and one summer Maud undertook to make some jam, and it was perfectly awful—I don't mean the jam: I mean the house while the jam was getting made. Maud and the Chinaman and Mortimer were all in such a bad temper!"

They walked on for a few moments in silence. Then Letitia continued:

"Why, even the girls who have fairly good

positions in stores don't get enough to live on. The girl who shampoos my hair has a sister in Abram's, and she gets seven dollars a week, and has to be nicely dressed. Just fancy that!" said Letitia; and then, in a burst of candor: "Why, I never in this world could dress on that alone, even if I gave up silk stockings and always wore alpaca petticoats like the woman who teaches Maud German."

"Nevertheless," said Gault, "it seems to me that a woman who was high-minded and proud and independent would be a shop-girl and live on seven dollars a week rather than—"

He stopped. Letitia looked at him interestedly, struck by something in his tone.

"Rather than what?" she asked.

"Rather than—well, in this story the people who were so poor had friends that were well off, and all that sort of thing, and they borrowed from them, and—I think it 's going to turn out that they lived that way."

"Did the girl borrow? Would n't work and lived on the borrowed money? Oh, that's —!"

Letitia raised both hands in the air and let them drop with a gesture that expressed complete finality of interest and approval.

"What do you mean by 'oh,' Letitia?" he said, rather sharply. "I never said the girl knew anything about it."

"Well, she must have had some curiosity to

know where the money came from. When her father or mother came in and said, 'Here 's ten dollars to pay the butcher, and here 's twenty dollars to pay the grocer,' don't you suppose she wanted to know where it came from? Really, John, considering you 're supposed to be so clever, you don't know much about women."

He made no answer, and she went on:

"Of course she knew all about it. She would have been an idiot if she had n't. And she does n't sound at all like an idiot. It 's just the other way. She was clever—altogether too clever. I don't like that kind of person at all. I would n't trust her from here to the corner. She must have been one of those soft, clinging, gentle creatures who are always turning aside to hide their tears. Was she?"

"I dare say. You seem to know more about her than I do."

"But it sounds very interesting," said Letitia, coming closer to him. "I 'd like to read it. What is the name of the book?"

"Oh, I don't remember. It 's nonsense, anyway — some stuff not worth talking about."

Letitia continued to look at him silently for a moment; then she said slowly:

"It 's not a book at all. It 's a real person. You 've been trying to make a fool of me."

He looked at her quickly, his eyes, behind the

shield of his glasses, narrowed to mere lines. For a moment, as their cold gleam met hers, she shrank, for she thought he was angry, and, like other people, Letitia was afraid of John Gault's anger. Then he smiled at her, and said:

"If you ever have to earn *your* living, Tishy, there 'll be no trouble about your vocation. You 'd make a fortune as a female detective. I never saw such wonderful ability. Why, Sherlock Holmes is n't in it with you."

"You can laugh as much as you like," said Letitia, flushing under his sarcasms, "but I know I 'm right."

"What!" he said, coming to a standstill, and staring into her face with a frown of exaggerated intensity, "you actually don't believe me?"

"No, I don't," she retorted, doggedly combative.

"After all these years, has my noble example of truth and probity made no deeper impression on you? Oh, Letitia, I could n't have believed it of you!"

"I don't care what you say," she repeated, "or how you try to turn it off. It 's a real person, and I 'm certain she 's simply horrid. And if you take *my* advice, the less you have to do with her the better."

This was apparently too much for the so-

briety of John Gault. In the loneliness of the street his laughter resounded deep and loud. Letitia looked at him with moody disfavor as he stood, his face flushed, his eyes suffused with moisture, and fairly roared. Letitia's eyes were threatened with a moisture of a different kind.

"Oh, dear Tishy," he said, when his paroxysm was over, taking one of her hands and holding it tightly, "what a sage you are! How good of you to warn me! With you to take care of me, I ought never to come to any harm."

"I guess you never would," said Letitia, with a little sigh. "Certainly I know enough to know that that woman is not a good person to trust—or even to know," added the mentor, with an accent of warning, and staring at him with large, cautioning eyes from under her hat-brim.

Her companion was threatened with another outburst.

"Oh, Letitia, don't be so *funny*," he said. "I have n't laughed as much as this for a month."

He took her hand and, drawing it inside his arm, pressed it against his heart; then, looking down at her with eyes still full of laughter, but touched with tenderness, he said:

"To think of Letitia Mason taking the trouble to give me good advice!"

Letitia was mollified, less by his words than

by his manner, which had in it that kindly camaraderie which made her feel happy and at ease. She withdrew her hand, laughing, and said, with a sort of shyness that was very charming:

“I ’ll always give you good advice, if you ’ll promise not to laugh at me.”

Then they walked on, talking of other things, until the girl’s spirits were restored to their normal attitude of a sedate, candid cheeriness. She grew quite talkative, discoursing to him of various small happenings in the house, and not noticing, in her recovered good humor, that his answers were short and his manner grave and distrait.

As they retraced their steps the broad, yellow glow of the sunset deepened behind them, and before them burned on the windows of houses that climbed the hillsides still farther on. The water and its low-lying shores—flat lands where silver creeks lay embedded like the metal wires in cloisonné ware—were already veiled in a soft, purplish twilight which exhaled a creeping chilliness. At a high point, unobstructed by buildings, they turned to watch the sun drop into the sea. For a moment it seemed to hesitate, resting on the horizon like a spinning copper disk; then it slipped out of sight, and the darkness rushed up from unexpected places and swept over the prospect, blotting out all

distinctions of color. Only in the west there was a great gold radiance, against which little red clouds floated like bits of raveled silk.

John Gault, as was his Sunday custom, dined with his brother's family. After dinner he left early, before the usual callers appeared—generally young men come to bow the knee at Letitia's shrine.

For a space he walked down the street with a quick, decided step. Then, of a sudden, he stopped, and stood looking at the pavement, uncertain and irresolute. The car which had borne him to the other side of town on the last evening that he had dined with the Mortimer Gaults glided across the avenue some blocks farther down. He heard its bell and saw the long funnel of light from its lantern pierce the darkness before it.

He stood for a moment watching it, then turned in the opposite direction and stopped. As he hesitated, he heard in the distance the bell of the next car. With a smothered ejaculation, he wheeled about and ran for it. He caught the car and swung himself to a front seat.

“Kismet!” he said to himself, as he sank down panting.

III

AT this period of his history the colonel's exchequer must have been in a particularly depleted condition, for it was not a week after John Gault's visit that he again appeared at the office, and this time requested a loan of forty dollars.

Had the colonel, during this interview, exhibited some of that shamefaced and conscious embarrassment that the most hardened borrowers will show, his benefactor would have felt less miserably ill at ease. But the old man was as suave and affably benignant as if he were conferring a long-solicited favor. That there was something of shame in his barefaced assaults upon the purse of his daughter's friend seemed an idea that had never entered his mind. No disconcerting scruples marred his appreciation of his sudden good fortune. Pride was evidently a possession of which he was as poorly supplied as he was with the tangible goods of this world.

He was in the best of spirits; indeed, to John Gault's suspicious eye he had the triumphant air of a man who had found a good thing. He came into the office with a jaunty tread and an alert, all-embracing glance, and left it showering smiles and bows on its chief and his clerks. The sun of his prosperity seemed to have warmed and brightened him in every way. He told inimitable stories of the early days, which—unhindered by the presence of his daughter—were less egotistical, and not always so conventional, as those he regaled Gault with at home. He was as pressing as ever in his invitations to call, and into these introduced Viola's name as being a participator with himself in the desire of seeing their mutual friend as often as his time and inclination would lead him to the house near South Park.

After this visit the vague irritation and moodiness that Gault had felt gave place to a poignant sense of uncertainty and doubt. Naturally of a suspicious nature, the life he had led, the surroundings in which he had passed from youth to maturity, the large experience of evil gained in a twenty years' residence in a thoroughly loose and lawless city, had intensified his original tendency till he was now prone to suspect where suspicion was either a folly or an insult. He had the vain man's dread of being fooled, imposed upon, made ridiculous,

and he was proud of his keenness in detecting such intentions.

At twenty-two he had come from Harvard to San Francisco, had plunged into the fashionable life of the day, and being the son of wealthy and well-known parents, had quickly learned the bitter lessons which society teaches its followers. People said John Gault had never married because he believed in no woman. This was an aspersion upon his sound, if narrow, common sense. He was afraid of marriage, of a terrible disillusionment, followed by a lifetime of conventionally correct misery. What he feared in it was himself. He dreaded that he might not make the woman he married happy, and deep in his soul he cherished the same dream as Balzac, who once wrote: "To devote myself to the happiness of a woman has been my ceaseless dream, and I suffer because I have not realized it." With the passage of the years he had grown narrower and more ambitionless. When he met Viola Reed he was sinking into the dull apathy of a self-engrossed and purposeless middle age.

Her attraction for him was sudden and compelling. He often wondered why he liked her so much. He had known hundreds of women who were prettier and quite as clever. About Viola there was a curious, distinguishing touch of refinement that he did not find in many of

the beauties and belles who were so ready to smile on him at the fortnightly cotillions and subscription germans. The delicate modesty of her beauty satisfied his exacting eye. There was something subtle and rare about her, a suggestion of romance in her wide, pondering eyes, a charm of mystery behind the face that looked so youthful and yet was so femininely secretive. She always seemed to say the right thing, and that and the soft tones of her voice were keenly pleasing to his fastidious taste.

At first he had merely sought her society for the passing pleasure he had derived from it. He was reaching that stage of life when he found it difficult to be interested in new people, and where the long tedium of a dinner next a handsome and pretentious partner was beginning to assume the aspect of a martyrdom. There was nothing irksome or commonplace or tedious in the evenings spent in the house near South Park; even the colonel ceased to be a bore when his daughter sat by listening. Gault began to like going there better than going anywhere else. On the days when he decided that he would spend the evening at the Reeds', he found himself looking forward to the visit all the afternoon. The anticipation of it lay like a glad thought at the bottom of his heart. On the night that Letitia had asked him about Colonel Reed's daughter, he had

nearly arrived at a conclusion—that Viola Reed was the one woman in the world for him.

Nearly, but not quite. The next day Colonel Reed had come and borrowed the first fifty dollars.

This simple action had disturbed John Gault's serenity. The second and third visits tore the fabric of his dream to pieces. If the old man had only made his request once, he would have thought no more of it than of the numberless other loans which he had contributed to the human wreckage left by the receding tides of San Francisco's several booms. But the colonel's subsequent appearances, so closely following on Gault's visits, awoke a sudden swarm of suspicions that began buzzing their importunate warnings into his ears. Why had the old man been so effusive in the beginning? Why had he invited him, insisted even, upon his calling? Was he so determinedly hospitable merely to secure a listener to his reminiscences? And if he had acted upon his own impulses at first,—which certainly seemed the case,—Viola could have stopped him later on. Gault had noticed that her word seemed law to her father.

In the pain of his doubts he surreptitiously made inquiries, and discovered that Colonel Reed's penury was of the past five years' duration. Up to that time he had still held small

properties and realized on them at intervals. People who knew said that since then his circumstances had been desperate, and yet it was known of all men that he was engaged in no paid employment. It was the one point upon which the pride of the erstwhile millionaire was firm. Viola did no work, either. In the West, the woman laboring to help sustain the ruined fortunes of her family is so common a spectacle that the strong man, secure in his riches and his health, felt a species of fierce indignation against the girl for her seeming idleness.

Yet it must take so little to keep them. They owned the house they lived in, and employed no servant, Viola doing all the work of the small menage. He had tried to persuade himself that the colonel was using him for his banker without the girl's knowledge, and then Letitia, with her heavy feminine common sense, had laid her finger on the weak spot in that argument. How could a sudden influx of money enter into so small a household without the cognizance of the person who managed it all? It was nonsensical to think of. She knew—and if she knew, was she not party to the whole sordid, ugly plot?

But here he always stopped. It was impossible. It could not be. The image of her face rose before him, as it often did now, making

him feel disgusted and ashamed that even in thought he should have done her an injury. There was a mistake somewhere. It would explain itself. But he knew that until it did explain itself he would know no peace; for he could not live without seeing her, and at every visit he felt her charm penetrate deeper into his heart, despite his lurking doubts.

He spent hours in pondering as to the best way to silence these doubts without letting her suspect their existence. Even if she were cognizant of it, he could hardly speak to her of her father's borrowing. Yet in his thought she always seemed so simple, so girlish, so young, that he was sure if he could see her alone, and perhaps turn the conversation upon some analogous subject, her ignorance would speak from every feature. He had grown to know all the varying expressions of her face, and he felt that he could detect the slightest change of color or tremor of consciousness on its pale innocence.

He did not, however, know at what hour he was likely to find her by herself. He had always gone in the evening, as it was the colonel who asked him, and who invariably designated that time. Gault fancied that his visits were the old man's chief amusement and recreation, and that he so particularly insisted upon the evening in the desire not to miss them. Upon

this hypothesis he concluded that he ran a better chance of finding Viola alone in the second half of the day, and on his first disengaged afternoon he left his office early, with the intention of walking across town to South Park.

It was not late enough in the season for the summer winds to have begun, and the straw, dust, paper, and general refuse that they sweep away with their steady, cold breath lay thick on the pavements. In the hard light of afternoon the dreary quarter looked even meaner and more squalid than it did by night. The wayfarer could see the dirt on the little shop-windows, the dinginess of the wares displayed. The small, open stands, where shell-fish and oyster cocktails were sold, were thick with flies. Behind the grimed glass of the pawnbroker's windows lay the relics of vanished days of splendor and extravagance. Old-fashioned pieces of jewelry, broken ornaments, rusted pistols, gold-mounted spectacles, mother-of-pearl opera-glasses, were heaped together in neglected disorder. Now and then the entrance of a second-hand clothes store gave a glimpse of a dark interior hung with clothes, between which the sharp Jewish faces of the patron and his wife peered out eagerly.

John Gault's eyes passed over this with slow disgust. What might not the constant sight of

such naked poverty breed in the most sensitive soul! Day after day Viola must have passed this way, must have seen the human spiders waiting in their dark web, perhaps might have chattered with them, or recognized her own jewelry among the tarnished relics in the pawnbroker's window.

He turned into the wider avenue, where gentility had once dwelt in its bulky palaces. They seemed to stare with wide, unshuttered windows, drearily speculating on the desolation of the street and their own decay. Around them gardens stretched unkempt and parched, here and there an aloe or some vigorously growing shrub striking a note of color in the uniform grayness. High iron gates, richly wrought, but eaten into by rust, hung open from broken hinges, or were tied together with ravelings of rope. One of the most imposing, still standing upright, was held ajar with a piece of broken brick. It gave entrance to a circular sweep of driveway and a large garden full of rankly growing shrubs and vines and headless statues, with a rusty fountain-basin in the center, and urns still showing the corpses of geraniums. Inside Gault saw some of the children of the neighborhood playing games, and realized that the broken brick was evidently of their introduction. This was the house which had been built by Jerry McCormick thirty-odd years be-

fore. It had the appearance of having been deserted for a century.

A few turns down narrower streets brought the wayfarer to the Reeds' home. He had only seen it once before by daylight, and now eyed it with curiosity. Though age and poverty showed in its peeling stucco walls, in the untended vines that hung about the bay-window, in the rotting woodwork of the old gate, it still had the air of a place that is lived in and cared for. Inside the gate the pathway of black-and-white marble was clean and bright. Round the root of the dracæna there was a flower-bed planted with mignonette. On the other side of the flagged walk fuchsias and heliotrope were trained against the high fence which separated the house from its next-door neighbor.

In answer to his ring Viola opened the door. She was dressed in a blue-and-white gingham dress, the sleeves of which were rolled up to the elbows, and showed arms slightly rounded and white as milk. She wore an apron and had a pair of scissors in her hand. When she saw who it was the color of joy ran in a beautiful flush over her face.

"You never came at this time before," she said in the hall, hastily pulling down her sleeves. "I never thought for a moment it was you, or I should n't have come to the door with my sleeves this way."

Then they passed into the drawing-room. The afternoon light streamed through the bare emptiness of this once stately apartment, revealing the long crack that zigzagged across the mirror, and the rents in the colonel's arm-chair. In the rear half of the room there were only one or two pieces of furniture, evidently seldom used, and pushed back into the corners. The double doors leading from here were open, and vouchsafed the visitor a view of one of those long and spacious dining-rooms, with an outer wall of glass, often seen in old San Francisco houses. Fronting this glass wall were tiers of plants, some mounted on rough boxes, some on tables. They were of many sizes and sorts, but the feathery foliage of the maidenhair was most in evidence. It seemed to be growing in every kind of receptacle, from the ordinary flower-pot to a tomato-can on one side and a huge kerosene-oil tin on the other. Near the dining-table was a chair, and the table itself was littered with brown paper, cut neatly into circular pieces about three inches in diameter.

Viola moved forward to close the doors, but was arrested by her visitor.

"Why, you 've a regular conservatory in there. What beautiful plants!"

She held the door open and let him look in, though apparently not quite at her ease.

"Yes," she said; "I have great luck with

ferns. Some people have, you know. It's just because we take more care of them than others."

"My sister-in-law would die of envy if she could see those," said Gault, indicating the maidenheads; "she's always buying that sort of thing, and they're always dying."

Viola looked at him thoughtfully for a moment. The color deepened in her cheeks, and then she looked away and began to play with the lock of the door.

"She must buy a great many?" she said, with a questioning inflection.

"Cart-loads," said he, absently, wondering what had caused her augmented color, and watching her as he would always now watch her whenever there was the slightest deviation from her normal manner.

"And I suppose," she said, "she spends a great deal on them?"

"I suppose so," he answered, "judging by the number that I've seen wither in their prime and disappear, and new ones take their places the next day."

Viola pressed the lock in and shot it out.

"Are any of them dead just now?" she asked, in rather a small voice.

"Dozens, probably. It seems to me some of them are always dead, only they're considerate enough not to all die at the same time."

There was a moment's pause. Gault's gaze

was diverted from her face to the high, old-fashioned room, with its marble mantel carved in fruits and flowers and its bare sideboard. Then Viola said:

"Your sister-in-law always gets her plants from the large florists, does n't she? Some one on Kearney or Sutter Street?"

"I dare say she does; but I 'm sure I don't know. I can't control my curiosity any further—what were you going to do with those round bits of paper you were cutting when I came in?"

She looked at him quickly, a look of sharp, dubious inquiry; then, as she met the amused curiosity of his glance, she gave a little laugh and said:

"I was going to make jam."

"But you don't make jam out of paper?"

"No; those are for the tops of the glasses. I soak them in brandy and put them on, and they preserve it."

He looked at the papers, then back at her. As their eyes met the delight each felt in the other's presence found expression in a simultaneous burst of laughter. For a moment they stood facing each other, laughing in foolish but happy lightness of heart.

"Now, you know," he said, "I 'm a credulous person, but is n't that going too far? Why, if you used all those things you 'd have jam enough to feed the American army."

Her laughter died, and looking slightly confused, she put out her hand, seized the other door, and drew them together with a bang.

"There!" she said, dropping the catch; "you can't see any more. You 're too curious, in the first place, and you don't believe me, which is worse."

"I 've found out the skeleton in the closet," he said, as they walked back into the front room. "It 's the colonel's passion for jam. I 've heard of a passion for pie running in families, but jam 's something new."

The bare austerity of this bleak apartment seemed to cast a sudden chill over their high spirits. Gault, sitting in the colonel's chair, reverted in thought to the object of his visit, and wondered how he could turn the conversation in the direction he had intended. His preoccupation, and the sense of shame he felt at the mean part he contemplated playing, made him respond to her conversational attempts with dry shortness. She grew constrained and embarrassed, and finally, in a desperate attempt to arrest a total silence, said:

"Don't you like my new cushion? You 've never noticed it!"

The visitor's slow glance moved in the direction indicated, and rested on a cretonne cushion in one of the wicker chairs.

"It 's a perfect beauty," he said, with as

much enthusiasm as he thought the occasion required.

"I 'm glad you think it 's pretty," she answered, evidently much pleased. "I ought not to have bought it, I suppose, but I do love pretty things."

"Why ought n't you to have bought it? What is the matter with it?"

"Nothing; I mean it was an extravagance. I sometimes think how perfectly delightful it would be to be able to go into stores and buy furniture and ornaments and curtains just whenever you wanted."

This remark dispelled Gault's preoccupation. He remained in the same position and continued staring at the cushion, but his glance had changed from its absent absorption to a fixed and listening intentness.

Viola saw that she had interested him, and continued with happy volubility:

"Sometimes, when I have nothing to do and am here alone, I think how I would furnish this room if I could buy anything I saw, and could just say to some outside person, the way princesses do, 'I have bought so much; please pay the bill.' I 've done it in white and gold, and in crimson with black wood, teak or ebony, very plain and heavy; and also in striped cretonnes with bunches of flowers, and little chairs and sofas with spindle legs. There 's a

great deal of satisfaction in it. It 's almost as good as having it really happen."

"It sounds very amusing," said Gault, as she paused; "but then, castles in the air," he added, turning to look at her, "are never quite the same as the real thing."

"If you can't get the real thing, you take the castles in the air," she answered, smiling.

"Tell me some more of yours."

"Oh, they 're just silly dreams, and mercenary ones, too. My castles are all built on a foundation of money. It 's a dreadful thing to have to acknowledge, but I 'm afraid I am mercenary. And it 's such a horrid fault to have."

"But is n't it rather a useful one?" he could not forbear asking.

"Not so far. Once I had my palm read by a palmist, and he told me I was going to be very prosperous—to have great riches. That 's one of my best castles in the air. I 'm all the time wondering about it, and where my great riches are coming from."

She spread both hands, palms up, on the table, and studied them as if trying to elicit further secrets from their delicately lined surfaces.

"Great riches!" she repeated. "Where could a person suddenly find great riches? The mining booms are over, and in California

people don't strike oil-wells in their gardens. I 'm afraid it will have to be either begging, borrowing, or stealing. I wonder which I would succeed best in."

With the last words she raised her bent head, and her eyes, diminished in size by her laughter, rested full on his. Their glance was clear, candid, and innocently mirthful as that of a merry child.

As he stared at her, almost vacantly, the notes of a clock, striking somewhere in the back of the house, fell with crystalline distinctness upon the silence.

"One—two—three—four—five," she counted absently, with each number touching the table with a finger-tip.

Gault rose to his feet, remarking with unfeigned surprise on the lateness of the hour. She looked suddenly confused and annoyed at the realization of her unintentional rudeness, and asked him if he would not remain till her father's return. But he pleaded an engagement he had made to attend the tea given that afternoon by Mrs. Jerry McCormick, and, with a hand pressure and the conventional words of farewell, brought his visit to a close.

Outside, he turned to the right and walked slowly forward toward where the rumble of traffic indicated one of the large and populous thoroughfares of the district. Before him, at

the end of the street's long vista, the sunset glowed pink, barred by a delicate scoring of telegraph-wires. Even as he looked it deepened and burned higher and higher up the sky, while at the far end of the vista it concentrated into a core of brightness, as though a conflagration were in progress there.

What was he to think? He felt his mind confused and full of warring images. He had been almost afraid of what she might say—she who was to him the ideal of all that was gentlest and truest and most maidenly. And yet what had she said to disturb or annoy him? It was only the foolish prattle of a girl who is happy and in high spirits. And even as he made these assurances to himself, sentences from the past interview surged up to the surface of his mind: "I 'm afraid I 'm mercenary, and it 's such a horrid fault to have." "Where are my riches coming from? It will have to be either begging, borrowing, or stealing."

Her mother had been an actress—one of the stars of San Francisco's hectic youth. Disimulation might be instinctive with a woman of Viola Reed's heredity. It was the whole art of acting; it was in her blood. He thought of all he had ever heard of her mother, of her few years of fame and glory, so splendidly ended by her marriage to the bonanza millionaire. It had been a wonderful, glittering life, quenched

in an early death. He had never heard anything against her character, but she had been an actress, the essence of whose art is the capacity to both conceal and assume emotion. And her daughter, in personal appearance at least, resembled her. He had heard that from the colonel himself.

A feeling of weariness and disillusion took possession of him, and in the sickness of heart that it brought he thought suddenly of Letitia. She was the one woman he knew that he could always rely on to be true and steadfast and genuine. Why had he not loved her—a woman a man could trust forever, and handsome enough to be the wife of a king? There would be no doubts nor difficulties in a life with her; it would be all kindness and cheer and sympathy. And even as he thus reflected, he knew that love for Letitia was as far from him as was indifference to the woman whom he mistrusted.

At the very hour that Gault was walking moodily across town from South Park, Letitia, the object of his thoughts, was rolling along the asphalted streets of the Western Addition in Mrs. Mortimer Gault's coupé. Her sister was with her, and both ladies were dressed with a rustling splendor which betokened festal doings. For they, too, were en route to the McCormick tea. This was, in fact, a large

reception given by Mrs. McCormick to little Prince Dombroski, a gentleman who had come from Russia to wed a Californian heiress, and was receiving a helping hand from the McCormicks, who on this particular afternoon had gathered together all maiden and widowed San Franciscan wealth for his inspection.

Letitia had dressed herself for the occasion with great care. When she had appeared at the front door and descended the stairs to the carriage, she had presented so dazzling a picture that even the coachman, a well-trained functionary imported from the East, could hardly forbear staring at her. She was regally clothed in a costume of bluish purple, with much yellow lace, fur, cream-colored satin, and glints of gold braiding about the front. There was a purple jewel at her throat, and a bunch of pale, crape-like orchids, that toned with the hue of her dress, was fastened on her breast. Clad thus in the proudest production of a great French modiste, Letitia was really too handsome to be quite in good taste. But she was used to sumptuous apparel, and carried it with the air of an actress who knows how to take the stage.

Maud Gault was somewhat less punctual to-day than her sister. Letitia sat in the carriage waiting for her, and finally, by the brushing of silken skirts and an advancing perfume of wood-violet, was apprised of her sister's ap-

proach. The elder woman gave the address to the coachman and then sprang in.

Hardly had the door closed when she looked at Letitia with a kindling eye, and said :

“Oh, Tishy, I know the funniest thing!”

Letitia knew that her sister had something of note to impart. Mrs. Gault's dark cheek was flushed a fine brick-red, her eye was alight. She was pulling on her gloves as she spoke.

“Do you remember that night, only a few weeks ago, when you asked John about Colonel Reed's daughter?”

“Yes.”

“And do you remember that he said he 'd never seen her?”

“No, he did n't say that,” corrected Letitia; “he said he 'd heard of her.”

“And what else?” asked the other, stopping in her glove-pulling to fix Letitia with a keen eye.

“I don't think he said anything else. I don't remember anything.”

“But he certainly led us to believe that he did n't know her. Did n't he, now?”

Letitia paled slightly. Her eyes, looking frankly troubled, were fastened on her sister.

“Yes—I think so. Why?”

“Well, my dear,” said Mrs. Gault, bridling with the consciousness of her important announcement, “he knows her well. He goes

there all the time. He 's having a regular affair with her. Did you ever know anything to beat men?"

"How do you know?" said Letitia, looking down and picking at the gold arabesques on her dress.

"Mortimer told me last night. He made me swear I would n't tell a living soul. You must remember that, by the way, or I 'll get into trouble. Mortimer saw Colonel Reed in the office the other day, and that red-haired clerk, the one John took in because his mother was crazy or consumptive or something, told Mortimer Colonel Reed came there often, and that John went out to see him at his home somewhere near South Park. Does n't that beat the band? John going calling in South Park on Colonel Reed's daughter, and then pretending to us that he does n't know her! If John knew the man had said anything about it, he 'd kick him down all the stairs in the building, if they reached from here to the ferry."

Letitia was silent. She thought of the conversation on Sunday, and the woman who had been the heroine of the novel. All the sunshine seemed to go out of the afternoon, and the innocent joy she had taken in putting on her beautiful clothes suddenly shriveled up and vanished.

"He might go out there and see Colonel

Reed's daughter and not tell us about it," she said, "and yet not—not be exactly in love with her."

"Dear me, Letitia," said her sister, pettishly, "what a dunce you are! Do you suppose John 's going to drag himself over to South Park to see Colonel Reed's daughter because he 's taken a philanthropic interest in her father? One would think you 'd been raised in Oshkosh or Milpitas, to hear the things you sometimes say. But that 's not all. This morning I was in the Woman's Exchange, and who should be there but old Biddy McCormick herself. I can't endure her, you know, especially since she 's got this little prince-creature up her sleeve; but I 'm always polite to her because of Tod and you—and things generally. You never can tell what may happen. And I heard her say, 'Not that jam; I always buy the same kind—Miss Viola Reed's.' So I up and said, as innocent as Mary's little lamb, 'Do tell me, Mrs. McCormick, what jam that is you 're buying. Everything you have is always so delicious.' And she said, 'It 's some that 's made by a woman named Reed, who lives across town somewhere.' Then, when she 'd gone, I corralled the girl, and she told me it was made by a Miss Viola Reed, who lives—"

Mrs. Gault opened her jeweled card-case and produced a slip of paper with an address

written on it. She handed this to Letitia, and said with an air of triumph:

“That ’s where she lives. Now you ’ll have to admit, Miss Letitia Mason, that there are no flies on your little sister!”

Letitia looked at the address and gave it back.

“No,” said her sister; “you keep it. That ’s my little scheme. You ’re to go there now—this afternoon—and order jam. Do you see?”

“But I don’t want any jam, and you never eat it.”

“Good gracious, Tishy, how awfully stupid you are to-day! What a fortunate thing it is that you and Mortimer have got me to take care of you! Of course you don’t want jam. I never heard of any civilized being who did. But I suppose you ’ll admit that you want to see this girl?”

“I don’t think I do,” said Letitia. “I don’t see why I should.”

“Well, I do,” said Mrs. Gault, with asperity. “Don’t you take an interest in John? Don’t you want to see if he ’s fallen into the clutches of an adventuress?”

“She does n’t sound at all like an adventuress, Maud. I never heard of an adventuress making jam for her living.”

“Jam for her living! Bosh! Can’t you imagine how she tells that to John, and shows him the glasses in the corner cupboard, and

lets him find her stirring things in a big pot on the kitchen stove? Oh, she's no fool, my dear! Will you go and see her?"

"I'd rather not."

"Very well, then; if you care so little for John, you need n't go. I'll do it myself, and I can tell you, I'll size her up."

Letitia looked uneasy. She knew nothing of Miss Reed except that she was poor and pretty. But she did not like the thought of subjecting even an unknown female to Mrs. Gault's mercies, when her interest was so evidently hostile and her curiosity so poignant.

"If you think somebody must go, then I will," she said pacifically. "I don't see the use of it, but I can go better than you."

"All right," said Mrs. Gault, immediately placated. "You'd better go now. It's always best to do a thing when you have the opportunity."

"No," said Letitia; "I don't think I'll do that."

"Why not? Is it possible you're so crazy to see that miserable little prince that I could put in my hat-box?"

"I don't care about him," answered the girl, with unmoved placidity. "I don't like to go—to go this way." She made an explanatory gesture toward her dress.

Mrs. Gault looked at her uncomprehendingly.

“Why? What’s wrong about your clothes?”

It was painful, but Letitia had to explain:

“If she’s so poor as all that—and everybody says so—I don’t think it ’s—it ’s—quite nice, some way or other, for me to go in this dress.” Her voice took on a sudden tone of decision. “I won’t do it, anyway.”

Her sister knew the tone, and knew that there was no use in combating the mood it indicated.

“You have the queerest notions,” she said, with a resigned sigh; “but do as you like. It’s all the same, if you do go to-morrow. Only you must promise that you won’t back out.”

Letitia promised.

On the afternoon of the next day she stood before her glass and critically eyed her reflection. She had put on a plain tailor-made suit, which fitted her heavily molded figure with unwrinkled smoothness. A brown turban crowned her reddish hair, and the exquisite pallor of her skin was obscured by a thin veil. Letitia did not approve of herself in this modest garb. She accepted the dictum that “beauty should go beautifully.” But for the mission upon which she was bound she had selected her attire with an eye to its fitness and propriety.

It was a gray afternoon, with a breath of fog

in the air. Already the city was beginning to show signs of the summer exodus, and Letitia was glad that in her journey across town she met no acquaintances and attracted no more attention than that frankly candid stare which is male California's passing tribute to beauty.

Though she had been born in South Park, she knew nothing of this side of the city, and found herself as much a stranger as its inhabitants would have been had they been transported to the aristocratic heart of the Western Addition. Finally, however, after some questioning of small boys and much retracing of steps, she found the house, and walked up the path with the black-and-white flagging.

Letitia was one to whom the word "shyness" has no meaning. She possessed her full share of the Westerner's placid self-approval, and with it that careless curiosity which makes an incursion into new surroundings interesting. Yet, as she stood waiting for the door to open, she experienced a sensation of nervousness quite new to her. Her heart had ached more in the last twenty-four hours than it had since her mother's death, years before. If Viola Reed was an adventuress or if she was a saint, the situation was equally painful to this splendid-looking creature, who, for all her regal air and stately immobility of demeanor, was only a woman of a simple, almost primitive type.

The door was opened by Viola, in her blue gingham dress and her apron. At the sight of her visitor she looked startled almost into speechlessness. Letitia announced the fact that she had come on business, and an invitation to enter brought her sweeping into the little hall and the drawing-room beyond.

Here the two girls looked at each other for one of those swift exploring moments in which women seem to take in every detail of dress, every peculiarity of feature and revealing change of expression, that a rival has to show. Letitia, with all her apparent heaviness, had keen perceptions. With a sinking at her heart she saw the beauty of the gray eyes fastened shyly upon her, and realized what must be the power of the delicate charm, so far removed in its soft, dependent femininity from her own. She saw that this girl had a distinguishing refinement she could never boast, and that it was strong enough to triumph over such poverty-stricken surroundings as, in all her experience, she had never before encountered. Her quick eye took in the gaunt emptiness of the room as John Gault's could not have done in a week's arduous examination. She saw the split and ragged shades in the windows, the ribs of twine in the old carpet, the rents in the colonel's chair.

Viola, for her part, saw one of the handsomest

and most imposing young women she had ever gazed upon. The very way Letitia rustled when she moved, and exhaled a faint perfume with every movement, seemed to breathe an atmosphere of fashion and elegance. She had never seen her before, and had no idea who she was. Letitia soon put an end to this condition of ignorance.

“My name is Mason,” she said judicially—
“Letitia Mason. I am the sister of Mrs. Mortimer Gault.”

At this announcement an instantaneous change took place in Viola. For a second she looked alarmed, then her face stiffened into lines of pride and anger. The eyes that had been so full of a naïve admiration were charged, as by magic, with a look of cold antagonism. Letitia felt her own breath quicken as she realized how much the name of Gault must mean to this girl.

Viola attempted no answer to the introduction, and Miss Mason hastily went on:

“My sister heard that you made jam—very good jam. We don’t like what we get in the stores, so we thought we would try yours.”

Viola had now found her voice,—a very low and cold one,—and answered:

“You can get it at the Woman’s Exchange. I sell it there all the time.”

“Yes, I know that,” said Letitia; “but we

thought it would be better to buy it straight from you; that—perhaps—it—perhaps it would save time and trouble.”

“I don’t see how it could do that. This part of town is a long distance out of everybody’s way.”

“Yes, of course it is,” the other agreed eagerly; then, with a sudden happy inspiration, “but I thought you might have a larger variety here—that you might have a good many different kinds on hand. I don’t want all the same sort.”

Viola rose and went to the door that led to the dining-room. Her resentment was not more obvious than her embarrassment. There was something tremulous in the expression of her face that gave Letitia a wretched feeling that only pride enabled her to keep back her tears.

“I have just the same here that I have at the Exchange,” she said, opening the doors.

The visitor followed her. In the gray of the afternoon the long room, with its tiers of plants and its bare sideboard and mantelpiece, looked even colder and drearier than the drawing-room. Viola opened a cupboard and indicated the lines of glass jars standing on the shelves. She tried to be businesslike, and told their contents and prices, but her voice betrayed her. Letitia, listening to her and staring at the Chinese cracker-jar that was the sole adornment

of the sideboard, suddenly felt sick with disgust at herself for intruding, at her sister, at John Gault.

As Viola's voice went on,—“These are apricots; they're fifty cents. Those on that shelf are strawberry and raspberry; they are only thirty,”—Letitia's shame and indignation worked up to a climax and a resultant resolution.

She took up one of the glasses and, looking at the legend written in neat script on the paper top, said:

“I think I ought to tell you how I happened to come here. It's really a secret and you must n't tell. What I said at first was not quite the case. No one at our house knows anything about this but me. I'm going to buy these preserves for my brother-in-law and tell him I made them. I'm going to fool him. Do you understand? It's just a little joke.”

Letitia delivered herself of this amazing effort at invention with admirable composure, for it was the first elaborate and important falsehood she had ever told in her life. Viola, turning from her contemplation of the shelves, looked at her, relieved but not quite comprehending.

“So I hunted you up myself at the Exchange,” continued Letitia, plunging deeper into the slough of deception, but knowing now

that she had gone too far to compromise with truth, "and came here myself this way so as to keep it all dark."

Viola's face had cleared with each word. As the other ended, her lips parted in the smile that John Gault found at once so irresistible and so enigmatic. Letitia found nothing enigmatic in it. She only thought, with a piercing dart of pain, "She is still prettier when she smiles."

"It 's very amusing," said Viola; "but why do you want to fool him?"

Letitia was even ready for this, so expert does the first lie make us in perpetrating the second.

"He says I am useless and can't do anything. I am going to show him that I can make jam."

Viola was rather shocked, but relief and amusement combined to make her light-hearted, and this time she laughed.

"But the writing," she said. "Won't he see by that that it 's not yours? There 's writing on every glass."

"Oh, that will be all right. I 'll have the Chinaman put it out in a dish. But you 'll promise not to give me away?"

"Oh, I never will," said Viola. "In fact," she continued naïvely, "I 'd rather have it that way myself. You see, many people—all people, that is—don't know that I do this."

She stopped and looked tentatively at Letitia, as if curious to see how she was taking these revelations.

“Do what?” asked Letitia, not understanding.

“Make the jam. Not that I mind much. But it’s a little sort of fancy of my father’s. Sometimes older people have those ideas, and it’s best to humor them, I think; don’t you?”

“Oh, much the best,” assented the other, turning aside and looking at the plants. “It’s best to humor everybody; it’s so much easier to get on. What beautiful ferns!”

“Yes; I am quite proud of them. But this is a splendid window for ferns.”

“Did you raise these yourself? I never saw such plants out of a greenhouse.”

Viola was now eagerly interested.

“Yes, I grew them all—some of them from a few roots like black threads. I sell these, too. There is a man at one of the Kearney Street florists’ who used to live near here and knew us, and he buys them from me. At Christmas I do quite well.”

Letitia examined the ferns.

“I wonder if you would let me buy one or two of them,” she said. “We can’t get such plants at our florist’s, and I am fonder of them than of any other kind of fern.”

Viola agreed with a blush of pleasure, and

after some consultation four ferns were selected. The visitor was amazed at their cheapness, but concealed her astonishment. Then she bought three dozen jars of the jam. She did not pay for them, but said that on the following day she would send the money by a messenger, who would also bring away the purchases.

Standing in the doorway, about to leave, she said:

“I ’m glad to have seen you. It ’s so interesting for a person like me, who can’t do anything, to meet some one who is clever and of use in the world. Good-by!” She held out her hand, and Viola, surprised, put hers into it. “Don’t forget to keep our secret. It makes a person feel like a conspirator, does n’t it? I think, too, Colonel Reed ’s quite right to want to be reticent about business matters. So you and I ’ll keep dark about this little transaction of ours.”

This was the most diplomatic sentence Letitia had ever given vent to in her life.

She walked slowly away from the house, her eyes downcast in thought. The superb health she had inherited from an untainted peasant ancestry made her imagination dull, and lightened such sufferings as she had encountered in her easy, care-free life. Even now she experienced none of those fierce pangs that jealousy and disappointed love provoke in the women

of a more sophisticated stock. She was made on that large, calm plan on which an all-wise nature creates the maternal woman—she whose destiny it is to bear strong children to a stalwart sire. But this afternoon, for the first time in her life, she knew what it was to feel her heart lying heavy in her breast like a thing of stone.

It was late when she reached home. Mrs. Gault was to give a dinner that evening, and as Letitia passed through the hall she caught a glimpse of her sister, in a loose creation of pink silk and lace, which swelled out behind her like a sail, hurrying round the bedecked dining-table, followed by two meek and attentive Chinamen. Knowing the indignation of Maud should she be late, she ran to her room and made her toilet with the utmost speed.

She was just completing this important rite, and, seated at her dressing-table under a blaze of electric light, was selecting an aigret for her hair, when the door opened and Mrs. Gault entered.

She had discarded her ebullient draperies of pink silk, and was sheathed tightly in her favorite yellow, from which the olive skin of her bared neck emerged in polished smoothness. As she came forward she had one hand full of diamond brooches, which she pinned with apparent carelessness round the edge of the low bodice.

“Well, Tishy,” she said, sitting down by the dressing-table, “what happened?”

Letitia looked at the array of silver that covered the table. Some jewels lay scattered among it, and the aigrets from which she had been about to choose the one she should wear. She selected a black one, and turned it round, looking at it.

“Nothing happened,” she answered. “I saw her, and bought the jam and some plants. She raises plants, too.”

“Is she really so pretty?”

“Yes, very—I think some people might say beautiful.”

Mrs. Gault’s face fell.

“She did n’t say anything about John, I suppose?”

“Of course not.”

“Did it seem to you that there was anything adventuressy or bad about her?”

Letitia looked at her sister—a sidelong look, which made Mrs. Gault feel rather uncomfortable.

“I never saw any one in my life that looked to me less so,” she answered.

“Dear me!” ejaculated Mrs. Gault, in a dismayed tone. “You don’t say so! Tishy, for goodness’ sake, look where you’re putting that aigret! You look like Pocahontas, and Tod McCormick ’s coming to dinner.”

Letitia arranged the aigret at a more satisfactory angle, her large white arms, shining like marble through the transparent tissue of her sleeves, shielding her face.

"Then," said Mrs. Gault, returning to the more important subject, "there really may be a chance of his marrying her."

"I should think a very good one," answered Letitia, in a low voice.

"Good heavens!" breathed her sister, in the undertone of utter horror, "how awful men are! What makes you think he may intend marrying her?"

"Because," said Letitia, dropping her arms and turning on her sister with her mouth trembling and her breast agitated with sudden emotion, "no man who was any sort of a man could mean anything else."

Maud Gault was amazed by the girl's unexpected emotion. She pushed back her chair, and staring at Letitia, said vaguely:

"Why? I don't understand."

"Even if he did n't care, even if he did n't love her, he 'd marry her. Oh, Maud, she's so helpless and so poor!"

And Letitia burst into a sudden storm of tears.

For a moment her sister sat still, looking at her in blank amazement. Then she felt a pang of feminine sympathy. So Letitia did care for him. Poor Tishy!

“There, don’t cry!” she said, patting her shoulder. “You never can tell about these things. John may not care a button for this girl, or have the least intention of marrying her. You ’re always seeing the dark side of things.”

But her form of consolation was not well chosen. Letitia threw off the hand and raised her disfigured face.

“John may be selfish and mean and all that, and I ’ve no doubt he is; but he ’s not mean enough, he ’s not contemptible enough, to do what you think he ’s doing. I ’ll not believe that of him. I ’d despise him if I thought so; I ’d hate him!”

Her tears burst forth afresh, and she hid her face in her hands.

Mrs. Gault was nonplussed. She looked at her sister’s shaken shoulders and bowed head with an uncomprehending but pitying eye. Then, as Letitia’s sobs diminished, she said gloomily:

“How much jam did you buy?”

“Three dozen glasses,” came the muffled answer.

“Good gracious!”—raising her eyes toward the ceiling in an access of horror. “What did you get so much for? Two or three would have done. We ’ll not get through that by Christmas.” There was no answer made to

this, and after a moment or two of silence Mrs. Gault recommenced, in a brisk and unemotional tone:

“I don’t understand you at all, Tishy; but I do know that if you don’t stop crying you ’ll look a perfect fright at dinner, and everybody will be wondering what ’s the matter with you.”

This appeal to her pride had a good effect upon Letitia. She struggled with her tears and finally subdued them. But her flushed and swollen countenance needed much attention, and when Mrs. Gault left the room she carried with her a picture of her sister sitting before the mirror solicitously dabbing at her eyelids with a powder-puff.

When she appeared all traces of her previous distress seemed successfully obliterated. It remained for the eye of love to penetrate the restorative processes with which she had doctored her telltale countenance.

Near the end of dinner Tod McCormick, who sat beside her, leaned toward her and said, in the low tone of long-established friendship:

“What ’s the matter, Tishy? You look sort of bunged up.”

Letitia said nothing was the matter—why?

The small, red-rimmed eyes of Tod passed over her face, lingering with the solicitude of affection upon the delicately pink eyelids and nostrils.

"You look as if you 'd been crying," he said.

"Oh, what a silly idea!" answered Letitia, with a laugh that would have been quite successful on the stage, but could not deceive the enamoured Tod; "I have a cold."

"It 's not that you don't look as pretty as usual. No matter what you did, you 'd always be out o' sight. But it just gives me the willies to think of your being down on your luck. Honest—I can't stand it."

Letitia looked away, more to avert her face from his searching gaze than from embarrassment.

"Everybody gets blue now and then," she said carelessly.

"But you ought n't to. I 'm the one that ought to get blue—black and blue."

"I guess we all do, more or less."

"If you 'd just ease up on the way you keep giving me the marble heart," continued Tod, dropping his voice to the key of tenderness, "I 'd see to it that there 'd never be a thing to make you blue. Everything would go your way. I 'd see to it."

Letitia looked at him with a little vexed frown.

"Dear me, Tod!" she said crossly, "you 're not going to propose to me here at dinner, are you, with everybody listening, too?"

Tod looked round rather guiltily. Letitia had exaggerated. The only person who appeared to be noticing them was Mrs. Mortimer Gault, and her glance immediately slipped away from his to give the signal for withdrawal to a lady at the other end of the table.

IV

THE colonel's visits now followed John Gault's with businesslike regularity. One week from the afternoon when the younger man had paid his last call, Colonel Reed had made his customary appearance and proffered his customary request.

With each succeeding gift of money his spirits seemed to rise, his gracious bonhomie to become more pronounced. Upon this occasion he had said cheerfully, as he dropped the pieces of gold into his old chamois-skin purse:

"It 's these unconscionable tradespeople that eat up our resources! Why can't a provident government arrange things so that we don't have to pay butchers and bakers and milkmen? Life would be so much better worth while if we could spend our money on clothes and books and entertaining our friends than in paying bills. Now, this"—jingling the gold in the purse—"goes to a son of Belial who sells us groceries on tick."

"Very kind of him, I should say," said the

other. "Are n't you rather lucky to have such good credit?"

"Well, that's what I think," said the colonel, throwing back his head and laughing like an old prince in whom the joy of life and the desire of the eyes still burned strong; "but Viola thinks credit is a trap set by the king of all the devils."

"Women are apt to be cautious about that sort of thing."

"I don't know about all women, but Viola is. She is more afraid of credit than she is of small-pox. But I say to her: 'My dear, look where we would have been without it! And as long as these good, charitable souls will give us food and drink for nothing, for goodness' sake let them do it. Don't let's try and suppress such a worthy impulse.' Not, of course," said the colonel, growing suddenly grave and squaring his shoulders, "that we don't intend to pay them. We always do. Sometimes, it is true, we're rather slow about it; but eventually things are squared off to everybody's satisfaction. How else could we have the credit?"

He asked this question with an air of triumph that, to the listener, seemed to have something in it of conscious cunning. Gault answered with a commonplace about the advantage of inspiring so great a trust in the vulgar mind. The colonel was openly gratified.

“Oh,” he said, as he moved toward the door, “there ’s something in the name of Ramsay Reed yet. But not enough,” he added, laughing with a mischievous appreciation of the humor of his misfortunes, “to let a grocery bill run on indefinitely. There was a day when my name was good for any length of time—but that was thirty years ago.”

Then he left, smiling and happy, and on the way home bought a pot of pâté de foie gras, a bottle of claret, and a handkerchief with an embroidered edge for Viola. At the grocery store on the corner of the street where he lived he stopped and paid twenty dollars on his bill, and then fared up the street with rapid strides, all agog with pleasure at the thought of Viola’s delight in his present, and the jolly little supper they would have on the end of the kitchen table.

The man who had made these innocent pleasures possible was far from enjoying those sensations of gratification said to be experienced by a cheerful giver.

He had begun to know very dark hours. His first great love, come tardily and reluctantly, at an age when the heart is almost closed to soft influences and the mind is hardened with much worldly contact, had come poisoned with torturing suspicions, with shame for his own weakness, with fears of the truth.

Had he been a stronger man he would have torn up by the roots this passion for a woman he dared not trust, have gone away and tried to forget. But the lifelong habit of self-indulgence was too powerful to be broken. He did not want to try and live without the charm and torment of Viola's presence. Had he been weaker he would have yielded to the spell, never dared to question, and gone on blindly into the purgatory of those who love and doubt. All his life he had retained an ideal of womanhood—a creature aloof from the coarseness of worldly ambition and vulgar greed. Now he found himself bound to one the breath of whose life seemed to be tainted with duplicity and sordid intrigue.

At times his state of uncertainty became intolerable. Then he resolved to go to her, take her hands in his, and looking into her eyes, ask for the truth. But the world's lessons of a conventional reserve, a well-bred reticence, asserted their claims, and he found himself contemplating, with ironical bitterness, this picture of his own simplicity. If they were deceiving him, how they would laugh—laugh together—at the folly of the pigeon they were plucking so cleverly! A life's experience, caution, cynicism, had gone down into dust before a girl's gray eyes. Could she be false and those eyes look into his so frankly and honestly? Could

those lips, that folded on each other in curves so full of innocence and truth, be ready with words of hypocrisy and deceit? When he was with her such thoughts seemed madness; when he was away from her his belief seemed a miserable infatuation.

After the colonel's last appearance he again determined to try and see her alone. This, he discovered, was not as easy of accomplishment as it had been on his first attempt. Arriving at the house at four o'clock, he rang repeatedly, but was not able to gain admittance. At last a small boy, who had been studying him through the bars of the gate, volunteered the information that the lady was out.

Gault turned away, and coming down the flagged walk, asked the child if he knew what direction she had taken.

"I dunno that," said the boy, "but she went out with her basket, and when she goes with her basket she generally stays a long while."

Gault rewarded him for his information with a piece of money, and turned down the street toward the other side of town.

It was a windy afternoon. The trades were just beginning, and their clear, chill sweep had already borne away some of the evil odors which hung about the old portion of the city. Gault could feel the touch of fog in their buoyant breath, and knew that long tongues of it

like white wool were stealing in through the Golden Gate. The city was putting on its summer aspect—a gray glare, softened by the mingling of dust and haze that rode the breezes. Bits of paper, rags, and straws were collected at corners in little whirling heaps. Presently the mightier winds would come, winging their way across miles of heaving seas to rush down the street in a mad carouse, carrying before them the dirt and refuse and odors and uncleanness which mark the dwelling of man.

He had walked some distance when, rounding a corner, a sharp gust seized him. In its fierce exultation it threw a whirlwind of dust into his eyes, so that, for a moment, he did not see that she was coming toward him. Then he caught a glimpse of the approaching figure and recognized it. She did not see him, but was engaged in her customary amusement of looking into the gardens. There was an air of unmistakable alertness and gaiety about her. Her hand tapped the tops of the fence-rails as she came, and she looked at the floral display behind them with happy eyes. Her scanty black skirt was sometimes whirled round her feet, showing her small ankles and narrow russet shoes. Once she had to put up her hand to her hat,—a white sailor bound with a dark ribbon,—and the frolicsome wind swept all the loosened ends of her hair forward and lashed

her skirts out on either side. She had a basket on one arm, and holding this firmly, leaned back almost on the wind, laughing to herself.

At the same moment she caught sight of him. The wind dropped suddenly, as if conscious that she should not be presented in such boisterous guise to a lover's eye, and her figure seemed to fall back into lines of decorous demureness; only the color and laughter of her recent buffeting still remained in her face.

"Is it you?" she cried. "Did you see me in the wind? Is n't it fun?"

They met, and he took her hand. She was all blown about, but fresh as a flower that has shaken off the dew. The contrast between them, between what might be called their different ranks in society, was much more clearly marked in the open light of the street than in the ragged homeliness of her own parlor.

While he was essentially the man of luxurious environment and assured position, she presented the appearance of a working-girl. Even the delicacy and refinement of her face could not counteract the suggestion of her dress. Beauty when unadorned may adorn the most, but it cannot give to ill-made old clothes the effect of garments made by a French modiste. John Gault was used to women who wore this kind of clothes—so used, in fact, that he hardly knew what made Viola appear so different from

the other girls of his acquaintance. The contrast in their looks seemed to mark more clearly the contrast in their positions, seemed to purposely accentuate that wide gulf set between them.

Gault took her basket from her and dropped into place at her side. The high rows of houses protected them from the wind, and only as they crossed the open spaces at the intersection of streets did it catch them, and, for a moment, play boisterously with them.

The girl seemed in excellent spirits. He had noticed this with every recurring visit. Looking back upon her as she was when he had first known her, care-worn, pale, and quiet, she seemed now like a different person. Her glance sparkled with animation, her voice was full of that thrilling quality which some women's voices acquire in moments of happiness. She was a hundred times more fatally alluring than she had been in the beginning. He knew now that while he was with her his reason would always be in abeyance to his heart.

"You seem to be in very good spirits," he said to her, not without a feeling of personal grievance that some cause of which he was ignorant should add so to her lightness of heart.

"I am," she answered. "I 'm in very good spirits. I 'm quite happy. It 's something lovely to feel so gay in your heart, is n't it?"

"I don't know; maybe I 've never felt so."

"Oh, what nonsense!" she cried, looking at him reproachfully. "You, who have always had just what you wanted! I used to be afraid of you at first. It seemed rather awful to know anybody who 'd always had things go exactly their way."

He ignored the remark and said:

"What 's making you happy? Tell it to me, and then perhaps I 'll get a little reflection of it."

"I don't know that it 's any one especial thing. Happiness comes when lots of little things fit nicely together. I never had one big thing in a lump to make me happy. I tell you what 's doing a good deal toward it. Father and I are"—she made an instant's pause and then said—"doing so much better; financially, I mean. It 's such a relief! You don't know."

He turned and looked at her and met her eyes. They looked rather abashed, and then fell away from the scrutiny of his.

"You don't think it queer of me to tell you that, do you?" she asked. "I tell you a good many things I would n't say to other people."

"I am proud that you should have such confidence in me."

"Well," she continued, with a quick sigh of relief, "we 've been lately—that is, just about when we first knew you, and before that—

really quite badly off. And my father being so sanguine, and having once been so differently situated, it 's very hard on him—very hard.”

She paused, and he felt that she was looking at him for confirmation of her remark.

“Very; I quite understand,” he answered.

“And, really, it was dreadful. It 's trying for old people—so much anxiety. And then, just at the very worst, things suddenly brightened. Just about a month or six weeks ago the luck changed. You must have been the mascot.”

This time he looked at her, but her glance was averted.

“Go on,” he said, thinking that his voice sounded strange.

“Because it was after we knew you that things began to get better. I was angry with my father that first day when he asked you in, because I did n't want you to see how—how straitened we were. There 's a pride of poverty, you know; well, I suppose I must have a little bit of it. Everything was at its worst then. But now it 's all different. You 've been the mascot.”

He again felt her eyes surveying him, but found it impossible to look at her. In his heart he was afraid of what he might read in her face.

“Don't you like being a mascot?” she

queried, in her happy girl's voice. "You don't look as if you did."

"I'm proud and flattered, probably too much so for speech."

"I'm glad, because that's what you were. There's no getting out of it. I'll tell you how it happened. My father used to own a great deal of stock in mines and companies and things, and when everything went down so fast, he sold almost all of it. But some he kept. He had it put away in the drawers of his desk up-stairs in his room, and about two months ago it began to go up, and now it pays dividends and we get them. Is n't that good luck?"

She was close to him, looking into his face. He turned his head this time and confronted her with a steady gaze. In the harsh afternoon light every curve and line of her countenance was revealed. Her eyes were full of light and joy. His glance met and held them for one searching moment, then turned away baffled.

"Very good luck. I congratulate you," he said.

"You may well," she answered. "I'd given up expecting good luck ever any more in this world. I believe in it, and my father's had come and gone almost before I was born, and mine—mine has n't come yet, I suppose."

"Unless you discover some more old stock in the pigeonholes of the desk."

"Oh, I don't think that 's likely. Lightning does n't strike twice in the same place."

"What was the stock? Mining stock?"

She seemed in doubt for a moment, then said:

"Yes, I think so—yes, surely, mining stock."

"Do you remember the name of the mine?"

He glanced at her as she walked beside him. She appeared to be cogitating.

"I don't believe I do," she answered at length.

"To tell you the truth, I don't believe my father mentioned it to me. I 'm very stupid about business. I 've never had any necessity to know about it, and so I 've never learned."

"How long had it been lying in the desk?"

"Oh, years and years! Probably twenty. It was a relic of the days when everything was booming."

"If he 's been paying assessments on it all these years, he ought certainly to be repaid now."

He was scrutinizing her sharply. Her profile was toward him, and at this remark he saw the color mount into her cheek, and that curious appearance of immobility come over her face which denotes a sudden, almost electric stoppage and then concentration of mental activity. She raised her head and said, without looking at him:

"Assessments are a yearly or semi-yearly payment, are n't they?"

"Yes, or quarterly—according to the way the stock is drawn."

"But is n't there some that is non-assessable? I've surely heard that expression."

"In other States, but in California—well, possibly there might be."

"I'm sure there must be. This of my father's must have been." She came quite close to him in her earnestness, and looked at him with an expression of uneasiness on her face.

"It must have been that kind," she insisted; "probably you never heard of this mine."

"Probably I never did," he answered grimly.

They walked on for a few moments in silence. There was a visible drop in her spirits. Stealing a side glance at her, he could see that she was looking down, evidently in troubled thought. Suddenly she raised her head and said:

"Well, I don't really know anything about it. Only I do hope one thing, and that is that it will go on paying."

"Don't bother about that," he said; "it will."

"What makes you think it will?"

He turned on her roughly and said:

"Don't you think it will?"

"I'd like to think so," she answered, abashed by his unusual manner; "but I've learned that it's foolish to hope. I try not to."

He gave a short, disagreeable laugh and said:

“Oh, not in this case. Hope as much as you like.”

“You ’re very cheering,” she answered; “but I don’t see how you can be so sure.”

“It seems to me you ’re very pessimistic—especially for a young woman who has just found a drawerful of paying stock.”

His manner in making this remark was so impregnated with angry bitterness that Viola, chilled and repelled, made no response. In silence they walked onward till a turn in the street brought them in sight of the house.

At the gate she said rather timidly:

“Would you like to come in?”

He had been carrying the basket, and now found the depositing of it in a place of safety an excuse to enter; for even in his present state of morose ill humor he could not forego the pleasure of a few more moments of her society.

In the cold, half-furnished house their footsteps echoed with a strangely solitary effect. She preceded him into the parlor, and moved about with the confident tread of the chatelaine, pulling up the blinds, putting the basket out of sight, and laying aside her hat and gloves. There were some thin flowered muslin curtains hanging over the bay-window, and she arranged the folds of these with deft, proprietary touches, and then stepped back and studied the effect.

After watching her for a moment the visitor said in a tone of restored amiability:

“Are n’t those something new?”

She looked at him with quick, grateful recognition of his change of mood.

“Yes; do you like them? I changed my mind about a dozen times before I bought them. Even now I don’t know whether I ’m entirely satisfied.”

“Oh, you ought to be,” he said, as he drew near and eyed the curtains with the air of a connoisseur; “I ’m sure you could n’t have chosen anything prettier.”

Viola’s spirits rose to the level they had been at when he met her earlier in the afternoon. Her eyes brightened and her face took on its most animated expression.

“They ’re another outward and visible sign of the rise in mining stock,” she continued. “I ’m so glad you noticed them without my having to make you do so.”

“Do you want to know why I did?”

“Because they were pretty, of course.”

“Not at all. I was looking at you as you arranged them, and wondering why a pair of curtains should be so much more interesting than I was.”

“What made you think they were?”

“Because you were devoting yourself to them and coldly ignoring me.”

"That was because I was a little bit frightened of you. You were so cross just now, before we came in, that I did n't know what to say to you."

"I cross? What a calumny! I was in my sweetest humor."

She looked at him mischievously.

"If you call that your sweetest humor, all I can think is that you 're not as clever as you pretend to be."

"I 'm afraid I 'm not. For example, I 'm not clever enough to understand you—a little girl like you, scarcely half my age."

"Am I really such a sphinx?"

"You are to me."

"I like that," she said, smiling, and gathering up the edge of the curtain in a frill; "I don't want everybody to see through me. But you 're different."

"How am I different?"

"You 're more a friend than other people—more a friend than anybody else I know. Tell me what you don't understand about me, and I 'll explain it. I won't leave myself a single secret."

Though he was standing close to her, looking down at her, he suddenly dropped his voice to the key that was the lowest she could hear.

"If I only dared to ask, and you would only tell the truth."

“Dared to ask!” she repeated blankly, alarmed and upset by his singular change of manner.

“And you would tell the truth,” he added, and heard his own voice sound suddenly husky and shaken. “Tell it to me now!”

“I always do,” she stammered.

“No matter what it is,” he continued, as if he had not heard her—“no matter how it may hurt me or injure you.”

The color ran over her face and as quickly ebbed away, leaving her pallid. It might have been the confession of innocence or the confusion of guilt. She looked nervously from side to side, raised her eyes to his, and dropped them again.

“There are always a few things a person can’t tell,” she almost whispered.

He gave an ugly laugh, and put his arm half round her as if to draw her to him, then drew back as quickly, and turning away, walked to the window. Viola did not seem to have noticed the attempted caress. There was a moment of penetrating silence. He wondered if she could hear his heart beat.

Then she said:

“Why do you say such strange things? I always tell you the truth.”

To his listening ear her voice sounded affectedly naïve. He answered without moving:

"Of course you do. So do all women since the days of Eve."

"But you don't seem to believe me."

"You must n't jump at such hasty conclusions."

"Have you heard anything about me that would make you think I was deceitful?"

"I have never spoken of you to any one except your father."

"I can't understand you at all to-day. You're so changeable and moody, and sometimes so ill-humored."

"What a dreadful afternoon you've had! I'm sorry." Then, with an abrupt change of tone: "Who picks up the leaves of the deodar and ties them up in those neat little bundles?"

"I do—do you believe me?" She spoke with a sharpness he had never heard her use before.

He broke out into sudden laughter that this time sounded genuine. Turning from the window, he came toward her and took her hand.

"Are you angry?" he asked. "I don't wonder. Say the most disagreeable things you can think of, and they won't be more than I deserve."

For the second time this afternoon she beamed over his restoration to good humor.

"I'm not a very good person to quarrel with," she said, looking at him with soft, for-

giving eyes, "though, as you see, I 've got a temper."

He gave her hand a little pressure and relinquished it, taking up his hat.

"Accept a hundred apologies from me for my rudeness. Good-by."

"You *were* disagreeable," she admitted, as they went together into the hall. "You seemed as if you did n't believe half I said to you, and actually as if our good luck made you angry."

Gault had opened the door, and his face was turned from her.

"Oh, don't think that," he answered, as he stepped out on to the porch; "whatever gives you happiness adds to mine. Adios, señorita."

The door closed after him, and Viola stood alone in the hall, smiling to herself. She made as if to watch him through one of the narrow panes of glass which formed small windows on either side of the portal, then suddenly drew back and shook her head.

"That would be bad luck," she said, "and I 'm too happy to risk bad luck."

It was a few days later than this that an opera company of some fame in southern France was encouraged by a successful Mexican season to run up to San Francisco. Californians are notoriously fond of music, and the small opera

companies which wander through the West, not daring to measure their talents with the Eastern stars, generally can count on a profitable season by the Golden Gate. Bad scenery, absurd costumes, and indifferent acting do not damp the ardor of the Californian, who will go anywhere and undergo any small discomfort to hear passable singing.

Mrs. Gault, who went every year or two to New York and found her ideas there, as she did her hats and dresses, derided the local taste for hearing unknown prima donnas as Leonora and Gilda. But her husband and Letitia overruled her in at least this one particular, and when opera came up from Mexico or across from New Orleans, she always went with them, and tried to look as bored as her animated features and lively style would permit.

This particular season, a short one of three weeks given by an Italian company that had been touring Mexico during the winter, opened with a performance of "Rigoletto." For the first night Mortimer Gault procured one of the lower boxes, leaving it to his wife to fill it with such company as she desired, provided a seat was left for him in the background, where he could hear and would not have to talk. The party, which consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Gault, Letitia, John, Tod McCormick, and his sister Pearl, was late in arriving, and it was not until the

interval between the second and third acts that they found time to look about the house. Letitia and Pearl were in the front of the box, the latter on the inner side nearest the audience, with John Gault sitting behind her in the shadow of the curtain. While Letitia looked about the house through her lorgnon she could hear the animated chatter of Pearl, interspersed with comments from Maud Gault and Tod.

“Do you see that woman in the box opposite—the pale one with the piece of blue velvet twisted in her hair? She came up with the company, and her husband is a professional gambler in Mexico and makes heaps of money. You can ask Tod if you don’t believe me.”

Tod said it was all true, and that she was a “peach,” a form of encomium that, in his vast appreciation, he was fond of applying to every member of the other sex that came within range of his admiring eye.

“In the box above, where the two good-looking men are, that little red, squeezed-looking woman is Lady Jervis, who used to be Tiny Madison ever so long ago. She went abroad and married Sir Somebody or other Jervis, and she ’s out here now with a syndicate.”

“What is she doing with a syndicate?” Mrs. Gault asked. “Is she going on the stage?”

“No; they ’re buying mines or railroads or

something. Her husband 's in it, and all the others, they say, are English lords. That 's part of the syndicate with her now, in the box."

"What part of the syndicate?" said Tod.
"The head, or the feet, or the middle?"

"Don't get gay, Tod," said his sister, severely; "I don't like small boys when they 're too funny. Down there in the audience, near the middle of the parquet, is the woman whose husband is something or other in Central America. He 's enormously rich, and she comes up here once a year and buys clothes. They say she used to be on the stage, and she looks just like it; she has such a lot of paint round her eyes and such vaudeville hair. But you ought to see her children! They 're quite black, just like little negroes. Major Conway, who lived down there a good deal, says that Central American children are all dark when they 're young, and then it wears off as they grow older."

"Do they use sapolio?" inquired Tod.

Pearl treated this inquiry with fitting scorn, and continued:

"There 's Bertha Lajaune, over there by the pillar. Do you think she 's so beautiful? I must say I don't. I heard the other day that she was a Jewess, and that her mother had one of those pawnbroking places south of Market

Street, and that they 'd only just moved away a few years when she married old Marcel La-jaune."

As Pearl rattled on thus, assisted by Tod and Mrs. Gault, Letitia let her lorgnon follow on the track of their comments, idly passing from face to face as their light talk touched on it.

She looked curiously at the wife of the Mexican gambler, a romantically handsome woman, with a skin like a magnolia-petal, and a frame of ebony hair setting off a face of Madonna-like softness. The lady in the box above was not pretty at all, Letitia thought. She had a broad, good-humored red face, an impudent nose, and a frizz of blond hair crimped far down on her forehead in the English fashion. Her black evening dress showed a section of white neck, and a piece of reddened arm was visible between her short sleeves and the edge of her long gloves. Letitia had been too young to remember her as Tiny Madison, and wondered how a Californian could come to look so like a British princess.

The Central American lady was much more interesting. She was like a lily among the gipsy-looking dark women and small, beady-eyed men of her suite. She was thin, pale, and haggard, with artificially reddened hair and heavy eyelids much painted. Her eyes from under these looked out with an air of languid

world-weariness. She had some immense diamonds round her throat, and the fan she lazily moved twinkled with them.

Letitia studied her for some interested minutes, then passed on to Bertha Lajaune, of whom everybody had heard and most people were talking. She was accounted by many the most beautiful woman in San Francisco, and had risen from an unpenetrated obscurity by her marriage with a rich French wine merchant. Letitia disagreed with Pearl. She thought Mme. Lajaune quite as beautiful as people said she was. To-night, in a gorgeous toilet of pale lavender with a good deal of silver and lace about it, she had the appearance of an ennyéd princess. Her pale skin, classic features, and large light eyes, with an extraordinarily wide sweep of lid, seemed to stamp her as one designed by nature to wear a crown. Letitia was about to turn and draw John Gault's attention to her, when the lorgnon, in its transit, suddenly commanded two faces just below—Colonel Reed's and Viola's.

They were not looking her way, and Letitia riveted the glass on them. The colonel was sitting up and looking about alertly. He was instinct with life, enjoyment, and animation. With his neck craned out of his collar, he was surveying the audience, now and then turning to impart some hasty comment to Viola. He

had the eager, happy air of a man who is in his element.

Viola was sitting back rather listlessly, with her hands clasped in her lap. She was dressed simply but prettily in gray, and wore no hat. The color was the one most perfectly suited to harmonize with her eyes and hair. Among the handsome and well-dressed women that surrounded her, she preserved the same suggestion of distinction and superiority that Letitia had recognized when she saw her in her own ragged drawing-room.

Holding out the glass, Letitia turned to Gault, who was sitting silent in the shelter of the curtain, and said:

“Colonel Reed ’s sitting down there.”

He gave the slightest possible start, and moving forward, looked in the direction she indicated.

“So he is,” he said in an uninterested tone, “and with his daughter.”

Unfortunately, Tod McCormick, who had drawn up as close to Letitia as his chair would permit, heard this short dialogue and pricked up his ears.

“Colonel Reed,” he said vivaciously, “and his daughter? Where?”

He bent forward, his lean neck stretched out, his weazened visage full of a curiosity that was only naïvely boyish, but that on his ugly and

insignificant features acquired a mean and disagreeable air.

“By gracious!” he said, after surveying the colonel with a knowing grin. “At the opera, in the best seats, dressed like the lilies of the field—oh, you old rascal!”

He wagged his head at the colonel with a look of wicked knowledge that he was extremely fond of assuming.

“What do you mean?” said Letitia, twisting round on her chair so that she could see him. “What makes you call him a rascal?”

“Oh, old rogue! old rogue!” repeated Tod, as though he had secret and masonic intelligence of serious misdeeds in the colonel’s past. “And that ’s his daughter? Ain’t she a peach!”

John Gault moved uneasily and looked back into the shadows of the box. Letitia, feeling uncomfortable, said hurriedly:

“Yes, indeed. She ’s prettier than anybody here, I think.”

“Except you, Tishy,” said Tod, but, it must be admitted, in an absent tone. He leaned farther forward, his eyes on the girl in the seat below, the smile on his face changing from one of whimsical malice to the slow, pleased grin of affected admiration.

“Well, she can draw my salary! She can have the key of my trunk!”

"Have you ever seen her before?" asked Letitia.

"No, but I 've heard of her. Everybody 's heard of her."

"It 's very odd; I never did till the other day."

"You might n't have. The boys, I mean. All of a sudden, every feller 's begun askin' every other feller if he knows Colonel Reed's daughter. She 's sort of in the air, like microbes."

"Why should she be?"

Tod shrugged.

"Oh, a girl as pretty as that can't be expected to blush unseen down in South Park forever."

John Gault rose suddenly and went to the back of the box, where he joined his brother, who was silently digesting his pleasure in the music. Tod, quite unconscious of any offense, was glad to be left in sole possession of Letitia, and rambled on, repeating tag-ends of gossip that had lodged in his shallow brain.

"The colonel 's a great old chap. He likes the 'long green.' He once had plenty of it, and once you get the habit of having it, it 's worse than morphine to get cured of. The colonel ain't got cured."

"He has n't got a cent," said Letitia, "so I don't see but that he 's got to get cured."

"There 's two good ways of getting money

when you ain't got it—just two," said Tod, oracularly.

"And what are those?"

"Stealing and borrowing. And if you steal you know there's always a risk about being an expense to your country; and no self-respecting man wants that. But borrowing! Get a good, quiet, peaceable victim,—the kind that don't make a fuss, likes to have his leg pulled, thrives on it, misses it when you leave off,—and you're on velvet. I should judge the colonel had found just the right kind."

"What a horrid thing to say, Tod!"

"Horrid! The colonel does n't think it's horrid. I wonder who he's corralled. Three years ago he took hold of my father. It was great, the way he worked the old man. You know, people have n't been able to trace Jerry McCormick through life by the quarters he's dropped. It did my heart good to see the way the colonel managed him. I guess he must have got nearly a thou' out of him before my father shut down."

"I should n't think his daughter would like that," said Letitia, feeling a chill at her heart.

Tod raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips. His faith in the pride and fine feelings of young women who were poor did not appear strong. But in spite of his assumption of a blasé cynicism, he was a kindly soul at heart.

“Oh, she might n't know,” he said; “it 's so easy to fool women.”

Letitia was silent for a moment. Then she commented, as if speaking to herself:

“I suppose it would be easy for her father to fool her?”

“Easy as lying.”

“Do you suppose he borrows that way from other men?”

Tod directed upon her an incredulous side glance. Then, meeting the anxious inquiry of her eyes, he broke into a broad smile.

“Well, I should snicker,” he said, in an amused tone.

The curtain rose here, and further dialogue was cut off, for Letitia was a lover of singing, and when the music began again, sank into a rapt and immovable silence. During the other entr'actes the conversation was general, and any more confidences on the subject of Colonel Reed and his daughter were impossible.

In the foyer, on the way out, the party became scattered. Crowds surging from the main aisle pressed forward and separated Mrs. Gault, her husband, and Pearl McCormick from the other three, who had stopped in an angle of space near the stairway for Letitia to adjust her cloak. As Gault was shaking it out preparatory to laying it across her shoulders, her attention was caught by the figures of Colonel

Reed and Viola, who emerged from the entrance of a side aisle just in front of them.

The colonel's eye fell on Gault, his face beamed with recognition and pleasure, and, with a word to Viola, he started forward to greet him. Viola gave a vexed exclamation and caught him by the arm, evidently with the intention of deterring him. But the old man, flushed with the excitement of once more finding himself in the familiar scenes of light and revelry, seized her hand, and, drawing her with him, came forward. Viola, thus forcibly overruled, advanced, her face full of distressed embarrassment.

Gault, who had been occupied with the cloak, had not seen this little pantomime, and the first intimation he had of the colonel's proximity was his loud and patronizing greeting. He turned quickly and saw the old man, bland and majestic as ever, and beside him Viola, pained and uncomfortable, the object of Tod's admiring stares, and only too plainly dragged forward by her ill-inspired father. His face flushed with annoyance, aroused alike by the false position in which the girl was placed, and by the revelation thus made to Letitia that he had not been frank when he had led her to believe that he did not know Colonel Reed's daughter.

His indignation found expression in his cold

and almost curt reply to the colonel's greeting. There was no mistaking its import. It spoke so plainly of annoyance that even the easy affability of the old man was disturbed. He looked taken aback, and for a moment evidently did not know what to say. Tod looked from one man to the other, grinning at the embarrassment of a situation he did not understand. For a moment there was a most disagreeable pause. Letitia knew that recognition would betray the fact that she had met Viola, but the mortification of the girl's position made her bold.

"How do you do, Miss Reed?" she said; and then, as a brilliant afterthought, "Do you like music?"

"Very much," Viola managed to answer; "and it was good, was n't it?"

"It was Al," said Tod, not by any means intending to be left out; "and that prima donna, ain't she a peach?"

"Mme. Foedor is a lovely Gilda. She looks so young. Most of them are too old and matronly," continued Letitia, fastening the clasps of her cloak, and wondering if this exceedingly uncomfortable conversation was to be prolonged.

Viola's reply put an end to her uneasiness:

"Lovely! I never saw her before, or the opera, either. But we must go. Father, we'll miss the car if we don't hurry. Good night. Good night, Mr. Gault."

She took the old man by the arm and tried to draw him toward the side entrance. But the vision of Letitia in all the glory of evening dress had been the last touch to the colonel's enjoyment on this momentous evening. He seemed to have forgotten the repulse he had just received, and hung back from his daughter's persuasive hand, looking with courtly admiration at Miss Mason. She was keen enough to see that he would again overrule his daughter and add further to the embarrassment of the meeting, and sweeping her cloak round her, she said :

"We must go too, or we'll never find the others. Good night." And with a little smiling nod she turned with her attendant cavaliers and plunged into the crowd.

Tod, squeezing along beside her in the throng, said querulously :

"Why did n't you introduce me? I'd have given that old man a song and dance, and he'd have asked me down there."

But Gault, on her other side, said nothing. Once, as the crowd jostled her against him, she stole a glance in his direction, and found him looking away with frowning brows and a morose expression. She wondered if he had realized that her remarks to Viola indicated a previous acquaintance. If he had he would certainly be angry with her.

Pearl and Tod were dropped on the way

back, but Gault drove home with the others. He said he had been suffering from insomnia lately, and a walk would tire him out. Once in the house, Mortimer led him back into the dining-room to try a new wine that had been made on the vineyard of a mutual friend. Letitia and Maud were left alone in the drawing-room, where the former, expressing fatigue, threw herself down in a long chair, and the latter moved about turning down lamps, and here and there arranging with a housewife's hand the disarray of tumbled cushions and carelessly disposed draperies. Finally she passed out of the room, and Letitia, still sitting where she had dropped, heard her skirts rustling softly as she ascended the stairway.

Letitia did not move. She wanted to see John before he left. If he had noticed her greeting of Viola Reed he would undoubtedly speak of it, and she would be given a chance to explain. With any other man but John it would have been nothing. But John was so peculiar, so reserved about his own affairs, so resentful, so terribly resentful, of anything like intrusion or interference. Letitia as she waited felt, much to her own surprise, that she was growing nervous, that her heart was beginning to beat uncomfortably hard and her breath to come uncomfortably short.

Suddenly she heard his voice, in the room be-

yond, bidding Mortimer good night. She sat up quickly, and then as quickly looked down so as to give her figure the air of repose and indifference which was so far from her state of mind. He entered the room, and seeing her, said:

“Oh, Tishy, are you still there?”

The tone of his voice struck on her ear as singularly cold and aloof. Her nervousness increased, for she sincerely feared his anger.

“Yes,” she answered; “I—I—wanted to speak to you.”

“What had you to say?” he asked, stopping before her, but not sitting down.

It did not occur to her, in her state of trepidation, that the obvious abstraction and coldness of his manner might be the result of causes that she did not know. She at once leaped to the conclusion that he had realized she had made Viola’s acquaintance in some underhand way, and that he was now bitterly incensed with her.

“I wanted to explain to you how—how—I came to know Viola Reed.”

The remark dispelled all his indifference in an instant. The sudden concentrating of his attention upon her in a piercing look and a sharp, penetrating fixity of observation added a hundredfold to Letitia’s agitation.

“I—I—knew you ’d be angry and probably

misunderstand. You're always so—so reticent and queer about your own affairs. I did n't see any harm in trying to know Miss Reed. It was better, anyway, than letting Maud go, and she was so set upon it."

Letitia raised her eyes pleadingly, then dropped them quickly. His were blazing. But it was too late to go back now. He took a chair, drew it up before her, and sat down.

"Just explain to me what you mean," he said quietly. "You and Maud have been trying to make the acquaintance of Miss Reed—is that it?"

"We did more than try. We did it—I did it. I would n't let Maud. I was afraid she'd do something. Maud sometimes has n't got as much tact—as much tact as she ought to have."

"How did you do it?"

"I just went there."

"You went there? You went into that lady's house—intruded, without invitation or acquaintance—forced your way in as if you were a peddler? I can't believe that of you, Letitia. You had some excuse for going there."

Letitia rose to her feet. She did it unconsciously.

"I did n't exactly intrude; though I'll tell you the truth, John—I'll not hide anything. I do think it was mean. I thought it after I got

in and saw how—how poor and miserable everything was. I felt mortified at what I'd done. I would n't have gone in the beginning if I'd thought it was as bad as that. But I had an excuse. I bought jam and four plants. That's one of them on the stand."

"Bought jam and plants! What are you talking about? I don't understand you."

"She sells them,—jam and plants,—and I bought three dozen pots and four plants."

"You went there and bought these things from her in her own house?"

"Yes," Letitia answered, and went on helplessly, in order to say something: "Four plants for two dollars. It was very cheap."

There was a moment's pause. Then the man said in a suppressed voice:

"You patronized her in her poverty—pried into her home, bought things from her, gave her money! Good God!"

He dropped his voice and turned away, unable to finish. Letitia came toward him. She knew that in this interview the happiness of her life was at stake, and yet that she must be true to herself.

"I did give her money, but not as you mean. I was sorry for her and wanted to help her. I would n't have hurt her any more than you would. It was because of you I went there. It was because we heard you were so interested

in her. But after I got there I was ashamed and sorry, and I tried not to make her feel it."

"So you gave her two dollars for four plants! It takes a woman to know how to humiliate a woman!"

"I saw she was n't the kind of person Maud thought she was," continued Letitia, going blindly on. "I was certain they made a mistake in saying the things they did about her. Even if you were giving them money, even if you were supporting them, she was n't that kind."

"Who told you I was supporting them?"

"Oh, I don't know—people say it. And maybe I did do her an injustice in going there and spying on her, as you say. But you are the one who has done her a real injustice—the kind of injustice that hurts."

"I!" he exclaimed, too surprised to defend himself. "What have I done?"

"You 've kept it all so secret that you made people think there was something wrong about it."

"Letitia," he cried, in a tone of warning, "take care! You 've meddled enough already."

"You hid away your friendship with her as if it were shameful. You acted as if you were ashamed of her and of your knowing her—as if there was something wicked about her, so you

could n't even speak of her to me or any other woman that you knew well. When I asked you about her, though you were too much of a man of honor to tell me a lie, you were not too much of a man of honor to act one. You gave her father money, but you were ashamed to acknowledge that you even knew her."

"We 've had enough of this conversation," he said, now trembling with rage. "Let it end."

He turned to leave the room, but Letitia's voice arrested him, and he stood with his back to her, listening.

"You ought to have known enough to trust her," she continued desperately, for she was singing the swan-song of her hopes. "You've only got to look into her face to see what she is. No matter what people say about her and her father, no matter what silly stories are repeated, even if there *were* other men who gave the colonel money—"

Letitia stopped. Gault had wheeled suddenly round upon her, and the expression of his face made the words die on her lips.

"Other men!" he repeated. "Who said that?"

"Tod," she faltered.

"Who were they?"

"I—I—don't know; he did n't tell their names."

"What did he say?"

"He said—he said—" she stammered, bewil-

dered by her own pain and sympathy for his obvious suffering. "No, it was I. I asked him if the colonel got money from other men, and he—he did n't say much; he laughed and said, 'Well, I should snicker!'"

"Thank you," answered Gault, in a low voice. "Good night."

He turned and left the room, and a moment later the hall door closed behind him with a muffled bang.

For a space Letitia stood motionless as a statue, a tall and splendid figure in her gleaming dress, on which fine lines of interwoven silver-work caught and lost the light. Then, rousing herself, she moved about heavily but methodically, putting out the remaining lights. When they were all extinguished she crossed the hall and slowly ascended the stairway, the silken whisperings of her skirts being the only sound in the sleeping house.

V

THE season had worn itself away to June. The winds were an established fact, and blew from the ocean down the long clefts of the streets out into the bay beyond. Outside the Golden Gate the fog lay along the horizon like the faint gray shores of a distant country. When the winds dropped at sundown, it came creeping in, drawing its white cloak over the water, across the dunes, and finally down the streets and round the houses. All night it brooded close over the city, sleeping on its crowded hills, and in the morning lay brimming in every hollow till the valleys looked like cups crowned high with a curdling white drink.

When the sun had driven it back to its cloud-country on the horizon, there were wonderful mornings, all blue and gold. The warm rays licked up the night's moisture, and for a few clear, still hours had the world to themselves. They burned the land dry and parched. The hills at the mouth of the bay turned fawn-color, and looked like lean, crouching lions with

hides that fell away from their gaunt bones. The sea and sky were a hard-baked blue, with the little sails of boats and the strenuous green leafage of tropical plants seeming as if inlaid in the turquoise background. The gardens about South Park grew dustier and drier. Only the aloes appeared to have sap enough to retain any color, and against the faded monochrome of the surrounding shrubs they shone a strong, cold gray-blue. In the Western Addition the gardens were watered and bloomed extravagantly, till the ivy geraniums hung from the window-boxes like pieces of pink carpet, and the heliotropes dashed themselves in purple spray to the second stories.

Fashionable people were leaving town daily. Some were going to the redwoods, where the forest glades are dim and still and full of a chill solemnity, like the aisles of old cathedrals. Others were en route for one of the twin towns which tip the points of the crescent that holds Monterey Bay between its horns. Many were repairing to the country houses which have sprung up in scattered clusters down the line of the railroad to the Santa Clara valley. Here they found the warmth and idleness which Californians love. All summer the vast expanse of the valley, shut in from wind and fog by a rampart of hills, brooded under perpetual sunshine. In the motionless noons its yellow fields,

where the shadows of the live-oaks lie round and black, swam in quivering veils of heat, and the smell of the tar-weed rose heavy and aromatic, like the incense from a hundred altars.

The Mortimer Gaults, being fashionable folk, had broken up their household and gone their several ways—Letitia first, with many trunks, to make visits at hotels and country houses. Mrs. Gault, like other San Francisco matrons, did not close her house, but made quick flights into the country, which she sincerely hated, and then came back thankfully to town, where she dwelt in comfort with two servants, and, when her husband was not with her, ate meals of choice daintiness, which were laid on a square of drawn-work on the end of the dining-room table.

John Gault had not been able to see Letitia before her departure, which was not so strange, as she left shortly after the night at the opera. In the one or two small gatherings which took place at the Mortimer Gaults' before the family exodus, he had been unable to participate—at least, that was what he wrote to Maud. She, it is needless to state, knowing of that evening interview after the opera, had tried to elicit from Letitia an account of what had taken place. In this, however, she was unsuccessful. Letitia was at first stubbornly silent, then cross. But she accepted an invitation to stay

with the McCormicks at their country place, the Hacienda del Pinos, in the Napa valley; and Maud felt that her extraordinary and inexplicable sister was, for once in her life, behaving like a rational human being.

Gault's reluctance to see Letitia had been the whim of a nature harassed past bearing. He had gone from her that evening in frenzy with her, himself, and a world where life was so unlivable and being alive so remorseless a tragedy. The man who had never had a serious check in his easy course from birth to middle age had now suddenly found himself the central figure in one of those maddening dilemmas which blight or make the lives of less fortunate individuals.

The time had come when the situation called for a determined step. But what step he could not decide. What particular course of action would end the whole matter most satisfactorily for himself was the question that besieged him. He hardly gave a thought to Viola. He was the victim of either a repulsively sordid plot, or else he was a man cruelly lured by fate into a position from which it seemed impossible to extricate himself without misery of one sort or another. At one moment he saw himself as the gullible victim of a clever pair of adventurers, and laughed fiercely at the scruples which prevented him from holding them at

their own valuation. At the next he was sickened at the manner in which he was degrading himself and her by giving way to the meanest and most dastardly suspicions.

He longed to think that he wronged her, and yet, so fearful was he of being hoodwinked, so inclined to distrust himself and the rest of the world, that he could not rise up and believe in her, though his love bade him. Once he thought of going to Tod and asking him to explain his conversation with Letitia, and then revolted at the idea of exposing Viola and his own weakness to the vulgar curiosity of the shallow-brained youth. The only possible ground for believing in Viola's innocence was that her father was deceiving her, and it seemed to Gault that the old man had neither the subtlety nor the desire to deceive anybody.

After suffering these torments for some days he suddenly came to a decision. He resolved that he would have an interview with Viola, in which, if she did not voluntarily tell him the truth, he would demand it from her. He would at first try to beguile her into an explanation, and if she evaded this, he would, directly and without circumlocution, force her to tell him. He knew it was brutal, but he was past consideration for any one. He had thought of this before, but merely from the comfortable distance of casual speculation. His attitude

now was one of determination. His self-indulgent, indolent nature had been goaded to a point where it could act more easily than it could endure.

Once having made up his mind, he was more at rest than he had been for weeks. He did not give much thought to the manner of attacking the subject, merely saying to himself that he was sure she could be induced to reveal all she knew by diplomacy. Of only one thing he felt convinced, and he felt this with the conviction that one has of the mandates of destiny — that the next time he saw her alone he would learn from her all there was to learn. Beyond this he shrank from looking.

While he had no desire to put off the interview that two months before would have seemed an impossibility, he was deliberative and unhurried. Thinking that the afternoon was the best time to find her by herself, he went to the house near South Park at four o'clock, a week after he had seen her at the opera. She was out, and on a second visit at a similar hour the result was the same. He had pushed his card under the door, and had hoped that she might have acknowledged the visits by a note; but she made no sign.

At the end of the second week he went again, in the evening, and found her, as usual, sitting with her father. She mentioned her disap-

pointment at missing him, and said that the afternoon was a bad time to find her, as she was almost always either busy or out. This seemed to him to plainly indicate that she did not wish to encourage his afternoon visits. He began to wonder if she was endeavoring to avoid seeing him alone. If she was, she must have had some inkling of what he contemplated. The thought spurred him to a feverish determination to have the explanation with her at the earliest opportunity. Heretofore she had appeared to him a factor which, if he chose to be hard enough, he could always manage. Now, if she were to oppose him with strategy and evasion, the difficulties of solving the problem would be increased a hundredfold.

But if Viola seemed desirous of escaping a tête-à-tête, the colonel was more assiduous than ever in seeking the society and bounty of his obliging friend. The sum to which he now stood indebted to Gault he described as being "quite formidable." He constantly spoke of repaying it, and made many vague allusions to promising enterprises that were destined to enrich his old age.

Two days after the evening visit the colonel appeared as usual, and this time produced a sheet of paper upon which was written a statement of his indebtedness. It was copied out

in his clear, fine hand, each sum scrupulously set down with its corresponding date, and at the end of the column of figures the total—\$510. Slapping his breast-pocket, he remarked that a duplicate of the memorandum lay there for his benefit and the stimulating of his memory.

“And when the days of the lean kine are over,” he said, “we will wipe it all out—clean the slate.”

His friend disclaimed any eagerness as to the arrival of these golden days, accommodated the colonel with his customary sum, and saw the old man go striding out in lofty satisfaction. Left by himself, he idly looked over the colonel's memorandum. It was a full statement, the dates preceding each sum, and at the top bearing the legend, “Memorandum of moneys loaned by John Gault to Ramsay Reed.”

He threw the paper into a drawer of his desk and thought no more about it, though he could not forbear smiling at the old man's studied preciseness.

After considerable reflection, Gault decided that the best way to bring matters to the crisis he desired was to ask Viola to accord him an interview. He would manage to make the request at some moment when the old man was either not listening—which was unusual—or

had preceded him into the hall in the moment of departure. If Viola refused, as he had some reason to think she might, he would have to arrange another plan, but, for the present, this was the most feasible one he could think of.

It was late for a cross-town visit when he started from his club. The evening, too, was one of the most disagreeable of the season. The city lay soaked under a blanket of fog. On the West Side there was so much life and activity on the streets, so much light and sound and pressure of shifting humanity, that, to a certain extent, the dreariness of the weather was overcome; but in the dark desolation of the old quarter the chill weight of the fog lay like a veil of mystery over the silent streets.

Gault passed down narrow alleys where his own footsteps were the only sound, and where the light of the rare lamps seemed smothered by the dense atmosphere. On the broad thoroughfare the old mansions looked like vast, dim ghosts of a lordly past, rising vague and mournful from huddled masses of wet foliage. Underfoot the hollows in the worn asphaltum gleamed with water, and lengths of brick wall, touched by the beam of an adjacent lamp, shone as though rain were falling.

Turning out of this wider way into the cross-

streets, he could hear in the silence the fog dripping off angles in slowly detaching drops. The old wooden pavements oozed water beneath the pressure of his foot. Sometimes from a crack in a sagging shutter an inquisitive yellow ray shot into the recesses of a tangled garden, gilding the shining leaves of great thirsty plants that drank in the reluctantly distilled moisture. Now and then a hurrying figure passed him with collar up and hat drawn down, but for the most part the streets were deserted, and even at this comparatively early hour the dwellers in the district seemed to be retiring, as most of the houses showed lights only in the upper stories.

In the Reeds' house there were the usual edges of light shining through the cracks and slits of the old blinds. In answer to his ring there was the usual moving of this light into the hall, where it shone out suddenly through the two narrow panes of glass that flanked the door. When the door opened there was the usual picture of Viola shading the light with one hand, that shone rosily, and looking questioningly out.

She seemed gladly surprised to see him, but the old days of her embarrassment were over. She helped him hang his coat, which was beaded with moisture, over the back of a chair, and then paused to arrange the wick of

her lamp as he preceded her into the drawing-room. In the doorway he stopped and looked questioningly about. The colonel was not there.

"Where is your father?" he said, as she followed him, carrying her lamp.

"My father?" She set the lamp on the table, still occupied with the recalcitrant wick. "Oh, he 's out. He hardly ever goes out in the evening, but to-night he wanted to see Mr. Maroney, who is only here from New York for a few days. Such a dreadful night, too! There — I don't think it will smoke any more."

Gault, who had absently taken the colonel's chair, made no response. So the opportunity he had been planning for had come! He felt a sensation of sickening repulsion at the task he had set himself. Already his heart seemed to have begun to beat like a hammer and his mouth felt dry. Without consciousness of what he looked at, his eyes moved about the room and rested on a black coat which was hanging over the back of a chair. On the edge of the table were a pair of scissors, a thimble, and some spools of thread.

Viola took the vacant chair near these and put on the thimble.

"You 'll not mind if I go on sewing?" she said. "I never thought of your coming to-night, and so I was fixing this. It will only take a few moments to finish it."

“What is it?” Gault asked, in order to say something, noticing that the garment seemed heavy and difficult for her to handle.

“My father’s coat—the one he wears every day,” she answered. “I was mending it while he had his other one on. He gets fond of clothes, and it’s next to impossible to get them away from him.”

She turned the coat about every now and then, her needle assaulting it, and catching splinters of light as it darted in and out. Gault leaned back, watching her. She bent her face over the work as she sewed, presenting to his gaze the fine white parting down the middle of her head, and the close-growing threads of her hair, here and there transmuted into filaments of gold. There was an air of serenity, of quietness and peace, about her, that seemed to tell of an inner sense of happiness.

As he sat back staring at her, and wondering, with that breathless beating of his heart growing stronger, what he should say, she suddenly raised her head and, looking straight into his eyes, said:

“What are you thinking about?”

Her face, with the lamplight shining full on it, seemed to radiate a soft, pervasive content. She asked the question with the indescribable charm of glance and smile of the woman who knows that her lightest word gives pleasure.

The increase in her beauty and attraction which he had felt rose from the consciousness that she was loved.

“I was n’t thinking about anything much,” he said evasively. “I ’d like to sit on here this way, not thinking or worrying or caring, but just watching you.”

“There is no reason why you should n’t do it; only it does n’t sound very amusing.”

“It is n’t amusing.”

“I know it is n’t,” she said contritely, “and I ’m so sorry that I have to do this old coat; but it will be done soon, and then we can talk. Just a minute—just a minute!”

She spoke in a busy tone, and went on turning the coat about, jerking at the buttons, and plunging her hands into the pockets.

Gault felt that the pleasure of thus sitting and looking at her was sapping his resolution. He felt himself drifting away, aimless and irresponsible, on the current of the moment. The duties of past and future were lost sight of in the dreamy satisfaction of watching the light on her hair and the movements of her hands.

He rose suddenly and walked to the window, with a remark about seeing if the fog was lifting. As he turned, he saw her take a folded paper from one of the coat-pockets, and, standing looking out of the window, heard the crisp

rustling of the paper as she unfolded it. There was a moment of perfect silence, and then he heard again the same light rustling, which sounded curiously loud and intrusive to his irritated nerves.

He turned toward her, wondering why she did not speak. She was sitting with the opened paper in her hands, her eyes riveted on it. As he drew near, he saw that the rustling rose from the fact that her hands were trembling violently, causing the paper to vibrate.

She heard his approaching step and looked up. At the sight of her face he stopped.

"What is it?" she cried, rising suddenly to her feet and holding it out toward him.

He glanced at it. It was the colonel's duplicate memorandum. Without aid or provocation the hour of revelation had come.

His first impulse was to seize it. But she drew it back from him, repeating in a high, strained voice:

"What is it? I don't understand. What is it?"

"It 's nothing—nothing but a business paper. Give it to me."

He did not know what to say or do—the scene had changed so suddenly and horribly. Her face looked at him, pale, bewildered, quivering with a terrified surmise. Without a moment's memory of what he had come for, he felt

as if all he wanted was to get the paper and hide it.

“Give it to me!” he demanded authoritatively.

“It does n’t concern you.”

“It does,” she cried, “it does! But what is it? What does it mean?”

She looked back at it, and her eyes ran down the list of figures, and then were raised to his, full of a piercingly anguished inquiry.

“It ’s nothing but a business matter between your father and me; and you don’t understand business.”

“I do understand—I understand this!” she answered; and then, with a sudden cry of shame and pain, she threw the crumpled paper on the table and covered her face with her hands. “Oh, how could he!” she whispered. “How could he!”

Gault looked at her, mute and motionless. From the moment he had seen her face as she read the paper, he knew that every suspicion he had had was groundless. He was ashamed to speak, almost to move. The sound of his own voice was hateful to him. He stood helplessly looking at her, shaken with pity, passion, and remorse. Finally he said gently:

“Look at me, Viola.”

She obeyed him like a child. Her face was drawn; her eyes, after the moment of meeting his, sank.

“Any man would have done what the colonel did. It’s nothing of the least importance.”

“Perhaps not to you,” she answered in a hardly audible voice; “but to me!”

He looked away and tried to speak lightly:

“It is of no importance whatever to me, and I don’t see why it should be of any to you.”

“Oh, Mr. Gault, what do you think I am, that you should say that?”

“A foolish girl who takes a trifling matter too seriously,” he answered quickly.

“No—a woman who has been hurt and humiliated. It may have been of no importance to you that you were giving us the clothes we wore and the food we ate—but oh! to me—”

Her voice broke, and she turned her face away.

He made an impatient movement with his head.

“Come, don’t let’s talk about that any more. You’re not yourself. Besides, whatever insignificant matter you’re worrying about was not of your doing.”

“No,” she said, turning on him passionately, “but the responsibility rests on me; for whatever my father may have done that was wrong or foolish was for me. There is an excuse for him. You—other people—outsiders—don’t know. He has n’t wanted these things for him-

self. It was all done for me. I was his idol, and it has almost broken his heart that his money and position were gone before I was old enough to profit by them. He always wanted to be rich again, but it was for me. He wanted me to have everything—pretty clothes to wear, and good things to eat, and theaters and amusements, like other girls. He tried to keep up with his old bonanza friends who were tired of him and had no use for him, because he thought their wives might be kind to me and ask me to their houses. He has forgotten himself and what he owed to me, but it was because he loved me so much.”

“Viola dear,” he said pleadingly, “I understand all this. No one blames the colonel.”

She did not seem to hear him. Her mood was past control.

“When we first met you things were at their worst. We were in terrible need. We had had some money—quite a good deal—three years before; it was for a mortgage on the house, or something; but it had all gone, mostly in Pine Street. Yours must have gone there, too. Everything he has had of late years goes there, because he is determined to make a second fortune for me before he dies. And he never will—poor old man! he never will. I did what I could and made a little, but he could n’t bear it, because he hated to think I

worked at anything. So that was why he went to you. We were in despair when we knew you first—we were starving.”

“Dear child, why go over all this? It’s only a pain to us both.”

He tried to take her hands, but she drew them back and made a gesture as though pushing him away.

“I did n’t know where it came from. I believed him. Oh, Mr. Gault, if he told me what was not true, you can’t blame him. You’ve never known what it feels like to have some one you love wanting the necessaries of life. You could beg for them—steal for them! And when I told you those things about the mining stock, what did you think I meant? What did you believe?”

She spoke less to him than to her own dazed and miserable consciousness, which moment by moment saw new matter for humiliation in the deception of which she had been the victim.

But Gault, with the guilt of his own hateful suspicions weighing upon him, feared that she had realized his previous state of mistrust, and said fervently:

“If I did believe what was a wrong to you, forgive me, Viola. I was a blind fool.”

She raised her head like a stag and transfixed him with a sudden glance. Unprepared for the

innocence of her point of view, he met the look shamefacedly, and in an instant she guessed what he had suspected. In one terrible moment, illuminated with a blasting flash of memory, she understood his attitude in the past, and heard again the words that had puzzled and surprised her. Horror and despair seemed to choke her. She drew away from him, her eyes full of tragic accusation, murmuring almost under her breath:

“You—that I believed in, and trusted, and loved!”

“I was a fool—a brute! I know it. All I can say is to ask you to forgive me.”

“I can’t forgive—or forget. Never—never!”

He tried again to take her hands, but she drew back from him with what seemed a fierce repugnance, and cried wildly:

“Go—you and my father, what have you done to me? I can’t forgive him, either! How can I? You’ve dragged me down, between you. You’ve destroyed me and broken my heart.”

“Viola,” he cried desperately, “listen to me. You don’t know my side. Listen to me while I tell you.”

“There’s nothing to say. I don’t want to hear. I know enough. Go—go away from me! Oh, my father! My poor father! How could you! How could you!”

She burst into tears—the most terrible tears that he had ever seen. Throwing herself into the colonel's chair, she lay huddled there, her face pressed into the arm, her slender figure shaken by the explosive force of her grief.

To his broken words and appeals she made no answer. He doubted whether she heard him. The storm of feeling, stronger than he had ever supposed her capable of, swayed her as a blast sways a sapling. Finally he bent over her and rested his cheek on her hair, whispering:

“I want to do everything you ask me. But before I go, say you forgive me.”

She raised herself and pushed him away. Her face was almost unrecognizable, blurred and swollen with tears.

“Go—go!” she cried. “That is all I want of you. You 've done enough harm to me. Do what I ask now.”

He attempted to bend over her and say some last words of farewell, but she turned her face away from him and pressed it into the upholstered arm of the chair. He kissed her hair, and stood for a moment looking at her, then turned and crossed the room. At the door he stopped and looked back.

“Good-by,” he said hesitatingly.

A smothered good-by came from her. He waited, hoping for some word of forgiveness

or recall. Instead, she said once more, this time pleadingly:

“Oh, go! please go—I want to be alone.”

He obeyed her—softly opened the door into the hall, put on his coat, and let himself out into the cold and fog-bedewed night. As he fumbled with the gate he heard a quick, swinging step coming from the darkened end of the street. It approached rapidly, and into the dense aureole of light shed by a lamp half-way up the block, a tall, muscular figure emerged from the surrounding blackness. Gault recognized the walk and the square, erect shoulders. With as little noise as possible he opened the gate, and, turning in the opposite direction, passed into the darkness with a stealthy tread.

The colonel let himself in with his latch-key, pulled off his coat in the hall, and entered the drawing-room with the buoyancy that characterized all his movements. As was often the case in these days of prosperity, he carried a paper bag full of fruit and a box of candy for Viola.

To his eye, dulled by the darkness without, the room looked brilliantly illuminated and seemed to welcome him with the warm and cheery note of home. Viola was standing with her back to him, her elbow on the chimney-piece. When she heard his step on the walk she had made a violent effort to control herself,

had tried to rub away the stains of her tears, and had turned the paper flower on the lamp-globe so that the light, as it fell upon her, was subdued.

The colonel was in good spirits. He laid his packages on the table and began opening them.

“Was n’t that Gault that I saw coming away as I came down the street?” he asked.

Viola said “Yes.”

“Why did n’t you keep him longer? I ’d like to have seen him. Look at that pear,” said the old man, holding up a yellow Bartlett that gleamed like wax in the lamplight. “Did you ever see anything finer than that? And there are people who say they don’t like the Californian fruit.”

Viola did not look at the pear, but he was too occupied in his purchases to notice her.

“He ought to have stayed till I came in. You ought n’t to have let him go. Poor old Gault, coming out in all this wet! It ’s a devil of a night. You could cut the fog with a knife. What did he have to say for himself?”

“Nothing much,” said Viola.

“I don’t think myself he ’s much of a talker. Now, see what I ’ve brought for you.” Viola heard the tearing away of the wrappers that were folded around the candy-box. “Look, young woman; is n’t that tempting?”

The colonel held out the box. Viola did not turn. He drew it back, a puzzled expression on his face.

“What ’s the matter?” he said. “Why don’t you look at me? Don’t you feel well?”

She turned round slowly and made a feint to take the box. As the colonel’s glance fell on her face he gave a sharp exclamation and started to his feet.

“What ’s happened?” he said. “What ’s the matter with you?”

She tried to tell him, but could not. The love and honor of him that had been the faith of her life were still alive. She could not say the words that would bring him to shame. Suddenly she pointed to the crumpled paper on the table. The colonel snatched it and pulled it open while she turned away. He recognized it at the first glance.

“Well,” he said, holding his head high and looking at her with a defiant air, “what of it?”

She made no answer, and he went on violently:

“What ’s there wrong about this to make you cry as if you ’d lost everything in the world, and Gault to sneak out of the house like a thief?”

“What ’s wrong about it?” she burst out. “What ’s wrong about you to make you ask such a question?”

“My dear, don't be so violent,” said the colonel, trying to assume his old jaunty manner.

“It's all a very simple matter, easily explained.”

“Then explain it, father—explain it. Oh, if there 's anything to be said, say it!”

“It 's merely a business matter, a financial transaction between myself and Gault—nothing that concerns you.”

“Oh, father, it concerns me more than anything that has ever happened to me in my life before.”

Her tone wrung the colonel's soul. He tried to silence his pain and fear by a sudden attempt to divert the blame from himself.

“Did that dog—that mean, underhanded sneak—come here to-night, when he knew I was out, to show you that paper?”

His manner and words horrified her, and she shrank from him.

“I found the paper in your coat. He tried to take it from me. He never breathed to me or let me suspect what you were doing. To-night, when I found the paper, he tried to make me think it was all right, quite an ordinary thing—that you had done what every one else would have done.”

“Well, then, why do you get so worked up about it? Why should a business transaction between him and me put you into such a state of mind?”

“A business transaction? Oh, father, have you deceived yourself, or are you trying to deceive me? What has been the matter with you? How could you do it! How could you forget yourself that way—yourself and me!”

The colonel's bravado began to give way, but he tried to take a last stand.

“If there was anything wrong, as you seem to think, in what I did, you should n't blame me for it. I did it for you. I was trying to make you comfortable and make things a little easier for you. I was only trying the best way I knew to make you happy.”

“Make me happy!” she repeated. “Did you think it would make me happy to have a man think I was being sold to him?”

The words burst from her, vibrating with all the anguish of the last two hours. They struck the colonel like a dagger in his heart.

“Oh, Viola!” he said. “Viola—don't!”

He began to tremble, and sat down, looking at her with an aghast, protesting look. Whatever his idea had been in so openly using Viola's name in his dealings with Gault, he had not meant that. Old age, bitter poverty, trampled pride—all had combined to lower that high standard, that proud self-respect, which his daughter had believed to be his. She would never believe in them again.

“You ought n't to say that, Viola,” he said

in a low voice; "you ought n't to say that to me."

She did not stir, and he said again, after a moment's pause:

"It 's not right for you to say that. I thought I was doing for the best. I may have done foolishly, but it was because I loved you."

He spoke heavily, sitting inert and sunken, with the lamplight pouring over his wrinkled face and white hair.

Suddenly Viola ran toward him. She put her arms round his neck, close and warm, and her tears fell on his hair, on his face, on his coat. She hugged his head against her breast and kissed it wildly, sobbing over and over:

"Oh, my poor father! Oh, my poor father! Oh, my poor father!"

The old man patted her head and said gently:

"Don't—don't go on that way. You did n't say anything. I've forgotten it already."

But she knew he had not, and continued sobbing out passionate, broken sentences:

"I did n't mean it—I spoke without thinking. Oh, please forget it! Don't look like that! I did n't mean it—I did n't mean it for a minute."

He tried to soothe and comfort her, but he himself was very quiet. When she had sobbed herself into a state of apathetic exhaustion, he

helped her up-stairs to her room, and prowled up and down in the passageway, every now and then listening at her door till he heard her caught breaths regulate themselves into the long, regular ones of heavy sleep.

Then he went into his own room. He did not go to bed, but sat motionless, shrunk together, staring at the light. His love for his daughter had been dear to him, but a thousand times dearer had been his realization of her love for him. When all the world had turned its back on him, the knowledge that he was still believed in, watched for, cherished by this one young girl had made life as well worth living as it had been in the days of his glory. And now he had lost that—it was gone forever. He was an old man, and to-night he had received his death-blow.

The day after his scene with Viola was the happiest John Gault had known for many months. The memory of her pain, of her tears, of her humiliation, could not outweigh the joy he felt in her exculpation. Even his own shame at the meanness of the part he had played was pushed aside by this pervasive, irradiating, uplifting sense of happiness. No cloud, no shadow of disbelief, could ever come between them now. He could love her without mistrust, without fear, without suspicion. He would absorb her, envelop her, in-

wrap her in the might of his passion. He had wronged her bitterly, but with what limitless tenderness, what depths of devotion, would he make up for it! He was troubled by no doubts as to her feeling for him. The memory of the light in her eyes as they met his, of the flush on the cheek, were enough. Viola was his when he chose to claim her.

Still, the deliberative habits of his curiously sensitive and conventional nature were stronger than the force of his last and deepest attachment. Three days followed his interview with Viola, and he had not yet gone to see her. He could not bring himself to intrude upon her. Her girl's passion of shame and grief seemed a sanctuary into which no man's coarse eye should look. He thought of her with a deep, almost reverential tenderness, but he did not feel as if he ought to see her till the first anguish of her discovery had spent itself. Then—then—he would take her in his arms, and there would be nothing to say, only to ask her to forgive him, to hear her say it, and then happiness—happiness—happiness—on to the end of time.

On the fourth day he decided to send her some flowers. But after he had bought them it seemed to him so meaningless, so banal, to send such a formal offering, one that he had sent so often to women for whom his senti-

ments were so widely different, that he suddenly changed his mind, and ordered the flowers to be sent to his sister-in-law, who was just then in town. When he walked away from the florist's he looked rather ashamed of himself and of his burst of sentiment. But what did he want to send her flowers for? He wanted to see her, to take her hands in his and look down deep into those beautiful gray eyes and say—perhaps not say anything. She and he understood.

He made up his mind that he would go on the morrow, and on this decision he went to sleep with a light heart. In the morning he was awakened by a messenger to say that his brother Mortimer had returned from the country seriously ill. He was at the house on Pacific Avenue inside an hour. Mortimer had come home a week before with a bad cold which had developed into a dangerous case of pneumonia. Maud Gault was helpless and distracted. Her brother-in-law spent the day in attending to the numerous duties which crop up with sickness, and in the evening telegraphed for Letitia.

For the four following days Mortimer Gault hung between life and death, brooded over by a frantic wife, three doctors, two nurses, a fond sister-in-law, and an extremely anxious brother. The tie between the two men was very close—John had never realized how close till those

four days of desperate anxiety were over. During this time, as he sat either by his brother's bedside or in one of the rooms adjoining, or made hasty visits to his office, he thought of Viola and wondered if she was puzzled by his lengthened absence. He did not think that she would misunderstand it. Like many men, he took it for granted that her knowledge of his character and affairs had been as thorough as the knowledge his superior insight and experience had given him into all that pertained to her.

On the sixth day after his brother's summons Mortimer was pronounced out of danger. This was the first opportunity John had had of seeing Viola.

At four o'clock he alighted from the car that had carried him across town to the old quarter about South Park. As he passed through the dingy side streets holiday reigned in his heart. Life in the past seemed dun and dreary compared to what it had become under the influence of the still, almost rapt joy which now possessed him. An immense, deep tenderness seemed to well from his heart over all his being. His love for Viola seemed to have made him see and feel all that was love-worthy in others — in the children that ran across his path or played in chattering groups in the gutters, the women he met trudging home with baskets on their

arms, the lean-shanked boys playing ball in the deserted gardens, the tousled young matrons exchanging gossip from open upper windows. He had never noticed these people before, save with cold repugnance; now he seemed to be able to see into them and note their justifiable ambitions, their unselfish struggles, their smiling, patient courage. The thought passed through his mind that perhaps this exalted, unusual affection was the love of the future state, the happiness that awaits the liberated soul.

He turned the last corner and came in sight of the house. For the first few advancing steps he did not realize what gave it an unfamiliar look. Then, as he approached, he saw that the vines which had hung in bunches about the bay-window were cut away. There were frilled white curtains in the lower windows. He drew near, staring astonished through his glasses, each step revealing some innovation.

They were evidently renovating the whole place. The two thick-set brick posts that supported the gate had been painted. The steps to the porch had been mended with new wood. Then, as he put his hand forward to unlatch the gate, he saw a woman—a broad-backed, red-necked woman in a blue print dress—kneeling on the ground just below the bay-window, evidently gardening. The sight surprised him into immobility, and for a moment he stood motion-

less, gazing at the back of her head, where her hair was twisted into a tight and uncompromising coil about as big as a silver dollar.

The next moment he pressed the latch, and the gate opened with a click. The woman started and turned round. Evidently greatly surprised at the figure her glance encountered, she straightened herself from her stooping posture, eying him curiously and wiping her earthy hands on her apron.

"Is Miss Reed in?" he said, advancing up the flagged walk.

"Miss Reed?" said the woman "No. She ain't here any more."

Gault stopped.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "Colonel Reed lives here."

"Not now," said the woman, struggling to her feet. "He did until last week. We bought the place off of him just seven days ago, and moved in Tuesday."

"Do you mean that he has sold it and gone away?"

"That 's it. We rushed it through, both of us. He wanted to sell 'bout as much as we wanted to buy, so there was n't much time wasted on either side."

"Had he thought of selling it for any length of time?"

"I can't rightly say as to that. We 've had

our eyes on it for the past five years. My husband—he 's Robson, the dry-goods dealer, on Third, just below here—was pretty well satisfied that the colonel could n't hang on to it forever. 'Bout three years ago he offered him three thousand. But the old man would n't hear of it. Said he would n't even raise a mortgage on it, as it was all he had to leave to his daughter when he died. But we knew he could n't hold out much longer. He did n't have no work, nor nothing to live on. Miss Reed she made a little, but not enough to run everything, and—”

“Yes—I know all about that. When did you say they left?”

“On Monday, and we moved in Tuesday. Saturday the old man came round to Mr. Robson's place and said he 'd let him have the house for anything he chose to give. There ain't nothing mean about Mr. Robson. He could 'a' beat the colonel down to 'most anything, but he said he 'd give him two thousand cash down, and the old man just jumped at it. Mr. Robson said it would 'a' been business to get the colonel to a lower figure, and he said he supposed he would 'a' done it if it had n't been for the daughter. She was sick, and the old man said he 'd got to have money to take her away.”

“Sick?—seriously sick?”

“Well, as to that I can't say. But she was

about the peakedest-looking girl I ever seen. I was awful sorry for them."

"Where have they gone?"

"I ain't able to say."

"But you surely have some idea of where they've moved to? Did n't they say something about their intentions? Did n't the colonel tell your husband in reference to the transfer of the money?"

"They did n't neither of 'em say a word. They 're the most close-mouthed pair I ever ran into. My husband paid the money down in cash the day we moved in. They took it, and that 's all I know about them."

"Can't you tell me some one about here who may know more—some of the tradespeople—butchers, grocers, that sort of thing?"

"You might try Coggles, the grocer at the corner. I think they had an account with him. But they did n't deal regular with any one else."

Gault thanked her and turned to go. She followed him down the walk, anxious to be agreeable, for his manner and appearance had impressed her immensely.

"If I hear anything about them I 'll let you know," she said affably.

"Thanks; it's very good of you," he answered, opening the gate. But he had no intention of giving her either his name or address, as he did

not for a moment think that this disappearance of the Reeds was other than temporary.

At the corner he stopped and inquired for them at Coggles the grocer's. Coggles himself answered his inquiries. He had even less information to give than Mrs. Robson. A week before the colonel had paid such small amounts as he yet owed, and had casually mentioned the fact that he had sold his house and was about to leave the city. This was all Coggles knew. He showed some desire to talk over the colonel's pecuniary difficulties, but Gault cut him short and left the store.

Gault walked away, feeling dazed and hardly master of himself. It had been so absolutely unexpected that he did not yet send his mind back over their past intercourse to ask what she might have been thinking since he saw her last. As is the case of the man in love, he had seen the situation only from his own side. But he did not for a moment doubt that he would hear from her within the next few days.

He was still with his brother a good deal of the time, and the days that followed passed with the swiftness which characterizes hours filled with various anxieties. Four days after learning of her flight, two weeks from the evening that he had seen her last, the janitor at his office handed him a small but heavy package. It had been left early in the morning by a boy,

the janitor said, who had merely asked if this was Mr. John Gault's office, and had then hastened away.

An instinct told him it was from her, and he shut himself into his inner office before he opened it. It was a rough wooden box, and contained the money given by him to the colonel—five hundred and ten dollars in gold coin. Lying on the top was a slip of paper bearing the words: "Good-by. VIOLA."

Still he could not but believe that she would soon reveal her whereabouts. The move was occupying her, and such an operation would seem a gigantic undertaking to her youthful inexperience. That she should treat him this way was thoughtless, cruel even, but she had been deeply wounded, and her hurt was evidently still sore. He could only wait patiently.

He did so for two weeks, his uncertainties growing into fears, his conviction of her intention to communicate with him gradually weakening. Uneasiness gave place to alarm. For the first time the haunting thought that she had gone from him purposely, fled forever from his love, entered his mind.

Finally, unable to endure the anxiety that now beset him, he commissioned a private detective agency to run to earth the boy who had brought the money. He supposed it had come directly from her, and that, through the boy,

without drawing her into the affair, her hiding-place could be discovered.

The finding of the boy was not so simple a matter as might have been supposed. It required a week's search to locate him. He was the only son of a poor widow living near South Park, who had done the Reeds' washing. Before her departure Miss Reed had commissioned him to deliver the package at Mr. Gault's office at a certain date, and at an hour when there would be no chance of his coming into personal contact with Mr. Gault himself.

Gault snatched at this meager information, and lost no time in seeking out the widow in her own home. She was a good-natured and loquacious Irish-American,—Mrs. Cassidy by name,—and was full of terror at the thought that detectives had been occupied in discovering her place of abode. Her fears, however, were soon allayed, and she became exceedingly discursive. But when it came to information of Viola, she could tell no more than the others.

Before Miss Reed had left the city she had given the package to the boy, with the instructions that he should not deliver it till the day set by her, some time after her departure. Of her own volition Mrs. Cassidy stated that she thought Miss Reed did not want any one to know where she went. Mrs. Cassidy had conferred with others of her kind in the locality,

and the silent and hasty departure of the Reeds had been matter of comment. The shrewd Irishwoman saw that there was a mysterious romance here, and her glance dwelt with compassionate curiosity upon the gentleman who was sufficiently interested in the pretty girl they had all known by sight to employ detectives to hunt for her.

The finding of the boy and the interview with Mrs. Cassidy broke down the last of Gault's hopes. He now knew that Viola had intentionally fled from him. At first, when no word came from her, and Mrs. Robson's description of her as ill was fresh in his mind, he had a terrible fear that she might have died. But a later judgment convinced him that had this been the case he would have heard from the colonel. Viola was living—hiding somewhere from him, restraining her father from communicating with him, which, Gault knew, would be the old man's wish and intention.

And now, with the blankness of her absence deadening his heart, for the first time he began to understand what she must have thought and felt—began to see the situation with her eyes. He thought of her, loving and believing in him as he knew she had always done, suddenly waking to the knowledge that he had suspected her. He saw her living over again those conversations in which

he had half revealed his groundless doubts, had tried to find confirmation of them in the halting admissions of her puzzled ignorance. And with her comprehension of the light in which he had been regarding her came that *coup de grâce* of all doubts in his favor—the giving of the money.

With a clearness of vision that was like clairvoyance, he seemed to be able to read down into the depths of her consciousness, to see into the hidden places of the nature he had once thought so jealously secretive. In the gnawing bitterness of his remorse he realized that she had believed herself tricked, that the hand she had thought stretched to her in kindly fellowship in reality concealed a trap. Where she had looked for protection, support, and love, she had found what now presented itself to her as a sinister and cruel craftiness. Her best friend had turned out to be her most unrelenting enemy.

In the loneliness of that long summer he came face to face with despair. He had lost her by his own mad folly. Remorse for the wrong he had done her alternated in his thoughts with an unquenchable longing to see her again. His heart craved for her, even if only for a single moment's glimpse. A younger man would have shaken off the gloom of his first great disappointment, have told himself

that there were other eyes as sweet and hearts as true. But with him the elasticity of youth was gone. There was no forming of new ties, no delight in fresh faces. Life had offered him supreme happiness, and he had let it pass by him. Like the base Indian, he had "thrown a pearl away richer than all his tribe."

The summer held the city in its spell of wind and fog. Acquaintances who encountered one another on its wide thoroughfares said town was empty—not a soul left in it. The Mortimer Gaults took themselves away for rest and recuperation to balsamic mountain gorges among the redwoods. Letitia returned to the hotels and the Hacienda del Pinos. John Gault was left alone with his empty heart. If she had died it would have been bearable. The inevitableness of death makes us bow to its blows with broken submission. But she was alive—poor, sick, her love disprized, her pride trampled on, driven away from all that was familiar and friendly to her by fear of him.

The winds beat and tore through the city, buffeting the passers-by and sweeping street and alley. Then, as the color deepened toward evening, their stress and clamor suddenly ceased, a burst of radiance ran from the Golden Gate up the sky, glazing the level floor of the bay and flaring on all the western windows. It stayed for a space, seeming to immerse the town in an

atmosphere of beaten gold, as if for one brief half-hour it was transformed into the glistening El Dorado of the early settlers' dreams. Then the fog stole noiselessly in, and the houses crowding to the summits of the hills, the rose-red clouds, and the clear purple distances were blotted out.

That went on day by day till the autumn came. The winds dropped and the sun shone all day. In the country the air was clear and heavy with sweet, aromatic scents. All the fields were parched and sun-dried like hemp; only the thick-growing, bushy trees defied the drought, remaining green and hardy. The great hills were scorched to a smooth yellow, with a few green tree-tufts slipped down into their valleys where the watercourses were not quite dry.

In town it was all still and golden and hot. The city, queening it on its hills, rose in an atmosphere of crystal clearness from a girdle of sapphire sea. In the evening the smoke lay lightly over it, and the sun glared through like a great, inquisitive eye. Poor people in the old districts were ill from lack of rain and from unclean sewers. Rich people were coming back, looking sunburnt and healthy from their summer in the open air.

The Gaults came up out of their lounging-place in the redwoods, robust and blooming,

Mortimer quite restored to health, and Maud two shades darker with her country tan. Letitia, with three trunks of ruined millinery, appeared from the hotels, and the town house was once more alive.

They had seen little of John since they left for the country, and it was not strange that Maud Gault, after his first visit, should have said to her husband:

“What ’s the matter with John? All of a sudden he looks quite old.”

“Nothing,” said the loyal Mortimer; “only a fellow can’t be expected to look young forever. John ’s not like a woman: he does n’t keep the same age for twenty years.”

VI

THE selling of the house and the subsequent flight of the Reeds had been, as Gault had guessed, Viola's idea. When, the morning after those two soul-destroying interviews, she had come down, white and apathetic, and had told her father that she wanted to leave the city, the old man, in a desperate desire to reinstate himself in her regard, had been willing to accede to anything.

Pressed by Viola, he had hurried through the sale, had taken the small sum Robson had offered without demur, and, driven by her feverish anxiety, had paid off all their household debts and handed to her the remaining money. This, with himself, he had placed entirely in her hands. As the girl locked it into the small tin box in which she kept such valuables as they possessed, she had suddenly looked at it, and then at him, and finally said:

"But the mortgage? Was n't there interest or something to pay on that?"

"Mortgage!" said the colonel, in innocent surprise. "What mortgage?"

Viola looked away from him and murmured something about being mixed up. She saw that he had forgotten the story by which, three years ago, he had accounted to her for the first sudden era of prosperity. She felt, with a dreary indifference, that she did not care where that money had come from. She, at least, had not been put forward as a means of procuring it.

The breathless hurry of their departure, and the quantity of work that accumulates about the breaking up of even so small a household, gave her no time for the indulgence of her own bitter thoughts. The days passed in a turmoil of noise and movement. In a nightmare atmosphere of dust and strange faces she haggled with the Jews from the second-hand stores on Mission Street, listened to their sarcastic comments on the old pieces of furniture she had passed her life among, watched them with dull eyes as they tested the springs of the colonel's chair and rubbed between appraising fingers the curtains his young bride had bought twenty-four years before. At night she crept into her bed, too exhausted for thought, to lose herself in blessed gulfs of sleep.

She was possessed by a wild desire to escape from the house and the city. The scene of her humiliation had become intolerable to her, and deep in her heart lay the terror that if she remained it would be the scene of her downfall.

The thought of Gault's reappearance filled her with dread. She was confident of his return, and his return as the conqueror who had gaged her weakness and his own power. All her trust in him had been shattered at a blow. Suddenly he had appeared to her, not as the lover whose highest wish was for her happiness, but as the master, cruel and relentless, the owner who had bought and paid for her. The shame of the thought that she still loved him caused her to bow her face upon her breast, hiding it from the eyes of men and the light of day. All she could whisper in her own justification was the words, "But when I grew to love him I never knew—I never guessed for a minute what he meant."

She wanted to begin all over again, to be another person in another place. The charm of home had vanished from the little house. She longed to put it behind her, to be a different woman from the Viola Reed who once within its narrow walls had known the taste of happiness.

She was so engrossed in her own sorrows that she thought nothing of her father, heretofore the first consideration of her life. She told him what he should do, and he did it unquestioningly. Though no more angry words had passed between them, it seemed to the frightened old man as if every day she receded

further from him. His only thought was to repair the damage he had done, to climb back somehow into his old position. He tried to anticipate her every wish, and followed her about with humble offers of help. But when, during those days of work and hurry, her eyes met his, they seemed to him to have a hard and alien gleam. It struck upon his somewhat vague contrition like an icy wind. If she had been gay and talkative he would have forgotten the wrong he had done her in twenty-four hours, and been ready to laugh with her at Gault. But she seemed now to have suddenly ranged herself against him on Gault's side, and to have left him, chilled and solitary, out in the cold.

So when she told him they would go to Sacramento, though the thought of change turned his heart to lead, he agreed with a good grace. He also acquiesced in all her injunctions about keeping their place of refuge a secret. When she told him of her plan to return Gault's money, he controlled his desire to disagree with it, and accepted her decision without open murmur. It seemed to him an unnecessary waste. What were the few paltry hundreds to the rich man? The colonel had been rich, too, and had aided hundreds of needy ones without ever thinking of repayment. By some obscure mental processes he had come to believe that

Gault wanted the money. Now that the younger man had come between him and Viola, his feeling for him had become sharply hostile. It was only fear of reopening a disagreeable subject that prevented him from abusing his former friend to his daughter.

They left the city with very different feelings. To the colonel his departure was as the dragging out of every fiber. The roots of his life seemed to have struck deep down into that sandy soil. His horizon had always been bounded by the long lines of gray houses, by the girdling blue of the bay. To the girl it seemed a flight from shame and misery. She was not escaping from it: part of it would go with her always; but she was putting behind her her own weakness and the temptation and despair that the weakness of others had brought upon her.

As the train carried them farther away, as the bay faded out of sight, and the scarred and dwarf scrub-oaks gave place to the stately trees of the valleys, she felt her breath come with the sigh of a deep relief, and to her blank heart whispered the consolation, "It 's over and done. I shall never see him again."

At Sacramento they found shelter in a cheap boarding-house. It was a large old house on a side street, set back from the publicity of the thoroughfare in an extensive garden. The

garden was so far cared for that it was watered, and the palms and aloes and fig-trees had reached a mighty growth; but its paths were weed-grown, and the statues and urns raised by its original owners lay overturned in the rank grass.

The house itself, dropping fast into peeling, unpainted decay, was commodious, with the high, airy rooms that were built in the days when all Californians seemed to be prosperous, and space was not too valuable to be sacrificed to comfort. The rooms still showed traces of their fine beginnings. There were exceedingly bad and elaborate frescos on the lofty ceilings of the lower floor, and great mirrors incased in gold moldings crowned the mantelpieces. In the musty, unaired parlors, where the puckered inside shades of faded silk were always down to keep the sun from revealing the threadbare secrets of the pale old carpets and the frayed satin arm-chairs, the colonel felt as if he were having a nightmare of the old days. It was all so like in its largeness, its rich stiffness, its obvious expensiveness, but so terribly unlike in its stuffy, squalid, unclean penury.

In the evening at dinner they met their fellow-boarders. The wide dining-room, with long windows opening on one of the many balconies that projected from the walls, showed the same frescos, the same pale, rose-strewn

carpet, the same cumbrous pieces of furniture, that, forty years back, some mining prince had brought round the Horn in a sailing-ship. The smell of hundreds of boarding-house dinners hung in the folds of the dingy lace curtains. From a crystal chandelier, lacking most of its pendants, a garish burst of light fell over the table, where much plated ware and pressed glass made a glittering array on a dirty cloth.

At the head of the board sat Mrs. Seymour, the landlady, and beside her her only child, Corinne, a sharp-faced little girl of eight, who, leaning with her elbows on the table, let her glance, shrewd, penetrating, and amused, pass from face to face. Mrs. Seymour, a large woman of a countenance originally buxomly pleasant, but hardened by contact with the world as the boarding-house keeper meets it, introduced the newcomers. They presented a curious contrast to their fellows. The colonel, whose social tastes had not fallen with his fortunes, was a trifle puzzled by the society in which he found himself. At the same time his gregarious spirit was cheered to see that there were other people in the house. He bowed to the lady on his right, introduced as Miss Mercer, with elaborate gallantry, and drawing out her chair, stood waiting for her to seat herself. The recipient of this unexpected courtesy did

not know how to take it, for the moment suspecting some joke.

To Viola the strange faces seemed unlovely and forbidding. She had met few people in her life, and this sudden plunge into society was a portentous experience. Pale and silent under the glare of the chandelier, she nibbled at her food, having neither heart nor courage to speak. When she raised her eyes she saw the young man opposite—Mrs. Seymour had presented him as “Bart Nelson, our prize young man”—staring at her over his plate with a steady, ruminating air. As he met her eyes for the second time, he said:

“Off your feed?”

And then, in reply to the colonel’s look of uneasy inquiry, jerked his head toward Viola and said:

“Mrs. Seymour ain’t goin’ to lose anything by her.”

Mrs. Seymour replied that she wanted somebody like that to even things off against such an appetite as Mr. Nelson’s.

The laugh then was on the prize young man, and he joined in it as heartily as the others.

Miss Mercer, who, it appeared, was a school-teacher, and who had the tight-mouthed visage and dominant voice of those who habitually instruct the young, said she guessed Miss Reed was trying to put Mrs. Seymour off her guard;

it was a case of making a good impression in the beginning.

The voice of the little girl here rose with penetrating suddenness:

“She don’t ever eat much. She ’s too thin.”

Viola, suddenly the objective point of interest of the table, felt herself growing red and embarrassed. That she might hide her face from this alarming concentration of attention, she pretended to drop her napkin, and bent down to get it. The landlady, with a tact that her appearance belied, saw that the girl was uncomfortable, and diverted the conversation.

It swelled, and was tossed back and forth about the table with much laughter and jest of a personal nature. There were but six people in the house besides Mrs. Seymour, and these seemed intimately conversant with one another’s histories and individual foibles. The school-teacher was attacked about an admirer known as “Little Willie,” and after a moment of confusion she made a spirited return on the young man beside her, whom every one called Charley, but who had been presented to Viola as Mr. Ryan. Charley’s infatuation for a lady who had ridden a bicycle in a recent vaudeville performance seemed to be a subject of gossip, and the school-teacher added further poignancy to the tale by relating how this lady, having made an appointment to lunch with Charley,

had failed to keep the tryst. The glee roused over Charley's discomfiture was loud and deep. A heavily bearded man who sat at the foot of the table, and was ceremoniously addressed as Mr. Betts, lay back in his chair and roared.

"Oh, Charley!" he gasped, when he had recovered his composure, "she got you straight in the slats that time."

His wife, at the other end of the table, said with a prim air: "What I 'd like to know is where Miss Mercer hears all these stories."

"Little birds tell them to her," said the child, in her sudden, piercing voice. "I guess they're trained birds."

After dinner, when they had gone up-stairs, the colonel stopped with Viola at her door. The passage was dimly lit by a gas-jet at the farther end, which was turned economically low. From the parlor bursts of laughter ascended.

"Well, good night, honey," said the colonel. "I'm sorry you're so tired." Then, somewhat uneasily, "Do you think you'll like it here?"

"Oh, I think so," said Viola.

The door swung back, and the dark, stuffy interior of the room opened before her like a long-closed cave. She turned her cheek and the colonel kissed it.

"Do you think you'll be able to stand those people?" he asked, in the low tone of confidential criticism.

“I dare say they ’ll be very nice when we get to know them. Everybody ’s strange at first. Good night, father.”

She went in and closed the door. The aloofness of her manner had never been more marked. It seemed to place the colonel in the position of a stranger to whom she preserved an attitude of polite reticence. Feeling shrunk and chilled, he crept away to his own room.

So the new life began. Everything was very strange, and the weather was very hot. The colonel, who had not for fifty years known a warmer climate than San Francisco, wilted in the furnace-like airs of the interior city. The first burning week exhausted him as a serious illness might have done. Viola, who had never seen her father ill, was frightened, and sent for a doctor. The doctor came, asked questions, and looked wise. He said the colonel’s heart was weak, and that he seemed in a very debilitated condition. A trip to the seaside would do him good; cooler weather would brace him up.

When the man had gone there was a silence between the father and daughter. Through the drawn blinds the golden cracks of intruding sunshine cut the dimness that Viola had made by closing all the shutters in a futile attempt to keep the room cool.

Presently she said, in a voice that she tried to make cheerful:

"As soon as you get stronger we will go on. It's too hot and uncomfortable here for any one to stay."

"Go on where?" the colonel asked, with the light of interest in his eyes.

"Farther east. It will be cool enough there. We can go to one of those seaside places you read about in the papers—a cheap one, I mean. We have plenty of money for the trip."

The colonel moved restlessly in his chair, and finally twitched open one of the shutters. The hot breath of the garden, laden with heavy exotic scents, puffed in through the opening like incense.

"Don't take me farther away, Viola," he said suddenly, in a tone like that of a querulous child; "don't take me out of California."

"Do you want to stay here?" she asked.

"If we can't go back," he answered, looking at her wistfully.

"I did n't think you minded," she said; "I thought you 'd like the change."

There was something of the old gentle fellowship in her tone, and it made the colonel's heart expand. He held out his hand to her, and taking her fingers, rubbed them against his cheek.

"I'm too old to be transplanted now."

She stood beside him, looking down, evidently troubled.

“Some day, perhaps,” he went on, watching her, “we can go back. They ’ll have forgotten us there in a few more weeks.”

He saw her face change at once, and dared go no further.

“Yes—some day,” she answered, and the conversation ended.

The long summer burned itself on through July into August. Glaring, golden mornings melted into breathless noons, which smoldered away into fiery sunsets. The leafage in the garden hung motionless, and exhaled strange, aromatic perfumes. In the evenings the palms stood black against the rose-red west like paintings of sunset in the desert. The city they had left, wrapped in its mantle of fog, appealed to the memories of the exiles as a dim, lost paradise.

To the girl whose simple life had passed in a seclusion almost cloistral, but at its loneliest marked by refinement, the sudden intimacies, the crude jovialities, of the boarding-house were violently repelling. She shrank from contact with her fellow-boarders, touched by, but unresponsive to their clumsy overtures of friendship, alarmed by their ferociously playful personalities. Fortunately her coolness was set down as shyness, and she suffered from none of that rancor which the boarder who is suspected of “putting on frills” is liable to rouse.

The long, idle days seemed interminable to her. At first she had found occupation in an attempt to beautify the two rooms she and her father rented. Of hers she had made a sitting-room, transforming the bed into a divan covered with a casing of blue denim and a heap of shaded blue cushions. Under one of the balconies she discovered a quantity of forgotten flower-pots, and in these she had planted cuttings of gay-colored geraniums, and set them along the window-sills and the balcony railing. But the work was soon completed, and a second interval of terrifying vacant hours faced her. This time she tried to seek intellectual diversion, and joined the free public library. She had often secretly deplored her own ignorance; now was the time to repair this defect; and she carried home many serious works, great thoughts of great minds with whom she had never before had an opportunity of becoming acquainted.

But poor Viola was not of the women who find in the exercise of the brain a method of healing the hurts of a wounded heart. At times a sense of piercing misery possessed her. There were hours when her loneliness pressed upon her like a weight, when the sense of what she had lost was unbearable as a fierce, continuous pain. Then, in the hope of escaping from the torment of "remembering happier things,"

she went out and, in the blistering heat under which the streets lay sweltering, walked aimlessly. If fatigue overcame her she sat down on one of the benches in the little plazas that dot the city, and there a graceful, listless figure slipped back over the intervening gulf to the days when the sunshine had been bright and her own heart was full of it.

Sometimes rebellion against the fate which had shut her out from happiness rose within her. A beloved companionship, no matter at what cost, was better than this waste of desolation. One life is all of which we are sure; why not, then, seize what we can of that one? How terrible, in the darkness of death, to realize that we have lost all that might have made this world so rich and sweet! Oh, the frightful thoughts of seeing at the end that we have relinquished joy and love for a dream, for nothing! For the first time in a life singularly free from event or developing experience, she met that dark second self which dwells in each of us.

So the tempter whispered his old words. She closed her ears to them with fear and aversion. But they returned, coming upon her persuasively in moments of deadly depression and disgust of life, coming upon her with comforting declarations of harmlessness, coming upon her with challenging queries as to their wrong.

One evening they were more convincing than they had ever been before. Sitting alone in her own room after dinner, Viola listened, for the first time hesitating. Where would be the wrong in writing to him—just a line to tell him she was sorry they had gone without seeing him? Common politeness would seem to suggest that she ought to do that. She would have done it before, only—only— She rose from her seat and, going to the window, looked down into the dark recesses of the garden, whence small rustling noises rose, then upward to the clear pink of the sunset, cut with black palm-spikes. He, once their best friend! What excuse was there for slighting a friend?

She turned from the window suddenly and went to the table where her writing-materials were kept. A sheet of note-paper lay ready on the blotter. It shone pink in the sunset light as she drew it toward her. Her hand trembled a little as she dipped the pen in the ink, but was firm when she wrote her letter. There were only a few lines, and of the most commonplace description. In the barest words she accounted for their sudden departure, made an apologetic allusion to their not having acquainted him with their intention of leaving, and ended with the words, "I hope we shall some day see you again." At the end of the letter she wrote the address, and upon this expended some care,

forming the numbers with exactness, and inscribing the name of the street with slow clearness. She sealed the envelop with nervous haste, and was rising from her chair when the colonel entered.

“Been writing letters?” he asked.

The question was not an idle one, for letter-writing was seldom practised in that small family circle.

Instinctively Viola placed her hand over the envelop as it lay on the table.

“Yes,” she said hurriedly, “just a note.”

“Whom to?” he asked. “Oh, I suppose your friend at the Woman’s Exchange.” This was a girl Viola had spoken of writing to anent the relinquishing of her work.

Viola made no answer. The old man, who was lighting the lamp, did not appear to notice her silence.

“Letter-writing ’s not much in my line,” he said absently, “but your mother wrote beautiful letters.”

“Whom to?” said the girl, in her turn.

“Me, when we were lovers.”

The lamp was lit, and he charily placed the globe on it. As he did so, Viola, from behind him, leaned forward and applied the letter, twisted into a spiral, to the chimney. It smoked, charred, and then went up in a flicker of flame.

“What are you doing?” he asked, staring at her in surprise.

“Burning my letter.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. Perhaps because I don’t write beautiful ones like my mother.”

Her voice trembled, broke, and she burst into wild tears. The door into the room beyond was open, and she ran through the aperture and shut the door behind her.

The colonel stood looking after her, amazed, alarmed, uncomprehending. In the old days he would have followed her. Now he stood listening at the closed door, not daring even to knock. When he heard her sobbing cease he came tiptoeing away as though afraid of re-awakening her drowsing grief. Standing by the table, he looked long and ruefully at the lamp-globe.

“Poor little girl!” he whispered; “she ’s homesick, too.”

The old man’s own homesickness was an incurable malady. As he had said himself, he was too old for transplanting. He could not shake himself down in the new rut. He could not get accustomed to the strange city and its unfamiliar thoroughfares. Its alien aspect seemed to force in upon him the sense of his insignificance and failure. He walked along the streets and no one knew him. There were

no cheery voices to cry out, "So long, colonel," and wave a welcoming hand to a hat-brim. People jostled him to one side, seeing only a thin, threadbare old man in a faded coat. He had no consciousness that they would turn and look at him, and point him out to the stranger from the East whom they were "taking round." He was no more to Sacramento than it was to him. He grew so to dread the feeling of oppressive melancholy that fell upon him in its unfriendly streets that he gave up going out, and spent most of his time in the garden or in Viola's room.

When with her he tried to be bright and to make the best of the situation. He saw in her changed attitude nothing but blame of him, and he would have borne anything uncomplainingly to win back the love he thought she withheld. That another and a deeper feeling could be causing her heaviness of spirit he did not dream. Like many another man, he had no instinct to see into the hidden inner life of the child that was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

He hardly ever let his thoughts revert to the cause that had made her take her hasty step. He knew he had been to blame, and the colonel was a man who always forgot his own mistakes. In the course of time they ceased to be mistakes, and, in his eyes, assumed the proportions

of worthy attempts that an unjust fate had frustrated. Just what he had meant by using his daughter's name in his intercourse with Gault he himself hardly knew—nothing to her actual detriment, that was certain. If any one had breathed a word of blame against her, or tried to harm one hair of her head, he would have been quick to rise in her defense, wrathful as a tiger. The wrongs that do not come directly back, like boomerangs, were wrongs the responsibility of which the colonel readily shifted from his shoulders. He had wanted money for Viola, and he used the readiest means to his hand to get it. The jingling of gold in his pocket, the gladness of her face when he brought her some trifling gift, made everything outside the pleasure of the moment count for naught.

And now they were estranged. A veil of indissoluble coldness separated them. Yet she was never curt or sharp or cross to him. Sometimes it seemed to him that she was the same in word and voice and manner as she had always been, only something had gone from her—light, cheer, gaiety, some inexpressible, loving, lovely thing that had made her the star of his life. Once, taking his courage in both hands, he had asked her if she was angry with him, and then shrank like a whipped dog before the startled negation of her eyes and her quick "Why, no, father! How could I be?"

The one diversion of the colonel's life was the society of his fellow-boarders. Though he abused them roundly up-stairs to Viola, he took undoubted satisfaction in regaling them with the stories of his past greatness. Night after night he bestrode his hobby, and entertained an admiring circle with its evolutions. It was many years since he had had so large and so attentive an audience, and he profited by the occasion, giving even more remarkable accounts of the men he had made than those with which he had once amused John Gault.

For some time his listeners awarded him a half-credulous attention; but soon their interest in the garrulous old man died away. Miss Mercer expressed the opinion that the colonel was "no better than an old, worn-out fake," a sentiment which found an echo in the breasts of every other inmate of the house—even Mrs. Seymour quietly, in her own mind, relegating him to the ranks of harmless frauds. The traditions of San Francisco were not known of all men in Sacramento. The colonel found that he was singing the songs of Zion in a strange land. No one believed him. When he spoke of his friendship with Adolphus Maroney, and how thirty years before he had laid the foundation of Jerry McCormick's fortune, the listeners made little attempt to hide their disbelief, and Mr. Betts and Charley Ryan took much delight

in openly "joshing the old man." Bart Nelson did not indulge in this pastime, as he had conceived a violent, if secret, regard for Viola.

One evening after dinner the "joshing" reached a climax against which even the colonel's egotistical infatuation was not proof. Viola was up-stairs, according to her custom; Mrs. Seymour was absent on her never-ending household duties; and Bart Nelson was out. There was no one to restrain the old man's foolish flights, and inspired by the ironically flattering queries of his listeners, his reminiscences became more vaingloriously brilliant than they had ever been before.

His completion of an elaborate account of his patronage of Adolphus Maroney called forth from Mr. Betts the remark:

"I don't see, colonel, how he can get on at all without you. Once you got from under him, it's a miracle he did n't entirely collapse."

"No, not quite that," the colonel modestly deprecated. "Maroney was no fool—no fool; only speculative and lacking in foresight. When I got him on his feet he was able to go his way alone."

"Well, that was smart of him, was n't it?" commented Charley Ryan, with a sagacious wag of his head.

There was something in the tone of his remark that disturbed the colonel's complacency.

For a moment he eyed Charley with a side glance, then he said:

"I 'm always willing to admit that Maroney was no fool."

"Now, how do we know," said Miss Mercer, letting her eyes give a preliminary sweep over the faces about her, "that you 're not still doing all the work and making all the money for those San Francisco millionaires? You know, I believe that 's just what you 're up to, and you 're too sly to tell."

She looked at him with an air of bright challenge. The colonel was pleased.

"No, my dear young lady," he answered; "that was in the past, when I was one of them myself."

"Are you sure you are not one of them still?" said Charley Ryan. "Come, now, colonel; make a clean breast of it. Here 's the family album; can you swear upon this book that you have n't got a few loose millions lying round in tea-pots and stockings up in your room?"

The colonel flushed. He did not mind alluding to his poverty himself, but he resented having others treat it as a jest.

"I can swear without family albums that the fortune I once had is a thing of the past," he answered, "and I rather fancy that you know all about its magnitude and its loss. Most people do."

This was too much. Mr. Betts, who was afflicted by an irrepressible sense of humor, burst into loud laughter.

“Well, colonel,” he said, “now that you remind me, I believe I have heard that there was a hitch about your millions. So there is about mine. Yours are gone, and mine ain’t come. Brothers in misfortune! Shake on that!”

He held out a large fist, and the colonel, not quite comprehending, but feeling the derision about him in an inward sense of heated discomfort, put his hand in it. Mr. Betts gave it a vigorous clasp, and holding it aloft, said:

“The Corsican Brothers!—as they appeared at that fatal moment when one had just lost and the other not yet found his pile.”

There was a shout of laughter, and the old man drew his hand away. His face was deeply flushed, and a feeling of tremulous indignation was rising in him.

“Don’t despond, colonel,” said Miss Mercer, cheerily. “Lots of men have made two fortunes. There ’s a chance for you yet.”

“I guess there ’s about as much chance for him,” said Mrs. Betts, who was an acidulous lady of a practical turn, “as there is for Mr. Betts. I ’m sorter tired of this talk of making millions, and then never having an extra dollar.”

“Stick close to the colonel, Mrs. Betts,” said Charley Ryan, “and you ’ll have your extra

dollar. He 'll make it for you same way as he did for Jerry McCormick."

"Now, colonel," said Mr. Betts, "there 's a chance for you. Here 's Mrs. Betts wants an extra dollar, and here are you, just the man to make it for her. No gentleman can resist the appeal of a female in distress. Send my henchman for ink and paper." He drew a stub of pencil from his pocket and began writing on the back of an envelop, reading as he wrote: "Colonel Reed, the multi-millionaire, will before the present witnesses sign a contract to make for the hereinbefore-mentioned Mary Louise Betts the sum of one dollar, the same payable on—"

He paused with raised pencil.

"What date did you say?"

The colonel rose. He was pale and almost gasping with anger. He had at last realized that these barbarians were making sport of him.

"I did not state any date," he said slowly; "nor did I—that I can remember—say that I would make any specified sum of money for any one here. But since you seem to insist that I did so, I will fulfil my obligations without any more unnecessary talk. Here is the dollar."

He drew a dollar from his pocket and flung it on the table with the gesture of one throwing a bone to a dog.

"Ladies," he said, bowing deeply to the two

women, "I have the honor to wish you good evening."

There was a moment of silence after his withdrawal, during which they all sat staring rather foolishly at the dollar. But if he had thought to humiliate them, he had mistaken his audience.

"There, now!" was the opening remark, contributed by Mrs. Betts; "you 've gone and rubbed him up the wrong way. And I don't see what satisfaction you get from it."

"Well," said Mr. Betts, "I 'll get the dollar, anyway."

He made a playfully frenzied lunge for the coin. But Charley Ryan had anticipated the movement, and his hand struck it first. An animated tussle ensued, during which Miss Mercer averted a catastrophe by removing the lamp.

"Lord! Lord!" cried Mrs. Betts, querulously, "what under the canopy possesses them? It 's like living in a bear-garden."

The struggle ended with the triumph of Charley Ryan, who, with an exaggerated bow and an affectation of the colonel's manner, presented his trophy to Mrs. Betts. She took it, threw it into her work-basket, and said snappishly:

"The old man gets that to-morrow. I ain't goin' into the hold-up business."

After this the colonel's attitude toward his fellow-boarders was of the stiffest and most repelling sort. They were a good deal surprised at it at first; then, as days passed and it did not soften, they came to regard it as a joke, and though by tacit consent he was let alone, they seemed to harbor no ill feeling toward him. He, on his side, was filled with unappeasable rage. He often passed a meal without speaking to one of them, and never again spent an evening in the parlor.

Up-stairs he abused them to Viola with a violence of phrase that would have amazed them. Even to Mrs. Seymour he permitted himself to indulge his wrath to the extent of biting sarcasms at their expense. The landlady soothed him by assuring him that they were of an inferior class to himself. This was some consolation to the colonel, but he avoided their society with a hauteur which was quite thrown away on them, and his life became lonelier and more purposeless than ever.

Cut off still further from his fellows, longing for, yet afraid to court, the society of his daughter, the old man found himself in a position of distressing isolation. In his dreariness he turned for amusement and solace to the one person left in the house who had neither the self-consciousness to bore, the experience to judge by, nor the cruelty to mock. This was

Corinne, Mrs. Seymour's little girl, a grave, large-eyed, lean-shanked child of eight.

The alternate spoiling and scolding that the boarders awarded her had developed in Corinne a chill disbelief in human nature. As a rule she held off from those about her who would one day buy her kisses with a bag of candy, and the next, when she was singing to her doll on the balcony, would box her ears for making a noise. The vagaries of humanity were a mystery to her, and she had already acquired a cautious philosophy, the main tenet of which was to go her own way without demand or appeal to her fellow-creatures.

Corinne, if not as experienced as her mother, was possessed of those intuitive faculties which distinguish many neglected children. She knew after the first week that neither the colonel nor Viola would blow hot and cold upon her little moods. Still, there was a prudent reticence in her acceptance of their overtures, and she took the colonel's first gifts of fruit and candy with a wary apprehension of the next day's rebuffs. But they never came, and the prematurely grave child and the lonely old man established friendly relations, grateful and warming to both. Finally, when the other boarders drove the colonel back into the citadel of his wounded pride, the tie between them was strengthened. Each felt the isolation of

the other as a secret bond of sympathy and understanding.

The colonel, sore, homesick, repulsed on every side, turned to the child with a pitiful eagerness, and lavished upon her the discarded affections of his hungry heart. He greeted her entrance into Viola's sitting-room—a noiseless entrance, hugging up to her breast her doll and her pet black kitten—with expressions of joy that to an outsider would have seemed laughably extravagant. But they were not, for she had come to represent to him tenderness, tolerance, appreciation. He felt at ease and contented with her, for he knew that she would not criticize him, would never find fault with him. She flattered and sustained the last remnant of his once buoyant vanity. He was not afraid that her eyes would meet his with a sad reproach. On the contrary, their absorbed unconsciousness was one of the most soothing and delightful things about her. Corinne would not have cared what he did. She liked him for himself, and accepted him uncomplainingly as he was.

It was holiday-time, and she spent many afternoons in the colonel's society, generally squatted on the floor in Viola's sitting-room. She spoke little, but had the appearance of listening to all the old man said, and at times made solemnly sagacious comments. He, on his

part, talked to her as if she had been a woman, expatiating to her on the strange capriciousness of affection that marked her sex. Once or twice he alluded sadly to the apparent estrangement between himself and his daughter.

"Seems almost as if she did n't like me, Corinne; does n't it?" he asked anxiously, watching the child, who was trying to put her doll's skirt on the kitten.

"I don't think so," Corinne responded gravely, holding the cat on its hind legs while she shook down the skirt; "I think she likes you a lot."

"What makes you think that? She does n't ever talk to me much, or tell me things, the way she used."

"She does n't talk to anybody much," said Corinne. "Mr. Nelson said she was the most awful quiet girl he ever knew." Here the cat gave a long, protesting mew, and Corinne's attention became concentrated on its toilet.

"She use n't to be quiet like that. She was the brightest girl! You ought to have seen her, Corinne—just like a picture, and always laughing."

"She don't laugh much now," said Corinne; "I don't think I ever heard her laugh—not once. Keep quiet now, deary"—coaxingly to the cat; "you 're nearly dressed."

"And all because I only tried to please her.

I just tried to do my best to make her happy. There 's no good trying to please a woman. You 're all the same. Be kind to them, be loving, break your heart trying to give them pleasure—and that 's the way it is."

"What 's the way it is?" asked Corinne, sitting up on her heels and feeling over her person for a pin to fasten the waistband of the skirt.

"The way it is now with me and Viola—coldness, indifference, maybe dislike." Then, half to himself: "There 's no understanding women. What were they made for, anyway?"

Corinne seemed to think this remark worthy of attention. Her search for the pin was arrested and she pondered for a moment. Then she looked at the colonel and said tentatively, not quite sure of the reasonableness of her reply:

"I suppose so that people can have mothers, colonel."

"So that people can have love, Corinne," he answered sadly.

Corinne, feeling that her solution of the problem had not been the right one, returned to the pin. She found it, and bending over the patient kitten, inserted it carefully into the band. But her calculations were not true, the pin pricked, and the cat, with an angry mew, broke away and went scuttling across the room inclosed in the skirt. Her appearance was so

funny that Corinne sat back on her heels and, punching the colonel's knee, cried in a burst of laughter:

"Oh, look, colonel, look! Ain't she cunning?"

The colonel looked. The cat turned, still in the skirt, and eyed them both with a look of hurt protest. It appealed to the colonel's humor as it had to Corinne's. Their combined laughter filled the room and greeted Viola as she came up the passage from one of her long walks.

"What are you laughing at?" she asked, as she opened the door and entered like a pale vision wilted with the heat and light outside.

The colonel's laughter died away immediately. Her listless air of delicacy struck him anew with the silent reproach which her mere presence now seemed to suggest. All amusement faded from his face, and he looked guiltily conscious, like a child found in mischief.

A short time after this a hot spell struck the city. Though it was September, the heat was stifling. For three days the mercury stood so high that even Corinne's engrossingly arduous play with the doll and the kitten was listlessly performed, and she spent most of her time in the sitting-room with Viola and the colonel, where, behind closed shutters, they gasped away the hours. The old man seemed to feel

the heat less than before ; at least, he said little about it, and occupied himself in teaching Corinne to play solitaire, a game for which she evinced a precocious aptitude. Viola, sitting by the window, where now and then a fine edge of warm air sifted in between the slats in the shutters, watched them. Her father seemed as much interested as the child, and the girl wondered how in this oppressive exile he could have spirit for so trivial an amusement.

After three days the heat broke, and was succeeded by a soothing, balmy coolness, under the influence of which the city seemed to relax and rest inert in the torpor of recuperation. The freshened airs that flowed through the overheated old house extracted every odor left from years of bad cooking and insufficient ventilation. The musty hangings of the rooms closed in and held the oven-like atmosphere. Dusty curtains and grease-stained carpets added their contributions to the closeness left by years of untidy occupancy.

Viola had spent the morning in the garden, sitting under the great fig-tree, sewing. The house was unbearable to her, and she wondered why her father had chosen to remain there, working methodically over an old solitaire he was trying to recall. Late in the afternoon, her work done, she resolved to go out for a walk. Entering the sitting-room with her hat

and gloves in her hand, she found the colonel still sitting at the table, upon which the cards were arranged in twelve neat piles. He had mastered the solitaire, and now refused to accompany her on the ground that he had an engagement to teach it to Corinne, who had that day gone to school for the first time. He seemed to be looking forward to the few hours of the child's society that the afternoon would give him, and had set forth on a corner of the table a little feast of cookies and fruit with which to regale her when the solitaire became irksome. Viola was not sorry that he would not come. She liked being alone, with nothing to interrupt the aimless flow of her thoughts.

The air was clear, fresh, and fine. The languor of the warm weather was gone, and the girl, as she fared toward one of the little plazas which at intervals interrupt the passage of the long streets, felt the promise of autumn. Sitting on a bench in the plaza, she looked out over the city, and caught a glimpse of the sparkle of the river at the end of an open vista, and, cutting into the thin pink of the sunset sky, roof beyond roof and chimney over chimney. The golden dreaminess of summer was over, with its brooding, purposeless inaction. The haze of churned-up yellow dust was dispersed by a breath that held a prophecy of coming cold, sharp and imperious. There was

a stir in the air, a promise in the flaring sky. Its light fell on Viola's face, and seemed to suddenly send a shaft into her deadened heart. She moved and looked up, almost as if some one had spoken to her. On the pallor of her lifted face the reflected glow shone like gilding.

The dead lethargy that had held her all summer seemed to be breaking. As she sat staring at the illuminated sky, her mind sprang back like a mended spring, past all the despair and struggle of the past three months to the life behind it, and then forward to the future. A rousing of energy, a sense of work to do, a return of force and will, ran through her in a brisk, revivifying current. The checked stream of her life seemed to burst the barrier that had held it and to move onward again.

There was work for every one, and work was the purpose of existence. She had claimed happiness as a right, demanded what is not to be; then, when the inexorable ruling will had interposed, had dropped from the ranks in the passion of a thwarted child. The glory and the dream—who realized them? Who of the millions about her had touched the happiness she had expected to seize and hold? Why should she be exempt from the grinding that forces the grain from the chaff? All yearned, aspired, dreamed, and yet, never achieving, lived on, learning their lesson of obedience.

Only some bowed their necks to the yoke more quickly than others.

There was a second plane of life—a plane to which some were rudely hurled and some crept by degrees. Here you went sternly on, and did the work before you for its own sake, not for yours. And thus, in time, self might be conquered and its insistent cry for recognition be stifled. There was a corner in the world for every one, where they took their broken idols and set them up, and some day would look at them and smile over the anguish there had been when they fell.

The sunset deepened to a fine, transparent red, which looked as if it had been clarified of all denser matter. It gave a flush to Viola's upward-looking face. Her thoughts turned from the vague lines they had been following to closer personal ones. The love for her father, that had seemed frozen, gushed up in her heart. His face, with its wistful glance, came before her; a hundred instances of her past coldness rose in accusing memory. There was something better yet than work. Love—that was the axis of the world; that made life possible, and the sacrifice of self full of use and meaning; that was the key-note of the whole structure of existence.

She rose to her feet, and rapidly, with her old firm alertness of step, moved out through

the plaza. She wanted to run, to find the old man and, taking his head in her arms, whisper her contrition. Through street after street her swift footfall woke sharp, decisive echoes. Her face had lost its look of dejection and was set in lines of firmness and resolution. People, as she passed, turned to look at her—at the young face so full of a steady purpose, at the eyes deep with a woman's aspirations. Her thoughts flew forward, high-strung, exalted, beating against the confining limits of time and space. She would take him back to San Francisco. They would go together. How had she had the heart to hurt him so! Now, all blindness swept away by the breaking down of her egotism, she knew what he had suffered.

It was almost dark when she reached the house, and as she went up the path from the gate she saw lights springing out here and there in the upper windows. In the passage to her own room she came upon Mrs. Seymour lighting the gas, her back toward the stair-head. The elder woman, hearing the girl's light step, turned with the match in her hand. Viola, still engrossed in her own thoughts, mechanically smiled a greeting. Mrs. Seymour's face, with the crude gaslight falling on it, was unresponsively grave.

"I'm glad that 's you," she said; "I've had a sort of scare about your father."

“Scare!” exclaimed Viola, stopping with a start. “What do you mean?”

“Nothing for you to get frightened about. It’s all over now. He had a sort of a sinking spell, that was all, when he was playing them cards with Corinne. She come out and hol-lered for me, and I come up and found him looking white and kind o’ queerish. He said he ’d only lost his breath. I gave him some brandy, and it seemed to pull him together all right. But I did n’t, some way or other, like his looks. I sorter wished you was here.”

Viola looked relieved.

“Oh, he ’s had that several times before. It’s his heart, the doctor said; but he did n’t seem to think it was anything serious. You frightened me.”

Mrs. Seymour walked down the hall to the gas-jet by the stair-head.

“You don’t want to get frightened,” she said over her shoulder; “but I don’t think you know much about sickness, and, if I was you, I’d get the doctor to-morrow.”

“I’ll do that anyway,” said Viola, as she opened the door of the colonel’s room.

The picture that she entered upon was reas-suring. The lamp was lighted under its opaque yellow shade, and cast its chastened light over the center of the room. Here Corinne lay on the floor, the pack of cards spread out before

her. In the intensity of her absorption she kicked gently on the floor with her toes, making a soft but regular tattoo. Near by sat the kitten, its tail curled neatly round its front feet, ink-black save for the transparent yellow-green of its large watching eyes. The colonel leaned over the arm of his chair, following the game as intently as the child. He was laughing when Viola came in, and pointing with a long forefinger at a possible move that Corinne had not seen. Both were so interested in their play that they did not heed the opening of the door. Viola stood in the aperture, regarding them with pleasure and relief. A slight smell of brandy in the air was the only indication that there had been sickness here a short time before.

At the sound of the closing of the door they both looked up. Over the colonel's visage the same childishly embarrassed expression flitted that Viola had noticed a few days before. Corinne, on the contrary, merely gave the newcomer the short side look of begrudged attention, and returned to the cards, murmuring, "It's only Viola."

The girl went across to her father, and taking his hand, curled her soft fingers around it in a warm, infolding clasp.

"Mrs. Seymour says you have n't been well," she said.

The unexpected caress made the old man forget the game, and his face flushed with pleasure. He leaned toward her with the content of a forgiven child.

"It was nothing—just a little turn like I had the other day. First a pain, and then something comes fluttering up near your throat. The heat knocked me out. But it scared Corinne."

"He got the color of the pitcher," said Corinne, not moving her eyes from the cards, but sparing enough time to give a jerk of her head in the direction of a white china water-pitcher on the table.

"You ought to have seen Corinne. She went out in the passage and made a noise as if there was a fire."

"I was scairt," said Corinne, "and hollered for mommer. I don't want you to scare me that way again, colonel."

The colonel and Viola laughed.

"I'll try and not have it happen again," said the old man. "You know, I always do what you tell me."

"Mostly always," Corinne absently agreed. "I'm going to put this ten-spot here. Look, colonel, is n't that the best move?"

The old man leaned forward, studying the contemplated move. Viola drew back, watching him. She had noticed his pallor when she came in. Now his face, settled into lines of gravity,

appeared to have suddenly collapsed and withered into the gray hollows of decrepitude. Her heart contracted at the sight. She turned away, under the pretense of pulling off her gloves, and said:

"I made a plan when I was out this afternoon. I think you 'll like it."

"Let 's hear it," he said, turning back from the cards and watching her with a fond half-smile.

"Something I think you 'll like—oh, ever so much!" She patted and pinched the limp gloves into shape, not looking at him.

"Hit me with it," he said. "Mrs. Seymour 's just given me that glass half full of brandy; you can't expect me to guess after that."

"That we should go back to San Francisco."

Her news had more effect than even she had expected. The colonel sat up as if he had been struck, his lips quivering into a smile that he feared to indulge.

"Do you mean that, Viola? Do you really mean it?" he asked.

"Of course I do. I thought you 'd like it."

"But do you like it? Do you want to go? Is n't there—would n't you rather stay here?"

"Oh, no." She struck lightly on the edge of the table with the gloves, avoiding his eyes. "I 'd rather be there. We 've had our little change, and we can go back. It 's our home,

anyway; and we 've enough money to last for a long time yet."

"Of course we have, and it does n't matter if we have n't." The old man's face burned with excitement and joy. "But the house is sold! Where shall we go? Oh, that does n't matter, either. We can get rooms near there. You 'd like to be back near the old place, would n't you? We could go to Mrs. Cassidy's; you know she rents her two back rooms on the second floor. Oh, Viola—to be back again!"

He sank back in his chair, his eyes half shut in the ecstasy of this sudden restoration to happiness.

"Just think of it!" he said. "To see the bay again, and Lotta's Fountain, and Montgomery Street! and to smell the sea outside the Golden Gate when the wind 's that way! and to feel the fog! Viola, you don't know what I 've suffered. I never meant to tell you."

"I know—I know now. But I did n't guess at first—truly, father, I did n't know at first."

"Why, of course not, honey—how should you? And it does n't matter now. It 's all over, and we 're going to have the time of our lives. But it was awful, was n't it? Everything was so lonesome and strange. And those dreadful people! But we won't have any more bother with them. When 'll we start? Let 's not waste any time."

Viola had turned away to the tall glass behind him, under the pretense of taking off her hat. She could not control her tears. As she stood, seeing her blurred image dark against the lamplight, she could hear the colonel babbling on, apparently too preoccupied to notice that she was not answering:

“It ’ll be warm when we get back—not this diabolical heat, but just soft and sunny. The hills will be all brown. Presently there ’ll be a smell of eucalyptus in the air, but that won’t be till later, when the evenings are short. Oh, I ’m so glad we ’re going back! It ’s like getting out of prison.”

He was suddenly silent, and Viola heard him making a slight rustling movement in his chair. Then the room was very quiet, for Corinne had stopped beating with her toes. For a space Viola struggled with herself, biting her lips, and surreptitiously taking out her handkerchief and pressing it against her face. She was more afraid of the piercing eyes of Corinne than of her father, and when she had controlled herself sufficiently to be presentable, she looked in the mirror to see if Corinne had been observing her. Instead, she saw the child standing up some few steps away from the colonel, regarding him with an expression of keen, suspended intentness that was at once curious and fearful.

As Viola's eyes encountered the reflection, and read in it terror and alarm, Corinne spoke in a quick, frightened voice:

"Look at the colonel, Viola. He looks so queer. I don't like him."

Viola was at his side before the child had ceased speaking.

The colonel's head had dropped forward on his breast. A yellowish, waxen hue had spread over his face, and his eyes, cold and brooding, were staring straight before him.

"Father!" she said, touching his hand with a strange fearfulness she had never felt before.

The word sounded portentously loud in the deep, mysterious stillness that had settled on the room. Awe of something majestic and terrible clutched Viola's heart. As she stood staring, she heard the child screaming down the hall:

"Mommer! Mommer! the colonel's sick again, and his eyes are open. Oh, come quick—come quick!"

A moment later Mrs. Seymour's heavy foot-fall sounded at the doorway, and she entered panting. As her glance fell on the colonel, she gave a sharp sound.

"What is it?" whispered Viola, her tongue suddenly dry and stiff as a piece of leather. "He won't speak."

Mrs. Seymour stepped forward, and laying

her hand on the colonel's eyes, softly closed the lids.

"He won't never speak no more, my dear," she said gently.

Viola looked at her with a wild and terrified face.

"Oh, no, Mrs. Seymour!" she cried. "Oh, no—oh, not that! We were just going away—we were going home! Oh, it could n't be that; it's too cruel, it's too unnecessary. He wanted so to go! There was no harm in it. Why could n't they have waited till we 'd got home?"

She raised her hands to her head in a gesture of dazed despair, and fell senseless into Mrs. Seymour's arms.

VII

ONE week from the day Viola had told her father of their contemplated return to San Francisco, Colonel Reed had passed into a memory.

Death had come and gone so quickly—so terribly, bewilderingly quickly! Viola had hardly realized what had happened to so check and change the current of her life when the days had already sprung back to their monotonous routine, and the other boarders had laid aside the expressions of lugubrious solemnity which they had worn while death had hushed the house. Now, while she sat still and stupid in her room up-stairs, they told funny stories and “joshed” each other at dinner, as they had “joshed” the old pioneer a few weeks before. Even Corinne had returned to the doll and the kitten, though, out of consideration for Viola, she played with them furtively on the corner of the balcony, where, with the assistance of an old umbrella and a pair of towels, she had built herself what she called a house. One

morning, stepping out upon the balcony, Viola came upon the child lying face downward and whispering to herself while she played the solitaire the colonel had taught her, with the pack of cards he had bought for her a few days before his death.

The waters of oblivion had closed without a ripple over the old pioneer. In the dingy boarding-house where he had spent the last months of his life his name was unknown, and his fellow-lodgers had come to regard the personal part of his reminiscences as figments of his imagination. So obscure had been his situation, so little trusted his own words, that his passing had not even been awarded the short newspaper notice that is evoked by the death of the most commonplace forty-niner. In the Sacramento boarding-house Colonel Reed was as a stranger in a strange land. Only his daughter, Mrs. Seymour, and Bart Nelson were the mourners at the funeral of the man who had once been one of the most extravagant and picturesque figures of California's brilliant youth.

At the end of the week Viola was to return to San Francisco. In her heart-sickness and desolation she had turned to her home as a cat does. After the first stunned bewilderment she woke to a sense of loneliness that chilled her to the marrow. The world seemed terribly

wide and menacing as she stood thus hesitating on its verge. For the first time in her life she realized what it meant to be alone, to be thrown into that great maelstrom without a hand to hold or a shoulder to lean on.

She had no intimates — few acquaintances, even. The houses and streets of San Francisco came to her mind with a more friendly aspect than the people. Mrs. Seymour had asked her if she should write to any one. She had answered that there was no one to write to. The good-natured landlady had gazed at the girl—looking so slight and pale in her somber draperies—with a frowning and fidgeted anxiety. She thought it a very hazardous thing to let this delicate creature, still half stupefied by a sudden blow, go away alone and unprotected into a city of strangers. But Viola insisted. To herself she kept reiterating, “I want to go home.” It seemed to her as if the gaunt, gray city, crowded on its wind-swept hills, would welcome her with the silent, understanding love of a mother. It was the one friend she knew and trusted.

After the expenses of the colonel’s funeral were paid and her score settled with Mrs. Seymour, she had still nearly one thousand dollars left. This to her represented a little fortune. Even without work she could live on it for several years. Economy had been the only

completed branch in Viola's education, and in this she was as proficient as she was ignorant of all pertaining to business and the investment or disposal of money. If she could find employment she would put her money away—tie it up in an old glove, and hide it in the bottom of her trunk. Mrs. Seymour had refused to allow her to leave until she had positively arranged for a place of abode which would be waiting and ready for her. Under the direction of that sensible woman, Viola had written and engaged one of Mrs. Cassidy's upper back rooms—it being the only place of its kind in the city where she knew the people.

The evening before her departure the last leaf was added to this momentous and miserable Sacramento chapter. Meeting her in the sitting-room, Bart Nelson had detained her and made a halting and bashful offer of marriage. Viola, too stunned by the terrible surprise of the past week to have room for any more astonishment, had listened to him indifferently, and then politely but coldly refused him.

The young man seemed to be astonished. He looked at her incredulously.

"But—but," he stammered, "what are you going to do?"

"I 'm going to San Francisco to-morrow," she answered, rather wearily, as she knew he was aware of her purpose.

“But what are you going to do when you get there?”

“I ’m going to work at something.”

“Work at something! What in the world can you work at? You look as if you had n’t strength enough to grind an organ! You must be crazy.”

“I can work at anything,” she said, almost absently. “Besides, I have money to live on, enough for a long time — several years.”

He looked at her moodily, amazed by her indifference.

“It would be a hundred times better for you to stay here and marry me. I ’d take care of you and support you. Ain’t that better for a woman than scratching along by herself? Mrs. Seymour says you have n’t got a friend in San Francisco.”

“No; but I don’t mind that. I don’t want to marry. I don’t ever want to.”

“But is n’t it better to have a man to work for you, and give you a nice comfortable home, and — well — of course, be fond of you, and all that — than to go off by yourself, trusting to luck to get work? You don’t know what you ’re in for.”

“Perhaps I don’t. But truly, there ’s no use talking about it any more. I can’t. I could n’t, no matter what happened. It was kind of you to think of me. Thank you, and good-by.”

When she had gained her own room she stood among her scattered possessions, thinking. No one knew how terrifying her loneliness seemed to her. As she looked out at it now, so close at hand, to begin to-morrow, her heart sickened, and the bleakness of an encompassing world, all strange, all cold, all uncaring, seemed to encircle her. Were not protection, companionship, home, at any price, better than this? She recalled the young man's coarse but good-natured face, his passion shining through the businesslike phlegm of his manner, and uttered a vehement exclamation, at the same time making a gesture as though repulsing him. There were some things that even to a woman in her position were impossible.

The next day she started, turning her back on her father's grave, and her face toward the city where she had been born and yet had not a friend.

Had Mrs. Cassidy heard this stricture upon her lonely condition, she would have hotly denied it. Mrs. Cassidy told Viola that she would be at once a mother and a father to her, and Micky Cassidy, her son, would fill the various positions of male relations that, in Miss Reed's case, were as yet untenanted. The impulsive widow did her best to make the girl feel at home, and certainly offered Viola the consolation of shedding many tears with her, and of

lauding the colonel's good qualities till even the girl's dulled emotions were roused, and she wept as she had not done since her father's death.

But her home-coming was sharpened with pangs that she had not reckoned on when her first longing to return to the city swept over her. Every step of her surroundings was reminiscent of her father and of their close companionship. All the byways held recollections of him, of small happenings that, at the time, had been pregnant with joy or anxiety, of little jokes they had had together. The shops they dealt at seemed as if they might at any moment disgorge his tall, angular figure, with its quick, decisive step, the old face alight with smiles as his eye fell on her.

One afternoon, after she had been home a week, she was returning from a walk, slowly traversing the familiar streets, absorbed in her own thoughts. So engrossed was she that, for the moment, the Sacramento interval, with all that it had held, was obliterated from her mind, and, walking loiteringly, she turned the accustomed corner and approached the house. Her suspension of memory lasted till she had her hand on the gate. Then, with a sudden, dizzying rush, the consciousness of the present returned. She felt faint and sick, and stood holding the gate-post and looking up at the

house with a frightened face. When she had mastered herself she went home to her room at Mrs. Cassidy's and locked herself in. Mrs. Cassidy knocked at her door three times that evening, but Viola would not open it, even when the widow, through the keyhole, extolled the merits of the tea she had waiting on the tray.

The next day Viola appeared to be herself, though she looked white and listless, and Mrs. Cassidy resolved to impart to her a piece of information that, with great effort of will, she had been hoarding up to cheer a particularly dark hour. It was her habit to bring Viola her tea at six, and during this meal to seat herself and discourse with her lodger in a friendly and cheering spirit. The widow loved a gossip, and it seemed to her that Miss Reed was a person more redolent of romance than any one she had ever known before.

Rocking comfortably back and forth in the plush-covered, ribbon-decked rocking-chair, she watched her lodger as she poured out her tea, and delicately, after the manner of people who are without appetite, broke small fragments off her roll and put them in her mouth. Then, in a voice vibrating with secret exultation, she said :

“ You won't always feel so bad as this, honey. Things cheer up sooner 'n we expect, and black clouds have silver linin's. Besides, there 's

friends of yours that would n't let you want for nothin', if they knew you was back."

She saw the piece of roll stop midway between Viola's mouth and the plate, and her eyes fix themselves on the lid of the tea-pot in an arrested stare.

"Who do you mean?" said the girl, the even modulations of her voice not hiding its undertone of apprehension.

"Who do you suppose?" retorted Mrs. Cassidy, teasingly.

"I can't imagine," replied Viola. "I have n't the slightest idea to whom you 're referring."

"Oh, yes, you have, now," said Mrs. Cassidy, wagging her head knowingly, and flushing over her broad, buxom face with the pleasure of her secret. "Try and guess."

"Who do you mean, Mrs. Cassidy?" said Viola. Her pretension of indifference had suddenly disappeared. She tried to make her voice commanding, but it was full of a frightened distress.

"Mr. John Gault," announced the other, her narrow eyes, alight with curiosity, fastened on her lodger's face. The change in its expression, quick, inexplicable in its sudden tightening of the muscles and veiling of the eyes, told the watcher, not what the romance was that she so keenly scented, but confirmed her suspicions that there was a romance of some sort or other.

Viola turned back to the tea-things. As she moved them about, the eager eyes of the watcher saw that her hands were trembling.

“He ’s the finest gentleman I ever set eyes on since I came to California,” continued the widow, immensely interested and hardly able to wait for further developments. “I said to Micky, after he ’d been here, ‘There, Mick Cassidy, is the way they grow real gentlemen. No imitation about him!’”

“Was he *here*?” came the question, in a hardly comprehending voice.

“He was that—and to find out about you. He was that crazy to know where you ’d gone that he was at Coggles’s, and had the Robsons turned ’most inside out with his questions. When he could n’t get nothing out of them, he got detectives to track out Mick,—’cause, you remember, he ’d left that package,—and he was here to find out what I knew. Oh, he ’s got it bad.”

Viola, conscious of the scrutiny fastened upon her, bent her face over the tray. She began to make another cup of tea.

“I could n’t give him no information,” continued Mrs. Cassidy—“more ’s the pity, for I ain’t never seen a gentleman that took my fancy more; and just as pleasant and agreeable as if he was no better off than me or Mick. Policeman O’Hara, when I asked him, says to me:

‘Rich? Why, Mrs. Cassidy, he’s more money in a minute than you ’ll ever see in your life. He’s a capitalist, and not mean, like the rest of ’em, neither.’”

Though the widow’s tongue had been busy, her eyes had followed the tea-making closely. It was not a success. Viola had abandoned it, and her hands were now clasped under the edge of the table. But she made no comment, sitting motionless, with her face averted. Nothing daunted, Mrs. Cassidy returned to the charge.

“He was just dead set upon finding you. He says to me as he left, says he, ‘If you hear anything of her, Mrs. Cassidy, let me know. Send over Mick the first thing in the morning.’”

It must be confessed that Mrs. Cassidy’s imagination had added this last touch; but to Viola, in her fluttered alarm, it carried no suggestion of fiction.

“Mrs. Cassidy,” she said, turning on the woman, “you have n’t let him know? You have n’t sent Mick?”

“Lord love you, no, dear,” returned the widow, good-humoredly. “I was waiting till you pulled yourself together a little more. But don’t you think, now,”—she leaned forward and spoke in a wheedling tone, but with her eyes full of an avid interest,—“don’t you think you might write a little letter, and Mick ’ll take it over to his office this evening?”

Viola pushed back from the table, her face suddenly suffused with an angry red.

"No—no!" she cried violently. "Don't think of such a thing—don't suggest it! I don't want to see that gentleman again, ever. This is my affair, Mrs. Cassidy; leave it to me."

She rose from the table and walked to the window.

"There's no use gettin' mad about it," retorted the other, somewhat tartly, rising from the rocker and setting the tea-things on the tray. "I'm only tryin' to do the best I can for you. And it don't seem to me just right for a girl like you, young and not over-strong, to be knockin' round this way, when she's got friends ready to black her boots for her. Still, it's your funeral, not mine."

There was no reply, and as she lifted the tray she said in an aggrieved tone:

"I don't want to hurt no one's feelin's, but I want to do my dooty in this world. Well, good night, deary. Don't get down on your luck. You're not so friendless as you think."

After she had left the room, Viola stood motionless, looking out of the window on the gray and soot-grimed back yard. Night was falling, and the washing, still pendulating on its lines after the slovenly fashion of the neighborhood, gleamed white and ghostly through the dusk. A high brick wall shut off the end

of the lot, and over this, dark, mournful-looking trails of ivy hung downward, rubbing back and forth in the passing breaths of wind. It was a prospect and an hour conducive to melancholy. But Viola felt none. For the moment a sense of hunted terror had shut out all other feelings.

He had searched for her, employed detectives to try and find a clue to her hiding-place! And now, led by some horrible caprice of destiny, she had walked into the very house where he would soonest find her. She must go tomorrow. Mrs. Cassidy could not be trusted. The expression of her face, with its ugly, half-concealed triumph and its coarsely prying interest, warned the girl that the secret of her whereabouts would not long remain with the widow. In a fever of anxiety she paced up and down the room. Her nerves, broken by the shock and strain of the past two weeks, exaggerated the importance of the situation, till she felt as if Mrs. Cassidy and Gault had spread a net around her, from which, in her weakness, she would never be able to break away.

She fell asleep, only to wake in the dead of the night, shaken into throbbing consciousness by the thought that the widow had already communicated with Gault, and that the conversation of that evening was for the purpose

of preparing her for the appearance of her lover. Curled up and trembling under the clothes, she lay staring into the blackness about her. It seemed a reflex, in its impenetrable gloom, of her own surroundings. With the goblin terrors of night weighing upon her overwrought spirit, she felt too helpless and feeble to battle with a life that was so beset with pitfalls. The dreariness of her isolation, the hopelessness of her misplaced love, that should have been the crown of her life, and was instead its direst dread and peril, seemed combining to crush her, and in her despair she pressed her face into the pillow and whispered wild supplications for death.

The next morning life did not look so formidable. Things fell into their proper perspective, and Viola's fears of Mrs. Cassidy as an agent of destruction appeared phantasmagoric. Nevertheless, sunlight and its restoring influences did not allay all her doubts of the woman. She had seen her thoughts and intentions written on her face, and she knew that it would only be a question of time when she would be tempted to communicate with Gault.

She determined to leave Mrs. Cassidy with no clue as to her new place of residence. She had no idea as to where she would go, except that she would try to find a lodging as far from where she was now as possible. This would be

an easy matter. The town seemed to be placarded from end to end with the signs of "Furnished Rooms." Viola was brave, now the morning had come, and with it sunlight. Moreover, the thought of moving from the locality every corner of which seemed alive with memories of her father was a sustaining relief.

After breakfast she acquainted Mrs. Cassidy with her intention of leaving, giving as her reason the fact that that portion of the city was too full of painful memories for her to remain in it. The widow received the news with loud lamentations, which ended almost in tears. As soon as she had overcome her surprise and commanded her feelings, she besieged Viola with questions as to where she intended going. The girl, who was not skilful at this sort of duel, found it difficult to evade her hostess's vigilant determination to maintain her surveillance. Viola was soon red and stammering under the widow's persistent and unescapable queries, and her discomfort was not lessened by the realization that Mrs. Cassidy had guessed her real reason for leaving and had resented it.

It was a clear, soft morning, the air still and golden. In its brief Indian summer the city seemed to stretch itself, and lie warm, apathetic, and relaxed, basking in the mellowness of its autumnal quiet. That part of it toward which

Viola directed her course was almost as old as the locality where she had passed her uneventful girlhood. Boarding an electric car, she crossed the low basin of the town, where originally the village of Yerba Buena skirted the cove in straggling huts and tents. Here the business life of a metropolis is compressed into an area covered by a few blocks. Women do their shopping one street away from where men are making the money which renders the shopping possible. The car swept Viola through the gay panorama that Kearney Street presents on a sunny morning, out past Portsmouth Square, with a glimpse of Chinese back balconies, where lines of flowering plants, the dip of swaying lanterns, and here and there the brilliant spot of color made by a woman or a child, bring to the scene a whiff of the Orient.

Beyond, where the broken flank of Telegraph Hill rises gaunt and red amid its clinging tenements, she alighted and continued her way on foot. She made a detour round the forbidding steps of the hill, past narrow alleys where shawled figures slunk along lengths of sun-touched wall, by old verandahed houses brooding under rusty cypress-trees, by straight-fronted, plastered dwellings, the stucco streaked with dark rain-stains like the traces of tears on a face too dejected to care how it looked. Finally the street rose over a spur of the hill,

then dipped, sloping down to the hollow of North Beach.

There was a sudden widening of the horizon on every side. Marine views broke on the eye through the spaces between high, cramped, flat buildings, over the tops of decrepit cottages, in the breaks between peeling, vine-draped walls. Vivid bits of sea were set in mosaic-like clearness between the trunks of dark old trees in gardens that were planted when the region was yet suburban. The end of the street's vista was filled with its blue expanse, with the distant hills beyond—all clear lights and shadows on this sun-steeped autumn morning.

Here was spaciousness and room. The torn hill, battered and weather-beaten with the stress and turmoil of the elements, stood up from the lower portions of the city in an eternal wash of air fresh from the ocean. Houses clung to it like barnacles. On its sharper steeps they seemed to be hanging precariously, clutching to irregularities in the soil, cowering down in hollows, or gripping rocky projections. But on its seaboard face the slope was more gradual, and here, in the old days, prosperous families had once built charming villas, where, from rose-shaded balconies, the inmates could look on the bay, sometimes a weltering waste, sometimes a vast sapphire level tracked with the trails of sailing-vessels bending to the trades.

Viola knew that North Beach, like her old home, was a quarter upon which fashion had turned its back. Rents were low there, and, judging by the number of signs of "Furnished Rooms," the inhabitants must be poor. She began her search at the foot of the hill, working up through the streets that struck her as at once clean and respectable-looking. But even her humble requirements were hard to fill.

By noontime, passing back and forth from street to street, she had gained the top of the hill. She had seen nothing at once tolerable to her taste and suitable to her purse. Now, spent with fatigue and disappointment, she climbed a last breathless ascent, and came out upon the slope below the summit. This space of open ground, devoid of streets, and with here and there a hovel squalidly sprawling amid its own debris, slants up the crest of the incline upon which perches the deserted observatory, worn and weather-stained into an appearance of mellow antiquity.

Even at this warm noonday hour the air was pure and balmily clear. Viola sank down, panting, on a broken sod, and several dogs, attracted by the unusual presence of a stranger, rushed upon her from one of the neighboring shanties, barking frenziedly. Some hens joined them, and for a moment they stood in

an excited group, evidently meditating a sortie. Presently a tousled woman in a wrapper emerged from the house and threw an old boot at them, at which they scattered—the hens running off in staggering terror, the dogs scuttling away to safer regions, their tails tucked in.

The silence that settled was crystalline. It seemed to place the city at a curiously remote distance. Far below her, Viola could see the wharves and the masts of ships that lay idle by the quays. Men were running about down there with the smooth, sure movements of mechanical toys. Drays passed along the water-front, and little light wagons that sped by in a sudden wake of dust. From there, and from regions unseen, sounds came up to her with clear distinctness. A bell rang, a dog barked, a child cried piercingly—each sound seeming to rise separate and finely accentuated from the muffled roar which broods over the hives of men.

She leaned back against the broken ground behind her and looked sleepily about. The parched sward was lined by little paths that seemed to cross and recross each other in purposeless wanderings. Some led to the edge of a quarry that had torn away a huge chunk of the hill as though a giant lion had struck down and ripped off a piece of its flank. Below her were the roofs and chimneys of houses on the

face of the slope. Smoke came from the chimneys and went up straight, and here and there the ragged foliage of eucalyptus-trees that had grown sere and scant in the turmoil of wintry gales hung motionless, resting on this day of grace. It must be near midday, Viola thought, and, even as the thought formed in her mind, all the whistles of the city below seemed to suddenly open their throats and blow together — a long, mellifluous, fluent sound. Then there was a pause, and odd ones, late but determined, took up the cry and poured out their hollow, reverberant roar. From the water-front louder ones came, hoarse, harsh, dominant, riding the tumult like strident talkers, and others, shrill-toned, broke in, high and protesting, and the note of distant whistles, away in the Mission and the Potrero, answered again, faint, thin, and far. It was twelve o'clock.

Viola gathered herself up from her relaxed attitude. She had been hunting now for two hours, and felt tired and discouraged. She wished she could live here, since one must live somewhere—just here, she thought, as she rose stiffly to her feet and dusted her dress. No one would ever find her, and there was something at once inspiring and soothing in all this vast panorama of sea and mountain and this wash of living air. She looked back at the house the woman with the shoe had

come from, and wondered if even there they would take her in. The woman had come to a doorway now, and stood there, eying her, it seemed to Viola, with suspicious disfavor; and even as she looked, the dogs, grown brave again, made a spirited rally round the corner, and came yapping about her heels. She turned and, selecting the first path that she saw, walked down over the forward face of the hill.

The fall of the land was so abrupt here that the few householders had had to build steps from the street below to their gates. Some had even gone to the extravagance of a hand-rail. Viola, making a chary descent, was attracted to glance about her by a sweet, pungent fragrance, and looking to locate its source, found herself at the gate of a house, low, long, and narrow, with a garden on the outward side, terraced to keep the soil from sliding bodily down into the back yard of the house below. From this garden rose the scent that had attracted her. It was the soft, illusive perfume of mignonette, of which the little inclosure, sheltered from the winds by a lattice-work fence, held a goodly store.

The love of flowers was strong in Viola, and pressing her breast against the top of the fence, she stood peering in at the garden with its roughly bordered terraces and pebbled paths.

The mignonette was growing in a border that skirted the side of the house. In the parterres below it were many varieties of blossoming annuals and rose-bushes still densely in flower. The cypress-trees from the yard below showed their dark, funereal tops over the outer fence, and a gaunt eucalyptus made a pattern on the pale noonday sky with its drooping foliage. From the garden Viola's gaze turned to the house. It presented its side to the view, its narrow front to the street. Its seaward face was flanked by a balcony, and windows, commanding the enormous sweep of water and distant hills, were set closely along the wall. In one of these windows Viola saw the sign her eyes had grown so accustomed to that morning — "Furnished Rooms."

Half an hour later she made her exit from the house, having completed her arrangement to become a tenant that same day. Its sole occupant at the time was the landlady, Miss Defoe, a spinster of advanced years, who dwelt there with her brother. She was glad of the chance of a lodger, especially one who seemed so gently tractable. The almost inaccessible position of the house made it difficult to rent the rooms, even at the lowest prices. Viola found that the terms offered her were more desirable than those made by Mrs. Cassidy.

In the afternoon, having made her escape

from the widow's with guilty stealth, she took up her residence on the high hilltop, in a room from one window of which she could look out through the Golden Gate on the broad bosom of the Pacific, while from the other she could see the dappled sweep of the Alameda hills, with Berkeley and Oakland clustering about their bases.

A life uneventful and monotonous now began for the solitary girl. The days in the house on the hill passed with the even, colorless rapidity of days full of uninteresting duties and bereft of the stimulus of hope. Viola plodded on doggedly, with her head down and her eyes on the furrow before her. Work had cropped up quickly, and she turned to it with dull resolution. In the back of the house some former tenant had built a small greenhouse, which, during the Defoes' occupancy, had been left in dusty desuetude. Being granted the use of it, she cleaned and repaired it, and here once more plied her old graceful trade of raising plants.

Her friend the Kearney Street florist, to whom the colonel in his grand days had given many profitable orders, was glad to help the daughter of his old patron. Once again Viola found herself supplying his shops with the delicate ferns which grew so luxuriantly under her intelligent care. Besides this, he now and then engaged her to assist in making up floral pieces

used in decoration and at weddings and funerals. In this branch of the work she displayed so much taste and skill that her services were employed more and more constantly.

She earned enough to supply her small wants, and the remains of the thousand dollars lay untouched in the bottom of her trunk.

As the winter began, with its early darkening of the days, its long gray spells of lowering weather, and its first warm, hesitating rains, Viola spent hours in the small room behind the store in Kearney Street, surrounded by flowers mounted on wire stalks, which she stuck into the mossy mold that filled in the skeleton frames. When the work was heavy she was assisted by the girl who waited in the shop—a self-confident, talkative young woman, whom every one called “Miss Gladys,” and who had the most improbably golden hair and the most astonishingly high collars Viola had ever seen. Nevertheless, the confidential chatter of Miss Gladys, which ranged over a variety of topics, not the least of which was Miss Gladys’s own conquering charm and its fatal power, had a salutary effect in diverting Viola from her brooding melancholy.

Her hours in the shop and greenhouse acted as preservatives of her physical health and mental freshness. Here she felt safe from observation, and worked on, with mind engrossed

and fingers busy, through the long gray afternoons till the dark fell and the early night was spangled with garlands of lamps.

In the off hours, when her plants did not need her attention and there was no work for her at the store, she took long walks. That portion of the city where she had hidden herself grew as familiar to her as the old one on the other side of town. Its charm of a ruinous picturesqueness, of a careless intermingling of alien races, of a sprawling, slovenly serenity through days drenched by sun and swept by rain, was slowly revealed to her. Aspects of it grew to have expressions of almost human attraction or repulsion. This little blue glimpse of sea invited her, with its suggestion of freedom and space. That lowering alley, dark and furtive, with reluctant rays of sunshine slanting down its walls, and the gleam of eyes watching from behind its stealthy shutters, inspired her imagination to strange, soaring flights.

From the summit of the hill she looked down on the crowding, dun-colored city, cut cleanly with streets and decked with feathers of smoke, and tried to reconstruct the village of '49. Here, far back, was the curve of the shore; there, up the California Street incline, tents and shanties were dotted through the chaparral; and below, an open sand-space marked

the plaza. The adobe of the Señora Briones lay farther round in the hollow of North Beach; her father had often shown her where it stood. Now the myriad roofs of a metropolis stretched far away, filling the valley and cresting the adjacent hills. Domes and the crosses on church steeples caught the light, and from this great height the girdle of silver water encircled it like a restraining bond.

The Italian and Spanish quarter was even more interesting. It was farther round, on one of the steepest faces of the hill. The streets seemed to share the characteristics of their occupants. They all started out bravely from the level ground, ascended for a few energetic blocks, then gave up the effort and appeared to lazily collapse in a debris of unkempt houses and squalid yards. But no one seemed to care. A tranquil indifference pervaded the quarter. Only the old houses—grave, stucco-fronted dwellings, with long windows under floriated cornices, and iron balconies skirting the upper stories—had the air of looking out on this degradation of the once prosperous region with the sad, patient dignity of a broken old age. Here and there, too, stood those dwellings, relics of Spanish taste, which maintain a secret and arresting suggestion of mystery. They are ramparted from vulgar eyes by a high plaster wall, which, through a curved arch-

way, gives egress up a flight of steps. All is dark, mossy, and quiet. Over the top of the wall great strands of ivy hang, and only an angle of windowed roof rises above the sheltering cypress- and pepper-trees.

But through decay, poverty, and dirt the love of beauty still spoke. It met Viola's eye and gave her its message in the touch of green, in the brilliant blossom that rejoiced in its existence on balcony-rail and window-ledge. Flowers were the one ornament that was cheap. They hung from windows, and stretched out frail blossoms from shadowed angles. They grew bushily in glad luxuriance on sunny roofs, and put forth buds of perfect beauty behind broken, grimy panes. When the sun touched them they bloomed, bravely, splendidly, prodigally, giving forth their best. Old verandas, sagging under their weight of decrepitude and household overflow, held their gardens. In the most menacing of the alleys there was the gleam of flower and leaf from starch- and soap-boxes on the ledges below unwashed, unshuttered casements. Viola had seen children leaning over the sills as they searched with pouting, busy gravity for a bud to pluck; and sometimes she caught a glimpse of the coarse, painted face of some humble Aspasia of the quarter bending over her window-garden, where the flowers bloomed as

luxuriantly for her as they did for the children on the floors above.

With the advance of winter and its multiplying gaieties, Viola's engagements at the florist's grew more and more frequent, her hours longer. Her employer realized that she was a more than ordinarily valuable acquisition, and constantly demanded the assistance of her skill and taste. She was often detained till long after dark, when she made a weary way up the hill to the cold dinner that had been awaiting her since six o'clock. On one of these nights, at the beginning of the rainy season, she walked past her destiny unseeing and unsuspecting.

It had been a lowering day. The clouds lying low and gray over the city bulged with rain which did not fall. The wind was moist and sweet, smelling as if it had blown over miles of rich earth, quick with germinating seed. People were out with umbrellas, and the children as they came home from school were protected by mackintoshes and rubbers.

GAULT, walking up Kearney Street in the gray of the late afternoon, observed his sister-in-law's coupé standing at the curb before a popular confectioner's. As he approached, Letitia emerged from the shop, her hands full of small boxes, and crossed the sidewalk to the carriage. He encountered her half-way, and paused with her by the carriage door for a

moment's greeting. Gault did not see as much of his brother's household as formerly. They knew of Viola Reed's disappearance; and Letitia from delicacy and Maud from a sense of guilty embarrassment refrained from urging him to reëstablish himself on the old footing of careless intimacy.

He said now, in response to Letitia's query why he absented himself so much, that he was getting old and had to go to bed early. "For beauty sleep, you know," he added, looking at her with his eyes smiling behind his glasses. "You don't need that, do you, Tishy? Hullo, there 's the rain!"

The first drops, swollen, slow, and reluctant, spotted the pavement. The air felt curiously damp, and had a languid softness in its touch.

Letitia looked up at the low-hanging clouds, and a drop fell on her cheek.

"Yes, there it is," she said. "Get in the carriage and come home to dinner, John. No one will be there—just ourselves."

He said he had an engagement for dinner.

"Well, then, get in the carriage and drive with me down to South Park, where I have a message to give a scrub-woman. I 've got something I want to say to you."

He obediently entered, and the coachman turned the horses' heads in the direction of South Park.

The afternoon had suddenly darkened as if a pall had been unfurled across the sky. The streets without had burst into a forest of umbrellas, already shining, and agitated with curiously unsteady movements as the bearers hurried this way and that. The rain was still falling slowly, but the drops were large. A little flurry of wind lashed the window with them as the coupé made its way through the mêlée of vehicles and over the car-tracks at Lotta's Fountain. An eery, yellowish light seemed to be diffusing itself from the horizon, and to have crept along under the dark cope of the storm.

Letitia leaned forward, looking out at the figures of the passers-by, butting against the wind with lowered umbrellas, and then jerking them aside and giving a scared look up and down for a threatening car. Gault, leaning back, could see her profile clearly defined against the pale square of the window. On the little seat in front of them she had dropped all her parcels, and a bunch of violets that she had thrust into a convenience for that purpose filled the carriage with its soft and subtle fragrance. Outside, the bells of the cars clanged furiously, and at moments the rain was dashed against the window and then diverted.

“Well, Tishy,” he said, “what 's the com-

munication you 're going to make? As far as I know, when a lady speaks solemnly of having an important matter to impart, it only means one thing."

"What 's that?" asked Letitia, without responding to the raillery of his tone.

"That she is going to be married."

"Well, that 's just it," she answered, and continued to look out of the window.

"What?"

Gault leaned forward and tried to see what her face revealed. It was handsome as ever, calm and imperturbable.

"That 's just it," she repeated, turning toward him and letting her eyes dwell gravely on his. "That 's what I wanted to talk to you about."

"Tishy!" he ejaculated. "Why, you amaze me!"

"Why should I?" she queried. "Everybody gets married sometime or other."

"I know, but—who is it?"

"Tod McCormick."

"Oh, Letitia!" he exclaimed in quite a different tone—a man's tone of sudden revolt and protest. "Tod McCormick?"

"Yes, of course, Tod McCormick. I should think you would have guessed him in a minute."

"He 's the last person I ever should have thought of."

“Well, is n’t that odd! Everybody knows Tod’s been fond of me. It’s been going on for years—five or six, I should think.”

“A woman does n’t marry a man because he happens to be fond of her. She marries a man because she happens to be fond of him.”

“She sometimes does—if she’s very lucky, and things turn out exactly right. But things don’t often turn out exactly right. Besides, I like Tod.”

“Yes—like him, of course. Everybody likes him. Maud likes him, and Mortimer, and, I’ve no doubt, hundreds of other people. But liking’s a poor sort of thing to marry on. It’s a bad substitute for love. A woman ought to love the man she marries.”

“Yes, I suppose she ought; and in novels she always does—unless she hates him terribly. But in real life girls don’t love or hate so desperately as all that. We just go along easily, taking things as they come.”

“Why are you going to marry him, if you don’t love him?” he asked in a tone of irritation.

“I think it’s better to marry. You see, there is n’t really anything else for a girl like me to do. Besides,—don’t misunderstand me,—I tell you I like him very much.”

He ignored the remark and said:

“I don’t see what you want to marry for at all. Wait till the right man comes along.”

“Oh, the right man!” she answered, with a little laugh which was the nearest approach to a bitter laugh he had ever heard from her. “That ’s what they keep telling us. But we may have met the right man, and he ’s never found out that he was the right man, or perhaps has n’t felt that we were the right woman.”

“A man must be a fool if he can’t see when a woman cares for him,” he answered.

For a moment Letitia looked silently out of the window; then she continued, but without turning her head: “Men seem to think that women can marry any one they want. We have to wait till we ’re asked. And the men that ask us are not always the men that we would like the best. Novelists would make you think a girl has nothing to do but make her choice from dozens of suitors who are all crazy about her. But that ’s not true—not in California, anyway. I ’ve only had three real offers in my life, and I ’ve got money, and”—she made a little pause, and then added bravely —“and I ’m handsome.”

Gault leaned forward, and, in a sudden élan of admiration for the honest, simple, strong-hearted creature, took her hand.

“Dearest Tishy,” he said, “don’t do this. Don’t make a hasty marriage with a man who is—who is—not worthy of you.”

Her hand remained motionless for a moment, and then she drew it away.

“Don’t say that. Tod ’s quite worthy of me,” she answered. “He ’s a first-rate fellow, but you never liked him, and so you never appreciated his good points. He’s not good-looking, and that ’s made people misunderstand him.”

Gault smothered a groan, and she went on:

“You asked me why I wanted to marry at all. There ’s nothing else for a woman in my position to do. I ’m not bright. I can’t do anything like writing, or painting, or making statues. All I do now is to help Maud when she has dinners, and talk to the dull people. And you know”—her voice dropping to a key of naïve confidence—“I sometimes feel that I ’d like to have a home of my own—a house where I could do just what I liked, and have the sort of people I liked to dinner. Maud does n’t care for the kind of people I do.”

“Why don’t you have it, then? You ’re of age; you ’re financially independent. You can do exactly what you like. You seem to forget that this is the United States at the end of the nineteenth century.”

“No, I don’t forget; but that does n’t make it any easier for me. I can’t go off and live all by myself. And think what a fuss Mortimer and Maud would make! It would drive Maud crazy if I did that. People would say I ’d

quarreled with her, and she can't stand people saying things like that. I don't like it, either. And it would hurt Mortimer's feelings dreadfully. He 'd think I was n't happy with them. You could n't make him understand. Besides, I don't want to live in a house of my own all alone. I 'd die of the blues. Think how dismal I 'd be with nobody but servants and Chinamen!"

Gault looked out of the window near him and made no immediate response. The appearance of squalor which marked the street was intensified by the rain, which was now falling heavily. Already the pavements shone with the greasiness of well-tramped mud. Miserable pedestrians, without umbrellas and in scanty clothes, stood under the dripping projections before show-windows, looking out with yellow, dejected faces. Others plodded drearily onward, their heads lowered against the descending flood. Women passed, with bare, red hands gripping at their sodden skirts. In the depths of the dark interiors Gault had seen so often, lights were being kindled that shone like small red sparks in the thick, smothering gloom. Without turning from the window, he said:

"But why marry Tod? If you want liberty, a larger and more independent life, why not choose some one else?"

Letitia was silent for a moment. Then she said in rather an offended tone:

"There 's nothing so dreadful about Tod. I don't like the way you speak about him. It sounds as if he was idiotic or deformed. I like him more than I do almost any one. I respect him, too. And then," she added, in one of her uncontrollable bursts of candor, "there 's nobody else wants to marry me."

Gault gave an annoyed ejaculation. The carriage turned from the main thoroughfare and began jolting over the cobbles of a paved street.

"Then wait till somebody better does," he said. "Heavens, Letitia! to think of you, that I 've always looked upon as a model of reason and sense and intelligence, throwing yourself away like this, when five—ten years from now will be time enough for you to marry."

"I 'll be twenty-seven next month," replied Letitia, with her ruthless regard for veracity.

The carriage here stopped at a high-stooped porch, and the coachman, alighting, delivered Letitia's message. While they waited, silence rested between its occupants, and continued when they were once more rattling over the uneven cobbles toward the wider street they had recently left.

Darkness had settled by this time, and the lamps were breaking out in every direction,

the long lines of the rain looking like threads of glass against their light. The force of the storm was augmenting. The drops beat on the top of the carriage with a drumming, pugnacious violence, and now and then dashed across the window. There were already pools in the hollows of the pavement, and from bent gutter-pipes long ribbons of water, torn by the gusts, sprang down on unwary passers-by.

Letitia took her handkerchief and rubbed away the moisture on the pane. She was looking out on the spectacle of the swimming streets with apparent interest. The conversation had not been resumed. She had nothing more to say, and Gault sat back in his corner immersed in silent thought. Once he had asked her if her engagement to Tod was a fully accomplished and recognized fact. To this she had replied that it was not, exactly, as Tod was to receive her final answer on the following Sunday, but that as far as she was concerned it was a settled thing.

Leaning back in the darkened corner, Gault bitterly inveighed against the social system which allows such a mismating; against the narrowing laws of conventionality which had fettered so strong a spirit as Letitia; above all, against that weakness of the woman which makes life alone so impossible to her unsufficing and dependent spirit. What a fate for this

creature, so rich and tender in her splendid womanhood! Letitia to make such a marriage—Letitia, whom nature had designed to be some strong man's guide and solace, to be the queen of a gracious home, the mother of tall sons and blooming daughters! It was a sacrilege.

The carriage rolled out upon Market Street, amid a din of car-bells and the roar of intersecting streams of traffic. The outlines of the high newspaper buildings were hazy in the blur of the rain, but their illuminated windows seemed dotting the sky far up toward the zenith, where they burst into a splutter of lights. From every point cars seemed to be advancing, with their lanterns shooting rays through the wet, and stretches of pavement and pools of water gave forth sudden gleams. The whole scene, lights magnified and outlines erased by the rain, had a chaotic, broken effect of glaring radiance and softly dark, looming vagueness.

Letitia again rubbed the window and leaned forward. Her companion could see the outline of her head against the light, as if it were a silhouette backgrounded with gold-leaf. Why should he not marry her? Would he not be a better mate for her than the witless and sickly boy to whom she intended binding her blooming youth, for whom she would pour out the treasures of her heart and reveal the sacred

places of a nature that he could never understand or appreciate?

She did not care for Tod. Her very assertions of a liking for him seemed to the man of the world proof of her indifference. He could make her care for him. He was certain of it. He was certain that even now she had more real affection for him—far removed from love though it was—than she had for the brainless lad who next Sunday would be her acknowledged fiancé.

What was the use of wasting a life in regrets for what was past, for what was irrevocably gone? Alone, he would go drearily on, forever dreaming of his lost paradise. He was so wretched in the isolation of his own accusing loneliness! Life was slipping by him un-lived. The future loomed dark and terrible, bereft of hope and promise. He cowered before its vast, cold emptiness. There was nothing that offered him a refuge from its enveloping despair but an affection in which he could forget the might-have-beens that now were unforgettable. The dreariness of that long road would only be beguiled by a loved presence at his side, a soft hand in his. And he would make Letitia happy—a thousand times happier than she would be with Tod.

His thoughts reached an abrupt decision. He leaned forward.

"Letitia," he said, in a tone the low pitch of which did not conceal a peremptory note.

"Yes," she answered rather listlessly, without turning from the window.

"I have something to say to you."

"Is it that you 're going to be married, too?" she asked, smiling.

"No—at least, I don't know. Listen to me. I want—"

She checked him with a sudden cry, and leaned forward, staring out of the window.

"Oh, John—wait! That girl! Did you see her? I'm almost sure it was Viola Reed."

In an instant every thought of Letitia had vanished from his mind.

"Where?" he said. "What girl? Which way did she go?"

"Look out of the back window," said Letitia, greatly excited. "Do you see her? A woman in black, walking quickly. I just caught a glimpse of her side face as she moved her umbrella, and it looked very like."

Through the small back window Gault saw the woman—a slender figure in black, the head bent forward under the fronting shield of her umbrella. As she passed a lamp he saw the gleam of blond hair. She was walking so rapidly that already she was some distance away. He pulled the strap, and the carriage came to a jolting halt.

“Letitia,” he said, turning toward her and trying to speak quietly, “you ’ll excuse me, won’t you? I ’m going to get out. Yes, I ’m going to follow her—I must. I don’t know whether it ’s she or not, but it may be. Good night.”

He was out and the door shut before Letitia could answer. As the carriage rolled on she turned and through the window followed his pursuing figure with eagerly interested eyes.

It was Viola. At the end of the block she turned into the florist’s, where she had agreed to come and spend the evening helping Miss Gladys on some extra orders. She passed through the store into the room beyond, and, donning her black apron, was soon busy. The two girls were working and talking together when Gault stopped at the street door and swept the flower-scented interior with a searching gaze. He had done this at every shop on the block. Yet, though he went up and down, hunting in every corner, in every darkened doorway where she might possibly have sought shelter, she had disappeared as completely as if the passing glimpse of her had been a vision.

Letitia had evidently made a mistake. Slowly through the rain Gault walked home to his rooms.

It was two hours later when Viola started to leave the florist's. The storm was raging with all the malignant intensity of driving rain and a wind that lay in wait at corners and sprang upon the wayfarer. She made part of her journey on the electric car, but the long climb up the hill had to be accomplished on foot. About this high point the wind met few obstacles, and swept by, shouting hoarsely in the joy of its freedom.

It played with Viola like a cat with a mouse — at one moment swept her forward in a sail-like spread of skirt, at the next turned upon her, buffeting her furiously back against the streaming walls, tearing at her hat, driving the rain into her face, down her neck, up her sleeves. It seized her umbrella and whisked it this way and that, while she held its handle and helplessly followed its eccentric course. When half-way up the hill she was forced to shut it, and then, angry with her for thus terminating its sport, the wind concentrated its spiteful anger upon her.

It blew steadily in her face, except at the moments when she crossed an intersecting street, Then it seemed to blow from all points at once, seizing her and shaking her, whirling her about, throwing her against a gate or into the drenched, yielding leafage of a hedge, and then creeping up behind her and beating against her with a

force that almost sent her on her face. Her clothes clung to her, saturated and heavy, confining her limbs with their clammy hold. The water streamed off her hat and oozed out of her shoes. Once she was forced to take shelter on a door-step, under the jutting roof of a balcony. From this she crept onward, clinging close to the walls, down which water ran in wide rills, and where long strands of creepers struck her with their wet leaves. Once in the cottage, she threw her clothes out of the window on the balcony, and crept shivering to bed.

The storm wore itself away in the course of the week, to be followed by an interval of bright weather, and then by other storms. There were short ones, when the rain came and went with a sudden rolling up of clouds and breaks of blue, and the sun burst out hopefully and licked up the moisture. There were long ones, when the rain fell in warm, rustling floods, copious but gentle, that assuaged the earth's thirst and poured down in silvery lances from a low, swollen sky. There were blustering ones, that lashed the windows and threshed against the pavements, flooded the sewers, and tried to force an entrance through opened casements and doors left ajar. And then the great, conscientious, businesslike ones, which went on day after day, oblivious of anything but their duty to thoroughly saturate

the dry ground far down through its parched crust to where the seeds lay waiting for the moisture that was to give them life.

So the time wore on till Christmas began to loom close at hand, and all the town was agog with its holiday shopping.

Maud Gault and Letitia splashed about the dripping streets in a hired coupé, which returned from every trip full of packages. Mortimer went alone to Shreve's and bought his wife and sister-in-law costly surprises. John ordered his presents,—there were a good many of them,—all but the beautiful turquoise clasp for Letitia, which he selected himself. Tod gave his mother money to buy his sisters suitable gifts, but took with him a friend of acknowledged taste when he went to choose the necklet of small diamonds and emeralds that was to carry his greetings to the fortunate Miss Mason.

On Christmas eve Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer Gault gave a large dinner for their sister, whose engagement to Mr. Theodore McCormick had been announced a short time before. Society had often predicted this finale to the attachment which it was known Mr. Theodore McCormick had long cherished for Miss Mason. Society did not concern itself about Miss Mason's sentiments on the subject. That Mr. Theodore McCormick was the only son of Jerry McCormick, one of the richest of the bonanza

men, was supposed to be sufficient ground for Miss Mason to have been pleased and flattered by his choice of herself. Society regarded her as a very lucky girl.

John Gault had gone to this dinner reluctantly. The thought of Letitia's marriage with Tod was as repulsive to him after a month had familiarized his mind with it, as it had been on the day Letitia told him of it. That the large-hearted girl, whose simple honesty of nature he had learned long ago to respect and rely on, was to give the freshness and beauty of her life to the feeble and half-bred son of a day-laborer, seemed to him a sacrilege worthy of the days of Molech. He had seen little of Letitia lately. When he had been at his brother's she had generally been absent, staying at the McCormicks', or dining elsewhere with Tod. Whatever her feelings for her fiancé were, Gault saw that, with her unswerving obedience to convention and duty, she was evidently doing her best to understand and grow fond of him.

To-night, however, at the dinner, he saw that a change had taken place in her. It was so subtle, so illusive, so hard to define, that for a space he watched her surreptitiously, wondering what it was. Yet even as he shook hands with her in the moment of greeting, he saw it in her face, he felt it radiating from her,

like the warm individual atmosphere that is said to encompass us and contain the color of our personality.

Her eyes dwelt on his with a bright, soft inner look of happiness, but happiness aloof and far away from him. The impersonal, cold sweetness of her glance seemed to put him at a great distance, to herd him together with all the hundred other casual people that she knew and spoke to, and liked and forgot. Some mysterious influence had suddenly withered their friendship. Its richness and reality were gone, and as he met that sparkling, conscious, and yet distant glance, he realized that Letitia was no longer his friend, nor yet his enemy, but from henceforth would be the same Letitia to him that she was to his brother, that she had once been to Tod.

She was in love with Tod McCormick. It was incredible, inconceivable, but true. He saw it in the abashed and yet proud consciousness of her manner to him, in her averted eye, in the indefinable softening of her whole presence when the meager-visaged lad addressed her. Inside she glowed with the consciousness of the developing of her life; but her eyes only let a little of the inner light out in their shy shining. That was why they had lost their look of a dear, comfortable intimacy when they met his. Now they said that all that was over,

a remnant of freedom that must die with girlhood and its other relinquished liberties. Everything belonged to some one else now—not love alone, but interest, loyalty, confidence, duty. The rest of the world was only to get that cool interest, that gentle, remote kindness, which is the husk of the woman's heart. The kernel was for her mate. With her maidenhood would end for Letitia all life but such as bore on the life of her husband.

Gault had lost her, even as he had lost Viola. He had thought of marriage removing her from the close, interested friendliness of the old days, but he had never realized that it would wean her from him with this cold completeness. She wore the semblance of the Letitia of the past, with strange, bright, alien eyes, and a soft hand that held his with the slack, indifferent clasp of polite acquaintance. Women—would he ever understand them? Would any man? What mystery was behind their white foreheads and under their white breasts?

A rush of unutterable sadness, of dreary, sick depression, overwhelmed him. He was hardly able to respond intelligently to the conversational inanities of Pearl, who sat beside him. A numbing consciousness of the futility and hopelessness of life invaded him, and with it, in the midst of the noise and glitter of the brilliant scene, a sense of isolation and a yearning

for the woman who, in this gay throng, would have felt lonely as he, and have turned to him as her one soul-mate. Suppose to-night she had been waiting for him in the bare parlor down near South Park!

A sudden resolve seized upon him. As soon as dinner was over he excused himself to Mrs. Gault and Letitia, hurried on his overcoat, and slipped away.

It had been raining all day—the warm, abundant rain of late December. The breath of the night was softly damp, and fragrant with scents from the saturated gardens. The avenue was deserted and noiseless, save for the even rustle of the falling flood, which made the asphalt shine like ice, into which the lamps' reflections stabbed in long, broken poniards. Nobody was abroad. It was Christmas eve. There were wreaths in the lighted windows, and sounds of singing now and then fell upon Gault's ear.

He boarded the car which crossed the avenue farther down, and sat in the glare of its lamps, his face fallen into lines of spiritless apathy. When it reached its terminus he alighted.

There were life and movement enough here. People were jostling on the sloppy sidewalks; umbrellas struck against umbrellas, sometimes, in an elbow-brushing contact, caught together, and were dragged apart with a spatter-

ing of moisture over laughing faces. The rain dripped monotonously down on them, between them, across the glare of windows, over the rheumy halo of lamps, off the cope of cornices and the angles of gutters. The even roar of Market Street was broken into by the deep voices of hilarious men and the shrill notes of women. Raucous laughter was interrupted by the sudden petulant wail of tired children. Over all the light of show-windows poured in a steady glare, unsoftened by the veil of rain. It was reflected from innumerable wet surfaces, uncovered faces that were moist, draperies beaded with drops, bits of sidewalk, pools in little hollows, and the black and gleaming bosses of hundreds of umbrellas.

Gault, unheeded and unheeding, hurried through the press, crossed Market Street, and plunged into the region beyond. There were crowds here too, and lights and laughter, brilliant windows that sent gushes of raw radiance across the sidewalks, and Christmas shoppers as busy as those on the other side of the city's great dividing artery. Even in the old street, among the brooding palaces, there was a faint show of life. In one there were lights in the second-story windows. Against the ground-glass panels in the massive front door of another the circular forms of two wreaths were outlined. The iron gate of its bulky neighbor grated

grudgingly to give egress to an expressman carrying parcels.

In the smaller streets down which he had so often passed, the windows were alight and, according to the gracious custom of the time, the blinds were undrawn. Sometimes he had a glimpse of darkling interiors, where, alone and glittering frostily in its fairy trimmings, the tree stood, not to be revealed until the morrow. But in many homes they were keeping Christmas eve. The rifled branches, sparkling even in their despoilment, were a-wink with candles. The children clustered about, some flushed and excited, others sitting solemnly among their presents, examining them with grave and pouting intentness. There were mothers with sleeping babies in their arms, and fathers explaining the mechanism of wondrous, uncomprehended toys. They were the city's humblest and least prosperous homes; yet, hidden by the veil of night, a man, rich in all they lacked, stood staring in at them, wistful, heart-hungry, and envious.

He turned the last corner, and the small shape of the colonel's old house defined itself among the surrounding buildings. In the kindly dark it looked as it used to, and he approached slowly, letting his gaze wander over its façade and dwell on the homely bulge of the bay-window, whence, as of old, light broke in

cracks and splinters on the small panes of glass on either side of the front door, on the steps, and the porch that used to sag down to one side, and the gate between its squat brick posts.

There was no one on the street, but a block away he could hear the measured tread of Policeman O'Hara on his customary beat from the saloon at the corner to the saloon in the middle of the block. Beyond this there was nothing but the whispering fall of the rain and its warm breath. Then, as he drew nearer, he passed into an atmosphere of delicate, illusive sweetness that told him the jasmine-tree by the gate was in flower. It recalled vividly other times when he had come—but not to stand outside this way, a stranger in the rain.

He advanced slowly. The street was deserted; no one was there to spy upon him. What would he have felt if to-night he had known she was there, and he was coming to see her—coming like a lover to see her, when the door opened to feel her little hand cold in his, and her lips softly respond to his welcoming kiss—the kiss that had never been given, that was never now to be returned! He would not pass by, but would stop at the gate just for a moment, and dream that she was waiting. He paused, and then started with a suppressed exclamation.

Some one was standing close in front of him in the shadow of the jasmine-tree, and almost

concealed by its foliage. He could not see whether the figure was that of a man or woman, could only trace the outline of a form through the darkness and rain. Whoever it was, he had not been heard,—the fall of the rain muffling other sounds,—and he was now close at hand. As he stood, undecided whether to pass on or turn back, the figure made a stealthy movement with its arm—appeared to part the flexible jasmine branches and through the aperture look at the house. The head was thus presented to Gault in partial profile, spotted over with the moving lights that filtered between the leaves. He saw it was a woman's, crowned with some sort of small, close hat. She seemed to be watching the house. The light caught the curve of her cheek; it was gleaming with moisture.

“She must be soaking,” he thought, “with no umbrella,” and made a step forward.

She heard and started, and, still mechanically holding the branches back, turned and looked at him. For one moment, like a memory from another life, he saw her face in the light.

“Viola!” he cried, as a man might cry to whom the beloved dead stood suddenly revealed.

She gave a gasping ejaculation and let go the branches. In the sudden blotting out of the light he lost her, and, in his terror and superstitious dread, he thought he had seen a vision.

“Viola,” he cried again, “stay with me! love me! forgive me! I’ve prayed for you—I’ve longed for you—I’ve died for you! Don’t leave me now! There is no life for me without you!”

She came forward beyond the dark shadow of the tree, and the light shone full on her. He might still have thought her a vision, for her face was transfigured with a look that seemed hardly of this earth. But the woman that he held in his arms was warm with life, the lips against his gave back his kiss.

A few moments later Policeman O’Hara, having extended his beat beyond the saloons, saw what he supposed to be a single figure standing opposite Robson’s house under a dripping umbrella. As he approached, it suddenly resolved itself into two figures, and walked away from him under the umbrella.

“Well, I’ll be jiggered!” murmured the bewildered policeman. “Have I got it that bad so early in the evenin’?”

And judging that his case was gone too far for help, he dropped into another saloon.

The two figures under the one umbrella walked down the street, out and away through the rain, seeing nothing but the vistas of glory which open before those who for one moment stand upon the pinnacle of life.

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