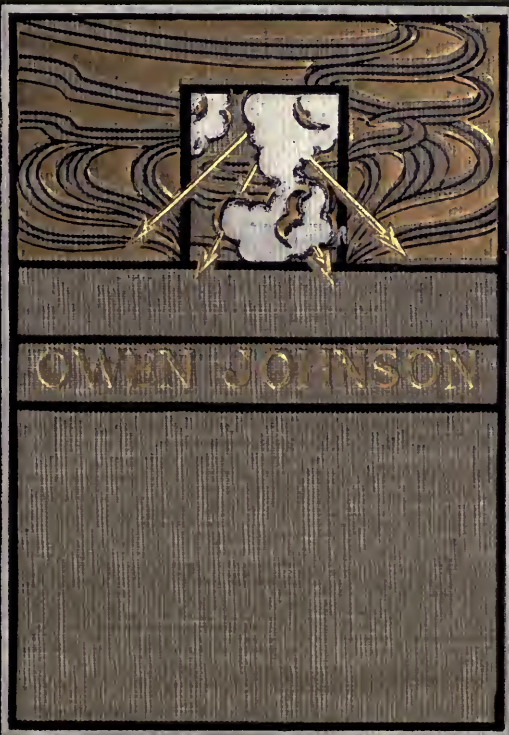


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ARROWS OF THE ALMIGHTY

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ARROWS OF THE ALMIGHTY

BY

OWEN JOHNSON

New York

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Arrows of the Almighty

CHAPTER I

WHEN, in the year 182-, Madame Crofton plunged Baltimore society into a furor by the announcement of a fancy-dress ball which, it was rumored, would eclipse in splendor all similar functions in the annals of the historic city, Emily Orkney, then an orphan of sixteen and the ward of a bachelor uncle, astounded her easy-going guardian by announcing one morning that she had made up her mind to attend.

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed Colonel Pickstaff, dropping his eye-glasses, "is the child utterly out of her head?"

"No, uncle," said a very sweet and very imperious voice, "not utterly — and I am not a child, I am sixteen," and she gave a toss of her head that sent the blue-black curls whirling across her cheeks. "I have put my foot down — there! do you see? I shall go; so say no more, and bring me my invitation to-night."

The veteran of the late war looked about him helplessly. "And will your highness condescend to tell me," he said tartly, "what has put this ridiculous idea into your head?"

The girl established herself on the arm of an opposite chair, clasping her hands over one knee and laughing down at his perplexity, but with a pout that refused all other answer.

"Are you going to tell me, eh?"

"M-m—yes."

With a sudden spring, she ran to the end of the room and courtesied before the tall French mirror. "Because my glass tells me I am young, uncle." Then she added saucily, when she had danced back before him, "and very beautiful."

"Great God!" exclaimed Colonel Pickstaff, startled into an oath, "what next?"

The girl caught her hands behind her and threw back her head, glancing down at him over her shoulders with a sudden arching of her eyebrows and a tempting contraction of her lips.

"Am I not?" she cried, stamping impatiently on the carpet, "am I not? I defy you to contradict me. Oh, uncle, uncle, you can't, you can't!"

To his shame the colonel stared and stared and found no answer.

"And no sarcastic remarks upon women, sir," continued the young lady, returning to her perch on the opposite chair. "There! I intend to enter the world, to be a terrible coquette, to have a court. M-m, but won't the ladies be furious when I attach all the beaux? And if you are very, very good, and do just what I say, I will tell you all about the campaign."

"Go on, go on," groaned the dumfounded bachelor. "What more?—humph!—strikes me you are very confident, miss."

"Oh," cried the girl, with a careless wave of her hand, "I have seen them follow me with their eyes so often, in the streets, on horseback, and oh, uncle, even in the sanctity of the church! oh! oh!"

The colonel groaned in spirit.

"Who is the reigning belle to-day? Tell me that,"

she added, abandoning her perch. "Harriet Fargate? And why Miss Harriet? Because Tilghman Blake is in her train. Now, uncle, listen — both ears. I will give him not a week, not two days, but just one night — the night of the ball — to come to my feet, these very feet, sir," she added, bending over with a mischievous face and drawing up her skirt to display what the old colonel acknowledged in his heart to be the daintiest of feet and the slimmest of ankles.

"Indeedy, Miss Flyaway!" he growled, however, as much astonished at her knowledge of the world as at her successive caprices, "will you permit me again to inquire the reasons of such confidence?"

"You great goose of an uncle," she cried, with a rippling laugh, her cheeks, nevertheless, giving symptoms of a blush "why — by — why — by the way he looks at me, of course."

It was on the tip of her tongue to add, "and by the way I shall look at him," but she curbed herself, not wishing to enrage him too far. "And now — I am waiting."

"And so you shall wait, miss!" burst out the latter, with rising choler. "No more of this nonsense. Get you an invitation, after such rigmarole? I'll be hanged first!" and clapping on his hat and snatching up his cane, he flung himself out of the door.

"Perhaps," she called after him, running to the threshold, "but you'll get my invitation just the same."

And she must have been right. For on the night of the ball, though Madame Crofton had the famous Imperial Orchestra down from New York; though General Fogy himself had personally taken command of the transformation of the hall until the decorations had converted the walls into hedges and bowers, and every pillar had

become a tree in blossom; though the quality drove in for thirty miles around: though a score of statesmen and gallant officers marched and countermarched along the hall; though in the masquerade a hundred heroes and heroines of a hundred climes and ages, such as had never met before this side the rolling Styx, promenaded and bowed with the utmost self-possession to ancestors and succeeding generations, — still the event of the fête was admitted by all the men to have been the introduction into society of Emily Orkney.

She had elected to appear as Ophelia, wilfully scouting the notion of desecrating with powder her blue-black tresses. Miss Fargate, who by a strange coincidence had chosen the same character, was quite eclipsed. The men wavered, broke ranks, and deserted *en masse* to the Pretender. She received their allegiance as a matter of course, and smiled with perfect equanimity at the outrageous compliments of the old beaux, those bugbears of débutantes. Her cousin, Roscoe Pickstaff, who had not so much as spoken to her these ten years, hurrying up to the edge of her court, she promptly ordered him to fetch Mr. Blake, and present him.

Mr. Roscoe, quite overcome, hurried off, and presently returned with Tilghman Blake as Hamlet under his arm.

Emily looked up at him steadily with such an arch twinkle in her eyes that the noble Dane, who had cherished but one possible interpretation of the summons, was entirely undeceived.

“I have a scolding in store for you,” said Ophelia, with a mischievous nod. “Oh, but it is a very serious one. Come, give me your arm, and invite me to dance.”

Another Ophelia was waiting to claim the number, but the mischievous eyes had made the traitor forget all else.

"Is the offence so serious?" he ventured, puzzled what address to assume. "Not beyond forgiveness, at any rate, I hope, Miss Orkney."

"That depends." The small foot began to tap the ground to the strains of the waltz. He put his arm about her, and they were off — lost in the crowd of dancers. "Do you know, sir, you have been fearfully rude to me?"

"What! rude?"

"Yes, rude. You have stared at me wherever you met me. I have been most displeased," she replied, frowning. "What answer have you ready, my lord Hamlet? Oh, no, no, no; there, you need not say it. General Fogy has said all that can be said, I assure you," she cried, cutting short his gallantry. "You are forgiven — on condition that you do not apologize."

Blake looked down, quite nonplussed, but thoroughly content, despite his experience, to be so overridden.

"There!" she cried, as the dance ended. "Splendid! There! You are to come back again. I have chosen you as my cavalier — Hamlet for Ophelia, you know."

Maybe he remembered another Ophelia waiting in not very good humor, alone in a corner; but if he did, he forgot to rectify his mistake. He was delighted with Emily's fire, her enjoyment, her spirits, her freshness, and (must it be confessed?) her imperious ways.

"What a pretty child that was you were dancing with," said Miss Harriet, carelessly, a little later. "Who can she be?"

"She is Emily Orkney," her partner answered, wondering at her ignorance.

"Emily? Impossible! Why, the child is only fourteen. She does make a very pretty gypsy."

"She's Ophelia too," he replied absently. Emily had

just floated by, her black hair straying across the dazzling white of her throat.

“Oph-e-lia!” Miss Harriet protested, with the rising inflection, but it was lost on the recreant.

“Why, yes, Ophelia. And you’re wrong; she must be seventeen, at least.”

“Oh, I dare say,” she answered quickly, seeing her blunder; “it is so hard to keep track. What a pretty girl she is!—a little cold in the eyes, don’t you think? You must dance often with her, Tilghman. It is her first ball. Do you know what that means to a girl? Why I remember—”

“What?” he asked, as she halted.

“Never mind,” she said abruptly. “Go, ask her now.”

She had been about to say — “I remember so well my first.” Miss Harriet, though indisputably in the height of her charms, had been out several years.

A moment later, as they passed, she stopped them, crying, as she offered her hand: “Why, Emily, my child, how pretty you have grown! You must come and sit with me, and talk over the time when I taught you to waltz.”

“Oh, thank you—*Miss Fargate*,” replied Emily, dropping her eyes. One would have thought Miss Harriet her grandmother, from the air of respect with which Emily made her courtesy.

When they had resumed dancing, she added to her partner, with a sly look, “You have the experience of many years; still, I wonder if you yet know the ways of women;” and Blake, who had missed all the fine play of Miss Fargate’s wit, understood.

“Do you-all know what they are calling Miss Fargate?” broke in a disloyal voice, as her cousin appeared for the quadrille.

"Miss Fargate? No."

"Ophelia's understudy."

Emily clapped her hands and laughed outright. On that moment she had almost made up her mind to forgive Roscoe the score of his cousinly neglect — almost, but not quite.

Colonel Pickstaff, who had been a witness to this little scene, looked on delighted. "Gad, what spirit she has!" he chuckled to himself. "How she has routed them all! I wouldn't have missed it for worlds," and with a wicked grin he moved over to condole with Mrs. Fargate, who had once done him the honor to refuse his hand.

When the evening came at length to a reluctant end, the havoc was something fearful. There was but one opinion among the men: the surrender was given unconditionally. The ball passed down into history as "The Rout of the Belles."

From that hour it was a continual triumph for the girl. Yet, though one after another deserted to her standard, she appeared outwardly indifferent, except to the pleasure of conquering.

"If you are going to make love to me," she would say, with a frown, "beware! If you will be my friend, here's my hand for good."

Very few long held possession of that hand; but when a young girl has delivered her warning and insisted upon a man's friendship—is she to be held for the consequences? Certainly not!

"Shall I marry?" she would exclaim boldly, when questioned. "Oh, yes, indeed! I shall marry at twenty, the very best match I can make, too, I assure you. For I intend to have a famous salon, like Madame de Staël, you know, or Madame de Rémusat," she would add,

with a confidential air, to her fox-hunting gallants, who would look very blank, never having met the ladies in question.

Toward the close of her second season, there arrived in Baltimore young Harry Gaunt, heir of the Gaunts of Delaware. After the fashion of the times, he had spent an elegant leisure at Oxford and in Paris, where he had conversed with Lamartine, Victor Hugo, and others of the Romantic School. He was in the heart of his youth, brilliant in conversation, "a man of parts," it was said, in every way fitted to make his mark.

Emily awaited with impatience the opportunity of trying the mettle of such a champion. When he was present at a ball on the second anniversary of the discomfiture of the belles, she attacked at once.

"I have heard a great deal of you," she said, looking him straight in the eyes, as she had done to so many others; "so much that I have been afraid to meet you lest you should disappoint me. Oh, I am going to take possession of you, I assure you. There is no escape, and you shall tell me all about London and Paris. Do you hear the music? Come, sir, are you going to invite me to dance?"

He stood at her side, overtopping every one in the room, eying the slim girl that barely reached to his shoulder. "I beg to be excused, Miss Orkney," he said stiffly; "I have just returned to my aunt's, and my first duty is to my cousin."

"What, a man of duty!" she cried, nettled at the failure of her attempt.

"A gentleman, I hope, Miss Orkney." He bowed and turned to go.

Acting on an impulse which she did not stop to control, she wheeled suddenly, and said:—

"I — I beg your pardon — it was very rude. You will forgive me, won't you, and ask me for the next?"

"I have heard of The Rout of the Belles," he said, drawing himself up, the strong, dark eyes bent on her with a glimmer of amusement. "They call you her Highness here, I believe. Is this too an order?"

She looked into his eyes, and for the first time in her life hers dropped. "I have been rude," she repeated; "it is an entreaty."

"Thank you," he said hurriedly. Her look and the sweetness of her voice had won where her coquetry had failed. On that instant he would have consigned duty and his cousin to oblivion to have held her in his arms.

They danced together again and again — now silent, now conversing on a dozen topics until all the room was talking of them. At the end the mischief would out in her. "If your duty made you give your cousin the first dance," she said, stealing a sly look, "don't you think you should have danced with her at least once again?"

At such moments every woman is a gambler. She knew what was coming as he looked at her steadily. She hesitated, seeking a chance to escape. "Tell me," he said, "you are glad I refused you, aren't you?"

She was fairly answered. She turned her head away.

"Tell me," he insisted.

"Yes," she replied, forced to meet his eyes. Then she left him.

Six months later she told her uncle of the engagement. Southerner and churchgoer that he was, he grew purple with anger. "Give my consent to your marrying a French atheist," he burst out, "a man who admires Voltaire? Never! never! Marry, marry

if you dare; but if you do, never enter my house again!"

"I enter your house again?" she cried, drawing herself up to her fullest height, her eyes burning. "You forgive me? Sir, from this moment you are dead to me. You insult my husband. You dare to oppose my choice? I say to you from this moment you no longer exist to me, and never, never shall I set eyes on you again."

The old fellow was quite overcome at her temper. He ran to the door. He entreated her from the street; but she was gone, never to return.

People shook their heads when the engagement was published. Not a few announced openly that they pitied *him*. She would lead him the deuce of a canter. When Mrs. Blake (*née* Fargate) read the announcement she exclaimed: "Emily Orkney married! Tilghman, dear, who is Harry Gaunt? I never heard of him, but I am afraid he will have a hard time controlling her."

His back was turned to her. He was silent for a moment. Then he said slowly:—

"No; if she really loves him, they will be happy, and if she finds she doesn't, her pride will never let any one know it, not even her husband."

"It is her children I pity," she said abruptly, and that was the common opinion.

So they were married, and started away on their bridal trip, and the gossips in the pews, even as the wedding procession passed down the aisle, were whispering, "I hope he can hold her," and not a few declared openly that it was a pity such a promising young fellow should have married a flyaway wife, who hungered for society and longed for nothing but admiration.

Three years after their marriage the Gaunts suddenly departed from Baltimore, and retired to Belle River, on the Eastern Shore, where lay the old family estates of the Orkneys. Mrs. Grundy was, of course, triumphant. Her prediction had come true. Poor Harry Gaunt! In a week Emily Gaunt's character was scattered in shreds. What could not be said of her? When a man suddenly carries his wife off to the country, and shuts her up—"yes, shuts her up," says Mrs. Grundy, with uplifted hands, "what *ought* not to be said?"

CHAPTER II

THE doctor's gig came to a stop before the gate. "Black as Lucifer down that avenue," cried a cheery voice from the inside, "Joe, be quick about it! Curse these gates." A negro sprang to the ground, shot the latch, closed it behind again, and was back in the carriage with a speed that spoke well for the master's authority. The gig rolled briskly ahead into the gloom of the long avenue, where the bordering beeches and maples hung as rustling curtains over the way, and ahead the lights of Windrift glimmered like two rising stars.

"Hold that lantern out," commanded the same voice. "Lower—that's it—keep it there. Go on now with what you were telling me."

"Lor', Marse Tom," began a guttural voice, "I only knows what Sol done tell me. He say Mistah Gaunt a-goin' to de debbil jess fas' he kin go."

"Drinking?"

"No, sah, not dat. Sol say he ack some time lak he were ha'nted. He say he seen his a'm one day, and it were all cov'ed wid little black scratches."

"What?" the master cried, now thoroughly alert. "Did he see that?"

"Yes, sah. Sol say he take some kin' o' medicine in his a'm make him feel funny. He done tole me de name, but I clar' it clean gone out o' ma haid."

"Humph, morphine?" the other asked, after a little hesitation.

"Yes, sah! dat's it—I t'ink dat's it."

The master drew in a long whistle and said sharply, "How did Sol know that?"

"De druggis' man ober in Belle Ribber done tole him so — I spec' he see Mistah Gaunt a-gittin' it dah."

"Damn all niggers," said the other under his breath. "Well, it don't need a nigger to see what's doing there." Then he added aloud, "There ain't a word of truth in it, Joe, and don't let me catch you repeating it. I reckon you'll be telling as big stories about me soon."

"Fo' de Lo'd, Marse Tom!"

"There, there," broke in the other, "you know you will. But just let me catch you once, and I'll sell you down to Georgia. Now jump out — another cursed gate."

The sound of a fiddle drifted over from the quarters as they came to a halt before the block, the blazing windows of Windrift at their side, the tall white pillars looming indistinct over the steps. The door opened with a stream of light, a couple of negroes in buff livery came out, and then, holding a lantern in front of him, a short man with a broken nose, a shock of hair that was red, brown, or grizzled in streaks, and quick eyes that seemed to take in at once every detail of the scene.

"Doctor Magog — I recognize your animal," said the man with the lantern, sending its beams into the carriage.

"Coming, Captain Brace, coming, as fast at this waistband of mine will let me. Hey — um — hah! Give me a push, Joe. There!" and with a tug and a squeeze a round little body landed on the steps. "Pretty tight quarters for an old gourmand, eh, Captain Ned?" laughed the doctor, patting his waistcoat, and showing a pair of rosy cheeks, and an eye ready for a frolic.

"Confound you, we'd about given you up, Doctor," greeted the captain, clapping him on the shoulder and

wringing his hand. "Good gad, think of that,—it would have broken up the party. There's none like Tom to keep the fun going, is there? No one plays such a devilish close hand, either."

"Go on, you're worse than a woman, Captain," the doctor exclaimed, highly pleased. "Lord bless you, I wouldn't miss a chance to get back at Cousin Bob Troutman after that last game of ours, if I had to walk here."

"And you'll do it, by gad, I'll back you to do it," the other cried, slipping his arm through the doctor's. "I offered to bet your cousin you would, just now. You can worst him six times out of seven, you know you can. But I tell you right now, Doctor, that seventh time any one's got to go down. That's the chances of the game, eh?"

"So it is, so it is," the doctor answered, somewhat mollified, as they were in the hall. "And I never did hear tell of such a run of cards as I had that night. Sure — there's Cousin Bob now." He flung his hat to a servant and ran into the parlor, stretching out both hands, crying briskly, "Good evening — evening every one — Colonel Spott — Cousin Bob — Harry!"

Two gentlemen in blue tail-coats with brass buttons and trim buff waistcoats, who were sitting, or rather reclining, in their chairs before the empty hearth, discussing a pitcher of apple toddy, started up: one, Colonel Spott, a lank, sharp man, with military beak and whiskers; the other, Troutman, a large comfortable figure in choking neckcloths, who gave the newcomer a pudgy hand and said in a piping voice, "Cousin Tom, I'm your man."

A third figure, head and shoulders above the rest, erect and taciturn before the fireplace, turned a pallid face and large black eyes, glowing as though they actu-

ally had the power to see in the dark and advancing one hand from behind his back, shook the doctor's, and as quickly withdrew it from sight again. It was the master of Windrift.

"Thought I never should get here, Harry," apologized the doctor. "Had a patient. Such things will happen, you know," he chuckled.

"It isn't late," said the master of the house absently; "shall we begin? What do you say?"

"Give the man time to wet his whistle, Harry," broke in Captain Brace. "Did you ever see such a one for the cards? Sol, hand up that apple toddy. Tom, a glass?"

"A glass? yes, yes!" answered the doctor, and then, noticing his host's impatience, he cried, with a cock of his eye, "Come on, gentlemen. I, for one, say let's get down to work. Cousin Bob, be on your guard to-night, I must have my revenge."

The master of the house, looking relieved, called a servant and gave orders. The candelabra were taken from the mantel and placed on the table. The gentlemen, without further urging, drew out the chairs, the cards were brought, shuffled, and cut, and the play began. The burst of candles threw a circle of light upon the table, strewn with the color of cards and the flash of coin. Beyond their pale the great drawing-room fell back into shadow and dusk, out of which, at one end, loomed a high balcony. In the fireplace the sticks had died down to cinders, while along the walls the negroes glided noiselessly, watching the play, — figures with rolling white eyes, indistinct as the shallow paintings above. Within the circle the faces of the five players stood out against the blackness, each varying emotion showing in the light of the candles, that light

which alone seems to draw to the surface the innermost thoughts of men.

"Hello! here's John," said Troutman, as the door suddenly opened, and a boy of twelve or thirteen, overgrown and awkward, came in. He shook hands with the guests, and, somewhat constrained and conscious, took a stand at the side of his father, looking on curiously from under his stern, sharply arched eyebrows. At times he shifted about the table, his strong gray eyes staring at the players with that insistent inquisitiveness of childhood which renders its object uneasily aware of being analyzed.

"Curse the luck," at length burst out Doctor Magog, throwing down his cards. "Cousin Bob, I don't call this revenge."

"Cousin Tom, I agree with you; you are right, sir—it is not your revenge," Squire Troutman replied, inflating his cheeks and rolling his little eyes slyly at the rest. "It's that patient, Tom, that's done it."

"Gad, I believe you're right," the doctor muttered, shrugging his shoulders. "I believe Joe Gamage did it."

"What, that old infidel, Joe Gamage?" Colonel Spott cried out, with a couple of army oaths. "Is that old heathen down?"

"Dead," the other said shortly.

"What!"

"Dead."

At this there was a burst of exclamations from the table, and even Harry Gaunt, who had been impatiently fingering his pile of coin, started in his chair, and then with an effort dropped his head, covering his eyes with a hand of even more striking pallor than his forehead.

"And what's more," said the doctor, in answer to the storm of questions, "he went off in a funk!"

"Tom, Tom! what's this story?" exclaimed Troutman. "What? the old atheist died in a funk?"

"In a funk? Gad, I wish you'd 'ave been there. In a funk? Why, he bellowed and shrieked like a stuck bull. I'm a professional man now, but I tell you, gentlemen, I never was so moved in all my life. He died, sir, in absolute fear—in abject terror, sir—and damn me, I wish I hadn't seen it."

"Good God, Doctor, enough, enough!" here broke in Captain Brace. "Why, you've thrown a chill over us already. A fine story to tell at a nice sociable party. Here, Sol—where the *devil* is that nigger? Here, bring round that brandy; this'll never do."

"Right, Ned, you're right, my boy," assented the doctor, recovering his spirits. "And none will drink deeper than I. But it'll take a taller glass than this to drown out to-night's doings, hang me if it won't."

He held up his glass throwing a curious glance toward the end of the table. Gaunt alone had not said a word, waiting restlessly, his eyes fixed on the cloth, his fingers running nervously through the cards. When the interruption passed and the game was about to proceed a look of relief passed over him. He pushed the pack toward the next dealer, and then, as though to screen from detection the emotions of his face, again drew the slim, bone-white hand before his eyes.

During the diversion the boy had made his way unnoticed along the table until he had reached his father's side. Just as the party were settling to their cards, he laid his hand upon the elder's arm and asked simply, looking up, "Why should he fear to die, sir?"

The effect was extraordinary; as though stung, the white hand started from its place, and Gaunt, wheeling in his chair, stared at the boy with eyes of fear. Doctor

Magog and the sharp colonel looked up suddenly, and the affair was becoming decidedly uncomfortable when Captain Brace gave one of his rumbling laughs and drew the boy away.

"Dear, dear! what are the young ones coming to!" he exclaimed quickly. "No more interruptions, young man, from the audience."

A flutter of the cards and the hitch was tided over in the eagerness for the game. Henry Gaunt returned behind his hand, again the gambler, with eyes for nothing but the game. The tide had set in strongly against him, but no sign in him betrayed the run of the cards. What to the others was a mere pastime was to him a passion. Whether he won or lost, not a muscle changed, not a tone of his voice was different. He never chuckled at a happy stroke like Doctor Magog; when the luck ran the other way, he never accused the cards like Captain Brace, who was always swearing the bottom out of heaven and hell whenever a dollar departed.

A stranger would have said that not he, but Captain Brace, was the host. The latter gave the orders, summoned the servants, proposed the toasts, and had his quick eyes roaming constantly over the room, lest the slightest action should escape him. Colonel Spott, over the cards, followed curiously this assumption of authority, and drew his own conclusions. He was unusually bluff and curt even for a man of the stripe, and on the several occasions when Captain Brace's glance met his eye, he returned the look so fixedly that the latter, who had an unpleasant habit of looking others down, retired uneasily.

"What do you think of that, Cousin Bob?" cried the doctor, rubbing his hands.

"Curse the luck," piped Troutman, pushing over his money with a scowl.

“The luck is with you to-night, Tom,” added Brace, “and gad, how you do play it.”

Colonel Spott, too, tossed over his mite with an avalanche of oaths. Gaunt, without a word, counted out a stack, slid it over, and wrote his name on a slip of paper against another heap of coin as coolly as though it were all done in a banking house.

So the game went on, the doctor radiant and rapidly erecting a breastwork of gold and silver before him, of which his cousin contributed some, and Gaunt the major part, when an interruption came in the person of a negress, who, peering with white eyes around the door, sought by frantic beckonings to attract the attention of the young master, who either did not or would not see. At length Uncle Sol, leaving the shadowy wall, with many grins shuffled over and said something in the young fellow's ear, at which he started up hotly and turned an angry shoulder. The darkey stood, scratching his head and muttering to himself, until, after many urgings from the impatient messenger at the door, he plucked up courage to shuffle his way to the other side of the table.

“Captain Brace, sah,” he said, with a scrape and a bob, “Liza have sent wo'd Marse John should come to bed, sah.”

Brace raised his head and sought out the boy. A change had come over John. His face went quick with anger.

“I won't,” he exclaimed, stamping his foot, his eyes beginning to flash under the falcon eyebrows. “The servants shall not order me round.”

At this a titter ran about the table; the doctor laughed outright, but Gaunt looked up full of delight at the boy's spirit and sudden temper.

“Come here,” he called; and, catching John by the

shoulder, he held him at full length. "What a little fire-brand! Won't be ordered about by women, hey?"

"I'll do what *you* say, sir," the boy cried impetuously, his eyes filling with tears of anger; "but I won't take orders from a servant, never, never!"

"Servants?" repeated the father, "not even if I command it?" John hesitated and then shook his head doggedly. "And, by Heaven, you shan't," the father instantly exclaimed, his eyes snapping with pride. "There's a boy of spirit, gentlemen!"

"Then, sir, I may stay?" asked John, his face grown radiant.

With a mind to try him further Gaunt looked quizzingly into his eyes. They were hard eyes to meet, frank and curious.

The father's glance wavered a moment, and then suddenly dropped to where his hand lay upon his son's shoulder. Instantly his eyes remained fixed—fascinated. His whole manner changed. His self seemed suddenly to rise up and confront him. The boy repeated the question uneasily. Gaunt did not hear him—he was still staring with dreamy intentness at his hand, which had now slipped to the table.

Troutman was gazing stupidly ahead, the doctor whistling to himself, Colonel Spott watching the scene out of the corner of his eye, when Captain Brace, leaning over, caught Gaunt by the arm and shook him roughly to his senses.

"Here, Harry, take the pack," he cried, with sudden authority, forcing the cards into his hand. "Take the pack, I say, and shuffle them. What shall we do with the young one?"

At his sharp voice Gaunt stiffened up, swept the room with a wild look, dropped his head quickly, and began

mechanically to shuffle the cards, saying absently, "Send him to bed."

John wheeled, puzzled at his father's change of manner, bowed rigidly to the table, and stalked from the room. Liza had wisely disappeared. He climbed the stairs and passed out on the balcony. From above the circle of light seemed to have suddenly contracted. Doctor Magog was clinking glasses with the colonel, Captain Brace was calling for a new decanter, the father was hanging with fixed intensity on the face of the cards — a statue of the gambling passion done in granite. The deal was given, and instantly the hum died into silence, and on the instant each face assumed a mark of absorption. A moment the boy looked down into the arena before he passed on and the room dropped suddenly behind the door. He was too young to understand. He was not too young to notice and to remember.

CHAPTER III

AT the landing lingered the offending Liza, candle in hand, waiting to light the way. John stopped short and stretched out his hand, saying stiffly, —

“Give it to me.” He never dreamed of showing anger before a servant. “And—you needn’t come with me.”

“Bress de Lo’d, chile,” the old mammy cried, aghast at such manners from the boy she had watched over from the cradle, “what am de matter wid you?”

“Will you go?” John’s eye began to kindle, despite his self-control. “Will you go this instant? for not a foot will I move until you do.”

“Golly, Marse John, I’s e not keepin’ you,” burst out Aunt Liza, quite dismayed. “It’s yo’ ma wants you.”

“You should have said so,” came the reply; and with a frown, but without surrendering a jot of his dignity, the boy turned on his heel, knocked at the end of the hall, and entered.

A slender figure stood at the window, her hands locked behind, her head thrown back, looking up into the moonlight. At the shut of the door she turned and came gracefully forward, holding out her arms, the wistful look in the eyes changing to a smile of great tenderness.

At the sight of his mother’s face the boy’s fortitude vanished. He threw himself into her arms and broke

into passionate weeping. She bent over him, the gray curls, strange about her young face, mingling with his brown locks, her mother's instinct guessing the storm that raged in the young breast.

"Oh, mother, mother," he cried tempestuously, "why am I to be treated like a child? I can't, I won't be commanded by servants. It just breaks my heart. I sometimes want to run away."

"I overheard you to-night, dear," she said, in the quiet voice that never failed to still his turbulence. She ran her fingers through his hair, looking down into the gray eyes that matched her own, and said with hesitation, "I happened to be passing on the balcony. I am sorry that it hurt you. Never mind; Eliza shall give you no more orders."

A smile of happiness broke through the tears. He flung himself into her arms again, and she, with the hot cheek against her cool one, gazed up at the wall. "And so you want to be a man," she said softly. "He wants to be a man — a man," and the look in her eyes was far away.

They were remarkably alike, the son and the mother, as they stood together. He had not only her eyes, but also her arching brows and the proud carriage of the head. Hers was a sad face, of that nature which, unable to bend, too often is fated to break; but as she leaned over her son a smile lighted up the eyes, and made them glorious. She was quiet so long that at length he noticed it and looked up curiously. "I cannot come to your bedside to-night, dear," she said abruptly, averting her face, "so put your arms around me again and say good night."

He did as he was bid — he was always under the spell of her words — and turned his face up for her kiss.

Then, with a smile of elation, he nodded eagerly over his shoulder and ran from the room.

At the landing he seized the candle from the yawning Liza, even condescending to throw her a look of recognition, as he skipped along the corridor and gained his room, swelling with his new freedom. The low window was open, the room luminous with the summer night. He put down the candle, of a sudden grown pale, and passed out along the gallery.

The flush moon was low on its downward path, dipping its lumbering body into the horizon. The sky was now free, without a cloud against the stars. The mellow light suffused the garden and veiled the fig trees and the pomegranates with its molten sheen, revealed the greensward, glittered on the white sides and the glass roofs of the conservatory, and in the distance touched the winding outlets of the bay with flashes of silver fire. The air was vibrant with summer. From the bushes rose the shrill voice of the katydid and the pipe of the cricket. Beyond in the branches the whip-poorwill was complaining and the tree-toad clamoring, while from ditch and pond and puddle answered the guttural note of the bullfrog and the sharp *tink-tank-tink-tanker* of the turtle. As though in search of hidden melodies, innumerable fireflies flashed their fairy lanterns through the gardens. Even the church bell, sounding from the gleaming belfry in the distance, had its brazen note of noon attuned to melody. It was a night when the harmony of the skies awakes the poetry of earth.

The boy, clinging to the railing, gave himself up to the subtle charm of the night, which covers the nakedness of man's handicraft and hides all ugliness in the mystery of its shadows. He was seized with a great

longing to roam the glowing fields, to skirt the river banks, to be off and away from the sound and the sight of human beings. He saw the moon pass below the fringe of woods and out, like the shut of a great eye. He crossed into the room, snuffed the candle, swung from the gallery to the drain, and dropped to the ground. The windows of the hall flared out at his very side. A moment he shrunk against the wall, breathless, as a burst of laughter broke out within; then he began to move down the greensward slowly, through the hum of the insect orchestra.

From the gallery he had felt only the mystery of the under-world. Now that his feet were on the soil, everything faded away, the earth, insect, bird and beast, tree and bush and lawn — faded utterly, and only the night and the stars abided, and a child lifting his face to eternities. The day, which is man's to change the face of the world, to strew the waters with strange shapes, to bind the continents with shackles of steel, to level the forests, to mingle the rivers, to people the wilderness, — the day world had vanished. As the sea wipes away the wind's path across the sand, so the night obliterates the centuries, and, reclaiming all in its shadow, returns all to the primal.

Throbbing with the growing wonder of the hour, the child searched the heavens — that changeless world that saw the Hun and the Vandal, the Roman and the Greek; the Egyptian and the Assyrian, and the waters and the glaciers before, that knew no man. Full in front of him, dominating the constellations, burned the great star of Venus. He looked and the star receded. He stopped to gaze, and all at once the star seemed to separate from the sky and to draw him up, up, up, high above the world. Behind him the myriad eyes of

the night had closed. He felt endless lines of distance cleaving the sky. He seemed to be fluttering in mid-air, and in a sudden dizziness covered his eyes with his hands. Then all at once the spell snapped and he was back with the feel of the sod beneath his feet.

Until now he had known the heavens only as an emblazoned bowl that shut over the earth and extinguished the day. Now he felt the immensity of space, and the dormant power of thought began to stir within him. He had pierced the veil, he was searching beyond for the secrets of creation.

Suddenly a dog's cold nose poked against his hand, and one of the house collies fawned at his side. The boy put his hand on the dog's head and with him passed through the arch in the wall that opened into the family graveyard, treading fearlessly among the cold tombstones under the cedars, making his way beyond into the fields that led to the water. There he stopped and sent the dog whimpering home. Then, free, utterly alone, he went on down the narrow threading path, his head exalted, his eyes challenging the firmament.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Liza came bustling into the room again, Emily Gaunt had returned to the window, and was standing in her characteristic pose, the hands clasped behind the girlish figure, the head tilted back, so that the moonlight bathed the gray masses of her hair with its lustre. Over the mantel, opposite the big tester bed, hung a canvas—a young girl with dancing eyes and arched brows, smiling down from under clouds of waving hair, black with a tinge of blue. Often Liza, coming in on tiptoe, would find her mistress looking up at the picture with a wistful smile: her hair had been gray seven years. It was a family trait, Doctor Magog took care to inform the county tea-tables; all the Orkneys were the same. Her mother's hair was gray at thirty and her grandmother's at twenty-two. Mrs. Troutman and Colonel Spott's lady actually laughed in the doctor's face; they preferred their own explanation.

Liza moved noisily about the room, and, as she made her preparations for the night, she cast nervous glances toward the window, until at length, come to the end of her duties, she ventured on a subdued "Mis' Em'ly." At her call, the mother left the window and came forward, the glow fading from her eyes, back to the dim-lit room and the real.

"Honey, you'se gwine to lie down, isn't you?" Aunt Liza began, looking up fondly. "You tire yo'self all out a-sittin' up y'here o' nights. Lie down, honey;

dere's no tellin' when dey's gwine to get t'rou' down dah."

"I will lie down," the mistress said, inclining her head; "wait in the other room."

She moved toward the bed and, with a quick turn of her skirt, cast herself upon it. Aunt Liza, shifting awkwardly from foot to foot, still lingered in the centre of the room.

"He — he — berry bad to-night, Miss Em'ly — berry sick, I spec," she began tentatively, pulling at her fingers. "Dat ole doctor, wid all his talk 'bout dat Gamage man, has set him off, I spec."

"Wait in the other room, Liza," came the order. "Place the candle behind my head and knock when they are gone."

"Yes, Mis' Em'ly. And — and honey — den — den you lemme wait outside de do' so as you kin call me — you gwine do dat, isn't you? Sometimes, Mis' Em'ly, you know —"

The slave's devotion touched her. "You are a good girl, Aunt Liza," she said softly. "Yes, wait in the next room afterward, and I will call — if it is necessary."

The next moment the old negress had flung herself down at the feet of her mistress, tears pouring down the wrinkled cheeks. "Oh, Mis' Em'ly, Mis' Em'ly, the Lo'd will rewa'd you, de Lo'd will rewa'd you in de kingdom come. Oh, honey, if you only lemme stay wid yo, ye kin sell me to de Georgia man ef I ever say a wo'd."

"What do you mean?" The mistress' voice was now cold and forbidding and her face grew set. "You forget yourself, Liza. Now go!"

The slave, abashed, muttering apologies, beseeching forgiveness with her eyes, started to her feet, hesitated, and sidled from the room.

It is said that all strong individualities have one predominating note — whether ambition, selfishness, reverence, affection, or what not — which shapes their every action. With Emily Gaunt this note was pride — somewhat of the feeling that nerved the Spartan boy, who, rather than be detected in the theft of the fox, allowed the animal to tear away his flesh. Her husband was a topic she never allowed a servant to discuss with her. When any reference had to be made to his failing it was always spoken of as an illness; it was gall and wormwood enough to her sensitive nature that any one should share her secret. During the long years that he had succumbed to the drug, she had waited, longingly at first, then defiantly, for his confidence. Had he given it to her she would never have reproached him; but as the years went by and that confidence never came, she could not bring herself to seek it, and week after week the sham went on, she never showing him by word or look that she knew. So he had passed out of her life as completely as though he had never entered it — and she had adored him! Had she ceased to love him? If she had, she never would have acknowledged it, even to herself. She voluntarily estranged her friends and withdrew from her relatives. Only once had she had a visitor, a schoolgirl chum who announced her arrival in person. On that occasion, and then only, Emily Gaunt had sought out her husband and, looking him firmly in the face, had requested that he would leave Windrift for a week, and he had gone. That was the one thought that constantly rose up before her — the dread of discovery: that the world, most of all that her son, should come to know.

As she lay there, staring at the ceiling with fixed wide eyes, an expression of deep sorrow touched her

face, perhaps at the thought of the inevitable day when John must learn the truth. Perhaps she was penetrating even further into the future, hoping, praying, fearing, for the man who must fight out such an inheritance.

From its shelter behind the bed the candle threw its wavering flicker across the portrait on the wall, so that the girl seemed to come and go out of the past. The woman drew her hands slowly across her eyes — then bent her head toward the picture.

Who is there — hardened though he be by the push and the scramble of life, embittered by failure, or schooled to stoicism by unconfessing pride — that can look unmoved, when suddenly confronted with the picture of an earlier self, and meet without wonder the childish eyes, the frank, the innocent — the eyes that tell what might have been?

She was proud, and proud in her pride, and no one had ever seen in her look an expression of rebellion, or heard in her voice the break of suffering; yet, as she turned to look into the face of her youth, the warm tears slipped into her eyes and clouded their vision. She would not recall them, for they were inexpressibly sweet. The portrait called her. The room was transformed, the feeble light grew radiant, the walls shifted into long vistas of forest and water. She was once again galloping through the fields of her youth, roaming with her dogs along cone-strewn alleys, now under familiar boughs weaving her garlands, or searching dreamily through the vaulted blue.

So far astray in dreams was she that without consciousness she heard below the stamp and neigh of horses, and the rumbling laugh of Captain Brace bidding the players good-night. Thrice Aunt Liza had drummed with anxious fingers on the door before she

realized that the slave was back in the room. Then almost a cry escaped her. She sprang up, touched her cheek, ran to the washstand and wet her eyes. Three fresh candles stood on the mantel. She lighted them, so that the room grew suddenly bright. Then, moving to the window, she turned her back and waited.

She heard a voice on the stairs cry, "The devil's luck, Harry, a — of a night for you. None of us could have stood against such cursed runs." Then the door clicked twice, and her husband stood in the room. The effort at self-control had told heavily on him. His hand trembled, and his eyes glowed with the brilliancy she knew too well.

Seeing her, he stopped in confusion. His eye fell on the disordered bed. "You — you — up again?" he said, averting his glance.

"Yes, I have been waiting," she answered quickly, disdaining an excuse; "I shall always wait for you."

"I lost — the luck was against me."

"It is all yours to lose."

He went to the bed and dropped on it, his hands on his knees, his body bent.

"Gamage is dead," he said, mumbling to himself — "the heretic — the atheist — the infidel."

"I know it."

"Died in fear." A shudder ran through him. "A coward — a shrieking coward — why the devil did Magog tell us that? Ugh! wish to heaven I'd shut my ears."

His head began to nod. She moved quickly to him, laid her fingers on his shoulder, and said, "Come, you must get to bed."

He rose — he always obeyed her — the great spare man looking down at the slim woman — and began to

fumble with his coat, until he collapsed stupidly on the bed, insensible.

She drew off his clothes quietly, doing the work she would not call in her slaves to do, put him into the bed, and sat down calmly, to wait wearily the bursting of the storm.

A half-hour passed before he began to talk. Then suddenly remorse swept over him; he began to call upon her for forgiveness and pity, to reproach himself, to curse the day he was born, to sob, to choke, to cry for mercy. Through all the torrent of his anguish she sat unflinching and unmoved. Once when his voice mounted to a shriek her heart almost stopped; she put her hand suddenly to her breast, and rose and closed the forgotten window.

At the sound of the grating he stopped a moment, and cried, "Emily! Emily!" She went to his side and let him clutch her arm, as she had done so often. Then suddenly broke over him the horror that ruled his life, the horror of death, the silent, dogged spectre ever at his shoulder, a fear that only in these fierce, unconscious bursts of passion tore through the mask of his habitual stoicism. "Emily! Emily!" he called out, as though she were not at his side. He appealed to her to save him, to ward off the dreadful foe, to drive it away, to save him, to save him, to save him! The spirit of the atheist rose up before him. He shrank away to the farthest corner of the bed, his eyes dilating with fear. He clung to her arm, as though the phantom that haunted him were dragging him the other way. His fingers dug deep into the soft arm among many such marks. Again and again she trembled as his voice rose, sick herself at the fearful intensity of the passion that shook his limbs. Another interval, and the

spell began to break. His appeals grew less and less distinct, and the fingers more numb, until his head fell heavily on the pillow. Just then, as, bruised and faint, she left him, and, drawing her sleeve over the scars of the night, was turning from the bed, her eyes went up with the quickness of instinctive dread. The door had swung open. There, before her, pale and trembling, leaning heavily against the frame of the door, stood John.

Her breath seemed to stop and she caught at the bed for support. Even then she did not lose her presence of mind — he might only have just come. Summoning all her strength, she placed a finger on her lip and whispered, "Hush! your father is very ill," and motioned him away. Then, panting, sobbing, she threw herself on her knees. It was her first prayer in seven years.

CHAPTER V

IN a whirlwind of emotion John rushed to his room. He had heard all. He had roamed through the misty fields, unconscious of time, revelling in the unfolding mystery of nature, without seeking after questions and answers—until with a start he had realized how late was the hour. He had returned slowly, his soul stirred, reverent, awed, aflame. Swinging in at a side window, he had crept softly along the creaking stairs. At the top a lighted crack had stopped him, and he had paused curiously, hearing a voice in agony—his father's voice, but changed from what he knew. He stopped, advanced, stopped, and listened. Then, as the full import of the revelation dawned upon him, he began to tremble and sway, until at last he had lurched against the yielding door.

Suddenly the great emotions of the night were swept away—what phantoms and delusions they were! This then was the true answer—pitiless, inexorable death—a spectre dogging every footstep, a horror ending in nothingness. He fled to his room, not noticing that Captain Brace's door was ajar, or that that gentleman's head immediately peered into the hall. He closed the door and locked it, as though he could thus shut out the words that rang in his ears. He threw off his clothes, groping beside the bed, and slipped under the covers, telling himself that he would go straight to sleep. He was obeying an instinct to shun a burden that he felt was too great

for his young understanding. He would forget all he had heard, above everything he must not think. So, drawing the covers over his head, and taking long sleepy breaths, he began to count imaginary flocks of sheep jumping through a gap in a fence—a charm that Liza had assured him could not fail.

Suddenly he sat bolt upright, wide-awake. The stillness was frightful. He could hear the old clock in the hall below, ticking away the lagging seconds. Something had creaked in the room. He listened. Again! Something was there in the darkness with him. His heart began to knock against his breast as though it would leap from its place.

“Nonsense,” he cried to himself, “there is no one here—I won’t be a coward.”

For the moment he hesitated—and perhaps on the decision of the boy hung all the character of the man. Then, setting his teeth, he sprang to the floor and made himself crawl under the bed, until every corner had been explored. He returned under the covers in triumph. For the time the excitement of subduing himself had made him forget. Then all at once something whispered in his ear: “I am here. Come—you must think!”

Unable longer to search the whispering darkness, he leaped again to the floor and lighted the candle, half expecting to find the room filled with grotesque shapes. The window was still open. He passed restlessly out on the gallery, still clinging to the protection of his candle. Now that the moon had left the sky to the stars, the earth was swallowed up in dusk. He looked down, wondering if he could really be the same child that had stood there but a little while ago. These sombre stretches, these black-browed woods, this sullen glimpse of water through the mist,—could this be the glowing

world through which he had roamed so lately? He looked once more—he could not have gone again! A great star caught his eye. But now it impressed him no longer with the sense of its grandeur and its immortality, but with a sense of his own impotence. His life seemed to dwindle—such a little hour under the domain of these gaping immensities!

He retreated hurriedly, shut the window, set the candle again on the table, returned with a quick motion, drew the curtains tight, unlocked the door, went back to bed, sat up, clasped his hands over his knees, and, giving up the struggle, began to think.

The next morning Aunt Liza, tiptoeing into the room, found him fast asleep in the middle of the bed, where he had fallen on his side, the pillows untouched. The flame was flickering in the socket as she snuffed it, cleared the windows, and stole away with the tell-tale candlestick that Miss Emily might not guess.

With a start John awoke. The morning glowed before him. The cool breeze rustling past the stirring curtains invited him to a long gallop or a splash in the winding river. He bounded up full of zest, and on the minute up started the memories of the night. His hand stopped in the midst of a gesture, and a cry escaped him. “Oh, if I could only forget!”

He started at the sound of his voice, and there rose before his eyes the startled face of his mother.

“It would break her heart if she knew,” he said to himself, growing instinctively wise, a child no longer, “and she shall not.”

He shut his lips, and began to dress. But despite his will, again and again he fell into profound reverie, standing like an image of stone, and again and again he

roused himself with determined shakes of his head, until at length down the stairs he went, whistling for spirits, and into the dining room, with a sigh of relief to find no one there.

Captain Brace had breakfasted, and was off. The others were not yet down. He ate his meal hurriedly, trembling at every foot-fall. At the steps stood his servant Jonah, with the ponies. On the spur of a wild desire to gallop mile on mile, he vaulted into the saddle, ordering the wondering negro to remain. *Thwack, thwack!* fell the whip upon the flanks of the astonished Puff. Bolt sprang the indignant pony through the gate and down the avenue. Behind fled fence, and tree, and fields gay with cattle. But, fast as they sped, fast and faster came that other, *Atra Cura*, and fast or slow, turn where he might, by flat highway or stooping bridle-path, there was no escaping that unbidden companion.

"If I had only gone to bed," once he cried to himself, if only to break the intense monotony of thought, "it would all be different. Oh, it can't be true; everything can't be so changed in a day."

He looked down. The reins had fallen from his hand and Puff was contentedly browsing, when Lufkin, landlord of the Bull's Eye, happening to pass at this moment, startled him from his revery with a hearty greeting.

"John, John, you're too young to be in love, or to forget an old friend."

John started up, flinging back so unceremonious an answer that his friend stared after him in amazement. *Thwack, thwack!* down came the whip, and away fled Puff, now out of the highway, cutting across the pastures and skirting the woods. When at length John

looked up Puff had halted on the edge of a graveyard, with six gray crosses in a line, six generations of masters below—it was the burial-ground of the Troutmans. He sat there, staring stupidly down on the family vaults and the cracked slabs overgrown with green, hardly moving in his saddle. Then a quick swish of Puff's tail brought him sharply back to himself, and, turning the bridle, he rode slowly home, the whip dangling idly in his hand.

The slim, familiar figure of his mother was waiting among the rose bushes as he came up the avenue. All his resolves returned to him. He cantered up, swinging his cap and nodding gayly in answer to her anxious smiles.

Dinner, always a gloomy meal, was passed in silence. John stared with intense fascination at the black circles under his father's eyes—eyes that hardly ever wandered from the cloth; and the mother, also silent, scanned the boy's face with questioning looks. Captain Brace, catching the infection, studied the portrait opposite—a Sir Joshua—of Viscount Orkney in red coat and periwig, frowning imposingly among a gallery of scenes from Shakespeare, famous Boydell engravings, that enlivened every wall. For the rest, he seemed to be intent on his dinner, making his requests with the greatest deference to Madame Gaunt, who never by word or look addressed him an answer.

Somehow the day came to an end—often afterwards John looked back and wondered how it ever passed—and again he lay in his bed. Presently there came a light tapping at the door, and his mother entered and took a seat at his side, and, as was her custom, brought out the harp that always stood in the corner. She thumbed the strings a moment idly, and then sang

for him ballads of her girlhood — “The Knight of the Raven Black Plume,” “My Bark is on the Billow,” and “Lady Mine.”

It was a picture the man never forgot, — the hickories snapping on the hearth, the big tester bed, the gilded harp, the graceful arms, the wistful face glancing back, the rich, low voice that sang his eyes to sleep.

The window was open, the strings still murmuring with the melody as she bent over him and laid her hand against his forehead.

“Why were you at my door last night, Johnnie-boy?” she asked, using the old pet name.

“Oh, mother,” he began — she must have heard the beating of his heart! — “I was out in the garden; it was so beautiful last night. I came up the stairs and saw a light in your room. I — I — wanted to tell you how wonderful it all was — I had just come.”

“Just come?”

He moved sleepily, evading the answer.

“Just come, dear?”

“Yes.” The shadows were on the room; she could not see his face.

“You are my son,” she said softly, drawing back, “you love the sky and the fields, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

She touched the strings again and sang a lullaby, the same with which she had often charmed him to sleep as she watched beside his cradle. The soft melody filled the room with languorous invitation. Lower and lower drooped his eyelids, until at length she heard a drowsy, deep-taken breath.

“He did not hear,” she whispered, her breast rising. “He does not know.”

She bent down, kissing his forehead so lightly that he

did not stir. She had come prepared to help him, her mother's love ready to show the groping child all the unconquerable beauty of life as she could see it; she went away with a prayer of thanksgiving on her lips and with hope in her eyes. It was one of those little misunderstandings from which grow the great tragedies.

CHAPTER VI

IN all Maryland, from Crisfield to Elkton, there was no such garden as that of Madame Gaunt's at Windrift in the year 1846. From the rear veranda it opened fan-shaped into a labyrinth of box-edged paths. One strayed among trellised lanes, where, blossoming each in its season, the crêpe myrtle, the white magnolia, and the Chinese honeysuckle blended overhead; narrow alleys of syringas, sweet shrub, snowball, and pomegranate opened out at times into circular bowers of wistaria or nine-fingered holly, leading on to benches beside quince trees, filbert, or fig. In front were beds of perfume-giving hyacinths, rural hollyhocks, pale bouncing betty, early crocus, and flowering pea, the bright button pink, the little red-brown chrysanthemum, and, spreading everywhere, the violet.

Down the middle to the shining greenhouse, cutting the garden into two wings, lay a broad reach of greensward, across which the gray squirrels from the sycamores scampered in the early morning, the redbird showed its flaming sides and the mocking-bird darted to its song. On one side, below clusters of the Black Hamburg and the Sweetwater, where the vines hung low and the Seven Sisters rose bushes narrowed the way, ran Lovers' Lane, luring to hidden bowers and sudden nooks.

Shutting out all this loveliness from the farther world was a high brick wall, enclosing the garden in a semi-

circle. Just beyond, through a narrow arch to the left of the greenhouses, under huddling cedars, was the family graveyard, the monuments weather-stained and the dim mounds overrun with violets and ground myrtle. Across the western wing, leading to the arch, was a lane closed at either end by high Gothic gates, that, in the traditions of Belle River, opened only to receive a funeral procession into its shaded depths, a lane for generations known as Via Dolorosa.

Twenty negroes moved incessantly through the garden by day, clipping the box borders, restraining the hedges, pruning and raking, and fighting the chickweed in the sward. Here John's mother passed her days—in the mornings hearing his lessons under the bowers of Lovers' Lane, in the afternoons straying among a hundred varieties of roses, lingering over her favorites, the variegated York and Lancaster, the Painted Ladies and the rare Prince Albert and Queen Victoria, a red and a white flower on the same stalk, which Paton, the great florist of Baltimore, had once come especially to see.

Emily Gaunt was never so happy as at these moments, when, in the calm of her paradise, something of the warmth of the roses entering her soul, she would go her way pruning and clipping, with a song on her lips. When the sun began to swell on the horizon, she strayed toward the house to seek through the double rows of beech and maple until John cantered up the avenue on Puff, swinging his cap, the glow of a long scamper burning on his cheeks.

Meanwhile the master of the house would be impatiently measuring the front terrace. Under the four great Lombardy poplars, sentinels of the house, and landmarks of all the country side, he would pace, halt-

ing every little while to sweep the avenue for the arrival of Captain Brace, who usually galloped in at half-past three from a neighborly call, or twice a week, on public days, from Bromfield, where he went to discuss Clay and the Missouri Compromise with the gentry who gathered at the Bull's Eye Tavern.

It was seldom that Harry Gaunt ever happened upon the rear veranda, and in all his aimless walks he did not once trespass into the garden, where some chance turn might bring him face to face with the arch yawning under the high brick wall, and the gleam of marble beyond. But evade as he might this *memento mori*, he never peered through the parlor windows, that beyond all the bright splash of the flower-beds he did not see the silent cedars, lifting above the wall, and know that some day for him the gates would stand open down the Via Dolorosa. Shunning all this, away across the country he would gallop with the speed of an evil wind, constantly urging the frantic Two Spot on and on, never satisfied, however sharp cut the wind across his face. At other times, unslinging a rifle from the wall, he would wander through the woods. But through it all he was restless and fidgeting until half-past three arrived, and Ned, and the cards.

In at last came Captain Brace, stamping through the hall, to smack his lips over a tumbler of brandy and water, and cry: "No cards to-day, Harry, that's final. Gad, I'm sick to death of their color. Has there been an afternoon or evening since I came that you haven't begged me—forced—yes, forced me into playing—has there, now?"

"And I hope there never will be," said Gaunt, looking up so frankly over the cards he was fingering that Brace exploded at once into a fit of laughter.

"Damme, Harry, you're incorrigible. There, there, just to please you, then. Tell me, is there anything else in life to you?"

"What else is there?" cried Gaunt, moodily bending over the table.

Captain Brace lifted his shoulders, not caring to return an answer.

"Search at the bottom of everything, what is there but a gamble?" continued the other, unbosoming himself, much to the surprise of his companion. "Success, happiness, fame, virtue, — yes, virtue most of all, — it's all a gamble, I say. I like it, it fascinates me. I'm a doubter, Ned. My father was before me. I doubt the future, I doubt everything. Lord, sometimes I doubt my doubts. Don't you see? The same hand that throws the cards, Ned, has made me what I am, and you, yes, and will make us what we must become — and that's what I see in the cards."

"You go too deep," replied Captain Brace, with a blank look. "I can't follow you. I reckon you're right, though; you generally are. Gad, Harry, I say it's the chances that make life interesting."

As a rule these parties were fairly even; Captain Brace seldom won, but neither did he lose much. Back to their game they hastened as soon as supper was ended, unless Squire Troutman and the doctor or sometimes Colonel Spott dropped in, when the pastime was made general. After one such night (and they gradually had become very frequent), Colonel Spott indulged in such language that Doctor Magog, who was driving him home, though he knew the gentleman's talent for profanity, was astounded.

"Come now, Colonel, come," he remonstrated, attributing his companion's humor to the cards, "certainly the

luck was against you, but you've no cause to complain; you're — ”

“Damn the luck,” burst out the colonel, “do you think I care a dashed dash about any dashed money? It's not that, no! it's that fellow behind. What in the dash, dash devilment is he up to there, I'd like to know?”

“Hands off, hands off, I say, when a man's down. Colonel, it isn't like you to be hitting at your host when — ”

“No, no, not Gaunt, not that poor devil. Why do you keep misunderstanding me? I mean that rascal of a Captain Brace,” the colonel cried in an avalanche of oaths, “the smoothest, glibbest sharper I ever saw.”

“Eh, what! Good heavens, Colonel! Do you know what you're saying? Ned Brace?”

“What do you know about Captain Brace?” the colonel cried, wheeling toward him. “You know nothing. You know this poor devil behind us picked him up eighteen months ago at the Bull's Eye, where he'd been, off and on, for two years, where he paid his board by sharpening the young fellows over the cards.”

“Sharpening?”

“Yes, sharpening. You needn't look at me that way, Tom. By —, Lufkin told me so.”

“Lufkin!” cried the doctor, with a sneer. “Do you go on his word against a gentleman? Besides, if he's what you say, why hasn't Brace tried his tricks by this time? See here, Colonel, Ned's been eighteen months at Harry's, and there's not twenty dollars' difference between them to-day. What do you say to that?”

The colonel emitted a short, barking laugh, and said point blank, grasping the shoulder of his companion, “Doctor, how long do you give a woman to live whose

heart's been breaking for ten years? and what will you give a man who's drinking himself to the grave as fast as a horse can trot? Tell me that. Do you see the situation? And add an adventurer worming himself into the poor devil's confidence. Ever hear of such a case before?"

"Oh, come now, Colonel, you're blundering frightfully. Ned Brace is one of the kindest fellows alive. Come, come, the whole country likes him."

"Damn the country—curse the country! I know my man—it's big game he wants. He's an infernal thoroughgoing, smooth-faced rascal. Mark my words, one of these patient scoundrels who'll wait his chance for years—I know them! I tell you I suspected him the moment I heard him swear. He doesn't swear right," added the colonel, who was a judge. "It don't come natural, he puts it on, I tell you, the dashed hypocrite!"

"Captain Brace, sir, is my friend," the doctor said stiffly, now thoroughly indignant. "I'll thank you to drop the conversation."

"Confound these military men," he thought to himself, "no one is safe from their suspicions." And the next day, being summoned to Windrift, he bore the whole of the conversation to the captain, who gave a rather loud guffaw, and swore it was the joke of the season.

"You're too good-natured, Ned; you'd be justified in doing something different."

"Pooh!" said Brace, lifting his thick shoulders, "people must gossip, Tom; I can stand it."

Thereafter, whenever the colonel passed, scowling and very curt, Brace never failed to break into a smile and to bow to his horse's mane, though careful never to give that warrior any cause to believe that he intended to call him out.

The county drawing-rooms, which at the start had taken up furiously the introduction of Captain Brace into the Gaunt household, and, discovering him to be without an available past, had delighted in furnishing him with several sets of most unflattering antecedents, gradually influenced by his affability and good nature, had come to admit that they had judged too hastily. Within six months, the captain, who had left the Bull's Eye at Bromfield with the reputation of being morose, taciturn, shoddy, and a little too keen on the sharp end of a bargain, became the familiar of almost every estate around, and was pronounced a good fellow and a man of the kindest feelings.

It presently became apparent that, instead of Captain Brace depending on the hospitality of the Gaunts, quite the reverse was true. Harry Gaunt could no more do without his companion than the earth could dispense with rain. He took instant alarm whenever the captain announced an intention to depart; some said that he even went down on his knees before him, and that it was only on the private solicitations of Emily Gaunt herself that the kind-hearted captain had consented to remain from month to month. Brace always excused himself gracefully when questioned upon such reports, neither affirming nor denying them.

Yet in respect to one person he could have had no illusions. Besides Colonel Spott and the landlord of the Bull's Eye, Emily Gaunt had distrusted him from the first, and had watched with alarm his growing influence over her husband. Whenever the captain's roving eyes and broken nose appeared, her manner became very haughty. Had he been her slave she could not have treated him with more condescension.

Captain Brace, who, despite rebuffs, never failed to

observe toward her the completest courtesy, especially in the presence of guests, redoubled his attentions the more distant became her reception of them. One day, in pursuance of this attitude, he even ventured to approach her as she was wandering among her beds directing her gardeners. To his surprise he found her unusually gracious, so much so that after a few moments he looked up frankly into her face and said abruptly, "Mrs. Gaunt, you don't like me, do you? But it is because you misunderstand me. I think you are one of the noblest women alive, and I'm going to tell you that I pity you, yes, from the bottom of my heart."

She wheeled on him quickly, a fire in her eyes, and he saw that he had been caught in his own trap.

"What is it you want? What is your purpose in this house? Don't act with me," she cried, as he started back under the confusion of the attack. "You have never deceived me. My husband is in your power. If it is money you want, why don't you win it from him? You have waited a — a decent time. If it is not that, what is it?" Her burst of anger was over; she stopped and finished quietly. "Such a man as you has known many women, and what one woman will do — and I tell you" (looking straight in his eyes) "that if you ever dare to make another advance to me — I shall know how to defend myself."

"Madam," replied Captain Brace, drawing himself up, now thoroughly recovered, "a gentleman can't answer such accusations; permit me to retire."

"A gentleman!" She stopped him as he bowed and was about to go. "Very well. As a gentleman, then, I ask you, — after what has passed, and knowing that your presence here is a constant annoyance to me, — will

you, as a gentleman, leave my home to-morrow — and forever ? ”

The captain backed and stammered, a sorry figure ; there is no knowing what would have happened, had not a gay shout ended the scene, as John and Puff came up.

Should she tell her husband of the interview and force a crisis ? This was actually in her mind — indeed her hand was even on the knob. Another moment and who knows what old barriers might not have been broken down and out of a truer understanding have come a happier life ? But even as she stood wavering before the door, the old dominant feeling of pride returned. “ I must ask ? ” she said, moving away, “ never ! If my husband cannot see that that fellow’s presence is a constant insult to me, I shall never tell him.”

Squire Troutman, Doctor Magog, and Major Llewellyn, rolling in for supper and a night at cards, found the captain in the drawing-room pacing furiously before the fire. All the doctor’s good spirits failed to draw a smile from him that afternoon. He was so silent and glum that all three vowed instantly he was in love ; yes, Captain Ned was trapped at last ! But even that sally fell unnoticed — the captain, usually the soul of the party, continued distrait, until suddenly Harry Gaunt entering the room, the quick eyes went up like a flash. A moment later he broke into a tremendous roar over a *bon mot* of the major’s. He clapped the doctor on the back ; he toasted everybody ; he drank enormously. At the cards everything was with him ; no one could stand against him.

CHAPTER VII

WHY do we belittle the griefs and sorrows of childhood? Are they not as deep and as vivid as those of later years, ay, and more lasting? Then disappointments and heartaches have dulled the edge of grief. There is a certain capacity to suffer, which, once being strained, we respond to the ache no more. It is the first sharp touch of the surgeon's knife that tries the patient's courage, and the first bite of the flames against which the martyr steels his fortitude. So in childhood it is the first knowledge of sorrow that overwhelms, for it is a grief that arrives fresh to the young ignorance of suffering, and with the sudden shattering of Utopia, leaves one groping for new ideals.

So it was with John in his first great grief. He felt alone, estranged, marked out from all the rest of his fellow-creatures. In all the trials of later years he was wont to refer to this as the darkest period of his life, when sorrow seemed irresistible. To most at such times come the cry for solitude, the longing for freedom, the desire to escape from life. Not so with John. He wanted to flee from himself, to stop thinking these terrible thoughts, to forget these unanswerable questions. He hungered for companions, for distractions to call him out of himself. He was his own unwelcome companion, from whom he was forever trying to escape by sudden rushes or silent turnings.

Often in his rambles on Puff he would gallop over toward Bromfield to the schoolhouse, and from the pony's back longingly watch the boys romping at their games. On three successive days he returned so thoughtful that his mother at length noticed the change, and asked the destination of his rides.

"To Bromfield," he replied; and then, hesitating, he added, "that is, to the schoolhouse."

"Would you like to go to school, dear, very much?" she asked mechanically. She looked at him long, and her heart bounded as he shook his head and replied:—

"No, mother, unless you want me to."

She put his hair back from his forehead and said:—

"I have been thinking of it, Johnnie-boy, for a long while."

And so she had. Often under the lilac bush in Lover's Lane, in the hours when he sat by her side, snuggling under her arm, as she read to him his history, she had thought of the day that was coming when she must surrender him to other teachers. It was hard to let him go. She had hoped to keep him just a little longer. People saw other things besides the past in her face, and Doctor Magog, though he had pooh-poohed Colonel Spott's insinuations, yet, on the occasion of his last call, had looked her steadily in the face and said, "It isn't your husband, madam, who needs my help the most." She shook her head—no doctor's drug could cure her malady.

"Yes, John, I have been thinking of it for a long while," she repeated, with forced cheerfulness; "you will be happier among companions of your own age—you are old enough, dear, and it is best. Next Monday I will have your father take you. You—you will be very happy, won't you?"

“Oh, mother, can I really go?”

He sprang up with a boyish caper, all eagerness and delight. His joy brought a pang to her mother's heart — a pang she hid under a smile. She stood silent, without a motion, as he ran off gleefully. She watched, drawing long breaths, until he had disappeared, then she slowly passed down the aisle of roses to her garden-seat. The Painted Ladies were stirring at her very shoulder as she leaned back wearily, looking up beyond the cedars, until evening crept across the skies and the dusk blotted out all things below.

So it happened that one Monday morning, as the Rev. Timothy Grimshaw, having rapped the school sharply to order, was about to guide the youthful minds into the realms of another week's learning, he saw through the open window a pale gentleman of indifferent manner staring about inquiringly from the back of a coal-black mare, and, erect on a midget of a pony, a serious, big-boned youngster, who was surveying the schoolhouse with the gravity of forty-five. Mr. Grimshaw, divining the import of the visit, at once suspended his labors, enjoined on the room the strictest attention to the rule of three, on displeasure of the rod, and strode down the aisle to greet the master of Windrift.

“I have the honor of welcoming Mr. Gaunt, I believe,” he began ceremoniously, fixing John with deep eyes that seemed to ask a dozen questions, as they gleamed under his tangled brows. “This, I know, is Master John. He, at least, is not a stranger to these parts. Your mother, young man, is your welcome anywhere.”

“The Reverend Timothy Grimshaw?” interposed the gentleman, who had paid not the slightest attention to

all this address. "My son John. He will be a pupil at your school from this day. You will find him, I reckon, well up for his age. His mother has taught him. Has a high spirit for a lad. Expect to see you some day at Windrift, Grimshaw, to dinner. I don't see what more there is to say, I'm sure. Good day. Don't bother the lad on religion, that's all." He nodded abruptly, and touching his spurs to the mare's flanks, unceremoniously galloped away.

The schoolmaster, the color mounting to his temples, turned curtly on his heel and signalled to John. The boy flung himself off briskly, threw the reins over Puff, who wandered contentedly into the clover, looked up frankly into the dark eyes that were studying him, and said, "Very well, sir, I am ready."

"Follow me, then."

He wheeled and led the way into the schoolroom, John close at his heels, unabashed before the gaze of the scholars. The boy's self-possession amused the elder, and with a view to trying him further, he left him standing in the aisle, purposely affecting, as he proceeded to his desk, to have forgotten his presence. But if he had expected to find any signs of timidity or indecision, he was mistaken. John, having remained standing for what he considered a decent interval, cast his eye about him, took possession of the first vacant seat, and began an examination of the room with a curiosity as frank as that which had greeted his arrival.

Three sharp raps from the master's desk, and a sudden stillness broke upon the whispers and the hum of the room. John looked up. Grimshaw had raised the desk and produced a bundle of birches. A moment he examined them nicely with thumb and finger, then he stretched up

to his full six feet three inches, and stalked slowly forward to the edge of the platform.

He was no ordinary man. He studied his pupils, searched out their vulnerable spots, and fitted his punishments accordingly. They, on their part, firmly believed him to be possessed of superhuman knowledge, and were convinced that not a single act of their lives could escape the cavernous eyes that searched into the very corners of their souls.

“We will now proceed in the order of castigation.”

So saying, Grimshaw drew out a paper, and began to read in a loud voice, “Record of the week. Commended for diligence and application: Troutman and Runcey. Tardy: Duff, Marston, E. Smith. Work after school: Lufkin and Spott. Reported for penalties and verses: Duff, Marston, E. Smith, and Rogers. Corporal punishment!” (Here a shiver ran through the class.) “Corporal punishment, for inattention, for insubordination and for general stupidity: *Marston! Bangs! E. Smith!*”

Three hangdog culprits stumbled forward, with the resignation of old offenders. Grimshaw, tossing the record of the week on the desk, took up the birches and eyed the desperate three.

“Dunces! Ignorami!” At this cabalistic accusation, a violent twitching took place among the condemned. “Stand there!” The three lurched into position. The master, satisfying himself with a glance, swept the classroom with his eyes, stroked the birches, and began.

“I have taught in the woods of Maine, I have taught on the prairies of Illinois, I have had occasion to chastise ignorance, I have had occasion to rebuke stupidity, I have had occasion to punish sloth — sloth! But never, never, never, did I expect to meet such complete, such colossal,

such *monumental* asininity!" The school ventured a titter, led by Troutman in the front row.

"Silence!"

Troutman, who owed his position to his ability to lead the laugh at the right moment, subsided with flaming ears.

"The boy Bangs," resumed the master, extending the birches, "who at the age of eleven cannot extract square root, the boy Marston, ignorant of the date of our beloved Declaration of Independence, the boy E. Smith, who spells plain gold ring, p-l-a-n-e g-o-o-l-d w-r-i-n-g—AT THIRTEEN, have not their parallels in the history of education! Where will such beginnings lead? To what ends? Just as the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined."

Saying which, he held up the birches and inclined the twigs, while the luckless three, who firmly believed this to be the proper interpretation of the passage in question, shivered in their stockings. "Dunces—advance!" With a sudden elongation of his arm, he caught them one after another by their collars and thrashed them soundly, suspended, struggling and kicking, in mid-air.

The ceremony over, and while John in wonder awaited developments, the master threw himself into his chair, stretched out his feet until they rested on the desk, placed his arms akimbo behind his neck, and gazed up at the ceiling.

"Is Duff here?" he said presently, in gentle tones.

A thrill of expectation ran about the room, and a strapping, burly fellow of fifteen beside John answered surly, "Present."

"Is Duff standing up," continued the quiet voice, "so that we can all see him?"

Duff, his face aflame, rose and balanced awkwardly from foot to foot. "Yes, sir."

“Good, very good; such lights must not be hid. Oh, Duff—you didn’t have your lessons last week—did you?”

No answer.

“Now you studied hard, didn’t you, Duff?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Poor Duff—poor Duff! It isn’t your fault, is it, Duff?”

“N-n-o, sir.”

A pause.

“By the way, Duff—do you ever go sparking?”

Consternation.

“Yes? I thought so. And did you ever go sparking up at the cross-roads, Duff?”

The faces of the front row were fairly tortured in their efforts to restrain their laughter from the redoubtable slugger. The back rows were beginning to titter, while John, making no attempt to conceal his amusement, grinned up at Duff, who, doubling his fists, was staring desperately ahead, longing to hurl himself upon his persecutor and beat him to the ground.

“Wonder if you went Tuesday night, Duff?” asked Grimshaw, fondling the birches.

“Yes, sir.” The answer was wrung from the quivering boy.

“A-ha! Friday night?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And Thursday and Wednesday nights?”

“Y-yes, sir.”

“Poor Duff! Did he think I was going to pass them over? Poo-oor Duff!—and you didn’t know your lessons all the week, did you, Duff?”

“No, sir.”

A pause.

"Poo-oor Duff! You must have been very much occupied those nights."

Duff hung his head, and tears of mortification sprang to his eyes; the back rows broke into an audible ripple, and one person laughed outright. Duff looked up in fury, the school, in amazement. It was John Gaunt, who, unable longer to contain his laughter, had thus broken out.

Grimshaw, thinking the boy had received his due amount of punishment, signalled to him to drop into his seat, and began the routine of the day with the class in percentage.

Profiting by the confusion, the smarting boy whirled about and glared at John, who, unconscious of offence, regarded the wheelwright's son with a look of intense amusement.

"Booby!" muttered Duff, sheltering himself behind the lid of his desk. "Booby, I'll make you smart for this!"

"What!" exclaimed the descendant of all the Gaunts, with eyes aflame.

At the unwonted noise, Duff subsided hurriedly, as the master sprang up and glared about the room. A moment later a scrap of paper was tossed on John's desk.

"You are a mamma's booby and a sneek. You wanted to git me cought by old Grimes. I'll ficks you after school. W. Duff."

John sat bolt upright, and looked straight at the mighty Duff, as though the next moment he would spring at the throat of his insulter. Recess declared, he started up, all fury. But fate decreed otherwise, for Grimshaw called him to the platform, where he was compelled to sit in unwilling examination through the entire play hour.

When the school came shuffling in, Duff's face wore a look of great contempt—another scrawl was rolled down the desk, bearing a single word, "Fraidcat."

When John's eye fell on this crowning insult his temper went entirely, and when at last the releasing rod descended on the desk, he fairly bounded from his seat and down the aisle. Crowding out the door, peering over one another's shoulders in their eagerness, came the school, and at last, looming up behind, stalked the burly Duff.

"Ha, there you are!" cried the champion, catching sight of John's white face. "I'm going to give you something you'll remember to the end of your life."

"Yes, here I am!" the furious boy burst out, to the blank amazement of every one. "You dared to call me a coward. Will you take it back, or fight?"

"What, fight you!" roared the astonished Duff, and in great contempt he picked up a lath, and made forward, with corporal punishment in his eye.

The next moment John hurled himself upon Duff, struck him a resounding blow in the face, and all but bore him to the ground. With a roar of anger Duff shook him off, and again blinded by rage, John threw himself against his surprised opponent. Time after time, straight blows from the shoulder cast him bleeding down, but he hardly touched the ground before he bounded up and returned to the assault. He circled, twisted, and turned, rushed under the other's guard, and left savage marks on his face, and once even bore him to the ground before the fury of his attack. It was several minutes before the bewildered Duff could collect his wits; then, bleeding and swollen, he shook himself together and began to strike out, as John came rushing in, desperate as a dervish, unmindful of himself, intent

only on wounding his enemy. Down and down again he went before the sturdy fists of the descendant of wheelwrights and blacksmiths, and back and back again he came, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, staggering, reeling, until at last down he went for the last time and fainted dead away.

When again the light of day broke over him, he was lying under an apple tree, staring up at a patch of blue sky, Jonah, his darky, hovering near with frightened eyes, and Banks, the cock of the school, bending over him, applying a wet cloth. In a moment John remembered.

"Where is he?" he shouted, attempting to spring up; but dizziness pulled away his legs, and he collapsed into the arms of his nurse.

"There, there, youngster, no more fight to-day," said the other, not unkindly, forcing him on his back. "Duff's gone home, and carried a pretty pair of eyes from you."

"Did he apologize?" asked the warrior, weakly.

"Duff? Lord, no,—it ain't in him."

"Then I'll fight him to-morrow."

"Hello!"

"I'll fight him to-morrow, I'll fight him every day, and I'll fight him as long as I can stand up or see."

"Well, well, youngster, you're certainly a plucky one; but if you want to thrash Duff, my boy, you've got to learn to fight—mind that! Now jump up and get on the pony. Can you get home all right?"

"Of course," John said stoutly; but his head was strangely light as he galloped home, with the wondering Jonah in his wake.

Never had any one seen the elder Gaunt in such spirits as he was that night. Doctor Magog, who had

been to Bromfield in the afternoon, had met Banks and carried back the whole story. Gaunt and Captain Brace brought in bandages and applied salt pork, and early the next morning, when John was able to stand up, they put him through a thorough drill in the first principles of "the manly art," showed him how to guard, taught him to strike from the shoulder, so as to get his body behind the blow, gave him their blessing, and sent him off to battle. Before he left he went into his mother's room, to her bedside, where she had called him.

"I am only lazy," she said, in answer to his anxious inquiries; "nothing else." She took the rough little fist with its bruised knuckles in her soft, cool hands, and added, "Now, my son, that you are in, never give up." There was plenty of the old battling spirit on both sides of the house.

That evening back came John again, bruised, but unbeaten. "I fought as long as I could stand, and I drew his blood—see!" and in triumph he held up his sleeve, which was dyed a brilliant crimson, and of a deeper color than that which bedaubed the rest of his shirt. That night Harry Gaunt actually forgot the cards, and sat up with the captain planning the next day's campaign; and it was arranged that John was to play for the wind.

Wednesday, John was later than usual, but when he returned, there was a light in his eye.

"To-morrow I'll make him apologize. He was all done up to-day. I played for his wind, as you told me, sir," he added, with the assurance of an *habitué* of the ring. He said nothing of his own punishment, which must have been severe, judging from the amount of pork consumed.

On Thursday, the fourth day, Harry Gaunt held out

during the morning, but in the afternoon he weakened, and, the carriage appearing, he and Captain Brace drove off, *ventre à terre*, for the battlefield.

When they returned, the expression of triumph on the father's face was something to behold. Captain Brace and Squire Troutman (who had received the tip) were on the back seat, while in front, John, battered and limp, rested on his father's shoulder, pale, but with the glow of victory in his eyes. At the close of the fourth day, after the most obstinate conflict of all, Duff had suddenly drawn back, shoved forth his hand, and muttered, "Here, I'm sick of fighting you. I take it back."

The elder Gaunt drove home, belaboring the horses, and saluting the passers-by in such high spirits that they stood and gaped after the flying team, astonished at the change in the indifferent master of Windrift.

"Why, where's mother?" the boy cried in disappointment, when they rolled up to the steps.

Aunt Liza, looking very grave, plucked him away.

"You's to come wid me, Marse John," she whispered; then, as he followed her upstairs, she added, "Yo' ma ain't well, honey; she stay in her baid all de day."

CHAPTER VIII

FROM that bed Emily Gaunt never rose. The days of John's campaign had been days of anguish. With his separation from her, the last prop had fallen away. At first she found that she could only reach the garden-seat, then only the edge of the jessamine. Thursday she was so weak that she was forced to keep her bed; on the next day, attempting to rise, her strength suddenly forsook her, and she dropped back unconscious. When the room came back to her again, Doctor Magog was standing at the foot of the bed, summoned by the frightened Liza.

"Come, come, now," he cried, camping down cheerily on the edge, "let's have this awful pulse. Bless my soul! I thought from the way your nigger came for me, it was a matter of life and death. Tut, tut, your pulse is all right, eh? Now for the tongue—a little off—ha, hem! My dear Mrs. Gaunt, there's absolutely nothing constitutionally the matter with you—not a bit! You're just generally run down, that's all—happens to all of us! I'm going to keep you in bed quite a while—give you a thorough rest." He drew out his handkerchief and blew a real Magogian blast. "This sort of thing comes when we least expect it—so it does, so it does. Gad—I remember, now, six years—no, let me see, five, five, five, was it five; come to think, it was four and a half—four and a half years before my famous operation on General Brock—gad, if I

didn't go off myself one morning—piff! boom! helpless as a baby. I thought the game was up with me—we all do—made my will—called in a doctor. 'Doctor,' says I, 'how long is it?' I says, 'I'm a medical man, I'm not afraid.' And what do you think he said? By gad! he looked at me and says, 'You young fool,'—the very words,—'keep your bed, and no more of such nonsense; eat and sleep, and don't be an ass.' Bless me! in a month I was up and chipper as a gamecock. Never have felt better in my life—look at me now." He slapped his fat little chest and laughed a jolly laugh, which showed the ruddiest of cheeks.

She looked up and smiled wearily.

"Come, now," said the doctor with a confidential twinkle, "confess you thought yourself at death's door."

"I have thought so—for a long time, Doctor," she admitted, the light of hope flashing into her eyes again.

"Tut, tut—didn't I know? What an idea! Bless me, I see I'll have to drop in right along, just to keep bookish thoughts out of some one's head. And—hello!—that's it—we'll have Master John sent home after morning school, that some one may enjoy him all the afternoon. There, there, was there ever such a good doctor?" Such a gleam of happiness as lighted her face at his words!

"What an aching heart it is!" he said to himself, as he closed the door and passed down the stairs. Captain Brace happening at the moment to issue from his room, the doctor hailed him gravely, "A word with you, Ned," and led the way to the porch. There he remained silent so long, tugging at his gloves, that Brace, growing impatient, inquired, "Nothing serious, Tom, I hope?"

"She won't live out the month," said Magog, turning short; "she may not live a week," he added under his breath, seeing how the captain started.

"No, no; not that, Tom!" Brace cried out, white as a sheet. "Good God! that's awful—awful! What can be the matter?"

Doctor Magog gave a bitter laugh and extended one hand significantly over the fields, where at that very moment Harry Gaunt on Two Spot was flying across country. "Do you understand? Can you catch a point? I've been expecting it for a long while—poor little woman! Mind you, Ned, no word of this; she is not to know."

Captain Brace, still very nervous, nodded back. "I think, Tom," he said, pursing his lips slowly, "that *he'd* better not know—for—for her sake and his."

"I'll leave that in your hands, Ned," said Magog, looking up, and with an exchange of glances, they separated.

Was there ever a patient who could not be deceived? To hope all, to believe the best, is instinctive with the dying. Therein lies the deep tragedy—in the false joy and the hollow hope. And yet they say that doctors who have most deceived, are in turn as easily tricked, when at the inscrutable turn of the wheel, they too lie on their last beds and await the verdict from other eyes.

At noon, when Aunt Liza bore in the tray, she was startled at the transformation. "Lor', honey, how young you is lookin'!" she ejaculated, rolling her eyes.

"You, too, a flatterer, Aunt Liza?" The mistress smiled back with a glimmer of the old mischief.

"I 'clar', Mis' Em'ly, you's jes' like dat picture," Aunt Liza cried, glancing up at the wall.

John arriving now, the mother called him up to her.

"They are trying to make an invalid of me, Johnnie-boy," she exclaimed, pinching the serious cheeks; "but they have prescribed such a good tonic that I shall want to be ill for a long, long time."

"And what is that?" John inquired innocently.

"You," answered the mother, her eyes kindling, and she held him long to her breast.

The days lengthened into the second week, and yet she was happy, without a doubt seeming to cross her mind.

"I am so weak, Doctor," she complained once; "weaker than ever. See, I can hardly lift this arm."

"Of course, of course," he scolded, "that's the way it goes," and she, radiant in her new hope, believed.

One morning of the second week there sounded a familiar knock, and in response to her, "Come in, Johnnie-boy," the door swung gently, and in came her son.

"You've come to bid me good morning, dear," she said with a flush of pleasure, "before you gallop to school. Dear old Puff! Does he miss my lump of sugar?"

"Better still, mother; I can stay with you all the time. Think of that!"

"No, no, dear," she answered. He was in her arms now, his face buried on her shoulder. "Your father is very kind, but you mustn't neglect your duties. Besides, the afternoons are long—very long, don't you see, Johnnie-boy?"

"But it isn't my father."

"Not your father? Why, John, what do you mean?" she cried, with a sudden premonition.

“Why, it’s the doctor, of course — and it’s orders,” he replied. “I knew it would please you. Aren’t you happy?”

“The doctor? — orders?” she repeated mechanically. What a shadow fell at that moment over the room! Gone was the sun, the fair stretch of blue, the white circling clouds, the breath of the fields, the birds swerving at the window, — gone like the snuffing of a candle.

“Yes, yes,” cried a hearty voice, and Doctor Magog’s apple cheeks peered around the door. “Doctor’s orders — a very severe tyrant — at your service, madam.”

“Shall I go?” asked John, preparing to slip away. She nodded her head; her eyes were shut; she could not speak.

“A terrible tyrant,” he began, rubbing his hands. “Come, now, we old saw-bones can be soft-hearted at times. You see the tonic was so good we’ve decided to double it. Two weeks, and we’ll have you in your garden again, with your boy at your side. Who then’ll thank this ogre of a doctor?”

“Hush — oh, hush!” She shut her hands convulsively over her eyes.

“What — what! Why, this is mutiny!”

She uncovered her face, and he saw the truth in her eyes. “I know,” she said faintly, checking all his mirth. “How long — how long will it be? Tell me.”

He walked to the window. The tears were on his face as he came back. “God help me — two weeks.”

She lay under the white canopy with closed eyes, and such a deathly pallor spread over her face that he started forward in alarm.

“I could have borne to die,” she said at last, opening her eyes slowly, “had you told me. What you have

done is worse than death. I — I shall not need you any more. 'Good-by.'

Doctor Magog, shaking and unnerved, went out without a word. On the steps he fairly broke down. "Oh, God, what have I done?" he cried, wringing his hands. Ah, Doctor Magog, all patients are not alike!

No one went into the sick-room that morning, not even her son. "I must be alone," she said, shaking her head to all requests. "This afternoon send John to me."

When he came, in the cool of the evening, her serene face was without a trace of the storm through which she had passed. "Call Sol and Aunt Liza, Johnnie-boy," she said, with an attempt at a smile, "and have them move my bed to the window."

They placed the great four-poster where she had directed, so that as she lay she looked out on the full sweep of the skies, the flush of the garden, the high brick wall, the thin archway, and the cedars. There, in the twilight's pale decline, they left her, her head thrown back against the propping pillows, staring with wide eyes at the boy who sat in wonder at the foot.

During all this time Harry Gaunt moved quietly about the house, spending his days in long, fierce runs over the country, playing feverishly at the cards long into the first of the morning. When he went to bed, it was always in a room next to Captain Brace, with the door left open for comradeship. Only once had he gone into his wife's room, and then he went no more — the very suggestion of death filled him with anguish. Brace thought him deceived, but he was not; it was merely that his mind was a blank.

One day, a week after the revelation of Doctor Magog, Emily summoned Aunt Liza to her bedside. It was

a full afternoon in August. She had been lying for an hour gazing out of the window. The wrens had several times poised at the sill to peck at the crumbs offered them; they had grown to be fast friends. The fresh green meadows were dotted with the white of sheep or the darker sides of cattle. From the garden below rose the scent of the shrubs and the flower-beds. In the quarters the little negroes were romping and shouting over their games. The lumbering buzzards were floating in languid circles against the sky. The squirrels were scolding from branch to branch. Everywhere was the spirit of life and youth—and just beyond a brick wall and the glimpse of an arch! From her bed she looked down on the gray Gothic gates that led to the Via Dolorosa. Presently a negro, rake on shoulder, came singing down the path and shambled on his way, carelessly leaving the gates ajar. She looked down and saw it. Then she looked up to find Aunt Liza waiting at the bed. She talked with her a long time in a faint voice, giving her directions, and as she left the room she called her back and sent her forgiveness to Doctor Magog. A moment later John rushed in from the fields, his face aglow with health and good spirits.

“What a happy boy!” she said, glancing up at him with her wistful smile. “What has he been doing all this bright day?”

He had been doing a dozen things. He had taught Puff to leap, and he had caught such a string of fish by the cove under the barrier. “You shall see them,” he cried, “when they are cooked. Liza is to bring them in—and, mother, they let me ride Two Spot!”

She cut his flow of spirits short, saying, “Come here, Johnnie-boy. Lie down by my side—so, with your head on my shoulder.”

“Won't it hurt you?”

She shook her head. “Not now.”

They lay there in silence until the sun had reached the horizon, and the sky was afire with color. Then she began to speak.

“Listen, my son. You may not understand me now, but you will some day; and so, remember what I am going to say to you.” She paused, her face aglow with the flame of the sunset. “Look into that beautiful sky, John, and see all the wonder that is painted there. How far we seem to look up into the space above us! I know you are like me in many things. You love nature. My son, always be true to that love. It will help you, dear, through many a trial. No matter what may come to you, no matter how black the future may seem—yes, or the present—remember that the greatest thing in all the world is your own soul. That nothing can destroy. I do not know what may come to you—I have often wondered, at night. It is easy to sin, John. Any one can do that. Hold yourself above the common herd. Be too proud to descend. You are a gentleman, a gentleman, John; always remember that. I need not tell you much more. You are brave; you are truthful; you are ambitious. Only remember this, dear, when you have forgotten all else I have ever said—how little I have said!—what can be said?—remember that every woman is of the sex of your mother.”

At the end she dropped back, as though exhausted, and her eyes closed. John had half risen, and was sitting staring into her face. She was quiet, without stirring, for a long time, while the dusk stole in and blotted out the room. At last her eyes opened, and she stretched forth her arms and caught him to her breast

where he lay, hushed but understanding nothing. Then she began to talk low. Several times, fancying she was speaking to him, John had questioned her, but she did not hear him. She was back in the days of her childhood, in the paths forever green, the sweet, the happy, the unforgotten. Just as the lights began to shimmer from the windows across the bay, just as below Gaunt and Captain Brace were rising from the afternoon game, and Sol's measured tones were announcing the supper, just as Aunt Liza came in bearing the candles, the mother's arms tightened a little, her head half rose, and with a heart-rending voice she cried, "Harry! Harry!"

CHAPTER IX

IN the early summer of the year 1852, the County Line stage-coach stood at Talbot, lingering before the doors of the White Horse Tavern. Tom Feeter, from the box, reins in hand, had twice sent the whistling lash cracking through the air, and shouted, "Aboard! aboard!" At a third impatient summons a young fellow with strong eyebrows who was sitting at his side cried out: "Start 'em up, Tom. It's the only way to fetch him."

"All right, Mister John, if you say so," replied the veteran, grinning. "He's a great chap, ain't he, now? Hi, you niggers, let go them horses' heads." The darkies tumbled back at a volley from the whip. A tightening of the reins, a cluck to the horses, and the creaking coach began to roll slowly down the street.

Instantly the door of the tavern was flung violently open, and a dapper little fellow bounded out and tore after the coach, which, slackening, allowed him to swing up to the roof.

"Gracious heavens! kept you waiting?" cried a merry voice, accompanied by a merry wink from a blue eye and a hazel one, that together gave the face an indescribable air of frolic and mischief. "John, false friend, why did you not call me?"

"We have done nothing else for the last quarter of an hour, Jack." The broad shoulders gave a shrug, and a heavy hand descended on the little fellow's back.

"Easy, easy, Mr. Giant! Strange, isn't it, I didn't hear you? Can't make it out," said Jack, innocently, looking at Tom Feeter, who exploded in a roar of laughter at the very sight of the twinkling eyes and the mouth, the corners of which always turned up. "Hello, now!"

The exclamation was prompted by a sudden outcry that rose behind them. At this moment, down the street, the landlord of the White Horse, his rosy daughter Bess, and a half-dozen negroes were seen tumbling out of doors, beckoning frantically to the fast-disappearing coach. Jack was on the box in a moment, waving his hat in vigorous response, until the coach had swerved behind a bend and rattled away.

"There's no use tellin', Mr. Hazard," said Tom Feeter, with a knowing grin, when Jack had tumbled again into his seat, blown and flushed. "You've made a right smart impression there, sah!"

"Think so?"

"Never heard tell of Bess running out like that before," added the driver, with a wise shake of his grizzled whiskers; "no, sah!"

"It was flattering, now, wasn't it? Poor 'maiden — alas, say I."

"You do, eh?" said John, with a chuckle. "Thought so. Well, what's up now?" For Jack had suddenly stopped, opened his mouth and brought his palm down with a resounding slap.

"Wrong, wrong! Oh, *vanitas vanitatum!* Let this be a lesson to thee. Jove, it was the reckoning!"

"Stop at once, Tom, and drive right back, or Jack will never forgive you," cried John, with mock solicitude.

"Mr. Feeter, do no such thing!"

"Lord bless you, if you kin bedevil old Sam Pringle," cried Feeter, with a chuckle, "sarves him right, say I."

"Bedevil? The word is strange, but your meaning is unmistakable, Mr. Feeter. What a sentiment is this in the company of honorable men? I see I must explain — address your ears."

Feeter scratched his head and gazed helpless from one to the other, as the little fellow, with an air of mystery, pulled out a note-book, and, with finger and thumb in air, proceeded to expound, in high burlesque.

"Primo — observe. I forget a reckoning — in other words we will say I owe the world a sum. That's one thing. Down we go in the book: J. Hazard, debtor to the world — one reckoning overlooked. But secundo, supposing I forget my change?"

"What?"

"Or lose my purse?"

"Hum!"

"Or, in my innocence, am fleeced by low sharpers?"

"Well."

"You catch my meaning, sir. I see intelligence in your eye. Concretely, I give landlord five-dollar bill, account at three dollars, and drive off. What then? Why certainly, I say the world owes me two dollars. Down it goes: World debtor to J. Hazard two dollars, for one change withheld. End of month, there you are. Account ready to balance — simple, isn't it?"

"Certainly, sah; right proper, too, sah."

"Precisely. Mr. Feeter, you are a man of quick comprehension and excellent judgments. You can't guess how often I do forget my change — happened night before last."

"Hark!" John broke in, laying one finger on his nose.

“You don’t remember. I’m not surprised, not at all, John Gaunt, though I didn’t expect you’d confess to it. But enough, enough. The conversation is growing stale. Mr. Feeter, how do you like my boots?”

The talk presently narrowed down to two, or rather to one. Jack rattled away in extravagant style, taking off the favorite actors of the day, the leading barristers, the college divines, the cat in the chimney, the little dog down the rain barrel, etc., etc., until his listener with aching sides begged off. John had drawn apart silently toward his end of the box, his memory beginning to play over the hundred and one familiar objects constantly rising along the way. He had grown into a strapping, thick-chested, long-armed fellow of nineteen — in figure the counterpart of his father — a good three inches over six feet. The eyebrows, falcon-like in childhood, were even stronger now, the gray eyes insistent but suggesting melancholy, the mouth sharp, thin, and resolute; a face bold in outline, clean-cut, older than his years, and sadder.

In a moment straight ahead sprang up the red-brick schoolhouse. There was the tree under which he had fought his great campaign with Duff. Was old Grimes, he wondered, still belaboring the recreants with rod and tongue, and the inevitable quotation, “Just as the twig is bent,” with the accompanying grim snapping of the birch? They were opposite the windows now, looking through at the rows of sprawling children — his place unoccupied.

“Lord, I feel just as though it were waiting for me now,” he thought. “What a queer little devil I was! I used to think I never could be so old as then — feel so now, but I suppose that too will pass.”

Away went the schoolhouse, and on rumbled the

coach, past the Caxtons' and the Llewellyns', past the red roof of the Troutmans', over the county bridge, where, looking far down the bay, one caught the first sight of Windrift glimmering white behind the poplars. There to the left were the fields through which he had roamed in the moonlight. There in the distance, gleaming in the sun, were the cove and the barrier where he had gone to fish that day. They overtook a familiar buggy and a piebald horse, and there, sure enough, was Lufkin—no—yes, Lufkin of the Bull's Eye, but grown so fat he hardly knew him. John had been away at college but two years; nothing was changed—and yet all was different.

The shadow on his face deepened as they swerved from the highway and began the long avenue with the white pillars of Windrift showing far in the vista. Jack was chattering away, popping a hundred questions, about the crops, the elections, how many children Feeter had, how much did they weigh, etc., and Feeter was rolling in his seat, his cheeks shaking with laughter as a pickaninny scudded up and threw open the gate.

John stared down with a melancholy air: there was no joy in this home-coming for him. There were ravages in the fences, and the cows and the sheep were grazing everywhere as they came up. The lawns were patchy, the hedges were broken, and green things were creeping through the gravel. The guinea fowl were running in squadrons on the terrace, darting among the rose-bushes—his mother's rose-bushes—where he used to distinguish her slim figure as he cantered up on Puff. Everywhere were neglect and shabbiness. Another lurch and they were climbing down at the step, where only old Sol and Aunt Liza were waiting to welcome him home.

"Where's my father?" inquired John, searching in wonder.

"In the big room, Marse John."

John, intrusting Jack to Aunt Liza, pushed in through the gloomy hallway, and was passing on when some one, who had run down the stairs at the sound of the coach, caught him by the hand and held him off at arm's length, with looks of admiration.

"What arms, what shoulders, John!" cried Captain Brace, a little bald, with new lines about the lips and eyes. "Duff wouldn't stand much chance now, would he, though? No, by gad, he wouldn't! Where's Mr. Hazard?"

"Liza has him in charge. Where's my father?"

The captain answered him with a gesture, and led the way through the dining hall to the winter parlor beyond. A figure at a table by the window, huddled over a pack of cards, looked up expectantly, and began to complain in a peevish voice: "Ned, you've been away an hour at least. Now, what is the matter? Here are your cards now."

"It is I, father;" and John loomed up out of the shadow over Captain Brace's shoulder.

"Oh, so it is," the father said, looking up guiltily. He held out his hand, and his eyes dropped. "You've grown, John."

"I reckon I have," said John, absently. He was staring at the limp, disordered figure, and the shaking hand.

"And you've come home—on vacation, haven't you?" continued the father, still avoiding the other's glance. He began to finger the cards nervously. "You have a friend, haven't you? I'm sure he is welcome."

"Thank you, sir, and with your permission I'll join him."

"I'm glad you've come, John," the father said kindly, very much relieved; and then in a moment he forgot him entirely, for the game had begun.

John turned on his heel and moved away. Not for an instant had Captain Brace's questioning eyes left the young fellow's face. Did his self-control conceal bitterness, he wondered, or only relief?

"Sho, Marse John, don't you mind him," Liza said, in waiting at the foot of the steps, sympathy kindling in her old eyes. "He been gittin' turrible bad dese days; it don't seem like he knowed things no mo'. He ack like he was plum crazy 'way f'om dem kyards."

John inclined his head—he had no need to be told what his eyes had seen. He went up the broad stairs alone, pausing on the balcony that overlooked the parlor, and there the memory of another night came back to him.

Everything recalled the days with his mother. In the years that had followed her death he had been conscious of nothing but a vague weight of sorrow, an enveloping cloud. Child that he was, he had never really known the loss; and now that after two years he had returned, for the first time, in all its vividness, rose the ache of the eternal separation. He peered into the dusk of the great room, and again saw the circle of lights on the table, the flash of coin, and the color of strewn cards. He left the balcony, went on up the stairs, and suddenly stood in her room. The smiling portrait was on the wall at his elbow; before him opened the window through which she had looked. He moved over and stood in its light. There was the garden, with the wall and the arch and the cedars beyond. Another sunset streaked the vesper skies, another twilight stole over the land as he gazed and

gazed, and all the world and all the sky and all his soul were empty. There Aunt Liza found him, long after supper had been announced, and Sol had carried the master helpless to his seat, and Captain Brace and Jack were chatting, wondering what had become of John, — there Aunt Liza found him, gazing up into the darkling sky, silent and lost.

“Honey! — Marse John! — Honey!”

Thrice she called him unanswered, and then plucked him gently by the sleeve.

CHAPTER X

THE life of a man proceeds by bounds and waits. One day the child awakes and finds he has a soul, and when he turns, the self of yesterday is distant and indistinct. But having thus suddenly achieved his new position, there his progress rests until, as unexpectedly, some half-dozen years later, he takes another leap and assumes the carriage and demeanor of majestic man. Then succeeds another period — a period of excessive self-consciousness and dignity — when he is ready to explode at a pin-prick, a time of tempests and brooding pride. Then suddenly arrives, one day, a great grief or a great responsibility, and he looks back and smiles at his pretensions — at last a man. To one who thus reviews his life, only the changes remain vivid and intense; the intervals are long, hazy, and uncertain.

So it was with John. The four years succeeding his mother's death had been four years of stagnation. True, he grew in bodily vigor. There was no horse he could not conquer, no ditch or rail to daunt him. He swung himself to the tops of the loftiest trees; he swam against the swiftest tides. At the hounds no one could show him the way.

He quickly became a leader among the neighborhood boys, and the pranks and depredations of these madcaps made them the bogy of the peace-loving for miles about. He won the right to lead, but it was by the force of his muscle and the strength of his will.

He was feared rather than loved. He had admirers, followers in plenty, but scarcely a friend.

The cloud of the first revelation was still heavy upon him. He was gloomy, at times morose. He shunned the garden, never by any chance approaching the little arch in the high brick wall. He shut his mind, he refused to think, still constantly striving to escape from his own unwelcome company. At the bottom of his soul he was miserably unhappy in the morbid atmosphere of his father.

At seventeen he completed his course under "old Grimes" and took the second leap in life. He grew exceedingly sensitive to his own dignity and importance, hectoring the colored quarters in mannish style, and instructed every one, though advice offered in return would rouse him at once to arms. His home became even more unbearable, so to escape from its gloom he decided to enter college. There was no opposition to the suggestion. It suited the father very well to be free of him, for he was always conscious and shifting under the scrutiny of his son. And so in the fall of the year 1850 John turned his back on the meadows and coves of Belle River and entered the college of Yale.

Up the battered halls of South Middle, up the narrow wooden flights he climbed, searching for room No. 19, and wondering what sort of man his room-mate would be. Students in their shirt sleeves, pipe in mouth, were lounging in and out, staring curiously at the newcomer, but he squared his shoulders; he was scant respecter of traditions. On the third floor he found a battle-scared door with two figures that might, in some measure, approach a one and a nine. From within arose an unusual racket, in which could be distinguished the wail of a flute and the whine of a dog.

John hesitated a moment, knocked, without answer, and pushed in.

A little fellow sunk in the corner of an easy-chair was blowing for dear life on a flute a species of jig to a ragged yellow cur whom he was maintaining with one foot on his hind legs, meanwhile bobbing his head and snapping one hand, in vain endeavor to make him caper; all of which sadly marred the rhythm of the music. Overhead a magpie swinging from a perch was scolding at such pranks.

The teacher ceased his labors, converted the flute into a weapon of defence, and turning on the newcomer a pair of roguish eyes, one blue and the other hazel, exclaimed:—

“Ha, stand back and avaunt, spirit of unrest! ‘Oh, come ye in peace, or come ye in war?’ *Ergo*, are you a gallant son of ’55, or a base and brutal sophomore? If you are neither sophomore, bailiff, or dun—why, here’s my hand.”

John burst out laughing. “I am John Gaunt.”

“What, my venerable room-mate? *Salve!* Took you for Fee-fi-fo-fum,” the other cried, springing up and seizing his hand. “Ahem! I trust you are a man of good moral habits.”

John laughed outright. “Hazard, I like you,” he said with a smile; “and I’m devilish glad to have such a defender.”

“Thanking you very kindly,” the little fellow responded, with a number of rapid winks. “I look small, but my strength is deceptive, as many have found to their cost, sir. And now sit down and tell me all about yourself.”

John was carried by storm. They were cronies in a moment. Somehow his gloomy thoughts could never

long remain in the presence of Jack's fine spirits, and slunk away, routed at once by a merry glance and the jolly upward curve of the mirth-inviting mouth. Was there ever seen such a fellow? Singing and dancing from bed-rise until the wee small hours, Jack had the restlessness of the unoccupied. To lay a wager was his constant delight. When all other sources of amusement failed, he would secure a beetle, and placing it in a circle, would bet with an imaginary Mr. Trim as to which quadrant the beast would depart by — keeping strict accounts in the little blue book of his breast pocket.

He would bet with anybody, on anything — at proper odds. The recitation hours, which he philosophically regarded as the inevitable drawbacks to a college life, he enlivened by numerous wagers with his neighbors — that two of the first three up would flunk; that the last man to recite would be from the back row, or the second from the first; that Briggs would drop his books again; that Professor Rootmeyer would make use of the expression, "Very creditable, indeed, sir," at least ten times in thirty minutes; and by such inventions he managed to endure the hour.

His recitations were the joy of the classroom, and perhaps secretly of his teachers, among whom his translations soon became classic. When called upon, Jack would spring to his feet with alacrity, eager and absorbed in the text. It mattered not a bit what he knew of the passage, he always recited.

"Ter Hazard," calls out the lover of Virgil and the flowing line, "begin to translate at the top of the page."

Up jumps Jack, snatching a book from Hazen on his right. He sees a few words that he knows, sprinkled

here and there; that is all that is necessary. Off he fires, describing in tremendous language the chariot race, the horses rearing and plunging, the shrill acclaim of the theatre, the straining of the leashes, the pistol crack of the whip, the exhortations of the driver — crash! now one is down, now another; still see-sawing, on they speed — and now 'the end, the goal, the victory!

During the recital the agony of the class is something fearful to behold. Rootmeyer, the "Roman," as the boys call him, screws about on one leg of his chair, his eyes bulging at the text in astonishment, his brow, at each successive burst of eloquence, twitching as though from pain. When Jack is quite through, he wipes his eyes with his pocket-handkerchief, and says, "That will do — that will quite do, Mr. Hazard, a trifle free — humph, yes, a trifle free, but excellently well done. Ahem! Will 'ter Jones try the same?" Jones rises and reads, with monotonous correctness, the meeting of Æneas and the sibyl!

Is Jack overwhelmed? Not in the least. He is back in his seat, whispering to Hazen, "Bet you even the Roman lets me through."

The Roman told the scene in faculty meeting, and though thereafter he never failed to put Jack on the rack twice a week, sure enough, at the end of the term, he let him through. There was method in Jack's madness.

A popular favorite John Gaunt never became. He was admired, he was respected, and in the frays with the sophomores, in the conflicts with the police and the fire department, — anywhere, in a word, where blows were to be given and taken, — he was a recognized leader. He had a way of looking too deep into men, his eyes were too sharp for hypocrisy; and when he had unearthed a toady or a humbug, his dislike was too apparent.

Perhaps it was because he was older in thought than his comrades that many felt not quite at their ease before his searching eyes. It was this contrary disposition that earned for the two friends the sobriquets of "Johnnie Gay" and "Johnnie Glum."

Jack Hazard was the idol of the class, with a dozen imitators who retailed his wit and copied his tricks of speech. Every one came to know of his accounts with the world and Mr. Trim, of his bets and of his bluffs. He even wrote verses, after the manner of his revered Tom Hood, which he sang to repeated encores in a thin, sweet tenor. There never was a more generous favorite: so long as he could borrow a dollar or gain new credit, any one might have for the asking.

A dozen times during the first year he was down on the faculty's black list, but by the strength of his wit he succeeded in squirming through. Sophomore year, every one swore it was the wonder of the college how he managed to hold his class, for he overcut and flunked until even John remonstrated. But the dean had been a classmate of his father's (only the wise can understand), and had a soft spot in his heart for the merry recreant. At length, however, an event occurred, on the last day of Jack's sophomore year, which broke down the limits of even that kindly man's patience, and Jack bade farewell to college, with the faculty sitting on his misdeeds, while his friends shook him sadly by the hand and said, "Wish you luck, old fellow; but we're afraid the game is up." This was how it came about.

The last examination was buried, and the glorious class of '55, revelling in their new dignity of juniors, had gathered under the hospitable roof of a favorite inn, to pass the flowing bowl and make the night merry

with their songs. Jack, having for certain failed on at least half of his subjects, was naturally the chief reveller. He was called upon again and again. He sang his best songs, he gave his drollest speeches, he took off Prexie's lecture to the freshman class, he imitated Rootmeyer's cough and pocket-handkerchief, and finally wound up with a sketch of that Roman listening to the chariot-race translation, which was received standing, with cheers. The glasses had clinked freely, the songs were gaining more in volume than in harmony. It was the last evening before breaking up for the summer, and the party was getting beyond control—such gatherings sometimes did—when cheers for '55 set in.

"Most popular man in '55," shouted a voice.

"Hazard! Hazard! Hazard!"

Jack, very unsteady on his feet, rose and made a profound bow. Then followed a chorus of shouts inquiring for the biggest dig, the strongest, the prettiest, the coolest-headed cribber, the most religious, etc.; all of which received uproarious nominations. Matters were becoming extremely boisterous, when some wag of discord had to sing out in deep, rumbling voice, "And, oh! who—has the—best—figure?"

"Chalmers!" shouted some.

"No, no; Brown—Robinson," from others.

All of a sudden up sprang Jack, flushed, earnest, and excited, crying, "No, no, boys, no; Hazard! Hazard's got the best figure."

A great roar went up, followed by cries of, "Oh, come now, Jack!" "Go easy, Jack, go easy," intended to egg him on. Some one pulled the little fellow down, but he bounded up again, insisting earnestly, "I have, I have—it's true."

"Oh, Jack, oh ho, Johnnie Gay, oh ho!" roared back the tables in delight. Chairs were thrown crashing to the floor, every one came piling in from the other rooms. In an instant the walls were choked up to the ceilings with men clambering up to laugh at Jack, who, swaying below in the pit, flushed and angry, suddenly pounded on the table and roared out, "And by——, I'll prove it."

Before any one could guess what he intended, he had flung aside his coat and stripped off his shirt. John Gaunt and Robinson, springing forward, caught him in their arms just as he was reaching down.

In a moment the room was rocking with the shock of laughter, the crowd surged and swayed, crushing glasses and chairs, some hotheads crying, "Go on, go on, Jack——" others, "Prove it—let him prove it!" But Jack's body-guard forming quickly, bore him, struggling, out of the choked and stuffy room.

"Here, on with his shirt—the little devil!" Robinson cried. But Jack would not be dressed. He fought, he struggled, he implored. Out ran the widow with a blanket.

"For the love of God, gentlemen, t'row this around 'im and carry 'im home, or it's ruined the place'll be."

John and Robinson bore him up the street, where at the corner the ferret eye of policeman No. 32 detected them. In a moment the hawk of the night swooped down, club in hand. There was no love lost between the right arm of the law and the college.

"Under arrest there," he cried; then, "Oh, it's Mr. Hazard, is it?"

"Hello—Charlie! Hello—my—ol'—friend—Charlie!" sang out the muffled voice. "Arrest 'em, Charlie. Run 'em in. Lock 'em up, Charlie,—they're jealous

of me — because I have the *f*-nest figure — the *f*-nest figure in fif-ty-five!”

“Hist, Mr. Hazard,” said the policeman, with a grin. “Moind, sir, the dean is jist afther goin’ up the street.”

“Whoopee!” burst out Jack, and, flinging himself free of his captors, away he scudded along the sidewalk. After him, with the wings of fear, flew John and Robinson; but just before they pounced upon him and swallowed him up in the blanket, the dean had turned and recognized the shouting figure; and, worse and worse, there, walking by his side, was no other than the president himself.

Jack told the story quite gayly that night, at the supper table, to Captain Brace.

“And so they’ve got Jack, poor Jack, up before the coroner’s committee,” he said, with a comical face. “Guess the game is up. I offered to bet the dean as much when he told me. Think you Jack is cast down thereby? No, sir, I am a philosopher. Who knows? Perhaps it is for the best. Really, now, I don’t see how else I could have escaped my debts. ‘It’s an ill wind,’ you know. John, I consider this remarkably fine old sherry. Have the goodness to pass Jack the decanter.”

CHAPTER XI

THE next morning John was up with the sun, and off for a canter on Two Spot, leaving Jack, a resolute sleeper, still rumbling away under a gorgeous nightcap of red and gold. When he rode back, ravenous for breakfast, a familiar sulky was moving before the steps, and there by the window, conversing with Captain Brace, was the bonny, round little figure he knew so well.

"What, what, John!" a brisk voice broke out at his entrance, and Doctor Magog, running forward, caught him by both hands. "At your old tricks, you rascal!"

"It is an old habit," said John, shaking hands in turn with Captain Brace, aware that the doctor was measuring him with eyes of admiration. "You're over early yourself."

"Of course, of course; do you suppose I'd lose a minute, when I knew you were here?" Doctor Magog cried, clapping John on the back; but there was a conscious pause, and the young fellow looked a little constrained. "Well, well; a doctor's ways, you know. Come over to-day and pay your respects. By the way, John, there's a certain young lady there. *Verbum sap.*, my boy."

"I'm not to be tempted," John answered, with a laugh. "There's my friend Hazard, though, you might try him."

"Who takes my name in vain?" cried a voice, and a black top and sunny smile bobbed out of the doorway. "Aha! You gentlemen just up, I perceive. Heard

my name, and came down to defend my reputation. Who can save us from our friends, eh, Captain Brace — us men of uneasy conscience, you know?"

"Yes, yes; that's good," Brace burst out, laughing hugely.

"Doctor Magrog? — Ma-gog, oh! Proud to know you, sir," Jack cried, over the other's plump hand. "My great-uncle was of your noble profession."

"Indeed, I'm glad to know you, Mr. Hazard," the doctor exclaimed, warming to him at once. "You must come with John to The Hill. John is a scoffer, but you, I understand, begad, are not so insensible to the charms of the other sex."

"No, no — oh, lord, no!" Jack exclaimed, with a look of dismay, and a sidelong glance at his friend. "If any man has told you that, he is a villain, and he lies in his teeth. It is a slander. A young woman — an unmarried one, Doctor — puts me to instant confusion. I — I'm like a fish out of water." Still with an indignant eye to John he surveyed himself in the mirror, gave a satisfied slap to his chest, and added: "But I like old women — always do well with them. I remember once Briggs called the faculty a lot of old women, and my saying, 'Wish the deuce they were! I'd be in clover.' I say, Doctor, I have it. Let me come and see your wife. I know we'll strike it up."

The others burst out laughing. "What have I said?" cried Jack, pirouetting about. "Have I offended any one? If I have, I ask his pardon, I'm sure."

"Not at all, not at all," Doctor Magog replied, much amused. "Come over, then, as you choose. John, good day. See you often. Ned, just a word with you."

"Did I say anything wrong?" asked Jack, innocently, over the sausage, when the others had left.

"Oh, no; certainly not. You never do," responded John, raising his shoulders deprecatingly. He never was quite convinced of Jack's ingenuousness. "Here, you laggard, quick with your coffee! We've a good canter to go this morning."

They galloped first down the Bromfield road to the old red brick academy, where Grimshaw came out and shook them by the hand—the same "old Grimes," with his chop whiskers, and the deep eyes searching them as though they were his schoolboys.

They halted a moment to greet Duff, now a strapping fellow in leathers, and then rode on over the fields, John pointing out a dozen scenes of his boyhood, and detailing early escapades. They dined at the Bull's Eye with the landlord, Lufkin, with whom Jack sealed an eternal friendship, so that at the end Lufkin actually got down the keys of the cellar and tipped them off to a bottle of '76 sherry, a most unheard-of generosity. Jack was a good companion to travel with.

Once or twice a regret had passed through John's mind that he had brought his friend to such a home. But Jack was one of those delightful persons who never notice what they are not expected to see, and John's misgiving soon wore away, under the relief he experienced in the company of Jack's good cheer. At other times he was gloomy enough.

In how many a home is there to be found one member of the household who is never mentioned, who comes and goes silently, whose presence is never noticed, whose absence is never remarked upon, whose entrance no more disturbs the conversation than does the coming of one's shadow when the lamp is brought in. Perhaps it is a younger daughter who, the neighbors whisper, with a tap to their foreheads, is "not all

there"; or an old lady who listens mute and blinking from a corner near the hearth; or a poor relation who leaves the room with the children; or a prodigal son; or a husband who sometimes appears coldly respectful to the lady at the head of the table.

Just such a shadow in his own home had Harry Gaunt become. Nowadays no one ever rode up at Windrift to pay a friendly call or spend a night in revelry. When the young fellows made their bow at the great country houses no one ever alluded to the elder Gaunt. He was never down before dinner — a meal at which the young men were seldom present. At supper he sat stooping and dumb, his hands trembling so that at times half the contents of his glass would be spilled on the cloth. These two meals over, he passed completely from sight. Even his own slaves forgot his presence: he was somewhere gambling with Captain Brace.

When a woman ceases to care how she looks, or a man who has been a gentleman loses all restraint in the presence of his servants, the end is not very far off. Into this last stage the unfortunate man had now passed. He broke down completely again and again before his slaves, and raved and shrieked until, in fear of their lives, they scrambled out of the way whenever his lagging foot was heard on the stairs. Only in the presence of his son was he silent, struggling for self-restraint. But though John constantly avoided him, each interview at night served only to swell the mortification in his soul. He too was silent and uneasy at the table, so that the conversation fell generally to Jack and Captain Brace, and, sometimes, to Doctor Magog, who had of late taken to spending the night.

All these days the doctor's sharp eyes were watching the young fellow. He knew well what troubled him.

"Take Jack with you," he said to him abruptly one morning foreseeing what was impending. "Run off for two or three weeks in the woods; this lazy life doesn't agree with two young fellows of spirit."

John jumped at the suggestion. "Just the thing! We can be off to-morrow. We'll ride to Bemis and strike off in a boat."

In the crisp of the morning the horses were at the steps tossing their heads, chafing to be off. Just as the sun rose over the colored quarters, Uncle Israel finished adjusting the packs. Presently John came down the steps alertly and examined the bits. "Dis y'here mare am pow'ful skittish, Marse John," the old coachman said as he strapped on the guns.

"The more the better, Israel." The young master slapped the sleek sides, crying, "Jack—Jack, you laggard!"

Down ran Jack, and, following more sedately behind him, Doctor Magog, who had come over to lend them his new Colt repeater, a superb and wonderful gun. Sol and Liza appeared at the window ready to wave them off. Jonah, crestfallen and longing to go, sulked under the trees. John was laughing with Doctor Magog, pumping his hand in farewell, one foot in the stirrup ready to spring up and be off and free, when—

"One moment," a voice cried, and Captain Brace, appearing, added, "John, it's your father wants to see you before you go."

Doctor Magog looked up quickly. John, who was about to vault into saddle, wavered, threw the reins curtly to Israel, and came back slowly to the house. The spring had vanished from his step.

At his father's door he was forced to knock three times before he heard a querulous voice cry, "Come in,

come in; why don't you come in? Am I to shout to you all day?"

The young fellow shut his lips, and with an effort pushed open the door and stood within.

"Oh, it's you, John, is it?" the father began hastily from the bed, "I thought it was that ornery nigger. I—I beg your pardon. Well, why don't you speak? Don't stand there staring at me; you make me nervous."

"I am come to say good-by," said John, gravely.

"Good-by—good-by, why do you say good-by? You're not running away from home, are you? One would think you never expected to see me again."

A premonition came to the young fellow as he waited there looking down at the huddled figure on the bed, the shaking hands, the pockets of flesh under the eyes,—eyes that never for a moment met his,—the form yet superb in its decay.

"Come closer, John," the father began again, trying to soften his voice. "Give me your hand—there! What a man you will make! I used to be just like you, years ago. John, don't mind my trembling so; it's nothing. I'm going to be up and out soon, and then I'll lead you a chase over the country. I—I've been devilish fond of you, John, all my life. You've been my pride and joy; you know it, don't you?" He stroked the hand he held a moment silently, and then added, almost inaudibly: "You're all that's left me, John—all that's left. Tell me—you still love your father, don't you?"

The sight of the parent's emotion for a moment swept before it all other feelings. John bent down suddenly, put his arm under the cramped figure, and touched the forehead with his lips. Then the vision of his mother rose up before his eyes, and he turned

and fled downstairs, deaf to the querulous voice that called him.

Once in the open air he gave his hand silently to Captain Brace and Doctor Magog, feeling in return their ill-ease, climbed into the saddle, and rode away. That afternoon all Jack's sunniness failed to drag a smile from him.

Gradually, a little of the old-time love of the tangled woods and the free sky returned to him, and something of the peace of the leafy silences stole into his heart. For two weeks he almost succeeded in shaking off the spell that hung over him, but never quite; for back of all the freedom of the great blue days there waited something ominous.

"And now, Jack, back to Bemis," he cried one morning, no longer able to withstand his anxiety. "Provisions are running low, and — well, I promised Doctor Magog I would, in case of an accident."

"Back to Bemis it is, Captain," said Jack, jumping up. "And I say — let's throw everything in. Then, you know, we can strike out fresh — anyhow, let's clear up, I say."

John, touched by his friend's tact, moved over and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Hello, what's in the wind now?" exclaimed Jack, instantly shunning a crisis.

"Jack, Jack, will you never be serious?"

"Serious — what's the use, sir? I live my life as well as another, I hope. I choose to laugh and sing on my way. What's the use of being sad and serious and sombre, Johnnie Glum; to pull a long face and say, Ah's me and alack-a-day! to sigh and groan. Bur-r-r-t! A short life and a merry one, there's my motto. Here, tumble into the boat, and no more serious faces."

That night they drifted under a covered sky over the quiet waters, feeling, rather than seeing, how the sagging clouds oppressed the earth. A lantern at the bow swept the banks with its narrow stream, piercing the tangled underbrush, and showing in the tree-tops the black bodies of the startled buzzards.

John, in the stern, softly dropped the guiding paddle in the dark current, swinging the canoe here and there to escape a truant log or a jutting branch, while Jack, stretched out in front, woke the echoes with his songs, the canoe gliding down its whispering way to the rhythm of the sweet, thin tenor.

"I say, Jack," began his friend meditatively, when the last notes of a gondola song had floated away, "what a difference the sky makes to our feelings. Last night it was clear as a spring; and somehow, do you know, I never felt so happy in my life, just lying under the trees and watching the moon working its way through the branches. And here it is now, black and sullen, not a star to be seen—it makes you feel queer, lonely, doesn't it? You can't account for it."

Jack nodded sleepily from the bottom. "So it does."

"How different a man is at night," continued John, extricating the canoe from a mesh of bulrushes into which it had rustled unnoticed. "Now I never get to thinking in the daytime—I mean just like this; somehow night's the time for quiet—for reflection. Do you know, Jack, I always keep looking up, wondering if the clouds won't part for a moment and let a star shine through. How far off they are when you look at them steadily; and to think that space never ends! It is too great to understand, isn't it?" He was silent a long time, and then he said hesitatingly: "I say, Jack, I've something serious to ask you. Do you believe there's any-

thing in heredity? I mean, do you believe the curse of the father descends to the son, even unto the second generation, as the Bible says? Tell me, Jack."

There was no answer.

"Jack?"

He bent over cautiously — Jack was asleep. He drew back slowly, and with a new feeling of loneliness, to the company of his own thoughts. He longed to pour out his doubts, his questions, and his searchings for a little light. Hungry and unsatisfied, long into the night, while his friend slept, he guided the boat, his ear starting at every snapping twig, his eye striving to penetrate beyond the trackless paths of the lantern.

At Bemis the first person to meet them was Lufkin of the Bull's Eye, grave and anxious. As soon as John saw his face, his premonitions returned:

"I know what it is," said John, quietly, taking his hand. "When did it happen?"

"A week ago yesterday," answered Lufkin, wondering at his knowledge. "I left right after the funeral."

Jack, divining the truth, turned his back and walked away to the edge of the wharf, while John, hesitating, shocked now that it had come, looked up and said:—

"Tell me one thing. Did he know he was going to die?"

"Yes, John."

"Did he go — quietly?"

"No, John."

"I feared as much." The young fellow looked a moment into the other's eyes, walked to the edge, stood thoughtfully looking down into the lapping water, and then called Jack.

As they came home the lights were showing along

the road; only Windrift was swallowed up in the night. They rode in silence up the avenue, through the black shadows of the beeches and maples, to the steps. At John's shout several negroes came tumbling from the quarters. He flung them the reins and went into the hall. They had not been expected, and everything was in darkness. Presently a candle twinkled on the stairs, and Aunt Liza shuffled down, crying, "Oh, Marse John, is dat you, honey? Oh, Marse John!"

"Hush," said John, cutting her short. "I do not want to hear. Where is Captain Brace?"

Captain Brace was away for a few days. Aunt Liza, wringing her hands, hurried off to light the candles and serve supper. John went up the stairs alone, taking the candle. Everything was silent, deserted — in vain he waited for the querulous voice at the end of the hall. Then slowly he moved down, and with his fingers pressed open the door of his father's room, shading the candle so that it lit up the farthest corners. Everything was covered — the curtains down, the linen drawn over the empty bed. He stood a moment outside. He had almost expected to see him. Then, without entering, he slowly drew the door and went downstairs.

"Do not wait for me, Jack," he said in the hall. "I'll be back presently."

It was a clear night. He went into the garden, past the gates of the Via Dolorosa, and down the open sward to the greenhouse, thence sharply to the left till he came face to face with the little arch in the wall.

There he stood, looking in at a slab that shone newer than the rest, but beyond he could not go — he had never gone. Half an hour later he started suddenly from the side of the arch where he had been leaning,

turned and went up to the house, now ablaze with light. There, all at once, he stopped, and cried with a choking voice: "I cannot understand. Why should he have been taken last?"

CHAPTER XII

CAPTAIN BRACE did not return for a week.

"I won't disguise from you, John," he said bluffly, as he took his hand, "that I ran away for a couple of weeks. Well, because I had to. I was completely used up. I'm not going to tell you what happened; what things he said and did. I'm not going to, by gad, because such things are too horrible to tell a young man."

"Indeed, it is not necessary, sir," said John. "I don't wish to know; I can imagine. I—I have known the truth about my father for a very long while; longer than you suspect, sir — for six years."

"What!" The stumpy figure whirled suddenly, and the sharp eyes went up to his face. "You knew all this time — and never told?"

"I kept it from my mother," answered John, curtly.

"I thought she might have told you," the captain said quickly. He walked to the hearth and bent down to straighten the logs. "Why! — did she never say anything to you — just at the last?"

"I was only thirteen," said John, puzzled at the question, and at the captain's manner. "Of course, I was too young for such a confidence."

"To be sure — damned stupid of me. I beg your pardon," cried Captain Brace, coming forward briskly again. "Well, John, I suppose you're curious to hear about the will."

"The will? Certainly; when was it made?"

"Two days before he died. Can't be any doubt about it," said Brace, looking a trifle constrained. "What was I saying? Oh—yes. Everything goes to you, of course, except a few legacies; and a mighty fine property it is, my boy. Your father appointed me his executor until you come of age. What a bad, hard-hearted old guardian you've got, eh, John?"

"I'll try to stand it," said John, laughing in turn. "I'll read the will over to-night. Is there anything more of interest in it?"

The captain exploded into peals of laughter. "Of interest? Gad, yes; I should say there was. There's one clause—he would put it, though I begged him not to, and in it went, for we didn't dare excite him. But Lord bless you, John Gaunt, we won't hear another word about that now—it's so much waste paper."

"And what was it?" asked John, extremely puzzled.

"Oh, the clause—haven't I told you yet? Well, John," the captain began, throwing his head back meditatively, "you know—of course, you know—your father and I played pretty steadily. I had to: it was the only thing that kept him quiet. Mind you, though, I never took it seriously, for I wasn't staying here to win money from him, as you know, and, damn me, yes, every one else knows. We were pretty even up to about two months ago, and then a most devilish hard run of luck set in, and I won't disguise from you that he lost heavily."

"And the clause directs that these debts shall be paid?"

"Yes, that is what it says."

"Then it must be done," said John, firmly.

Captain Brace walked over to him and took him by

the shoulder. "Now, look here, my boy, no more such nonsense. It's all right to pay when you're at a card party; that's right; I say nothing against that. But this is a matter between friends, and gambling debts stop somewhere."

"I understand fully the kindness of your motives, sir," said John, taking him up earnestly; "but it will not do. A debt of honor is the first of debts, and I direct you to settle the amount at once. No, sir—no, no, sir—say no more. You'll only offend me deeply."

"John, I vow —" began the captain, in a high voice.

"No, no, I am in earnest," John broke in, still louder. "You will make me very angry. See here, Captain, supposing it was you who had lost; what would you have done?"

"That's different."

"No, answer me."

The captain shrugged his shoulders, gave a quick laugh, and said reluctantly: "Well, let it go. It shall be done as you say. Though I vow I don't feel right about it."

"Not at all," answered John, the color still showing in his cheeks; "consider that settled."

Captain Brace moved to the window with another protesting shrug; then suddenly he came back and clapped the young fellow on the back, exclaiming:—

"Here, give me your hand—there! Tell the truth, John, I like your spirit. You're right, and, damn me, that's what I'd have done myself."

John, very much pleased, shook hands, and said, "I understand your part, sir."

"Until dinner, then, I'm off for a canter in this glorious weather." The captain slapped his hands together in the best of humor. "I'll be running away on little

trips now, John, more than I used to, looking up old friends. Of course, though legally I'm your guardian, why, hang it, go ahead with repairs and improvements on your own responsibility. I'm glad to see you taking hold of the place. Just consider yourself, my boy, Mr. Gaunt, Master of Windrift."

Captain Brace had called him "Mr." Gaunt. It had had a strange sound to John the day Lufkin had met him with the news; it had pleased him when Joe, Doctor Magog's man, had saluted him with the title on the day following his return. Israel and Sol bent to him with increased respect, the household servants, the stable boys, the farm hands, all stood deferentially while he passed. The tradesmen all solicited his patronage; it was his judgment now before which all matters on the estate were laid for settlement.

"The king is dead, Jack," he said musingly, strolling out with his friend to inspect the sheep, "long live the king. It is terrible that a man can die and pass out of my life like that, and that man be my father. And yet his life was once all happiness and good promise. I wonder how I will end. Do you know, Jack, I sometimes feel that I have his spirit—I can't ever go into the graveyard—think of that. I—I sometimes wonder how it will all work out. Don't joke, Jack. Here we are—now for the sheep."

His ruminations were often more sombre. At first the death of his father had carried with it a sense of relief. He felt that the shadow was lifted, that his life was his own, that all the rest would be forgotten, could be forgotten. He soon found it was not to be. That gloomy presence, that sombre reminder, was indeed gone—but the shadow lay over all.

"What good is life?" he would think in his rambles,

often under the stress of these insistent memories. "What can it offer me? If I should die to-morrow, the world would not feel it a jot. Oh, for men of genius, men of action, it is a wonderful opportunity; but for me, what does it mean but to be a sort of a county squire all my days, a narrow little wheel in a narrow little rut? What does it all mean, after all? Why will no one talk to me of the things we don't understand? It seems to me at times as though men feared to show their true selves."

Jack, who seldom could be fastened to the serious, was unapproachable. Captain Brace listened quietly enough as long as the ardent young thinker chose to discourse; but when appealed to for his own opinions he threw up his hands and said: "Give it up, too deep for me. I live my life as long and as hard as I can, and when my time comes—why—presto! the game is done—finis!"

"Come, come, John, there's enough perplexity in life as it is," Doctor Magog had said, when John had cornered him one night. "I like to have you talk to me, my boy; talk all you want. But take my advice—don't try to unravel what is beyond you. Give up, lad, and be happy; yes, by gad, be happy, if you can."

"What is to be happy? to be ignorant?"

The doctor looked wise and said, "You are only nineteen; wait and see!"

"Why won't men talk on such subjects? What is it that holds them back?" the eager young searcher asked of himself after each fruitless attempt; but no answer came.

The evening before Jack departed the two companions sat up long into the night, toasting their feet luxuriously before the old brass andirons. John, in his new rôle of custodian of the cellar keys, produced a bottle of the

famous Orkney Port, which the two treated with scant respect.

"I've given up college, Jack," said John, brushing away the cobwebs from the neck of the bottle. "Your glass, old fellow. I'm going to build the place up from wreck and ruin. You can't go back, Jack. Give me your hand, and let's take the world together. Make your visit, and come back for good. When I'm twenty-one I'll sell the place, and we'll strike out West together. You mean the deuce of a lot to me, old Johnnie Gay. You cheer me up like nothing else. Think it over well."

"No need to think. Give me your hand," cried Jack. "There! done! Why the deuce didn't you ask me sooner? I say, John, you know how I am. I laugh a good deal, and I make fun of things; but I say, at the bottom, I think the world of you, and I'm devilish lonely myself, though you don't know it. Shake again. Hello, good heavens! have mercy on that arm!" he shouted, wincing with the momentum of John's hand-shaking.

"Jack," said the delighted fellow, "there's nothing in this world like the friendship between two men, is there?"

"Nothing at all, Solomon," announced Jack, who by this time had recovered himself.

"How we men do stick to each other," continued the sage, delighted to have caught his attention. "Jack, there's more waiting in the bottle. You rogue! You know good wine. Now, two women—it's the first man, you know, sends them a-flying."

"Indeed and alas! I know that to my sorrow."

"Now, Jack, do be serious. Let's have a good old talk. Do you believe in love? I'll tell you flatly, I

don't. It's a delusion, a passing fancy — there are so many in life." John, standing legs apart before the chimney, delivered these sentiments with his glass to his bosom. "It comes and it goes. Look at the Talbots and the Wellyns, and the Caxtons. Why, Jack, the last was a runaway match. Look at them now. Of course, though, I suppose it's right we should have delusions," he interjected very soberly. "It carries on the race. Still, friendship is the only true basis of life. Why, the world's just made for two men to travel. A honeymoon? — stuff! Give me a trip with you, Jack, any day."

Jack, who had hitherto held in, here burst out in a roar of laughter. "Go on, go on. Oh, John, my innocent lamb, the wine is in your head!"

"Confound you, Jack!" John whipped out, looking discomfited; for the truth is, the wine had oiled his tongue. "You make fun of everything. There's no talking seriously with you."

"Serious! My dear friend, I humbly beg your pardon, but you are a goose," and with a crash Jack brought down his legs which, in the exuberance of his mirth, had been wavering in the air. "No, no, John. I prize your friendship beyond all else in the world — ahem — at present; but I'm a wiser man than you are, if I say it. As you say, Solomon, a man will play the deuce between two women. But the immortal goddess, Truth, compels me to say to you, John Gaunt, that when the inevitable SHE does come, our friendship, I grant you, will remain — but, BUT — Apologies, old winebibber, for calling your worship a goose, but I'll bet you five to one the day'll come when you confess it yourself. And now, come to bed — Benedick!"

Jack was not to return for two months. John forth-

with took up in earnest the matter of repairing the estate. He mended the fences, repaired the avenue, cleaned the gravel paths, and restored the terraces to their old lustre. Guinea fowl, turkeys, geese, and ducks no more ravaged the rolling lawns, but cackled and squawked in a neat poultry-yard. The stables and the pens and the outhouses fairly shone in their neatness. There was no more sprawling, loafing, or shirking. The garden — always to him his mother's garden — was reclaimed. The dishevelled hedges were brought sharply to order; the box was taught to stand in unbroken smoothness; the greensward was again purged of chickweed and parsley; the trees were pruned, the arbors strengthened, and the vines guided to proper paths. Only one change was made — the gates on the Via Dolorosa were taken down forever.

People liked to see ambition and energy in a young fellow, and offered him a host of suggestions; for all of which John, who would ride twenty miles to learn a lesson or view a new experiment, was profoundly grateful.

Doctor Magog, trotting past one morning, spied the young fellow in the orchards, and called to him from the buggy. "Hello! Farmer John, hello! What are you doing this fine, sharp morning?"

"Doctor, I'm beyond my depth," said John, coming up with a troubled look; "there's some sort of blight on my fruit trees, and I can't make it out. Recommend me an authority, Doctor. I'm bound Windrift shall have the first orchard in the county."

"Bless my soul! Run over this moment and see Mr. Franklin. He is a past-master. Haven't you ever tasted his pears? Makes my mouth water to speak of 'em."

"What, Uncle Nim? I've been there fifty times and never noticed."

"It depends how you look at things, John."

"I'm off this minute," cried John; "a thousand thanks."

He called for Eli, a spirited steeple-chaser just purchased, and was up and away in a trice, all eagerness.

At The Willows Daniel, the butler, grinned to him in recognition. John nodded, flung the reins to a boy, saying, "Here, Ezra, look smart about this horse, and take good care of him. Daniel, tell Uncle Nim I've dropped in for dinner and to see the orchards; I'll wait in the parlor. All right, I know my way."

Into the room, hat in hand, spurs jingling, dusty and stained with the long ride, flushed and rosy, he strode, straight to the gilt mirror, and stood before it, arranging the disorder of his stock.

"Fairly caught, sir," cried a voice, with a ripple of laughter; "caught, beyond a quibble."

John swung about in a flash. A slim figure in light green was standing by the fireplace, a hand on the mantel, bending her head against her arm.

"Welcome, Cousin John." He saw a pair of mischievous black eyes as the girl advanced, and a slender hand was held up to him. "I shall take pity on your confusion; I am Helen Dare, cousin to Uncle Nim, and so cousin to you."

Now, if there was one thing above another that could pique the lord and master of Windrift, it was a charge of embarrassment; so he took the proffered hand coolly, saying, "Miss Dare? Indeed, I am very glad to meet you — and if you will excuse me a moment, I will finish adjusting my stock."

And majestically, with a show of much unconcern, he returned to the mirror, saying to himself, "Embarrass me! Humph, indeed!"

“And now, Miss Dare,” he said, returning (“catch me calling her cousin”), “tell me how you knew me?”

The girl, who, it must be confessed, had been watching these manœuvres with secret delight, looked up with a lingering twinkle at the tall figure, and with a smile drew her hand across her shoulders, and then raising it to the level of John’s head, replied, with an air of great respect, “By your shoulders and your height.”

“Does she take me for a boor, to be won by gross flattery?” thought the young fellow, still cherishing her first remark, and fancying he detected symptoms of levity.

“By that, I perceive two things,” he said grimly, taking his seat opposite, and folding his arms. “First, you are from the city; second, you have been much in society. I myself — ahem — have not lived all my life in Belle River.”

She clapped her hands merrily, and laughed outright. “Bravo! You’re the kind of man I like. I have been puzzled all these minutes how to meet you. And now let me tell *you* two things.” She threw herself back in the chair, crossed her arms, and said sternly, to counterfeit his attitude. “First, you are vexed because I accused you of being embarrassed; second, because you think I was trying to flatter you.”

John threw one leg over his knee and looked at her again. This slender girl, who turned her face to him so impudently, was something very different from the plump Miss Talbot of Brompton, or the three bouncing Wilmerdink sisters, or the young ladies down the bay, who had, up to this time, constituted the narrow circle of his female acquaintance. Now John, though he had proclaimed with much gusto his cosmopolitan experience, was yet what Jack would call “green” in such

matters. But there are certain strong and wonderful instincts that rise to aid in like predicaments. He looked at her for the third time, and took her measure.

"I know what is her game—I shall take care to give her as good as she sends," he assured himself wisely; then he said aloud, with much frankness, "Right, Cousin, in both respects."

"Do you think me a sorceress?" she said, smiling at the "cousin."

"Perhaps."

"Doubter! Don't you know I can forecast the future and tell your character by your hand? What? You want me to? Yes? The left hand, please. You are my cousin, you know, and besides, I am a good deal older than you are. Then, too," she added, with a mischievous gleam, "it is excellent to break the ice."

In this interesting position (not a novel one by any means) Aunt Hester surprised them, as she came rustling in. "Ahem, Helen," said the old lady, shaking her curls and settling the stiff skirts.

Helen dropped his hand quickly and sprang up with a very fine color.

"Good morning, Aunt Hester," said John, rising coolly, to make his bow. "Rode over to see Uncle Nim; but my luck is against me. However, Cousin Nell has been good enough to entertain me by telling my fortune. She finds me obstinate and a trifle conceited. At present we are on the line of the affections. Sit down and listen." He held out his hand again and actually forced Helen to continue. The sorceress, in the presence of such a sharp third, was rather constrained for a lady of supernatural powers.

The old lady's eyes twinkled. John was a past favorite of hers, and when the chance came, she leaned over

slyly and patted him on the back. After dinner, as Uncle Nim was off for the afternoon, and another visit would, of course, be imperative in a matter of the importance of fruit trees, John called for his horse and said good evening to Aunt Hester.

Helen, who was a great admirer of horses, and must, of course, examine Eli, accompanied him to the block.

"Until to-morrow," she said in a low voice, accompanied with a killing glance. "You have turned the tables on me cruelly. I foresee we shall quarrel."

"War is sometimes the safest," announced a very experienced young man, nodding sagely. "This, you see, is the first skirmish."

"War be it, then! Good-by. To-day the honors are all with you."

He waved his hat, and then broke into a laugh, for the truth was, Aunt Hester was shaking a warning finger to him behind Nell's back. Another wave, and Eli sprang into a run against the rising wind.

"It's deuced lucky," said this experienced young man to his steed, "that I have a steady head on my shoulders. How she did try to flatter me! Now that last about the honors being mine was right smartly aimed, but, Eli, old fellow, we saw the shaft in time."

At this moment Eli shied at a neat little gig.

"Hello, Uncle Nim!" John shouted across the wind, as he gathered in the reins; "been over to see you. Coming in to-morrow — want to get advice — fruit trees, fruit trees!"

"Eh, what's that?" drawled out the driver, and a quantity of straggling gray whiskers appeared around the corner of the flap. "Yes, yes, come to-morrow sure. See Nell?"

"Saw?—dined with her."

"Look out for her," shouted the other, shaking his head; "she's—cute—country boys. John, take—advice."

"All right, Uncle. Whoa!—whoa!—it's—whoa! it's already—whoa!—" but Eli was no longer to be detained, and darted off.

"Don't go and try any of your tricks on him, Nell," said Aunt Hester, when they had returned to the house. "He's too fine a man to be played with, young lady."

"Nonsense, Aunt. Cousin John is already up in arms against me."

"Humph!" the old lady vouchsafed, drawing back. "Who knows? Maybe John Gaunt is more than your match. He had all the best of it this morning. You needn't look so sure, Missy. It's my opinion you couldn't get him if you tried," and with a bob of her curls she was gone from the room.

Nell went slowly to the window, and stood looking out for a long time. When she turned, she came back pensively, and halted before the mirror. "Perhaps!" she said at length, breaking into a smile, and nodding mysteriously to a very bright reflection.

CHAPTER XIII

AMONG the institutions with which the country of the great Napoleon has become identified, is the *mariage de convenance*. The parents of Adolphe, having determined that promising young man to be in a marriageable condition, proceed forthwith to cast about for their future daughter-in-law. The search is pursued in a methodical and businesslike manner.

"See you, Henri," says Madame la mère, over the counterpanes, "it is necessary that we should exercise the greatest pains in this so delicate of matters. We must see that the wife of Adolphe shall be a woman of gentle disposition. The good child, with all his virtues, inherits greatly of your temper and excitability. Monsieur Henri, I shall look to the matter of temperament."

"La! la! la!" retorts Monsieur le père, shivering over a sulky fire. "What foolishness are you talking? Look to the pocket. He is spendthrift—like thee, Angélique. Money glides through his fingers. Search for the wife of economy, and, *dame!* of sufficient dot!"

And the industrious couple begin their hunt for the proper young woman, much after the manner in which the father, the month before, attended to the purchase of a suitable family mare, consulting with the best authorities, lest there should be a hidden blemish.

Naturally enough, monsieur makes no mention of that weakness of temper, and Angélique fails to allude

to the subject of youthful extravagances : all that is for the other party to the bargain to discover. The theory is, of course, that the parents, who know these little faults of character, are better qualified to obtain the necessary remedy than Adolphe, who, until fifteen, has gone to school with a nurse, or Virginie, who, since she has been liberated from her convent, has not said ten words to a man outside the range of her mamma. Naturally mistakes will happen, and sharp dealings will occur. The parents of Virginie will awake to the fact that their darling's husband is a brute for temper and a prodigal for money — but is not the same true of many a bargain in horse-flesh? Was there ever a swap effected to the satisfaction of *both* parties? Certainly all systems must have their drawbacks ; so has the French.

In this country of independence the matter is left in the hands of the parties most interested. Consequently a knowledge of the *genus masculinum* and of the etiquette of all functions is absolutely essential to any young lady of aspirations. The more the experience and the greater the acquaintance with the habits and peculiarities of the animal, the more certain it is that she will be able to pick the favorite, and having so recognized him, can clinch the bargain without unnecessary delays. Not that such ideas are ever consciously entertained. Not at all — they are part of the great underlying instincts of human nature. And as it boots little to find what you want if you cannot secure it, is it at all surprising that each should be anxious to test her skill?

Here, too, mistakes will occur. The clown is too often mistaken for the prince ; all the more need, then, of caution and experience. Too many, tired of long waiting, affect to believe in disguises, and try each newcomer as though to penetrate the mask.

Of this class was Helen Dare. She never met a man of whom she did not at once have "a premonition," nor retained that premonition beyond a month, at the most. She kept a diary, in which were revealed her innermost thoughts — the tragedies, the sorrows, and the conquests of her maiden existence. So, on the night of her meeting with John, she seated herself at a neat little desk, attired in a dainty dressing-gown; set free with three shakes of her head a tangled mass of tumbling black curls; sent an appealing glance to the staid cheval glass opposite; plunged into the drawer, and drew out her diary and made this entry:—

"Met to-day my third cousin, John Gaunt. A striking individuality, with the finest square shoulders I have ever seen. Ordinarily taciturn, never says more than is necessary. Sensitive to his own importance, rather suspicious of flattery, but can be reached, all the same. Strong will, and a steady way of looking at you as he speaks. *Would be very attractive to any woman.* Fine self-control; but I think behind it all there is a great tragedy. A man born to lead. There is a very noble look in his eyes and, though I know if he once made up his mind nothing would stop him, I am sure his end would always be high. He has great reserve force — the kind of a man a woman would develop wonderfully. Am I going to fall in love with him? Maybe; I don't know. Somehow, to-night, I have the strongest premonition . . ."

She broke off the sentence, and leaning back, placed the tip of her quill against her lips. Suddenly she brushed back the fallen tresses and began to laugh. "Come, let me see," she said musingly; "just how often have I felt the same?"

She picked up the diary and began to skim. In a moment appeared a twitching of the lips, a frown, a smile, finally an open laugh. "*Mon Dieu, tant que cela?*" And she bundled up the sorrows and the conquests, tossed the book impatiently into the desk, made

a face in the mirror, cried, "Goose!" with a shrug of the white shoulders, and retired for the night.

"Well, Nell," Uncle Nim began in his drawling way, over the ham and muffins, "so you've — ah — been a-makin' up to John, eh?"

"What," said Miss Innocence, "that boy! Indeed, no. I thought him right conceited."

"John? No, Nell, no! Why do you say that? He's a fine young fellow, open and, ah — straight-forward."

"Well, stupid, then; he hadn't two words to say."

"Reckon you didn't try him on horses and ah — huntin', then?"

"Horses! Is that all?"

"Well, now, he can talk you philosophy, too, Nell," went on Uncle Nim. "He's puzzled us all here with his questions. Maybe, ah — now, he'd be a little too deep for even you, Nell. He's read a lot, and thought a lot. I, ah — just mentioned horses, Nell — because —" added the old tease — "well, now, because I thought it would be easier, ah — for you."

"Oh, he is a philosopher? Say outright a bore. Why, didn't some one tell me — wasn't it Aunt Hester or Mrs. Claversham — something about a fight he once had? Think of a philosopher fighting!"

The old fellow broke into the history of John *vs.* Duff. She protested she had no desire to listen to the story of a stupid boyish squabble.

"But you shall," insisted Uncle Nim, now aroused; and he proceeded to detail the episodes of that encounter, until, warming up (in no small measure piqued by her indifference), he branched off into a long account of John's characteristics.

"What are you two doing?" Aunt Hester inquired, returning from the negro quarters.

"I've been — a-tellin' — Nell —" Uncle Nim began, drawling.

"Oh, we've been quarrelling again," interposed Nell, jumping up, "and as he is getting the best of me, I'll run away."

She said good night and tripped upstairs, leaving Aunt Hester to bustle about, silently arranging the curtains for the night.

"Now what's the matter with Nell, here?" began Uncle Nim, stroking his silky beard; "she seems to have set herself against John."

"Nimrod Franklin! Have you eyes in your head?"

"Eh, what's that? — what's that?"

"And you can't see how matters stand?"

"Eh, no, no — you don't — pshaw! — well, I declare!"

"And so she's been pumping you, has she?" Aunt Hester said, planting herself in great indignation before his knees. "Pulling wool over your eyes? Nimrod Franklin, I'd be ashamed of myself!"

"Well — I reckon now — come to think of it — she's been doin' jest that. I reckon I've been right thick-headed. Reckon you could have done the same, many a time," he added, the old rascal, pulling her down to his cheek, "if you hadn't been above such things — eh, Hester?"

"Humph!" exclaimed the partner of his secrets, with a twinkle of satisfaction. "It's time you were locking up, Nimmie."

The next morning when the sun, that indefatigable summoner, had roused the world, Miss Helen Dare sprang up, eager for the game to begin, as keen as

the fisherman already whipping the stream, or the hunters closing in on their quarry. She had a sport worth all of these. On the desk (where was confined the neglected diary) lay a letter which she had penned the previous day, when she was dying of ennui, accepting an invitation to visit a bosom friend, jumping at the chance to leave the dull country existence. Her eye now fell on the letter. She caught it up with a laugh, and tore it into shreds. Instead, she scratched off, rapidly : —

“MY DEAREST ROSALIE : —

“Conceive of my *delight* and *joy* when I received your *sweetest* letter. I am *désolée* — I cannot come. If you only knew how I was tempted ! I had actually written you accepting, before I listened to my conscience. Oh, what a dreadful thing it is to have a conscience ! Mine is always at my heels. You know, dear, that I am here for my health, and I have made the most *solemn* promises to take the *strictest* care of myself. Dear mother has worried over me so ! How I wish I could come ! It is so stupid here — nothing but the air. But conscience, conscience, conscience says no !”

She started to write “My cousin,” and then shook her head. “No, that will never do !” So she sent her heart and an immense measure of love, and wound up with a flourish, “Your affectionate and lonely Nell.”

At Miss Chiever’s Select Home for Young Ladies, where Helen had held sway, she used to write the letters for the whole house. Fanny would beg of her a letter to condole on the death of a great-uncle, Florence an acceptance to an invitation to visit, Emelia (very young) a delicate reply to a confidential note just smuggled in ; and the indefatigable Nell would plump down and dash them off in a trice, after which they would be handed about, admired, and sent on their way.

“There !” mused the young lady with a finger to

her lips. "I suppose Rosalie will suspect; but then, she always does, whether there is a cause or not."

She flung open the blinds. How crisp and green the vista looked! Everything pleased her: the picturesque long avenues, the waving poplars, the cattle-dotted meadows, the fresh scent of honeysuckle, and the peep of distant waters.

"What can the city offer to compare with this!" she cried, clapping her hands in pure delight. She danced to the window again, and courtesied mockingly to the fresh lustre of the morning. "He's coming, he's coming! If I do say it—how a man does change the whole world!" and with a quick toilette she went demurely down the stairs.

"And now," she reflected, when the meal was over, and she was again in her room, "to prepare for the battle. I must be careful. I began wrong—he is not a boy. I must be reserved and dignified. He is on the lookout for flattery, is he? Ho, ho! Show me the man who can't be flattered. But there are other ways besides compliments. Who knows but, after all, unwittingly I may have begun for the best. Now what shall I wear? He is a philosopher, is he? Men never notice except when we are badly dressed. There is the changeable green silk from Stewart's—my color, too; or shall it be the blue? He is not to be caught by vulgar tricks. Perhaps the muslin with the bonnet would be best. I must reach his confidence. There! I have it—I will wear the green."

She slipped a rose behind her curls—a red rose that gave color to her face—and did her hair with her very best ribbon. A visit to the jewelry tray resulted in the selection of the proper cameo brooch, a dainty topaz bracelet, and her finest handkerchief and ring. It took

her a full ten minutes to decide which shawl should have the preference.

"These mantillas are lovely," she thought, hesitating, "but I think I will take the black — yes, I will take the black; my throat does look so well against it. *Finis!* And now for the effect."

She tripped before the mirror and burst into an exclamation of delight. A mocking-bird was carolling from a branch that swung across her window: she turned, and blew him a kiss. Indeed, she looked very pretty courtesying there in the dainty changing green silk, bare at the throat and arms, her eyes sparkling under the cluster of black curls that held the rose. Could it have been only the thought of possible puddles that made her put her hands demurely to the sides of her bulging skirt and draw them up just enough to show a tiny slipper and the white peep of an embroidered stocking? Still pursuing her mischievous mood, she kicked off a slipper and laughed down, bubbling over with fun, at the arched instep.

"I wonder how I shall look when he sees me," she said, pensively dropping her skirts. "I never can decide which is my best profile — or whether that is better than my full face. *Voyons!*" So saying, she turned on her heel and walked away, glancing back, first over one shoulder and then over the other, and returning full in front of the mirror, she dropped it a deep courtesy. All at once she burst into a laugh.

"What a little goose! If any one should catch me, boo! Oh, but it is good, good, good, to be young and pretty!" Then her mood went like the fading out of a rainbow, and looking into her own eyes very soberly, she added, "And what of thirty? At thirty — heigho!"

She threw her hands up in the air, snapping her fingers over her head. Then as she ran to the door, she stopped, her hand on the knob, tapped her foot, and frowned. Then she returned, half crying, "Oh no, no, this will never do. What a fearful blunder! He will know I have dressed for him — terrible, terrible! Whereupon she threw off the gown, flinging it aside heedlessly, seized a simple white muslin figured with roses, slipped into it, and buried her curls under a bonnet. At the door she again hesitated; then, returning, she held the black mantilla up to her throat, saying, "Well, yes, just this, then; it is so becoming!" and yielded to the temptation. Then, laughing at her own weakness, she went singing down the stairs.

On and on fled Eli. Oh, what a fever was burning in the young master's brain! As a spirited horse neighs and throws its head at the scent of battle, or a hound breaks against the leash on the morning of the hunt, so impatience was coursing in his veins. The great instinct of man was aflame within him, the instinct to win. He was happy, confident, eager, elate. At the second gate he looked for Nell, and again in vain on the veranda. Uncle Nim, shaking him by the hand, informed him of her whereabouts.

"In the garden, all right — back, right away," John cried, with a bluff affectation of unconcern; "then for the orchards."

Down the gravel he strode, and stopped. She was coming daintily toward him, over the damp ground, lifting her skirts airily at either side — a figure of floating white and pink.

"Good morning, Cousin;" the small hand was held out and the dark eyes were lifted quietly from under

the bonnet. "You are early. Were you up with the dawn?"

"I was," answered the big, frank voice. "I had much to do. I have come to take you with us to the orchards, as I promised."

Helen smiled. "So you did; I had forgotten. But never mind, I am going to let you off. I am going to drive over to the Clavershams' for dinner." She looked up sharply. His face became blank. He had not yet learned to conceal.

"Come," she said, pursuing her advantage, "I am going to say something to you. I did not know yesterday how old you are. You must not think me unmaidenly for the way I acted —"

John was too puzzled at this handling of his nineteen years to answer; he was also annoyed at the slighting of his plans.

"And now we understand each other better," she resumed. She had made her explanation steadily, without a trace of embarrassment. "We shall be very good friends, I know; and no more of this foolish talk of war and skirmishes, which I hope you won't be offended if I tell you has only too often led to most serious consequences. You understand what I mean, don't you? And now I am off. I shall be back soon after dinner, and then we will have a nice talk together. Good-by, Cousin John."

In the early afternoon Cephas and the team came prancing back. Out ran Daniel to serve the door, while Aunt Hester, rocking on the veranda, looked up sharply over her knitting, as Helen, who had been drumming all the while on the back of her seat, alighted and carelessly searched about.

“What are you looking for, child?” asked the old lady; “John?”

“John? No; is he still here?” said Helen, with a glance toward the orchard.

“He left right after dinner,” answered the old lady, softly, fixing her sharp eyes on the girl’s face.

CHAPTER XIV

“WAIT!” said Helen sagely to herself, as she climbed the stairs; “I know men. He will make an excuse. He will come to-morrow.” But neither that day nor the next, as she swept the front lawn with mincing step, glancing carelessly at each turn down the far avenue, neither that day nor the next did the desired speck loom up on her horizon. Though she went to bed each night without even a glance into her mirror, and took not the slightest notice of her diary, outwardly she was in the most amiable of spirits. She read all the morning out of “The Pilgrim’s Progress” to Aunt Hester, and played long sleepy games of cribbage with Uncle Nim, so that the shrewd fellow announced that it was all nonsense about Helen setting her cap for John—a judgment set aside by the superior court with contempt and silence.

On the fourth morning Helen pronounced for a ride, and away she went on the big roan, refusing an escort, with only Sir Walter, the greyhound, bounding at her side. At the crossroads, after two false starts, she chose the post that read “Belle River, 12 miles.”

“Since I am out for a gallop, why not this as well as the other?” she reasoned. “What a splendid seat he has! I wonder if he rides in the mornings.”

Thereafter she rode on timidly, past the harvest fields where the negroes were singing as they toiled; often checking her horse as though to turn, so that Sir Walter

was constantly trotting back to inquire the meaning of these sudden halts. The roan had just made the curve out of the Caxton woods when she caught sight of a well-known figure on the road ahead, galloping break-neck toward her. She pulled in the roan, throwing him back on his haunches, the instinct of flight rushing over her; for almost the first time in her life she was covered with confusion.

"Heavens—what will he think? Oh, why did I come? No, no, that will never do, he has seen me. I must ride on." She urged on the roan, calling out gayly when at last he reined up, bareheaded, at her side. "Well met, Cousin John. Where away this splendid morning?"

He bowed and replaced his hat. "Good morning, Cousin. To—to the Talbots for information on—guess what—turnips!"

"Little fool that I am," thought Helen to herself, noticing the hitch, "why didn't I wait? He was coming to see me. Never mind, I must pretend to believe him."

Sir Walter, called back, led the way, romping before the horses. Helen, in black habit, with two long plumes dangling over one shoulder, and curls flying in the breeze, looked over curiously and said:—

"Have you come straight from Belle River? I thought this road went to Bromfield."

"You didn't know?" he answered with a twinkle; "well, you go through Bromfield first to Belle River, you know."

"Oh, indeed! What a glorious creature Eli is! You must ride beside him to appreciate him."

"Indeed you must, Cousin. You should see him take a fence."

"I should like to see him," said a happy voice; for

the joy of the sport had come back to her, now that she had John at her side once more. "And, sir, I should like to see you. Will he take anything?"

"Anything I put him to."

They were now out of the woods.

"Even that?" asked Nell, with a flourish of her whip; "that fence with the ditch beyond? Any horse might balk at that."

"But not Eli. Come on, Cousin!" He jumped the low stone wall, Nell following. The fence lay at the end of the smooth pasture, with a run of a hundred yards.

"Now watch him," shouted John, eagerly; for to attempt something just a little beyond every one else always set his eyes to blazing. "Hi!"

Away sped Eli over the strong, even turf — away and up and over.

"A splendid jump!" cried Nell, her face aglow as he came prancing up. The flattery reached him, for it was sincere. "But a very risky one, and a very close one, Cousin. He clicked the top rail."

"What!" exclaimed the madcap, his head turned with the zest of daring. "Then over he shall go until he takes it clear."

She did not call to him or remonstrate. She sat and waited quietly while he made good his promise. As he trotted back, bending over the frisking horse, patting his neck and whispering in his ear, Helen said nothing for a while, but sat staring steadily at the hazard. Presently she turned toward him with a flush on her cheek.

"See this roan, Cousin," she cried impetuously; "he is a thoroughbred. What do you say of him?"

"None better in the county," answered John, eying him critically, "always excepting Eli."

"Then will he do the same?"

"No," said John, firmly; "it was almost too much for Eli."

"Very well, then. Watch!" and with a resounding clack, she brought down the stock. Off bolted the roan like a startled hare.

"Great God!" cried John, Eli springing after. "Stop, stop, I say! You'll kill yourself! Don't! for God's sake, don't, Nell!"

He leaned forward in his stirrups, commanding, beseeching, imploring her to stop. For reply she looked back a moment over her shoulder and waved her whip aloft with a disdainful laugh. In a frenzy John struck his spurs deep. Eli responded with a furious bound. Two more; already John saw a vague line of fence looming up ahead, heard the quick pant of her horse, and the wild roll of the hoofs. Another heave of Eli's flanks, and stretching far out on his neck, he caught her reins in his clutching hand. Yet so close were they that the next moment her horse was thrown rocking against the bars. She swayed, faint and dizzy, in the saddle, stared helplessly into the yawning ditch, and suddenly hung limp against his arm. He looked down on the head against his shoulder, on the shut lids, the warm cheek, the slender neck, and the heaving breast. For the first time in his life he held a woman in his arms, and that woman was beautiful.

In a moment her eyes opened; her cheeks went crimson, and struggling to regain her saddle, she fell again against his shoulder.

"Don't try to move yet, Nell," he said in a troubled voice.

Everything was reeling before her eyes. Her head was heavy on his shoulder, and his arm was strong

around her. It was the woman weak and helpless before a man in his strength. A wave of emotion overcame her as she turned, and unconsciously her fingers tightened on his coat.

"Listen, John," she said faintly. "I was very wicked — I — I never meant to do it. I knew you would catch me."

"And if I hadn't?"

"I — I would have — gone on."

He drew his arm tighter about her, and bending, whispered in her ear, "Thank God!" How his cheeks burned where her hair touched them! He did not know what he did; he did not hear what he said. He was blinded, swept away by the touch of her body.

Suddenly she put his arm away, frightened, trembling, shrinking from his side, and hurried the roan toward the road. Only once did their eyes meet, when John, who had sprung to lower the bars, lifted his face to hers as she passed with bowed head, and then both glances fell. They rode home in silence, neither daring to risk the sound of the voice or the glance of the eyes, until they halted at last before the steps. She took his hand without looking into his face, fled up the steps, fled up the stairs to her room, and flung herself down upon the bed, crushing her palms against her temples — while John, forgetting dinner, forgetting everything but the wonderful, the sudden, the troubling emotions surging within him, galloped on, and on, and on.

"What has come over me?" he cried. "An hour ago I could look on her calmly, and now — and now!"

Before a man is capable of a great love he must have felt the burning need of it in his life; the longing and the hunger for the companionship it alone can give. John, with his restless soul seeking an outlet, was just at

this period, and all at once he had looked down and seen a woman in his arms, and felt the weight of her body and the warmth of her breath. Then he had looked up into her eyes and found a soul suddenly aflame with love. It was the strength of the emotion that had swept over her that bewildered him, the wonder of being loved that intoxicated him.

The days now fairly trod on one another's heels — days of riding at her side, days spent in the quiet parlor, leaning over the piano, watching the eyes that wavered under his as she sang his favorite ballads, days of long walks and confidences, when he spoke to her of his wonderings, doubts, and seekings. At Windrift time lagged fearfully after supper, and his nights were long and heavy with impatience for the morning.

Luckily, Captain Brace, returning about this time, consented to sit up with him, listening gravely to his discourses.

"John, my boy," he said one night, with a mighty yawn, as they were camped before the fire, puffing away at their pipes, "what say you to a rubber? It is dashed slow here without your friend Jack. Good fellow, Jack. Yes, by gad, a good fellow. It will pass the time."

"I'm your man," said John, yawning in turn, ready for anything to help along the clock.

The captain rose smartly, whipped up a table, and brought out a pack — the same that had grown limp under the fingers of another Gaunt.

"How say you? Just for the fun of the game — no money, eh? I'm too old a hand for you."

John was stretching out his arms lazily, his mind far away. He did not notice the last remark, nor how sharply the captain's brilliant eyes were following him.

"Thank you, no!" he said, settling slowly into his chair. "Lord, how slow the time goes without — Jack! Thank you, no; I have had my warning."

"Glad to hear you say so, my boy," the captain put in, with an approving nod. "I was going to refuse myself, if you'd said different, and that'd hurt you. You're right; you have had your warning."

They played that night and the next, and then they played no more; the popular captain sought his amusement elsewhere.

Each night, as John fretted on his pillow, he would say to himself, "I am not in love with her — I know that;" but each morning he went. Helen used to wait his coming in the garden, her heart trembling for his step. In his presence she was like a little child, all the veil of coquetry torn away, never to be used again. She knew what he was passing through, and hung breathlessly on the outcome.

"How well I read his heart," she meditated, as she passed up and down the floor at night. "He is filled with wonder, with doubt. He is trying to know his own mind now. Some day I shall look up into his eyes and see — and see — oh, what shall I see!" and she threw herself on her knees, and buried her head and prayed for pity and for mercy. She would sit nervously rocking at the window, her eyes deserting the book whose leaves she never turned, her ear trained for the first thud of Eli's gallop.

Aunt Hester was quite overcome by her condition, and in a hundred simple womanly ways made her feel the warm motherly heart that ached for her. At such times the tears would gather in the girl's eyes. Once she put her arm about the old lady and rested her head against her shoulder. "Oh, Aunty, Aunty!" was all she

could say, but the other understood. Her eyes, too, searched the young fellow's face from day to day.

Eli and the roan went often together nowadays. Once they jogged to the county bridge. Gleaming far down the bay showed the sides of Windrift. John pointed out the white patch to Nell with the end of his whip. What a strange feeling came to the girl as she looked upon his home and thought — "Perhaps."

"Jack comes to-morrow," said he, trying to see into her face.

"Oh, indeed," answered Nell, who seemed to know perfectly who Jack was.

"How you will take to him! He is the best fellow in the world."

"He is your very best friend, isn't he?"

"Yes, more than that. How he will like you!"

"What! I thought he was the sworn enemy of our sex. Never mind though, I know I shall like him."

"Why?" asked John, for the tenth time touching Eli forward that he might look into her face. "Why, Nell?"

"Because," said she, with a wave of her hand; but she kept her eyes down on the skirts of the path. "See, Cousin, how bright the goldenrod makes the road."

"But why, Nell?" persisted John, coming closer. The rogue wanted her to say, "Because he is your friend."

"Why are you so curious? Because — why, because you have given such a good description of him, of course. Here we are at our brook again. Let's dismount for a cool drink."

Before she could stir he had swung himself laughing from his saddle, and, running to the brook, he stooped and filled his hat and offered it to her with a splendid bow. When she had drunk she merely said, "Thank you," and gave it back to him.

"You never look at me any more, Nell," said John, standing at the roan's head, and fastening upon her his strong, clear eyes. "When we ride, your glance is always on the ground, and now that I am at your feet, it is in the tree-tops."

"What an idea!" Her glance came to his a moment, and then wavered and fell.

"Oh, God, can't he see?" she cried to herself. He was on Eli again, leading the way down the bridle-path. They were in the deep of the woods, riding along a thin lane that ran straight ahead until, in the distance, it lost itself among the graceful maples.

"How small the world is, after all, Nell," John cried suddenly, turning in his saddle.* "It seems now as though it only held us two."

She heard what he said, and shook her head. "Ah, no, John, it is not that, it is wide as the sky. We see so many people once, and never see them again. I so often think, John, when I meet some one I like, that in a year he—she will be utterly lost to me, swallowed up in the great multitude. And such thoughts will come to me even as I listen to their voices, and look upon their faces. No, no, John, the world is immense. You do not know it as I do."

"Perhaps not. I wish I did."

She sighed; she was tired of it, and longed for something very different.

At the broadening of the path he was by her side again, saying, "Nell, look in my face; I like to see your eyes when I talk to you. How little we give each other of ourselves in this world. Do you know that all the people I have ever known, even Jack, have been afraid, ashamed, it seemed to me, to let me see their true selves—except you, Nell. Why should they? I don't

understand, Nell. Will you let me talk to you? Tell me what you feel about the great things—I mean life and death.”

“I don’t know, John,” she said hurriedly; “I have never had any one ask me that before. I have almost never thought of it. A woman lives and believes more by her intuitions; you try to reason. I—I—oh, I don’t know. My intuition has taught me to close my eyes, to shut my ears. I don’t dare to think, I can’t think. There! that is the truth, I know.”

They rode along in silence.

“Oh, why did you ask me, John?” she said at last.

“Why? Because—I don’t know.” He laid his hand on hers. “Well, because, Nell—I have never found any one like you before who would let me talk to him. And there is so much I want to talk of.”

All that day she had been wondering if the light had yet come to him. As his hand lay on hers, a sudden temptation came to her. She knew well that should he hold her again in his arms, feel again the appeal of her head on his shoulder, all the long suspense would be over. How easy it would be, she thought, as she looked down musingly at his hand. What a temptation came, as she felt the pressure of his palm! But no; she drew a long breath, and put his hand gently away.

“It is his love I want,” she told herself, “not him.”

The lane ended—all lanes do. They came back into the highway, into the world of men. In the west squadrons of storm-clouds were beginning to climb the sky, the tree-tops were swinging in the rising wind. They put whip to their horses and began to gallop.

“It will pass,” shouted John, with a nod of encouragement. “How black everything looks.”

Carriages began to whirl by them, fleeing before the

storm; in the fields the bleating sheep were making for shelter, when, "Hello!" cried John, suddenly; "here's Captain Brace, running home."

Eli was a length ahead of the roan. The two men shouted a greeting as they passed, and then Captain Brace, looking up, saw Helen Dare. If it had been stung with a whip, his face could not have winced more suddenly. The effect on Helen was almost as startling. The color flashed out of her face.

"No, no; not that. It can't be true," she cried, turning in the saddle, as though it were some phantom of the storm. He, too, on the impulse had turned. It *was* true!

John, who had not seen the encounter, reined in his horse, to allow her to come alongside.

"That—was—Captain Brace? That is Captain Brace, your guardian?" she stammered. She thought he must hear her heart, it beat so loud.

"Yes, that's he."

"Captain — Brace?"

"Ned Brace, yes," he called back through the rumbling of the storm. "My guardian—queer fellow. Always thought there was something serious back in his life. Disappointment in love, perhaps. Good heavens, Nell; what *is* the matter?"

"I am such a coward about the lightning," she answered, steadying herself. "No more talking now. Hurry!"

Away with redoubled speed flew the horses. The black clouds shut over the land like the fall of night. John's face, the horses, the passers-by, all began to look wan and unnatural in the lurid light. Behind whirled tree, and meadow, and house, as empty and unreal in the show of lightning as though they were one vast flitting panorama.

They bounded over a noisy bridge, shaved the corners of the gate-post, caught the avenue in half a dozen leaps, bolted through the second gate, snatched open by a negro just in time, and clattered to a halt at last before the block.

"There!" cried John, springing from the steaming horse. "A glorious race, Nell!"

Uncle Nim and Aunt Hester ran out, clapping their hands. The stable boys scampered up for the horses. Nell gave him her hand, and slipped down, saying:—

"You will stay?"

He shook his head.

"Nothing I like better than a race in a storm."

She watched him silently as he tightened the girth. "Please," she repeated. "You will be drenched." Oh, why did not the clouds break, fall crashing to the earth, and drive him in with their torrents? But instead, the wind lurched.

"Hello," he cried; "we shall not get it, after all. The blue is widening. It has passed us by."

It was only too true. Hopelessly she saw the storm sweep over the northern horizon, the blue breaking out above.

"But it will come back; why risk it?" she said desperately.

He shook his head and sprang into the saddle. "Now to be off. Twelve miles before supper, Nell."

Twice she started forward, and twice she checked the words. He brought Eli to the block, and bared his head, and stretched down his hand. She saw his eyes, and she could not let him go. Again she called him back as he started off, and said hurriedly: "Once more, John, I beg you to stay—for my sake. I—I shall be so worried."

"Nonsense, Nell. I must be home to-night."

She looked up at him suddenly, and cried impulsively, "Why do you refuse me, John?" It was only to hold him a moment longer.

"Why," said the young fellow, looking down and beginning to laugh, "that's the way to win a woman, isn't it?"

"If he loved me," she said to herself, dumbly, "he never could have said that." She made no further attempt to detain him.

"Until to-morrow, then," he cried, leaning over his saddle, and holding out his hand.

"Good-by," she answered, putting her hand into his, and with a smile she looked him full in the face.

CHAPTER XV

ON the morning before the scene just described, Captain Brace had strolled out lazily on the veranda. The most appetizing of breakfasts had just been left behind. John had bolted through the postern an hour before. Israel had brought up the captain's horse, at a smart run, and now stood waiting his pleasure. But the captain, apparently unconscious, still patrolled the veranda, blowing rings of smoke from his lips, and flicking his cigar with an easy, thoughtful toss of his finger. Once or twice he stopped short, struck by some sudden thought, and pensively surveyed the long terrace, the neat outhouses, the trim fields, and the high avenue of maple and beech. The air was brisk, the sky fair, the breeze balmy, and over all floated a sense of quiet and comfort; it was a day and a scene to tempt the city-sick. Presently the stumpy figure threw away the smoking butt, shrugged his shoulders as though answering a self-propounded question, ran down the steps, and took his saddle absently. Israel, who was lingering near, saw him look up quickly at the broad mansion and rub his chin musingly, and heard him mutter, "After all—why not?" as he gathered up the reins. Then he passed about the circle, out of the gate and slowly away.

Whatever were the suspicions of Colonel Spott (who indeed still clung doggedly to his first impression) Captain Brace never made any secret of the fact that he had

“had a past,” nor did he pretend at the present time that he was any better than he should be. On his own confession he was a man of the world, with all the meaning read into the phrase when one man pronounces it to another with a lift of his shoulders. Perhaps the prospect and the serenity of the day had tempted him, and grown all at once weary of the gambling, the drinking, the women, and what-not, he had reflected that wrinkles were coming soon, and the streaked hair was fast turning all of one color, and that it was deucedly comfortable here, with the little money he had had, and the neat sum he had so fortunately won at the last. At any rate, whatever may have been the motive, he determined then and there to give over and reform.

It was a nice, comfortable, selfish sort of repentance, as such repentances are. He was going to give over his wild ways, because — well — because he was tired of them; he was going in for virtue and respectability, because — well, because the prospect pleased him. Indeed, just as it sometimes occurs in this inconsistent world of ours that a man of forty years' steadiness and integrity will, in the twinkling of an eye, break loose and give rein to his lower nature, so the captain, after a long record of consistent ill-doing, had grown suddenly sated with its monotony, and being tempted to virtue, had listened, wavered, and fallen.

Feeling very virtuous — for after deciding, for whatever reasons, on a virtuous action, is it not in the nature of man to give it virtuous causes? — feeling kindly disposed to simple honesty and quiet joys, he had ridden forth on the day of the storm. He was in this comfortable and complacent mood, when suddenly, at the turn of the road, a vision of the past rose up before him and smote his eyes.

At the sound of the hoofs down the avenue, Jonah, whose duty it was to tend the gate, rushed out, to let the foam-speckled horse dart through. Israel running up, a moment tardy, to take the bridle, expecting to be covered with a storm of abuse after the captain's usual manner, was astounded to see him throw himself off without a word. Brace's quick eyes shot a sidelong glance, a gesture indicated his return, and without a word he glided quickly up the steps and into the house. Fifteen minutes later the door opened, and he came down the flight, and without a glance to right or left, swung into the saddle and rode away into the coming storm.

A negro, tracking through the Caxton fields a little later, according to an account afterward delivered, saw the captain spurring furiously along the road, and, following him curiously with his eyes, beheld him suddenly check his horse at the edge of the woods, dismount, and, leading the animal by the bridle, disappear among the trees. Aroused by such unwonted actions, the negro made his way quickly into the cedars and came abruptly upon the captain tethering the horse. Unaware of the intruder, Brace turned, threaded his way toward the road, selected a clump of bushes that commanded the view, screened himself, pulled out his watch impatiently, and began to wait. Half an hour later the chance observer of the scene caught the sound of distant hoof-beats, and saw the captain quickly prick up, pocket his watch, and crouch down. A moment later John Gaunt passed by at an easy canter, cracking his whip and trolling a drinking chorus.

Hardly had the noise of his going died away before the captain sprang up, and came nonchalantly back, cutting the air in careless circles with his whip. He

untethered his horse, jumped up, and rode leisurely home by the way by which he had come.

When Captain Brace came in, John was standing before the fire drying his clothes.

"What, Captain, you caught, too?" he cried, at the sight of the dripping collar.

The captain made a wry face. "Gad, I thought it would blow over. Sol, bring me that decanter of whiskey. John, make room for a fellow-sufferer. Quite a fair companion, my boy, I saw you with."

"Yes, rather," John said, with the awkwardness of a first affair.

"Don't give in to them, John," pursued the captain, tapping him on the shoulder. "The more you take your own way, the more they like you. The young lady's a visitor, isn't she?"

"She is a Miss Dare, from Philadelphia," answered John, dryly, disliking the turn of the conversation. "She is staying at my Uncle Nim's."

"So? When does Jack come? To-morrow? Ah, here's the whiskey. Until supper, John. Here's success to you." At the door he added, "By the way, I'm off for a little trip to-morrow—can't say how long. So remember me to Jack."

When the captain had quit the room, John was conscious of a little irritation. No young fellow likes to bear the banter of his gallantries.

"Why the deuce don't people mind their own business?" thought he. "Can't a man have a friendship with a woman without every one immediately sticking his tongue in his cheek? Hang it, if Jack begins this way, it'll spoil a very lovely friendship."

And so by dint of repeating to himself again and

again that they were merely friends, he naturally, after supper, came to question if this were indeed the truth. Captain Brace having ridden off to Bromfield on a business excuse, John was left to his own amusement. He wandered into the big parlor and stood before the blazing hickory, feet wide apart, arms folded, head thrown back toward the balcony—a characteristic pose.

“Confound it!” continued John Gaunt, Esq., “now what *will* Jack say? He does so make fun of everything, and I am not in a mood for ridicule,” he said, with a shake of his head. “Nothing breaks up friendship so quick as that.”

By this time, having argued the question in full with his conscience, he had reverted to the conclusion that neither he nor the party of the second part desired or sought anything beyond the enjoyments of a purely platonic friendship. Alas when for the moment, a man resorts to arguing with his conscience: he can make himself believe whatever he desires. A conscience is an extraordinarily timid debater. Like all tyrants ruling by dictums and fiats, once question its authority, force it to the test of reason, it is struck dumb and retires at discretion, and the victory over it is absurdly complete. Show it a bold front—it retreats; argue—it acquiesces; but once turn your back, and behold the hyena is howling at your heels. So John, having to his satisfaction proven his present conduct not merely open but honorable, and having routed ingloriously the last scruple, something whispered in his ear, “Well, what about Jack? What is he going to say when you ride off to-morrow afternoon? What of that?”

As this was simply a question of fact, with little doubt as to how the irrepressible Jack would act, John, in

decidedly bad humor, gave up his revery and made for the bookcase. There he chose a copy of Cervantes' history of the sorrowful knight, a favorite book of his mother's, and drew up before the fire. Her handwriting was on the margins, her fingers had underscored many a favorite passage. The sight of the dear writing, thin and delicate, with the little curves over the t's and the flourished loops, never failed to lead him into depressing meditation. He thumbed the leaves, but it was only to catch the pencilled notes; he skimmed a page, but it was only to recall a passage she had loved. How often had he listened to these very words, ensconced at her knee, or cuddled in the big tester bed, blinking at the singing pine-knots in the fireplace!

He passed through to the very last page, to the "Finis" at the bottom, and turned down the cover gently and let the book drop on his knees. Presently he rose and began to walk back and forward, halting every now and then before a window, a picture, or a door. When, at length, he turned and came back, there was a new light in his eyes, of calm and of decision.

"I suppose it is because I am so restless that I have been blind," he thought, staring down into the blaze. "I do not know what it was came over me, but I do not, I never can, love her. And I have played with her—yes, wanted her to fall in love with me. It was not right." He recalled a dozen incidents—the tones of her voice, her entreaties for him to stay, the look in her eyes. "Yes, I know I have deceived her. There is but one thing to be done: I shall tell her the truth, and ask her forgiveness. There must be no misunderstanding."

Aunt Liza, passing through the upper hall sometime later, saw a candle burning in the great bedroom, and tiptoeing down found John standing before his mother's

portrait. The young fellow looked up. "Aunt Liza, you knew her when she was a girl, didn't you?"

"Yes, honey."

"She was very beautiful?"

"Yes, honey."

"You may move this in the morning. Place it over my bed."

"Yes, honey," she answered; and after he had passed out of the room, she stole back and stood peering up at the portrait, and drawing her hand across her eyes.

Breakfast was hardly ended before Israel and the team were at the steps. Captain Brace came out with John and examined the luggage, and shaking hands, was about to spring into the coach, when he suddenly stopped, one foot on the step, and said:—

"John, my boy, what do you think I am going to ask you?"

"I am sure I don't know."

"Well—a bottle of the family port," the captain cried, with a burst of laughter. "Gad, do you know, I've a feeling something's going to happen to me this time, and, curse it, I should hate to die away from such wine."

John, wondering at the request, went in and presently returned with one of the famous bottles. "There, Captain, I begin to believe you're running away for good."

"If I were, I'd carry off the whole cellar, damme if I wouldn't," the other roared. "John, I'll drink to your success, always. John, take care of yourself. Good-by."

He gripped the young fellow's hand, nodded twice in great good humor, and hopped into the seat. When

the coach rounded the circle, he thrust his head out of the window. John had gone in, but until the coach turned the postern at the end of the long avenue, the captain's shock head remained out gazing back.

Jack came in the afternoon, at one, like a breeze in midsummer. John was on the point of unbosoming himself, when the thought came to him that the confidence was not his alone. So the next day when, after breakfast, Eli was led around, John merely said in answer to Jack's inquiry:—

“I have done something I am sorry for, Jack, and I am going off this afternoon to apologize. Forgive my leaving you so soon.”

Jack, with an impudent rejoinder on his tongue, looked up and saw from his friend's face that the affair was serious.

“What?—oh, yes! Off with you, you rascal! How dare you consider me a stranger! Or do you linger to admire my silky whiskers?” He had returned with these stylish appendages. “They are highly spoken of in some quarters. I'll drop in at the Bull's Eye, and sample some of Lufkin's sherry.”

Off went John, gritting his teeth; for though since his decision a load seemed to have slipped from his shoulders, as he neared his destination he began to wonder how Helen would receive the tender of his apologies.

“I—I—think she is fond of me,” he said. He meant to be humble, but what man could resist the pleasure of such a thought? “Yes, I believe Nell is deucedly fond of me. How she looked at me that day in the woods! How frightened she was the night I rode off! Poor Nell, I hope it hasn't gone too far; I should

never forgive myself. It will be hard, very hard; but it must be done."

His uneasiness increased as they reached the avenue and Eli trotted slowly past the gate, through which he had always raced. John set his lips tight and muttered "Courage!" for the truth was, at the bottom he felt decidedly for flight.

The terrace was silent; there was no one on the porch to meet him. At the noise of his approach the door opened and Aunt Hester came gravely out. John gave her the accustomed greeting, but the ring of his voice was not that of old, as he asked, "Where is Cousin Nell?"

"She left this morning," said the old lady, looking up solemnly.

He said not a word; he could not utter a sound, but sat and stared.

"She was called away suddenly. She left this letter for you," and so saying, Aunt Hester brought out an envelope from behind her skirt and handed it up to him. As in a dream his fingers closed over it. He was staggered by the suddenness of the stroke. He made her a half bow, seeing only the staring inscription, "John Gaunt," mumbled something, and clapped his heels to Eli. He wanted to escape, to fly somewhere where he might be free to read.

He rode a mile on the highway and then turned aside down a bridle-path and brought out the crumpled little envelope from his pocket. It was the first letter she had written him. He let the reins fall on Eli's neck, who turned at once to cropping the grass under the big sycamore. He opened the envelope in a clumsy effort, with fingers that trembled. Then he smoothed the sheet out carefully before him and read:—

“DEAR COUSIN JOHN:—

“When you read this letter I shall be far on my way to my home, where I have been suddenly called. I do not know whether I shall ever see you again; probably not. So I send you this letter, which will be at once my explanation and my farewell. I hope you will always remember me as kindly in your thoughts as I do you in mine.

“Your friend and cousin,

“HELEN DARE.”

That was all—barely a dozen lines. How cold they seemed! He put the letter in his pocket and rode on slowly until he came opposite the meadow with the fence and ditch beyond, where he had caught her in his arms.

“She never loved me,” he said bitterly. “She deceived me with her eyes and the tones of her voice. How she used to look at me! and now she tosses me over like an old glove. What a fool, what a blind little fool I have been! It was just play, just one more to her, and I—and I, oh God, how I loved her!”

CHAPTER XVI

JOHN had gone full of remorse, he returned head over heels in love; and as it is instinctive to reduce everything to logic, he assured himself thus: "How vainly I tried to deceive myself, last night! but I know now — oh, yes, I know now," and Eli, taking advantage of his master's abstraction, pursued the road at a lazy trot.

The truth is, that on the preceding night, the young conqueror believed all that he needed to do was to cast down the royal handkerchief, for Helen to make him a grateful bow and clutch it to her breast. He had played the game — the game of all games — and he had won. So, having the prize virtually in hand, he naturally had inquired of himself if he really wanted it; if, after all, the satisfaction of winning were not sufficient!

It is generally so when a young fellow who has just achieved the dignity of manhood is thrown in company with a lady of more than three seasons. Vanity whispers to him the desire to know if he can win where (of course) so many have failed to move. Depend upon it, ninety cases in a hundred, if the lady should be so indiscreet as to let him perceive the force of his charms, the rascal would never reach the interesting point. Fortunately we learn as we live — and any lady of more than three seasons is well versed in the strategy of the game.

And so, suddenly discovering that Helen was not dying of love, for him, — indeed was so little smitten that she had gayly danced away (to other men, he thought savagely) with only a scrap of paper for her adieu, — discovering that whereas he had ridden over full of generous, if mistaken resolves, she had all the while been laughing up her sleeve, — discovering finally that instead of his casting the handkerchief of favor to her, it is she who has dropped him a mitten; having suddenly come face to face with all these evidences of double dealing, John decided at once that he was madly in love. He was a victim to a hopeless and unrequited passion. He had thrown away all his youthful affections and the frank outpourings of his mind, on a — “No, I won’t call her names,” he cried. “I can’t forget that I loved her. Oh, Nell, Nell!”

It was not disappointed love but only wounded vanity. But of the two, the latter ailment pains the more. For when a man is suddenly infected with the ills of vanity, he pronounces it at once to be the affection of the heart (else it would not be vanity), and assumes all the aches and groans which he knows attend that dread disease; but always, beyond, there are the mortifying twinge and the rankling sting that come not with simple, honest heartache.

John, of course, understood nothing of the nature of his illness, — if, indeed, any one ever does, — and the world was all blacks and grays to him on that smiling afternoon. He felt very savage, raging inwardly; he could never, never forgive her. She had abused his confidence, she had stricken all his faith in human nature. He felt that he would never be the same hereafter. That we call an illness by the wrong name does not make it any easier to bear. John was wretched,

defeated — routed. He had borne enough, he had reached the breaking point at last. What was there in life for him but to forget — to have it through quickly? At one moment he thought of running away to sea, on the next ship, to California, Africa, Australia, anywhere to escape from himself. The thought of his mother and her guiding influence never came to him. When he reached home, he did not seek her books or stand before her portrait, neither that day nor the next nor for many after. He did not want help — the very thought irritated him. He wanted to brood alone.

“Where’s Mr. Jack?” he called, swinging off before the steps. Jack had sent a note to say he had met friends and would not be home for supper. John knew the names, they were of his class at Yale, of the sort reputed “good fellows” by their friends.

“I must do something,” he said, with a rise of his shoulder. “Sol, serve the supper, and have Israel hitch up the grays right away.”

That night Lufkin was kept busy, bustling around a table of seven as jolly fellows as ever made the Bull’s Eye ring with their shouts, and not too easy to please. When Jack had come bursting into the public room that afternoon, and had rung loudly with a glass on the table, and shouted, “Tony, come forth,” two figures started forward simultaneously, with cries of, “Why, little Johnnie Gay!”

“Bless my eyes, why, Tommie Bayly, you old villain!” cried Jack, flinging his arms around a little roly-poly man with a jolly eye. “Oh, my eyes and whiskers! Toppin! Well, well — and, wait a moment — Troutman in the shadow — I’ll bet 3 to 1 it’s Davie behind the door.”

"Hello, little Johnnie," a big voice exclaimed, and Davie emerged, caught Master Jack about the waist, and tossed him to the ceiling. Lufkin rushing in excitedly, found them capering in a circle.

"Ho, ho, enough, enough, for heaven's sake!" Jack puffed, out of breath, and, letting go of hands, each shot off into a corner.

Lufkin, grinning like a Cheshire cat, wiped his hands on his apron and shook hands with the returned prodigal. "Glad to see you, Mr. Hazard, glad to see you again. I might have known it was you; and Mr. John, I hope you found him well?"

"Sure enough, Jack, where's Johnnie Glum?" broke in Bayly. "Haven't seen you two since — since —"

"Since that night, eh?" Jack finished with a cough. "Great night — memorable — night on which they chucked poor Jack. You start — you look surprised — gather and listen, my sons," and with a histrionic gesture he indicated table and seats.

The collegians with looks of dismay gathered about. Lufkin, with a hand on a chair and a hand on his hip, his good ear tilted forward, prepared to enjoy some new escapade of Jack's.

"In preface," began the little fellow, producing an envelope, "allow me to say I am staying with John Gaunt, whom you have so familiarly addressed. And now, rum-uns, as William the First has said, lend me your ears. Here is the decree. Received to-day. A-hem!

"DEAN'S OFFICE.

"MR. JOHN JAY HAZARD, —

"Dear Sir: I regret exceedingly to inform you that at the last session of the sophomore faculty, before whom your case came up, it was thought advisable to ask your resignation. Indeed, the sentiment of the meeting was for immediate expulsion, and I fear the verdict would have been to that end, had not Professor Rootmeyer

[good for the Roman! It was the translations, Davie, ahem.] interceded in your favor and mitigated the severity of the sentence. You will accordingly be allowed until the 15th instant to forward your resignation as a member of this college. In conclusion, permit me to add that I retain only the kindest recollections of your manly conduct in confessing your error, and regret the public accident, which I am sure you will realize could have, in the interest of college discipline, no other ending.'

"There!" cried Jack, throwing the letter in the air, as though to signify, Up goes the sponge. "There is the epitaph. Here, gentlemen, and very pleased to meet you, is the tomb."

The seekers after knowledge were in consternation.

"Oh, come now, Gay, it's not true; you're hoaxing us."

"Why, little Johnnie, what will the college do without you?"

"The widow'll be disconsolate."

"I say, that's tough!"

Evidently there were two opinions as to Mr. Hazard's value as a member of the college.

"Well, it is true," Jack answered, forcing a comical face; "and unless the faculty discover soon how necessary I am to its welfare, I'm afraid I have walked my last beneath the elms, and drunk my last drink at the old Oyster House. *Vale! Vale!* But come, I say; because one well is dry, all are not empty. I say, stop, and let's make a dinner of it here. We'll take the small parlor. We'll celebrate—we'll—we'll have a wake, and at the end I'll write my resignation. Say, here's a lark! Hello, there go the Caxtons and Wellyn! Say yes, and I'll have 'em in. Yes or no? The ayes have it!"

With such a toastmaster as Jack, no meeting could

have been a failure. The Caxtons sang an admirable duet, and Tom Bayly gave his famous laughing song, to repeated encores, until the room implored him to desist. Through the window they could hear the listening darkies roaring with laughter. Jack served up his best imitations, and was, as he said, on the whole a very lively corpse. Tommie was in the midst of his take-off on the stuttering minister, when John arrived. He stood a moment in the dusk of the hall, looking in at the jolly company with that indefinable melancholy that comes to a spectator whose mood is alien to the revelry about him.

Bayly, with his droll cheeks, was declaiming; the collegians were rocking in their seats, clapping the table with their glasses and shouting, "Good old Tommie;" Lufkin was grinning; the negroes were clasping their sides with the pain of their laughter; while Jack, like the spirit of frolic, presided at the head of the table over a bowl of punch.

"I wonder," thought the poor fellow in the hall, "if there really is such a thing as drowning your sorrow? I am in a mood for anything to-night," and flinging open the door, he strode into the light of the acclaiming room.

Now at college, John, while by no means a hermit, had never won the degree of "good fellow," one degree which to this day has never lost in popularity. He liked to take a quiet glass off in a corner with a friend or two. When he found himself in a crowd; which was seldom, he lapsed into a silent spectator of the frolic, which Jack was sure to be leading.

Yet in ten minutes he had plunged in savagely, and was stamping his glass louder than the rest. He made huge demands on the punch, and croaked out the cho-

ruses in a thundering bass, remarkable chiefly for its volume. But his gayety was forced, and there lacked the true ring to his voice. Yet the more distasteful it became, the more blindly did he determine to continue. His wild actions puzzled Jack.

"What the deuce has come over him?" he thought, and began to cast anxious glances toward his friend.

Now between John Gaunt and Toppin there had been small cordiality. The latter, ironically saluted as Snobbin and Foppin by his loving classmates, was generally unpopular for the qualities suggested. John, who hated affectation, had a cordial detestation of him, a feeling which the other returned as only a man can who knows he is found out.

On the present occasion Toppin, a flashy, bloated fellow with a reputation for hard drinking, being already flushed with his previous exertions, proceeded to make himself obnoxious. He pooh-poohed the wine, berated Lufkin until the host grew red in the face, pronounced the punch flabby, and finally, singling out John, began to ridicule his bass singing. John, though sorely provoked, held himself well in hand.

"He-he!" cried Toppin, with a crowing imitation. "A solo from Johnnie Glum. Hear, hear, a solo! a solo!"

"Damn you, shut up!" burst out Troutman with an oath. "Don't you mind him, John, he's maudlin."

"I maudlin? No, no—it's John-nie Glum! Look at him, he's had *three glasses!* What a *devil!* Ho, ho, ho!"

"Curse the little simpering snob," sputtered John, brought to the rope-end of his patience. "Here, I've had enough. See here, you Foppin, I've a good mind to smash your confounded little head. Because I don't

choose to brag, it doesn't mean I haven't twice as steady a head as you."

"Who's braggin' now?"

"Shut up! shut up!" — from Jack and the Caxtons.

"Put him under the pump," from Troutman's rumbling voice.

John drew back, grown suddenly quiet, as was his way when planning something particularly daring.

"Very well. See here, Toppin — I'll bet you twenty dollars I drink you under the table, glass for glass."

"What? Done!"

Jack jumped up and ran to his friend to dissuade him. John swept him aside with one arm.

"I have said it, I have said it, and I will do it. And what's more," he added, with a crash of his tumbler and a snap of the eyes, "you — you Toppin, I'll carry you home on my shoulders afterward, or forfeit the stakes."

Jack was about to protest again, but Davie plucked him away, whispering, "Let him be, Jack; he can do it."

When the room was quieted down, John filled his glass and held it up to Toppin and drank it off, never taking his eyes from the other's face. Each time he said firmly, "I have said I could do it, and I will." All the other's bravado slunk away under John's insistent stare.

Here was a pretty how-to-do! Lufkin, roaming restlessly about the room, could hardly believe his eyes. Was this the quiet John Gaunt, silent and self-restrained, whom he had known from boyhood? It went to his heart to see him at such a pass. "Poor fellow!" he muttered, with a doleful shake of his head. "It's the father coming out in him."

And that is what Doctor Magog thought an hour later, as he came upon the noisy party on the Bromfield

road, John grimly carrying an insensible figure slung over his broad shoulders, he and Davie towering above the rest, who were shouting and cheering. The doctor, too, shook his head, and said sadly, "I feared as much."

At the gate of the Troutman mansion the noisy party broke up, and Jack, very much perturbed in spirit over the strange behavior of his chum, pushed his friend into the waiting carriage. The fresh air, cutting against John's face as they hurried on, raised him again from his lethargy and woke the wild blood in him. The startled stable-boy stared in amazement at the sight of the young master, dishevelled and askew, stained with the conflict, and bawling at the top of his voice.

At the stamping and the thundering from the dining room, old Sol came piling down the stairs, pistol in hand, and the white eyes of Aunt Liza were seen rolling in horror from the balcony.

"Sol, you old villain, come here!" cried John, slapping down a key on the table. "Get wine—bring wine—bring anything—no, stop! a bottle of port."

Jack, catching his arms, tried to reason with him; while Sol, shocked out of his slumbers, still clutching his pistol, rocked from one foot to the other, his eyes blinking, his mouth gaping, too astonished to move.

"By —, am I to be obeyed?" the young master whipped out. Aunt Liza gave a shriek, and like magic a row of shiny eyes disappeared from the windows, and Sol, starting off in fear of his life, brought up the bottle.

"Here; give me the glasses. There, there. To the brim."

"I say, John. Come, that's enough," cried Jack. "Come to bed."

"One toast, Jack; one toast, Jack, old Johnnie Gay. Get a glass for yourself, Sol. A glass, I say! And stop;

come back—come right back here, you old villain. Get one for Liza, too.” At this the black figure gave a howl, and ran off to her room to slam and double-lock the door.

John filled three glasses, and cried, “Here’s confusion to woman, the enemy of man!”

Jack was in doubt whether to storm or to laugh. It was all so absurd, and Uncle Sol cut such an amazing figure.

“And now, John, to bed, like a good fellow. I’ll bet you can’t walk up the stairs,” he added strategically, turning down his glass.

“To bed! Oh, no, no!” John exclaimed, looking at him with maudlin cunning. “You want to get me upstairs, don’t you? Oh, no, no; changed my mind, Jack, other bottle—another bottle, quick! Drowns sorrow, Jack. Come on! Be a good fellow. We’ll make a night of it.”

Jack, who was in the last ditch of his wits, had a sudden thought. He filled a glass. “I drank your toast, John. Here’s mine: ‘To one Woman.’”

“Oh, oh,” said John, with a wise smirk. “You old Jack—you sly old Jack! So that’s your game, sly old Jack. Who is she? What’s her name?”

“Your mother,” said Jack, sternly, holding up his glass, and fixing his eyes steadily on John’s. “To your mother.”

John had his glass well in the air. He stopped and gave Jack one look. His whole expression changed. He turned and threw the glass upon the table, where it shattered with a crash, and scattered in every direction. Then without a word he wheeled and went straight up the stairs, and slammed the door of his room.

“Fo’ de Lo’d! wha’s gwine come to Marse John?”

said Sol, a few minutes later, as he tottered up the stairs to Aunt Liza, peering round the door.

“It’s his pa’s debilment in him, dat’s what it am,” answered the old mammy, with shaking head. “Po’ marse!” And so, too, thought Jack, as he prepared for bed.

CHAPTER XVII

As the days went by, Jack began to grow more and more anxious. John had taken up gambling. There was scarce a night that the walls of Windrift did not ring to the shouts of the revellers. So frequent became these parties, and so prolonged, that Jack, from sheer worry, lost his lightheartedness, until even his comrades began to rally him.

"What the deuce is the matter with the man?" said Jack to himself, and, having a pretty acute inkling as to the cause, from several hints dropped by John, he determined to investigate for himself.

A few skilful questions at the Caxtons' and the Talbots', who had been perfectly well aware of certain riding parties; a word from Doctor Magog, who had had the truth from Uncle Nim; an hour's confidence with the minister; a dozen inquiries carelessly thrown among the colored quarters, and Jack soon arrived at the correct solution of his chum's sudden plunge into wild ways.

As the upshot of much meditation, he determined to read the young offender a severe curtain lecture—a resolution that drove him to twirling his thumbs on the garden-seat in silent preparation; for lecture-giving was not exactly in Johnnie Gay's line.

"Suppose it would sound better from another quarter," he thought, scratching his head in perplexity. "But as there is no one else—here goes."

So that afternoon when John came in, flushed from a match which he had won on Eli against the pick of the Troutman stables, Jack with solemn face actually attacked him in his room, as he was about to apply the sponge.

“John!”

The little fellow came to a stop in the middle of the room.

“Hello?”

“John, we’ve stuck together through some pretty tough scrapes, haven’t we?”

“So we have.”

This not seeming to lead anywhere, Jack relapsed, sorted out the contents of the table, scrutinized the walls, and made the turn of the room.

“John!”

“Hello—hello!”

“John, now look here. I’ve got to say something to you—and—and I’m going to say it right from the shoulder!”

“Well, fire away!” consented John, with a smile at his manner, suspecting what was coming.

“Now, that’s just like you, John Gaunt,” burst out Jack, smarting under the other’s smile. “Because I prefer to laugh and make merry, you choose never to take me seriously. I am your closest friend. I shouldn’t be doing my duty by you if I didn’t talk to you, and listen you shall!”

“I know what you’re going to say,” John put in, with a grimace. “Well, go on.”

“I am going to say to you,” cried Jack, excitedly, getting on his feet, “that you ought to be thoroughly ashamed of yourself—yes, ashamed!—I have said it. And it’s not my idea of John Gaunt to see you crying

out when you're hit. No, I say it isn't. I know what the matter is," he added, speaking more rapidly — "never mind how I found out — and I tell you, you're not the first one who's got in trouble over a woman, and has had to bear it. Come, be a man, John, grit your teeth."

"Stop!" broke out John. "I don't know how you found out what you did. I don't care. Let that go. But when you choose to upbraid me and call me hard names, I want you to know the facts. I didn't expect this of you, Jack; it's mighty unkind, if I do say it."

"Hang it, John, you don't know how badly I've felt about you," Jack stammered, floundering instantly. "I — I couldn't bear to see you flinging yourself away, old fellow. Now don't say that. Come, I say, John — forgive me. Hang it, I don't mean that, I mean — hang it if I know what I do mean."

"H'm." John drew out a letter and stretched it to him. "I think you'll understand when you read that — came this morning."

A black look settled over his face, and turning his back, he walked to the window, where he waited, drumming on the pane.

Jack hurriedly slipped out the letter and glanced at the end. "No signature, eh? Anonymous letter — handwriting disguised — bad, always bad. Now for it."

"JOHN GAUNT, ESQUIRE, —

"Honored Sir: I *entreat* you to read honestly what I have to write. I know the fate of anonymous letters, but believe me, there are circumstances which do not allow me to sign my name. I have never met you, or I would have delivered this warning in person. You have in your household an *adventurer*, purporting to call himself Ned Brace. This man I know to a certainty has many aliases, one of which is Roger Westlake. I cannot give you his real name, as I have never been able to discover it. Without telling you the reason why I

have cause to regret the acquaintance of Roger Westlake, alias Captain Brace, I simply beg you to convince yourself of his true character. Make investigations as to the security of *your estate*, of which I understand he is the guardian. Knowing his true character, I fear for the result. Do not neglect this. Make your inquiries with *caution* and the *greatest secrecy*, for Westlake is a damned clever man."

"Hello, seven words underlined, and a damn," Jack muttered, glancing over it curiously. "Evidently a woman. Captain has an enemy. Well?"

John turned from the window and came back, saying slowly, "Jack, I don't feel as though I could ever trust another human being—I never doubted that man."

"Good God!" Jack landed on his feet, the whole situation crashing in upon him like a clap of thunder. "It isn't true? Good God, John, say it isn't true!"

"The worst is, it's only half true. I don't know to what extent he has robbed me. He has gone off with the account at the Bromfield bank. I have telegraphed to Baltimore and Philadelphia—I shall know to-night or to-morrow. It isn't that"—his voice broke—"but—but—" Jack came quickly to his side and laid a hand on his arm—"it's my mother, Jack. I have seen Aunt Liza and Soland Israel, and made them talk. They were frightened to death of him—feared him like the devil himself. I know it all now. Before he came, my father was fighting his best against that habit, Jack. What do you think that villain did? He used to egg him on, used to get the drug for him, kept him gambling night and day, and all the time pretended to be his friend. Liza told me—all the servants knew it, and—and so did my mother. What's more, he cheated him at the last—that sum he won and got me to pay. Israel saw it, and Jonah, from the balcony. They suspected him. That's what killed my

mother, Jack. Oh, the cursed, black-hearted villain! I'd give it all to get my hands around his neck."

"Good God! Good God!" exclaimed Jack, pacing the floor in horror, the perspiration showing on his forehead. "Oh, this is awful, awful, John! Why didn't you throw me out the window when I spoke to you as I did?"

"Because I didn't care." He sank dejectedly into a chair, pulling his lip. "Because I don't care *that* what becomes of me. I was badly enough knocked up before about a woman who played with me. You were right there. Now I have faith in neither man nor woman." He sprang up suddenly as Jack was passing and caught and wheeled him about by the shoulders. "Here, how do I know that even you won't deceive me some day?"

"John Gaunt! John Gaunt!" burst out Jack, crimson with shame. "Oh, how despicable — how cowardly —"

"Don't, Jack," cried John, dropping back into the chair, "don't hit me when I'm down. I don't know what I'm saying — forgive me."

"Of course you don't," said Jack, running up eagerly, and squeezing his hand. "Don't I know just how you feel, old fellow?"

"After what I have said," said John, passing his hand across his forehead, "I wonder that you don't leave me at once. Perhaps it would be for the best. Leave me to go my own way, Jack. I don't think it will be long, and I — I — don't care much."

"John," said the little fellow, drawing off and looking down at his friend with tears in his eyes, "I do want to say something to help you, but hang it, I don't know how. I'm not used to it — I have always relied on you. What shall I say — what shall I say to you?" Suddenly he stopped in his course and laid a hand on his friend's shoulder. "See here, John, the best thing I can say is this

—you're a man, and you're game. You don't cry out when you're hit. I've heard how you fought once. Yes, I think I know you better than you do yourself. You've got a hard situation to face, — yes, a damned hard situation, — and many a man would go under. But you won't, John Gaunt; you won't, because you are John Gaunt. Do you hear me?" In his vehemence he shook him sharply by the shoulder. "Did I cry out when the faculty chucked me? You didn't think I liked it, did you? You're not the only one, John, to grin and bear things. I — I've never spoken of myself — I can't just now, but I will some day — but I say, I've had a pretty hard pull of it myself. And I think, John, it's not because of the trials we have to bear, — we all have those, — but for the way we bear them, that we deserve sympathy. One woman deceived you, John, but remember the other. And though one friend has turned out a villain, why, John, here's another that'll stick to you through thick and thin." He held out his hand, and added, "Come, John, promise me one thing, that — that you won't do anything desperate."

John looked up, tried to smile, and dropped his head again; then nodded, and silently gripped the proffered hand, and there the lecture ended.

Supper over, they swung into their saddles. As they were riding slowly, that Jonah might open the terrace gate, John turned, and said, "Jack, you have shamed me, you have roused me out of myself. I will grit my teeth. God bless you!"

They rode off to Bromfield for news, Jack in such high feather that you would have thought he was going to hear of a legacy.

"Wait outside, Jack," said John, when they had reined in before Judge Wellyn's, "I shall only be a few moments."

Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes, dragged out, and still he did not come. Doctor Magog's smart sulky and Uncle Nim's equipage from Brewster's were also in wait; it was evident that a conference of John's friends was going on inside. From where Jack sat he could look in through the brilliant windows. Several times he saw Doctor Magog pass, shaking his head with gestures of anger. Presently John's strong figure loomed up in front, and then Uncle Nim came up and placed his hand on the young fellow's shoulder and began to talk to him earnestly. Sometimes their voices rose so high that Jack could almost distinguish the words.

"I hope everything isn't gone," he said; "if it is, I don't know what will become of him."

All at once the little knot at the window separated, and the door opening, John came tramping down the path. Jack's courage sank.

"It's coming now," he said. An unreasoning impulse rushed over him to turn the horse and gallop away; to escape from what he was going to hear.

The next instant John was at his side, with a hand on his knee, saying, "Well, Jack, I've heard. It's all gone, and I'm a beggar, with hardly a cent in the world, and I say, Thank God!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THERE is only one thing consistent in human nature, — its inconsistency. When, on the death of his father, John had finally realized that the gloom of his boyhood was not to be lifted, unwilling to admit that the trouble lay within himself, he had sought for outward causes for his melancholy. If it were not his father, what was it? The conviction had settled upon him that only in escape from his home could he be rid of the black pursuing shadow. If he stayed, he thought, with a shudder, that some day he must fall into the dire inheritance. In the dread of succumbing to such a moral decline, he had made a resolution — on the day of his majority he would turn his back on the place forever, escape to a new environment, and start life anew where the air was not poisoned by such inexorable memories. So the discovery of his beggary, instead of proving the climax of John's sorrows, was in reality the saving stroke. It broke at one blow all the chains that held him down. It left him penniless on the mercy of the world and to the test of his own wits; but it left him free.

"Thank God, thank God!" he broke out impetuously, as they rode home in the night, Jonah clattering behind. "Don't you see, Jack, it sets me free. It was inactivity that was driving me crazy. I can carve my own way — I can begin at the beginning, and show what I can do. It is the making of me; I know it — I feel it — do you hear?"

Jack, who was too overcome with amazement to reply, contented himself with a prolonged whistle in the wind.

"The scoundrel has run off with everything," continued John, his voice ringing. "What's more, there is a heavy mortgage on the place. My father negotiated it last year to make some investments. We shall have to sell the place to clear it, and what is over goes to me, but it won't be much. Judge Wellyn is to arrange for the sale as soon as possible. Then you and I'll start out west together. They say that there are good openings at Cleveland."

"What a queer chap you are!" growled Jack. "I don't think I shall ever get to understand you. Here you come bobbing up gayly when I thought you'd be floored flat—sort of expected to tote you home, you know. I say, though, I was deuced cut up about you this afternoon."

"You see, Jack," answered John, with an attempt to laugh down the other's remarks, "ambition is the real motive of a man's life, and if he can't be forging ahead, why, he runs to seed, or something worse. I'm on my mettle, now—I've got to earn my own bread; I've got to show what stuff I'm made of. It touches my pride, you see. But one thing, Jack—I'm through with women! Thank heaven, I've learned my lesson, and learned it early. As for men, my motto shall be, 'In business trust no man.'"

"I say, John, isn't that going a bit too far?" put in Jack, who began to see the sting underneath all the bravado. John gave a laugh—he wasn't through yet. "Jack, you don't know the world—lucky fellow! Everything is selfish—the struggle for existence. It's your wits against every one else's. Play the game, my boy, according to the rules, but know whom you're

playing with, and don't be deceived by platitudes. I can almost forgive that villain for the good he has done me in opening my eyes. My eyes *are* open—I shall win, my boy, because from this day I shall put faith in neither man nor woman. I'm going to be selfish, like other people. It doesn't make me any the worse to be honest about it. I am going to fight a selfish, hard fight—there!”

Jack was quite taken aback by the bitter ring in his voice. “Look here—if I thought you meant a tenth of the abominable stuff you've been spouting, John Gaunt, I'd be tempted to give you a good sound thrashing, for all your size. But you don't—you know you don't—it's all talk;” and Jack reflected to himself that perhaps it was just as well that John's savage humor should evaporate in that way.

“Well, perhaps I don't,” said John, with another laugh. “I never know what I mean, or what I'll do next. Does any one really know his true self, I wonder?”

“Oh, I say,” said Jack, in positive alarm, “be quiet there. That's enough for one night.”

John laughed for the third time—they were home now—and said, with a long breath, “Well, Johnnie Gay, I reckon I'll sleep sounder to-night than I expected.”

“Hang it!” replied Jack, slipping under his arm, “don't you think *I* shall?”

Now that the news of John's misfortune had spread abroad, it was really astonishing how many people had long suspected the swindler. Lufkin and Colonel Spott were the heroes of every gathering. Dr. Magog, who prudently shunned the colonel, confessed in private that he had long been troubled with qualms—a certain look in the eyes; “Cousin Bob” Troutman, whom Captain

Brace had terribly bitten at *écarté*, inflated his cheeks and vowed in his piping voice that he had scented a sharper from that very minute ; upon his soul, no honest man could have so defeated him. Pretty soon it began to be rumored, at first in stray hints, and then in a storm of testimony, that John was not the sole victim. Caxton had loaned the captain a large sum ; his reckonings at the White Horse and the Seven Oaks mounted to three figures ; worse and worse, he had been made the executor of numerous small wills, while others had intrusted money to him for investments. It soon appeared that at the last the captain had gone off, making as clean a sweep as though he had led in a company of freebooters and sacked the county. Searches, investigations, clues — all were alike futile. He had disappeared as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

The notice of sale of "Windrift and properties" was posted in the villages round about, and published in the city papers. For a week before the auction the place swarmed with prospective buyers, punching the cattle, calculating the crops, and examining the furniture ; some professional gentlemen from Baltimore, with little note-books, jotting down figures, for the estate was famed and historic. It brought a queer feeling to John to see these intruders overrunning the garden and shuffling noisily along the corridors, prying among the orchards and ferreting in the stables. He used to rise early and gallop over to Bromfield or to The Willows to dine with Uncle Nim, returning at six, that he might escape the curious. Yet he vowed again and again to Jack that he was glad the place was gone under the hammer, that its memories were too bitter, too gloomy,

to call it home. Outwardly, at least, he appeared insensible, exhibiting only restlessness and impatience to have the thing done, and to be off.

On Monday the stage-coach deposited at the door a tall, lanky personage in black, shining clothes, with a high, bald forehead, somewhat concealed by a wisp of hair, which was worn after the style of a well-known Corsican. With him were two stout, rolling assistants, addressed as Toby and Frank. The gentleman, who at first sight might have been mistaken for an undertaker, was in reality the auctioneer, Mr. Belsham of Philadelphia and Baltimore. Toby handed down the baggage and passed Feeter the fare, while his chief, without any sign of moving upon the house, proceeded to scrutinize the grounds, enumerating to his assistants the details which pleased him most, punctuating his remarks by gestures with a toothpick, which at such times he removed from his mouth.

"Elegant grounds, Toby," began the knight of the hammer; "sweeping meadows, bashful brooks, stately avenues, commodious terrace, historic mansion — good working-place, Toby."

"Better'n that there last place of ourn," said Toby, with an oath.

"So it is," Belsham replied, nodding with satisfaction. Then, having completed his survey, he advanced, and gave the young fellows a profound sweep of his tile.

"Good morning, gentlemen. Mr. Gaunt, I take it? Ah, you, sir. Am delighted to meet you — hope to be of assistance — my lieutenants, Toby and Frank."

Uncle Sol carried off the pair. John inclined his head stiffly, but Jack, scenting an original, ran down at once and shook his hand.

"It's lucky for you, gentlemen, I came early," con-

tinued the auctioneer, with urbanity. "We have only a day before us, but we can do much. I noticed three spots where the fences were down as I drove up. We must fix that up, sir, right away. I see you have given the house and stables a coat of paint lately — very good — excellent! but the chicken-house and dog kennels have been skipped; we must touch them up, too, sir. There's nothing succeeds like trimness — well-ordered estate — everything in repair — makes a difference of ten per cent. And what does it cost? A little carpentering, a daub of paint — and there you are. It's a trick of the profession. If the Morrisons, my last clients, had listened to me, sir, they'd be in pocket a thousand more, let me tell you. Hope you won't neglect these little touches, Mr. Gaunt."

Jack listened, all ears, but John strode away, saying rather gloomily: "Do what you wish. Mr. Hazard will take charge."

"Ah, Mr. Hazard," Belsham began gravely, performing on a large bandanna. "Call up your niggers, and we'll get down to work. These halls, now. Dust 'em and scrub 'em up thoroughly. Furniture? Rub it down, and polish it up. Everything must be spick and span. We must station a nigger at the door, watch the mat, make every one wipe their feet. That always has a fine effect in a mansion — imposes, awes, reduces to proper respect. No levity during sale."

"Mr. Belsham, I bow to your wisdom," said Jack, with a confidential wink.

"Thank you, sir. And now, Mr. Hazard, if you'll have the kindness to conduct me, I'll make my inspection, and arrange the campaign. You know we gentlemen of my profession always feel as though we owned the grounds until the sale is over — while we are at the helm, you know."

"Of course, and very naturally," Jack chimed in. "And, being the captain, Mr. Belsham, — ahem! — you understand — the — captain commands the cellar! Now, just a cooling glass, eh, Captain?"

"You catch my meaning admirably," responded Belsham, with an approving wink. "A little refreshment does certainly stimulate the imagination."

When Jack, thoroughly delighted, had brought the bottle, Belsham measured out his glass, saying wisely as he topped off Mr. Hazard's health: —

"I know all about the trouble here. Edward Brace, *alias* Roger Westlake, *alias, alias* — real name supposed to be Roger Clieve — bad egg, thoroughly bad egg. There are a dozen counts out against him in the city. Seems to have been a taking one with the women, sir — generally the case. And now to business. Point one: air bracing — enlarge on health. Point two: garden famous, pearl of the Eastern Shore. Point three: house historic — good point, that. Sentiment and tradition goes a long way. Too many is apt to neglect 'em. I never do. I take my art seriously, Mr. Hazard."

"And the sentiment does you great honor, sir," assented Jack.

"Now, Mr. Hazard, say we look round. Anything broken? Damaged? Shabby on one side? Or one side better than the other? Show me around, and I'll tip Toby the wink. There's another point: any one can sell a person what he wants. It takes genius, say I, to sell him what he don't want. To be frank with you, sir, I won't disguise from you that you can't hope to realize what the place is worth; never can, when you sell in a hurry. Remember that. People will suspect. But you've fallen in good hands, and that's in your favor. Ah! this way to the outhouses, sir. After you."

Jack, who asked nothing better than to revel in such company, stuck to Belsham throughout the day, but John, who had taken a dislike to "the king-buzzard of all the flock," as he savagely termed him, kept out of their way. He was busy running over his affairs, deciding what to put aside, and what to send under the hammer. He kept his mother's portrait, a few of her trinkets, a medallion or so, and her rings, and at last, after much hesitation, added his father's watch and the heavy gold seals.

"It doesn't seem like a home, Jack," he began gloomily, that night. "It's more like a cage from which I'm escaping. I have no sentiment about it. It's a shackle that holds me back to the past. It cramps me. I want to be free to go where I'll never see that cursed wall, and know what's beyond. There, now; you know the truth." He stopped suddenly, startled, himself, at his outburst of confidence, and then added doggedly: "Do you think I'm going to play the hypocrite, and weep? I'm glad I'm leaving. I'm glad I shall never have to see it again. I shall go away tomorrow, and stay away until the cursed thing is over."

But despite all his resolutions, the next morning he had gone no farther than the Caxton woods, when he jerked Eli sharply about and made for home.

The stables were packed with vehicles, and it seemed as though there was a cluster of them under each tree. The negroes were laughing and calling on the terraces, the rooms were hot with people. Every one he knew was there—the Talbots, the Caxtons, the Troutmans, Doctor Magog, Uncle Nim and Aunt Hester, Colonel Spott and his daughters, even Lufkin, from the Bull's Eye. John went quietly down the hall, aware that every one turned as he entered, and stood in a corner on the edge

of the crowd. From where he was he could see Belsham over the heads of the crowd, laughing and spouting away, and Toby and Frank handing up the merchandise. Article after article went its sing-song course; the family silver, the old piano, the mahogany furniture from his mother's room—the dining-room table, the portrait by Sir Joshua, and the Boydell engravings—all to the tune of "going, going, gone," while Belsham, the soul of good-humor, rattled away, cracking his jokes and drawing a laugh over the oldest mementos of John's childhood.

"How like an undertaker the fellow looks!" he said to Jack, who came and stood by his side. "Every time he brings his hammer down it sounds as though he were nailing a coffin! Ugh! Will the business never be over? and why the devil do people keep glancing over at me?"

It ended at last. The rooms, so lately thronged, noisy, and hot with the breath of people, were empty, and the barns and the yards and the terraces. Even Belsham had run off to catch another engagement. Only Judge Wellyn and Doctor Magog lingered to cast up the sale.

"There, the mortgage is covered!" the judge called out at length, "and John, there is something over for you."

John, who had been restlessly treading the length of the hall, looked up and asked, "How much?"

The amount was read off.

"My father left the sum of three hundred dollars to Aunt Liza, and directed me to free her when I came of age. I have done that. The nurse of my mother, at least, shall be provided for. Subtract that sum and tell me what is left."

“Seven hundred and twenty-odd dollars,” said Doctor Magog.

“I understand, Judge Wellyn, I cannot legally touch that sum until six months from now, when I come of age. I am going to leave to-morrow; I must have some money. Will you lend me six hundred dollars, sir, if I give you my note of hand in exchange?”

“I reckon so, John,” replied the judge, a gentleman of the old school. “On one condition, sir, that I lend it to you, sir, simply on your word.”

At this John flushed with pleasure, and for the first time his face softened a bit.

“And now,” cried Doctor Magog, slipping his arm through John’s, “you and Jack come home with me and spend the night.”

“Thank you, Doctor, I think I’ll stay at home.” The gentlemen looked a little awkward at the word. “I mean, I’ll stay here, my last night. There are other things — some things I must do. Good-by, and thank you.” So saying, he saw them to the steps and shook hands silently twice again.

It was already long after seven. Tea over, a scant meal, he stole away to the stables to rub his hand affectionately over Eli’s cheek, and say good-by to blind old Puff. Now that it was all over, and he was a stranger in his own home — home no longer — he felt fearfully adrift. He passed down into the garden, slowly pacing the long sward, then turning up each alley, along Lover’s Lane, past the rose bushes and the bower under the lilacs, seeking each path, each bush, each flower, fraught with one dear memory — for the last time, he thought. It was growing so dark that objects began to fade before his eyes. He felt strangely, terribly alone, as a little

child might feel. He passed on to the garden-seat and touched with his finger-tips the Painted Ladies swinging over the back, where a hundred times he had surprised his mother sitting wistfully in the twilight. "And this is the end!" he thought, with a sudden revulsion. "Oh, God, if I could only bring her back!"

A little later Jack, who had grown anxious over his continued absence, started down the path. Suddenly he stopped short. There, before the garden-seat, flung on his knees, his head on his arms, motionless, almost unseen in the dusk, was John.

"Dear old boy," thought Jack, as he withdrew softly; "I don't think I need worry over him, after that."

The sun was not yet up on the morrow, when Tom Feeter came cracking up the turn with Moses and Aaron. Jack ran out and bustled over the baggage, and presently down came John, followed by Aunt Liza, who was clutching his hand, the tears bathing her checks as she begged him to take her along. John shook his head, said something low to the old woman, at which she began to sob, but she made no further attempt to hold him. He drew his hand gently away, and the next moment he was on the top. Jack touched the coachman's arm, and they drove rapidly round the gravel turn, through the terrace gate, and along the avenue. The sun was coming up over the bay, the buzzards were swooping in great curves overhead, the sheep were starting out to pasture. It was just like any other day.

At the turnpike Doctor Magog met them and gave them his blessing, and a little later up came Uncle Nim and Aunt Hester. A hand-shake, some words of parting, a flutter of something white, and they too fell

behind. A quarter of a mile farther they met the post—Andrew Brook—who waved a cheery farewell. How was John to know that in the brown leather mail-bag under the seat of that sulky lay a small letter addressed to him with the inscription, “Return to Miss Helen Dare, Box 427, Philadelphia, if not called for in three days”? The letter lay at Belle River the requisite time, and then reverted to its writer. How was John to know that in that letter was the message he had waited for,—ay, despite all protestations,—longed for? Who knows, but for the accident of time, what might have been the sequel?

The post was gone long ago; the Caxton woods, the Troutmans’ and the Talbots,’ were left behind. The horses began to clatter over the county bridge, into the full blaze of the stretching bay. The white caps were gleaming in the churn of the tide, the storm gulls were sweeping the crests with their wings, and beyond the far meadows shone a splash of white roofs among the trees. Feeter, wondering at John’s abstraction, at last pulled him gently by the sleeve, saying, “Look, John, it’s the last glimpse of Windrift.”

CHAPTER XIX

ON a certain Sabbath in September of the year 1860, the sun had been shining for several hours over the streets of Cleveland, when Mrs. Bushrod Wingate, wife of the ex-senator, rose from her chair in the library where she had been conning her Bible, and sounded the call to prayers on the large Chinese gong in the hall. She passed into the red parlor over the red medallion carpet to the red-hung windows, and drew the draperies until the room assumed the proper degree of gloom that, in the opinion of some, should attend a reading of the Holy Word. That done, she took up the family Bible from its place beside the family album on the what-not, and retreated to the large comfortable chair near the mantel. She settled her sober brown taffeta skirts, and steadied, with three stiff fingers of either hand, her breakfast cap of rigid black. There, in full view of the portraits of five relatives, ministers and missionaries of the church, she fell into appropriate meditation.

A patter of children's feet on the stairs, and there entered Louisa, in a prim red-and-white-checked frock, with pantalets of crackling stiffness, holding by hand her brother Bushrod, fidgeting in his Sunday best. The children advanced with trepidation, and waited silently until their mother, returning from her inward contemplation with a start, kissed them perfunctorily on the forehead, and began the inspection of their toilettes.

"Put up your hands, children. Humph! Louisa, your hair is not tidily brushed; not as a young lady's

should be. Bushrod, put out your right hand — no, not that way; give it to me. Humph! just as I thought; you have not used the soap — don't tell me you have; I know better. Take your seats now, and after prayers go to Matilda, and let her attend to you properly. For shame, Louisa! For shame, Bushrod! To think that I should have such children!"

In the midst of this soft-spoken speech a tall figure, straight and square, entered the room. The children ran forward with shrieks of delight. On the next instant they were being tossed to the ceiling.

"Mr. Wingate, Mr. Wingate," cried a warning voice, "the children are very naughty; they have neglected their toilettes this morning. I do wish you would not pet them so."

"There, there, Maria," the senator answered, a shade of annoyance crossing his wrinkled, smooth-shaven face. "Children will be children; don't forget we were once so ourselves."

"Remember also that there is such a thing as discipline," she retorted, raising her eyebrows at the two children, now snuggling on his knees.

"Where children are high-spirited, there is such a thing as too much discipline."

Mrs. Wingate was settling back stiffly in the arm-chair, when some one came singing down the stairs, and in a flash of blue, a young lady, just out of her teens, with curls of brown and eyes of hazel, swept the floor with a laughing courtesy. The father put the children from his knees and rose with a glow of welcome on his face — all the annoyance vanished, the dark room transformed by some one's coming.

"Good morning," she cried, throwing herself into his arms with a laugh of happiness. "Good morning,

father; good morning, mother. Dick, the laggard, is just coming down. Oh, what a fine morning! Where are Shadow and Frolic?" At the sound of their names the dogs came bounding in, tumbling over each other in their eagerness to reach their mistress.

Bushrod Wingate drew back, looking down affectionately at his favorite, Marjory, as she stooped to receive the caresses of the dogs.

"How graceful she is!" thought the father. "I don't believe she could make a motion that was unlovely."

Mrs. Wingate, whose little foot had been whipping the carpet, — a gesture always preceding meditation or indecision, — burst out impatiently: "Richard is always the last. He is never prompt. He is never punctual."

"I beg your pardon," suddenly broke out a voice from behind the door, accompanied by a lively tattoo on the panels. "Will you please to consult the clock; twenty-nine minutes and fifty-seven seconds past seven; fifty-eight, fifty-nine—half-past—on time—good morning!" and a young fellow, with defiant eyes and obstinate cowlick, pirouetted into the room, holding at arm's-length a watch, which he placed on the table, proceeding to do reverence before it in pantomimic fashion, hand on heart, until Marjory, the children, and his father burst into roars of laughter.

"Good morning, mother," he cried, suddenly assuming dignity as he advanced and brushed with his lips his mother's forehead.

"Humph!" Mrs. Wingate glanced fixedly at the embroidered waistcoat. "Good morning; another vest, Richard?"

"Only the twenty-seventh, ma'am. Anything wrong with me? Hands clean? hair brushed? I saw you looking at them."

“Dick, Dick!” warned his father.

Mrs. Wingate winced, for to tell the truth she was looking at them. She looked at every one in the same way, from her husband and the visiting clergymen to the little Bennetts next door. With her, cleanliness was an article of faith.

Marjory looked up anxiously, wondering if her mother and Dick had quarrelled again last night. Then as the senator made a sign for attention, she took her seat on the sofa, Bushrod and Louisa peering over her arms, opened the Bible, and began the alternate verses in a sweet, low voice, Louisa, at the direction of her finger, following her in childish treble.

Mrs. Wingate waited the next reading somewhat anxiously, for Richard was a continual source of unexpected discomfort.

It was only the last Sunday, while the Rev. Jephtha Eppineetle was under their roof, that Dick had been guilty of an irreparable breach of conduct. The alternate verses had been finished without mishap, and she had beheld him with a sigh of relief in respectful posture, when the prayer ended, and the others arising, it was seen that Dick was still on his knees. Marjory coughed hurriedly once — twice — without effect, and the children began to giggle, so that the minister looked about and saw the mortification of his hostess. With a gallantry characteristic of the South, he raised his hand and interposed in a delicate undertone, “A deeply religious nature, madam; I know these childish awakenings. Come, let us leave the boy to prayer.” Unfortunately, at this moment Dick was heard to giggle outright, and Mrs. Wingate, gliding swiftly forward, beheld him staring rapturously out of the low window at the profanest, wickedest of sights —

at a pair of cocks fighting in the Bennett's yard. Slap across his ears fell the angry hand, but it was Wednesday before the mother could recover her wonted equanimity.

On the present occasion, Louisa, having spelled through her verse with many promptings from Marjory, and ended with an air of great achievement, Dick gave a slight cough and began rapidly in a subdued tone, "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, lest they be discouraged —"

"Richard! There, I knew it — I knew it!"

"What, ma'am? Oh, isn't that the verse?" asked Dick, with a cat-and-cream expression, and he began again at the proper place.

Mrs. Wingate's foot began to whip the carpet again, and prayers being ended, she bridled up to her husband and exclaimed: "Such impertinence! Do you allow your children to insult their parents before your eyes? You should have punished him."

"Punished — punished — I am tired of punishing my children, and I won't. I want to enjoy them. Boys will be boys. What has he done?"

"He did it to annoy me. He was most disrespectful — most insulting, last night when you were out; most insulting!"

"Maria, have you been nagging the boy again about his statues?" the senator interrupted impatiently. "Have you been at him? I have asked you to let him alone. Have you forgotten Stephen and Henry?" Their two elder sons had not been at home for three years.

"I know my duties as a mother, as a Christian mother, Mr. Wingate, and I intend to perform them, at whatever heartache to myself."

"You will respect my wishes, wife. I will not have the children tormented by constant punishments."

When her husband used that tone and called her "wife," Mrs. Wingate knew that further discussion was unprofitable. So she lifted her eyebrows, and saying very low, "He is blind to my suffering; may God forgive him!" rustled into the breakfast room and plumped down at the head of the table, seeking a little consolation in "The Death of Wesley," that hung where every morning she might regard it "with higher thoughts."

Sunday, being the day usually consecrated to repose and tranquillity, was invariably the battling-ground of the week. In ten minutes the musketry began. Dick was determined to be a sculptor. He had his little den peopled with a score of famous ancients from which he was wont to practise in the clay. The stark Venuses and unmaidenly Dianas were the mortification of Mrs. Wingate, who held, with many strict people of that day, the strongest notions of what is termed the nude in art. To destroy these pagan divinities would have been to her eyes as pious a service as any recorded overthrow of infidel idols, and only by the stern refusal of her husband was she restrained from such missionary work. On the present occasion she was taunting Dick with his latest purchase—a small cast of the Venus of Milo which she had newly discovered in the den of abominations.

"So you have been prying among my things?" cried Dick, angrily.

"I have been doing my duty, as I know it. A mother has the right to see everything."

"Indeed; why don't you go into my room openly, then, instead of stealing in when I am away?"

"I will not discuss such a suggestion," answered

Mrs. Wingate haughtily, and, finding the fire a little too close, she cast her eyes about for another point of attack.

"Marjory, do I understand that you are going to the Beldon's this week?"

"Yes, mother."

"To a dance?"

"Yes, mother."

"Dance?"

"Yes, but—"

"You understand that I thoroughly disapprove of such proceedings?"

"Yes, mother."

"That I consider dancing a most improper exercise?"

"Yes, mother."

"A most vulgar, common, sinful, immodest, unmaidenly, reprehensible exercise?"

"Oh, mother!"

"And you intend to go—to dance?"

"But—"

At this point the senator laid down his knife and fork with a crash, and said: "Wife, I want to repeat to you once for all that I have requested Marjory to dance, to wear what she pleases, to enjoy herself as other modest, pure-minded girls do. Now let that settle it, once for all. I have *ordered* Marjory to dance."

Mrs. Wingate bit her lips, retired to the contemplation of her plate, and began in a low voice, "What position, pray, do I hold in this household? My daughter decks herself out in ribbons and feathers and jewelry against my express wishes. My son flaunts his disgraceful statues in my house."

"Mother does not approve of the Venus of Milo," interposed Dick, addressing the table.

"I certainly do not," retorted the mother, seizing the chance to change her fire; "of that or any other of your vulgar collection. If I — if I had any voice in my home, I know what should be done."

"You would clean the place out, wouldn't you, ma'am? Can't we make them respectable? Shall we put a pair of trousers on Apollo — and a dress on Venus?"

Louisa, who had been listening bewildered and open-eyed to this conversation, here seized upon her mother's sleeve, and piped out, "Mamma, why don't Venus wear a dress?"

"Hush, my dear," said the mother, with an expression of pain. "See what monstrous ideas you are putting into the mind of an innocent child."

"It is you, rather," began the boy.

"Dick, Dick," said the senator, and Marjory looked up with appealing eyes, "enough, enough."

"I will not discuss the matter any further," continued Mrs. Wingate. "Do not say another word upon the subject. I cannot make you see your wickedness and your impiety — I pray that God will" — she bent her head over her plate and said in a low voice, "and forgive you — as I do."

With an angry exclamation Dick sprang up, and crying, "How long am I to stand this!" slammed out of the room. The children looked up frightened, as Marjory rose to follow, while Mrs. Wingate, with a scarlet spot on either cheek, eyed the senator with a gaze that inquired point-blank, "Well, Mr. Wingate, do you intend to notice *that*?"

When Marjory reached the rebel he was roaming the library in a frantic rage.

"Confound it!" he cried at her entrance. "I won't stand it any longer. I won't — I won't — I won't!"

"Dick, Dick, be calm." The girl went and stood in front of him and laid her hands upon his shoulders.

"Calm — oh, yes! Of course, calm! Here, you don't know the worst — here, look at these, here and here!"

He pulled out a bundle of clippings and thrust them into her hands. "There, that's what she's been doing all this week, sticking those up on my pincushion at night — a lot of her old sermons! Read them! Read them! 'Humility,' ah-h, humility! 'Obedience!' 'Duty of the child to his parents!' Go on, go on! That's the one she put up last night after we'd had a discussion about her eternal nude in art. By heavens! I won't stand it! I won't — I won't! I'm so mad I'd just like to take that vase there — see it — and break it on the floor." And Dick in his temper, snatching up the urn, looked so fierce that Marjory began to smile.

"Confound it, Sis — I won't stand her asking God to forgive me. Hang it, Marjory, no one could stand that. She asked God to forgive me last night. Great heavens, how that enrages me!"

"Poor old Dick!" Marjory said, putting her arms around his neck; "why do you answer her? It is so much better to be patient."

"I can't, Sis." He shook his head. "You're different from me. You stand things like an angel; you are an angel to me." He glanced about, a little ashamed of his sudden anger. "I say, let's go into the garden; it will cool me off, and you do me so much good, Marjory. I can't help myself; I'm made different."

"I wish — I wish you could live independently," Marjory said abruptly, when they were in the garden. "You're so unhappy here — dear old Dick."

"I wish to heaven I could!" the young fellow answered gloomily. He bent down and snapped off a

branch, "If it wasn't for the governor, I'd run away. You know how it was with Harry and Steve."

"Yes, I know — Harry and Steve. Dick, I think it would be better — I think I'll speak to father."

"Wish you would, Sis; if you only ask, I know he won't refuse."

They walked up and down silently for a while, Dick slashing at the weeds, Marjory with her eyes on the ground.

"Dick, what do you do away from here? Have you many friends?"

"I say, Sis," he broke out resolutely, "don't you get glum now. Don't you worry about me. I won't have it. I don't bother much about this, it's only when I'm here; I forget it when I'm away. Friends? Why, yes, lots of 'em. How I wish you could meet John Gaunt, and Jack Hazard; there's a fellow for you!"

"I have met Mr. Hazard," Marjory looked up with a smile, for Jack, tenor in the choir, had once been unavoidably introduced; "but I don't think he enjoys the society of our sex. I have seen Mr. Gaunt several times, and heard much about him — not all for the best, Dick. You are constantly talking of him to me: are you sure he deserves all your admiration?"

"John Gaunt is a trump! Why, Sis, I don't know what I'd have done if it hadn't been for him. I was going right down when he took hold of me. I used to feel so hopeless, Sis. I always feel I'm a lost soul when she is through. I tell you, I can't stand it. There, there, Marjory, don't take my hand. If you do, I don't know what I'll do. There. Where was I? — oh, John Gaunt. He took hold of me and gave me a good talking-to that straightened me out and — and I've been around to their rooms a lot, and they've been as good as gold

to me. You're wrong about John. I think he was a little wild himself at first; but he's fine all through now. I sometimes think, do you know, Sis, that he was pretty hard struck some way, and he just tried to forget things — for it does do that, you know."

Marjory followed him sadly — they had never talked so frankly before, and she was beginning to see under the surface.

"How I wish you'd meet him, Sis. Do you know how he came to Cleveland —"

"And how he thrashed the wharf hand," Marjory broke in, mischievously. "And how he saved him again, and slew all the giants and delivered the country? My dear Dick, you have drummed the tale into my ears a dozen times, and so has Mr. Blodgett."

"Now don't make fun, Marjory; he's just the kind of a man — well, I'd pick for you."

"And so you'd marry your old sister off to John Gaunt, would you?" she answered, pinching his cheek.

"Don't tease. Yes, I would, that's flat, and I'll tell you another thing."

"What?"

"I don't like that Garroway," with which Dick looked up into her face a little guiltily.

"Why, Dick," Marjory exclaimed, stopping short, "what do you mean?"

"Don't know." He returned to slashing the weeds. "Can't tell what it is, but I don't like the fellow — that's all. He's — he's not quite — not quite your sort, don't you know."

Marjory searched his face curiously, flushed a bit, and then signed imperiously that she did not choose to continue the conversation.

“Well, anyhow, Sis, you’re a trump. Good-by. I — I feel too wicked for church. I’m going for a long walk — don’t care what they think — good-by.” And before she could remonstrate, Dick had sprung over the fence and disappeared.

Marjory, astounded at such flat rebellion, made her way into the house. Her mother was nowhere to be seen, her father was pacing the library. She tiptoed to her room, and making ready for the street, returned and peeped in through the library door.

“I must be alone, Marjory,” the senator said, looking up with a troubled face. “Don’t disturb me.”

She crossed her arms ferociously, stamped her foot, and said with a tremendous scowl: “I must be alone! Oh, how terrible and awe-inspiring!”

“But really, Marjory, I insist, I in —”

“Not another word,” cried the little tyrant, and inside of three minutes she had his hat on his head, and his cane in his hand.

“I surrender,” the old fellow said, with a heavy sigh; “how you do bulldoze your old father.”

“Stuff! You know you love it. Give me your arm. I am carrying you off for a walk before church. Where’s mother?”

“She — she is in her room — at prayer,” the father answered, with hesitation.

The news disturbed Marjory, but she put aside all her apprehensions, and began to coax away his bitter thoughts, and drove the worry from the corners of his eyes; and after church, having brought him to better spirits, she broached the subject of the change of quarters, and reluctantly they decided that Dick should be allowed to begin life in bachelor quarters and have a taste of the independence for which he longed.

CHAPTER XX

MRS. WINGATE never renounced a purpose. It was now thirty years since she had promised to honor and obey the man to whom she had given her hand, and, defeated and repulsed a thousand times, she had never once flinched in her desire or desisted from her purpose to make a convert of her husband. Just as Dick's pincushion was wont to flower at night with moral clippings, so the old mahogany table and desk in the senator's room were constantly offering to his eyes a variety of theological discussions, calculated to awaken and convince. Dick wickedly inserted these offerings into a scrap-book, from which it is feared he read extracts to boon companions; the father had ceased to notice.

Her husband still remaining impervious to these arguments, and to the contemporary eloquence of the casual Sunday circle, she induced the Rev. Mr. Eppineetle to undertake his conversion. Bolstered up by her exertions, the buoyant and hopeful young minister, just from the divinity school, one night, in a passion of cheerful martyrdom, actually bearded the senator in his library.

At the end of a short half-hour, Mr. Eppineetle returned from the crusade, limp and crestfallen. "Your husband, my dear Mrs. Wingate, while a gentleman of courtesy, is not, I fear, amenable to reason. He does not possess your enlightenment, nor your reverence for

things sacred." And not another word could he be brought to say of the interview.

But the indefatigable woman did not renounce her attempt. At the very moment when she was driving home with Dr. Pax, she was scheming how the eloquence that had championed the tenets of her church and put to shame the scoffers of other communions, might at last accomplish her desire.

Yet Mrs. Wingate, with all her energy, had been fated to witness the defeat of her fondest ambitions. At the birth of each son she had consoled herself with the conviction that she had presented the world with a prophet of the church. Stephen and Henry, raised to this end, according to the best available scriptural and ecclesiastical precepts, had nearly prostrated their mother by running away at the age of eighteen, forsaking the pulpit for the mart; while Richard, Mrs. Wingate herself confessed, could not be said to have shown any leanings toward the ministry. Bushrod, aged nine, still remained, and on his tender years were set the last hopes of the devout woman. Bushrod, at least, should uplift his fellow-men. Upon Bushrod, then, was concentrated all the sacred artillery of the Sunday dinners. Mr. Eppineetle, who specially enjoyed the repast, took the young man under his own ecclesiastical wing, taught him his psalms, and, after the fashion of the day, strove earnestly to show him the innate wickedness of his soul and the deadly error of his ways. His mother bore him off with her when she and Miss Crotchett, her elderly confidante, went about in the carriage on their tours of well-doing. She beckoned him to her side when engaged in discourse on points of faith, and would halt and reverse the train of conversation that her darling might not be left behind. In a

word, she had signalled him out and anointed him for the call—and the neighbors were wont to say that a more thorough scamp, completer rogue, greater nuisance, than young Bushrod did not exist from one end of Euclid Avenue to the other!

It may perhaps be doing Mrs. Wingate injustice to hint that on presenting her husband with her third child, she was disappointed to learn that she could have bequeathed the world so unministerial a thing as a girl. Certainly, whatever may have been her secret preference, she consoled herself with the thought that if by reason of sex the little Marjory could never adorn a pulpit, she might live to grace a minister's home. So when that young lady passed from a slim girl with romping ways into hoop skirts and dignity, Mrs. Wingate began to search among the cloth, and the eye of favor fell upon Jephtha Eppineetle. She gave him to understand that he was *persona grata*, his allowance of dinners was doubled, and no matter who else was down to be fed, the strong beak and rising forehead of the young minister were to be seen next to Marjory.

At first the girl would not believe that her mother could destine her for this dreary old-young man, who rarely smiled, and always agreed perfectly with both sides of the question.

"What a nose!" she cried one day, when her mother had adroitly led up to the pretender. "It can't be all his."

"Marjory, don't be disrespectful. Mr. Eppineetle's nose is very handsome. A large nose, my dear, is a mark of character. What a noble, high forehead he has! That, my dear, is the mark of intellect."

"The mark of fiddlesticks, mamma—he is as bald as a coot from his crown to his eyebrows," broke in

Marjory, who had learned the expression from Master Dick.

“What language for a young lady! Shame on you! I particularly request you to refrain from such vulgar expressions. Mr. Eppineetle is highly spoken of in the church. Doctor Pax said the most flattering things about him yesterday. *He* has a future, my dear; *his* voice will be heard. The woman who gets *him*, let me tell you, will be a very fortunate woman.”

Marjory saw the drift of her mother's remarks, and piqued at the suggestion, answered tartly: “Sally Bowers might take him, mother. She's deaf, and so would miss half of his weary platitudes; but as for anyone else—Heaven preserve her, say I!”

“Humph!” the indignant lady burst out, at the end of her patience. “Very smart, Miss Marjory, very smart indeed; but you may count yourself lucky if you ever get the chance.”

“What!” Marjory sat bolt upright, rubbing her eyes. “You mean me for that dismal scarecrow. Yes, you do—you do! That is it, that is it! That's why he is always placed next to me.”

The mother, of course, vigorously denied any such intention. She had said not what was untrue, but a little more than she had meant to say. Marjory burst out laughing, clapped her hands, ran down the stairs and straight against her father, who was that moment entering. She caught him by the arm, pulled him into the library, and poured out the tale, brokenly, through shrieks of laughter, until he, at first disposed to frown, gave away before her merriment and joined in her amusement.

“And now tell me all about Dick. What is he going to do?” cried Marjory, jumping up.

"We have arranged everything," said the senator, and he told her how Dick had been installed next to his friends. "I saw Mr. Hazard, and a very original fellow he is, but I think he will have a good influence over Dick. I am going around to-night after supper to see Mr. Gaunt."

"So you are going to meet John Gaunt," said Marjory, with a smile; "I warn you I shall have a lot of questions for you."

Supper over, the senator took down his tall hat, selected a cane, and trudged off on his errand, until he came to a stop before a low frame building with a bay-window bulging on the second floor. Lights were blazing across the panes, and the sounds of a song floating down suggested that the young fellows were entertaining. He stood a moment in the shadow, nodding his head in time to the clear tenor voice ringing above, and waited until the last note had died away before he began to thunder on the shaky door. When, after repeated summons, Caffy, the landlord, had loosened the door a crack, and peered through with suspicious eyes, he sent the old fellow, coughing, up the stairs, to say simply that a gentleman wished to see Mr. Gaunt below.

Soon there came a firm tramp, and the senator, looking up, beheld in the dusk a figure descending that seemed to fill the stairway. A hand took his, two steady eyes scrutinized him from a face whose strong melancholy stood out in the light of the windy, ill-smelling lamp, and a quiet voice said: "I am John Gaunt. This must be Senator Wingate."

"I am Dick's father, Mr. Gaunt." The two men stood a moment, taking their impressions. "I have come to talk with you about my boy."

"I was expecting you, sir. Shall I get my hat? Jack has friends upstairs. We can take a walk by ourselves."

The tenor voice was beginning again as they stepped into the street. The senator glanced up at the window, wondering if his son were of the jolly company, and said, "Mr. Gaunt, you must forgive my taking you from your party."

"It sounds pretty from here, doesn't it?" said John. "That is my chum, singing; Dick is there, also. To tell the truth, Senator Wingate, I am a very poor companion. I like to sit in a corner and look on, but I do not shine in a crowd, and somehow I always feel the fun runs more easily when I'm not looking on; so you see I am really glad to have a walk under the stars."

"Well, now, that's a characteristic of my own," the senator began, at once at his ease; "I have always envied others of a more fortunate temperament."

They walked along a moment in silence, the senator swinging his cane, and studying how to begin, when John said suddenly:—

"I think I understand, sir, how you feel. You are hesitating because you do not know how far I have Dick's confidence. He has told me all. I hope you will not think I have sought his secrets. On the contrary, I begged him not to confide in me. But the poor fellow was so down on his luck that he wanted to pour out his heart to some one, and I let him—well, because I have learned from my own experience how it relieves the pressure."

"I believe you, Mr. Gaunt. It doesn't take me long to make up my mind about a man. I thank you for your frankness. I have been seriously worried over Dick for some time. The boy is impetuous, hasty in his temper, and very impatient of restraint. I am afraid

that his mother, with all her good qualities, has never understood him. I suppose Dick has told you of his unhappiness at home."

"Yes, he has."

"It was partly that that decided me to let him start for himself. It is a very difficult time for a parent when a child is beginning to reach maturity. Neither quite appreciates the other's standpoint. It has been doubly hard in the case of Dick and his mother, where interests and temperaments are different—and I think in such cases the sooner the children are independent the quicker a better understanding will come. I suppose, Mr. Gaunt, that it is one of the saddest things in life that a father can never know his son as well as the friends he has chosen. We are too willing to be deceived. So I have come to you, as you see, frankly to ask your opinion of the boy. Is there anything wrong with him? I beg you to speak honestly to me. I am not the father to cast off my son when he is in trouble."

"I can understand now, sir, why Dick has never gone to the bad," said John, looking over at the other kindly. "I will be equally frank with you. At the bottom there is nothing wrong with the boy. He is honest and straightforward, and he is clean. He drinks more than is good for him, and has gambled a little—you see I am hiding nothing from you. But he is simply passing through a period of unrest, like many a man before him. What the boy wants is work—to have his ambition roused. To my thinking, sir, you have done the wisest thing you could do."

"I am very glad to hear you say so," said the senator, shaking his head sadly, "for it was hard to come to this decision."

"I did not mean to hurt you," began John, quickly,

seeing, under the other's words, how deep lay the wound. "I know, sir, what you mean; of course it must have been hard. Still, I repeat, you have done the wisest thing. Now we must get him to work. You know, perhaps, that since Mr. Blodgett has retired the wharves are under my control."

"Yes, Sam Blodgett is an old acquaintance of mine," replied the senator; "he has often spoken of you."

"You must not go too implicitly on his stories," John said, with a smile. "He is inclined to exaggerate, I am afraid. Now to what I was saying. Dick wants to be a man; I should say, give him a taste of what that means. I will offer him a place, with good, hard, rough work; that ought to give him confidence and make him self-reliant. Meanwhile, I'd fit out his room with busts and models, and that will keep his idle hours out of mischief. I am no judge—but he made what seems to me a capital likeness of a little yellow cur of my chum's."

"You do not share, then, in the prejudice against musicians and artists?"

"I—why should I? The day will come when the prejudice will be against us."

John waited while the elder turned over in his mind the plan proposed, until at length he broke silence.

"I believe you are right. We'll try it." Then he added abruptly, "By the way, how did you learn so much about young fellows?"

"Well, Senator, there is only one way to learn such things," John replied—"by experience."

It was the other's turn to feel that he had been trespassing.

"I knew your mother, Mr. Gaunt, I think, in Baltimore," Senator Wingate said, as they came in sight of

the door; "and just met your father. You must come and see me — you and your friend."

"I have never gone out much — I have always said I wouldn't; but I should like to drop in quietly and have a talk with you. I have always admired your stand upon these questions that are coming so dangerously near now — I should like to discuss them with you."

"Why not come in Wednesday, then — you and Mr. Hazard — to supper?"

"Thank you, but we go to the Blodgetts' that night. That is the only place I have gone to since coming here, and very little there; but if you will let us, we can probably drop in afterward."

"Very well," said the senator, and perceiving that his companion disliked demonstration, he held out his hand, and added simply, "Good night, and thank you."

The next afternoon, as Marjory was walking in the garden, she suddenly beheld a tow head over the fence, and Dick advancing with that peculiarly gloomy air which he wore when he had anything of consequence to unfold. She ran forward to meet him.

"Come along with me, Sis," began Dick, drawing his arm through hers, and looking very conscious. "Come on, now; I must have a talk with you."

"You can't tell me any news," Marjory cried, as she skipped along gayly by his side. "Isn't it fine, Dick? I know it all."

"You don't, Sis, and I'm afraid you won't like it. Oh, no, no, it's not about me; there's nothing to worry about."

"Then, Dick, why don't you tell me?"

"I — well, because — you see, I don't suppose I got it in just the right way. It's about that Garroway."

Marjory, thoroughly puzzled, dropped his arm.

"Why, Dick, what can you have to tell me about Mr. Garroway?"

"You — you don't care for him, do you, Marjie?"

"Tell me at once what you have to say."

"Well, Sis," he began haltingly, with a tentative glance, "you know I didn't like the fellow. I told you I suspected him, and last night I wanted to draw him out, sort of make him talk, you know — get the truth, you understand."

"Go on."

"Well, I found him corned."

"Corned!" exclaimed the astonished Marjory.

"Well, in Queer Street."

"What do you mean, Dick — explain. Is Mr. Garroway in jail?"

"Drunk, then."

"Oh!" The little nostrils began to quiver. "I don't wonder you were ashamed to tell me."

"Well, anyhow," Dick cried defiantly, "I found him out — there! He got to talking about you."

"Herbert Garroway mentioned my name at a drinking party! No, no, no, I won't believe it!"

"Believe it or not, he not only mentioned your name — but when some one joked him about you — he — he — now don't get angry, Sis — he said: 'Guess the girl *is* fond of me.' I hit the fellow between the eyes," added Dick; "there was no end of a row. I don't think he knew who it was."

When Marjory had listened to this astounding bit of news, she bowed her head, and her cheeks grew so hot and she began to walk so rapidly that Dick was quite frightened. At the end of a few minutes she stopped and said, "Give me your word of honor that everything you have said is true."

"On my honor, Marjie, it is."

"That will do." And she started off again so rapidly that Dick was forced to his longest strides to keep at her side. Then all in a moment she turned and cried, "Oh, Dick, it can't be true!"

"Why, Sis, you're not in love with the man!" cried Dick, aghast at the thought.

"In love!" she flashed out, with a curl of the lip, "no. But I thought—that is, he swore a hundred times he loved me—asked my help. Oh, Dick, Dick, are all men alike? Is there no sincerity, no honor, among them? Do they care nothing for a woman but to make boasts of her over their glasses? Forgive you?—I thank you. He is coming to take me riding this afternoon. I promise you it will be the last. Where are you going, Dick? Don't think I am in love with him; I'm not. It is the ingratitude of it that brings the tears to my eyes. Where are you going, Dick? Aren't you coming in to have an old-time talk with me?"

"I've got to be at the yards," said Dick, a trifle scared at her manner. "I want to get acquainted; I begin to-morrow."

"Oh, Dick," she called after him, "Mr. Gaunt and Mr. Hazard are coming to call to-morrow night. Come in, then—won't you?" He nodded, and she watched him a moment absently, and then went in to dinner.

Soon after the meal was over there came the clatter of hoofs on the driveway, and there rode up a thin, stylish, dark young fellow, sitting his saddle carelessly.

In a moment Marjory came out in walking costume. She acknowledged his inquiring bow coldly, and said: "I have something to say to you, Mr. Garroway. Give your horse to Peter and come in the garden with me."

He sprang off, threw the reins to the man, and followed her over the lawn.

At the sound of his step she turned about and, looking him full in the face, said: "You have a bruise on your forehead. How did that happen?"

"An accident. Is that what you wish to speak to me about?"

"Indeed; what kind of an accident?"

"Really—does it interest you?" He turned and drew his whip across his body, facing her with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Is it possible, Mr. Garroway, you do not understand my reference?" She pointed to his forehead. She bit her lip, walked on, and then suddenly turning on him again, she insisted: "Answer me. Did you or did you not say these words last night when—when, after you had allowed my name to become the subject of conversation, some—some cad had the audacity to compliment you upon your—what shall I say?—your conquest, I believe that is the word." For a moment she could not speak. "Did you not reply, "'The girl *is* fond of me'? Answer me, sir!"

"Who has dared?"

"Dared, sir! dared to tell me the truth? My brother, who, thank Heaven, struck you the next moment."

His face flinched, and the whip, going suddenly down, lay with its tip stirring among the gravel.

"It is true. I do not deny it. If it had been anybody else, I—but your brother, that is different, and, I say, it served me right. I am not going to ask your forgiveness, Miss Wingate. I am not going to cry out when I'm beaten. But I said what I did when I did not know what I was saying. Look here, Marjory. I love you so that I would cut off my right hand to have

the words unsaid. Don't speak. I know what you are going to say — if I loved you so, I could reform. Isn't that so?"

Marjory nodded.

"I *have* tried, and — well, I can't; and that is all there is to it. I shall not trouble you any more. Good day, and good-by."

Marjory barely moved her head in return. She had never respected him so much as at that moment.

She crossed the garden blindly from bush to bush. The dogs came romping out, springing up against her, beseeching a frolic. She went down the path to the bench, and sat straining her eyes over the broken lines of the house-tops.

"What is there in me," she thought, "that I attract only men beneath me — men whom I have to help? Why should the greatest of blessings come to other women, and not to me? Why must there be a smirch on every man who falls in love with me? Is there anything wrong in me, or what is it, then? To think that a man who loved me — whom I have done my best to help — cannot respect my name!"

The tears blinded her eyes. What a restless moment it is in the heart of a woman when she awaits the coming of love! How she longs! How she wonders at the unrest within her, and searches dumbly for the cause! All her future, all her happiness or sorrow, her home, hangs on the events of — who knows? — a month, a year, a week, perhaps! For is not love a woman's ambition? The unanswered question, the wonder, the uncertainty, and the storm were throbbing in her breast as she shook off the dogs and ran back into the house. Her father was in the library. She threw herself into his arms, and told him the story.

"Oh, father! father!" she cried at the end, burying her face; "I am so miserable."

"Are you sure, little girl," he asked, as he stroked her curls, "that you do not love him?"

"Yes, but —" her voice fell to a whisper — "I might have married him."

"What! Oh, Marjie!"

"Oh, don't you understand?" She closed her arms around his neck, and her breath came quick and fast.

"Is it so hard, then, for you here, little girl?"

She sat up, and brushed off the tears.

"Oh, no, no! You mustn't think that, daddy; not when you're here, but —" she turned her head away, gazing into the fire, and then fell back on his shoulder — "it was, sometimes, when you were away."

"I shall not leave you again, Marjory. When I go, you shall come with me."

"Will you promise me that? Will you let me be always by your side — always there to take care of you? Will you promise?"

"I promise; but —"

"No buts, sir. I shall never marry, if that's what you mean — oh, I know it; I shall be your daughter all my life."

"What good times we shall have, little girl." The furrowed face lightened up in the glow of the fire. "We've always been such friends. How happy you have made your old father feel."

She moved her cheek up against his, and lay quietly on his shoulder, dreaming.

"What good times," he repeated softly, "for — well, at least — for a little while," and a tear mingled in the smile that was on his face.

CHAPTER XXI

THE Blodgetts had "arrived," exactly how, no one could explain. One could not live in Cleveland a week without hearing from a dozen people the family history: how Blodgett had started as a simple wharf-hand; how his wife was once plain Maggie Holan, pretty and rosy-cheeked, but still Maggie Holan, who waited at Shinn's restaurant; how father Holan still peddled milk, refusing assistance from his son-in-law; what Malapropian blunders Mrs. Blodgett had uttered at the last church fair; how her husband was bored to death at her sleepy functions and wandered off for companionship to his saloon, which he actually retained to this day. They called themselves the S. Cadmus Blodgetts—ridiculous! It had been nothing but plain Sam Blodgett on the wharves; Samuel Cooney Blodgett when the saloon was opened and a flag was thrown out to the Irish constituency; Mr. S. C. Blodgett when the wharves and lake traffic had established his financial foothold; and Mr. and Mrs. S. Cadmus Blodgett only when Miss Minnie and Miss Euphemia had returned from their finishing in New York,—with "notions,"—and that is the whole story.

At first Cleveland had taken very kindly to the young couple. They joined the favorite church, where nothing could be urged against either their piety or their generosity. They were cited as evidence of American opportunity and the inward greatness of the people.

Nor could it be denied that they were a very good example. Young Blodgett, thrifty and shrewd, had swung himself up from one round to another, as fast as he had gathered his money sinking it in real estate along the lake front, foreseeing in the little town of nine thousand, with its few and simple docks and slow-plodding steamers, the great city, — the wharves, the piers, the storehouses, the ships, and the thronging commerce. He obtained a growing interest in the steamboat line, — a third — a half — a controlling one. The tide was about to turn, his economies were beginning to bear fruit, when he engaged himself to pretty Maggie Holan of Shinn's restaurant.

The young fellow had ambitions; he wanted his wife to be a lady. So with his very first profits he sent Miss Holan off to a convent for her education, while he, by the light of random candle in his narrow quarters, struggled over such books as he could pick up. Remembering all this, society looked very kindly on them in the beginning. It was only when Mrs. Blodgett, in the natural course of events, began to aspire, that people thrust their tongues in their cheeks. To these social advances of his wife Blodgett at first paid small attention, humoring her as he always did in matters that pleased her and did him no harm; it was only later that he rebelled.

The children were the first to feel the change. For young Sam and Minnie nothing could be done, but the next arriving were christened successively Euphemia, Adelaide, and Florilla — so that people used to say you could distinguish the steps of the Blodgett fortune by the names of the children. The crowning touch was added by the advent home of the two older daughters from New York. From that moment Mrs. S. Cadmus

Blodgett became "hopeless." The first overt act was the placing of the dinner hour at night, to the horror of the midday diners. The innovation became the talk of the town. The husband, stirred by the gibes of his acquaintances, at first remonstrated, but Mrs. Blodgett, flanked by the two finished daughters, was invincible. The meal remained, and Sam consoled himself with the belief that his wife, with her Eastern fancies, would soon distance the women of society, even as in business he had outstripped the husbands.

It was, then, to this much-disputed meal that John, who was a familiar of the house, had been invited to bring his friend, who, though an old acquaintance of Blodgett, had never had the pleasure of meeting his wife and the daughters.

On the night of the expected visit the family had hardly settled into the throes of preparation when a voice from the second floor broke out:—

"Oh, pa, pa, what is Mr. Hazard like? Is he nice?"

"Addie, aren't you 'shamed of yourself?" A bang of the door and Miss Euphemia's sharp voice rose from her room. "Hollerin' all around the house and callin' father, 'pa'!"

"Phe-mie, don't you be so smart, yourself," here put in a third voice, and Miss Minnie emerged in turn. She had been two years finishing, while her sister had served but one. "You ought to know better, yourself, than use such a word as 'holler.'"

"It's right."

"It isn't."

"'Tis."

"'Tisn't."

"Who's hollerin' now, I'd like to know?" cried Miss

Adelaide, in triumph. Then, returning to the assault, "Pa, pa, why don't you answer me? Pa, oh, pa!"

The discussion waxing furious upstairs, young Sam, who was lounging below, smoking his father's best and passing upon the wine, sauntered to the foot of the stairs and volunteered:—

"Fine house, lovely girls! Go it, Minnie, go it, Phemie! Bawl away, Addie!"

"You shut up, Sam. Mind your own business. Pa, oh, pa!"

"Sweet temper—nice manners!"

"Silence, all of you." Thus announced, the father, in shirt-sleeves, bounded out of his room and began to pound on the banisters with the back of a hair brush. "Shut up, shut up, do you hear now? Shut up, or I'll lock you up, every one of you!"

No one gave the slightest attention to this warning. Adelaide in dishabille, bending over the banisters, began to scold, Minnie and Phemie shouted back and forth fierce retorts, the father pounded away, threatening every one in a fury, while Sam below indulged in satire at the expense of the rest, until Mrs. Blodgett, pale and determined, with a hastily snatched-up wrapper over her shoulders, appeared and took command.

"Be quiet, every one of you! Sam, finish dressing; I will stop this. Minnie, Minnie—Euphemia, Euphemia, stop instantly, or not another dress you get this year. Adelaide, go at once to your room or stay home from the party."

"How 'bout Sam?" rose in a parting shriek from Adelaide, as two separate slams announced that the sisters had retired before the awful threat. "Why don't you punish him, sometimes?"

"Go to your room, miss, do you hear, saucy child?"

Sammie, do be quiet. O Lord, listen to that! Here they are!"

At the ring of the bell which accompanied her exclamation, a sudden calm spread over the house. The ladies beat a precipitous retreat, Sam lounged nonchalantly into the parlor, while the black butler proceeded to the door, where the two friends, who had caught the last of the battle, entered with grave faces. John nodded to the butler, while Jack made for the glass, took a parting look at the Dundrearies into which he had blossomed, and cried, "Well, John, my boy, look at them, look at them! They're perfectly irresistible—I'm sorry for the ladies."

"Evening, gentlemen!" said young Sam, appearing,—a dry, stiff-necked, flashy fellow, who held them out the hand of equality.

"Hello," from John.

"Hello," still cooler, from Jack.

"Have a cig'—governor's best. Take anything before your meals?"

The two, declining, followed Sam through the yellow damask hangings into the canary parlor, where Jack fell to examining a creation of wax flowers and fruit that reposed in honor under a glass dome on the piano.

"Good cigar, just the same," Sam began, devoting himself to John. "Ought to take one—they come ten dollars a box. Hear that young Wingate has been raising no end of a row."

John was about to retort, when suddenly there came the swish of draperies on the stairs, a little birdlike voice warbling in the hall, a quick break of the hangings, and a vision in pink came tripping through—then, at the sight of the young men, halted, and started back with a blush and the tiniest little cry of surprise.

“Oh, Mr. Gaunt, why, when did you come? Just now? Why, I didn't hear you,” cried Miss Minnie, who in company with her mamma, her papa, and her two sisters had witnessed their arrival from the vantage of the banisters. “Mr. Hazard, I am *so* glad to meet you.” At this Sam, muttering, “Well, I call that cool,” slipped his hands in his pockets and went off to aid the butler with the wines.

Minnie, having settled her hoops into a chair, smoothed out her gorgeous pink silk, and assured herself that the braided net of the same color still confined her blond hair, became at once so concentrated upon John that Jack began to prick up his ears.

Another rustle in the hall, and in came Euphemia with the same show of blushes and the same start of surprise. The pink silk shot her a furious glance, the glance was returned with hauteur; for Euphemia, a dashing brunette, had wickedly arrayed herself in scarlet, and all the shine had fled from Minnie's timid pink. Jack, again introduced, fared no better than before.

“Come here, my darling, let me straighten your net,” said the blonde, affectionately, and as she arranged the curls whispered low, “I'll fix you for this, Miss Spiteful.”

“Is it all done? Thank you, dear,” answered Phemia, with the rising inflection, and took her seat, all smiles. “Oh, Mr. Gaunt, what do you think of the situation in the South? Isn't it just terrible?”

“What are we coming to, Mr. Gaunt? oh, what do you think of it?” chimed in Minnie, placing the table between her and that terrible scarlet.

“Whew, is it even so?” thought Jack to himself; and finding no consolation in the survey of his boots or the figures on the yellow medallion carpet, began to

explore the room: the mantelpiece with its gilt clock and its tinted china figures of modest shepherds and setter-dogs, the gay worsted antimacassars pinned on the rosewood chairs which looked as if they were lying in wait to catch in his coat; the splendid what-not laden with crystals and china, the gilt chandelier with sixteen magnificent candles, and the gilt cornices over the windows. On the walls hung crayon portraits of the family, all consistently atrocious: Mr. and Mrs. Blodgett as affectionate bride and groom, Mr. Blodgett with watch in hand and seals showing, looking very pompous and magisterial at the age of forty-five; Mrs. Blodgett holding in her arms her first-born; Sam in his first trousers; Minnie at the age of five, nine, and fifteen; Phemie at the age of four, seven, and twelve, etc. Jack had progressed as far as the tenth in line when there came another patter from the steps and Miss Adelaide entered, looking fresh and simple in a dress of white flowered muslin, which further accentuated the clashing of the other toilettes.

"That you, Mr. Gaunt? Heard you upstairs. Guess this is Mr. Hazard, ain't it, you told us about?" With this Miss Adelaide, too, joined the group about John.

"Three," thought Jack. "Jack, my boy, let's hope the dinner's good."

He was starting through the family album, filled with pictures of the young ladies at various unbecoming ages, when Mrs. Blodgett arrived. She wore light yellow silk, with two feathers of the same color in her hair; a lace collar fastened with a large cameo; two hair bracelets on her plump arms, and held a fan to her teeth. Clinging to her mother's fingers was Florilla, a child of ten, tortured with tight curls and dressed in exact imitation of mamma, as far as to the end of her skirts. Last

of all, in bustled a burly, puffing figure, with fat cheeks and neck, with eyes as keen and disappearing as those of a hippopotamus; and Blodgett, completing the party, began to pump both young men by the hand, meanwhile asking their health, as was his custom.

"John, John, you're lookin' well," he cried, pumping to the right. "Mr. Hazard, we've waited long to see you," pumping to the left. "John, brought your appetite? Mr. Hazard, hope you eat well, too."

"Now, pa, do let them alone before you have shaken their arms off," interposed Miss Adelaide, coming to their rescue. "Now do let them alone."

"What? All right," answered Blodgett with perfect good humor, and releasing their hands, he added, to put every one at ease: "Girls, been makin' up to the young men? Well, well, young people will be young people." Three faces showed signs of instant confusion. "Well, well, there! What have I said? Come on in to dinner now. I never can talk to suit my girls. If you've an eye to good wine, Mr. Hazard, I can promise you some of the best; not another bottle like it in town—had them send it up to-day from my old place."

"Isn't father awful!" whispered the elder daughters, and the ice thus gracefully broken, the party moved out, the scarlet and the pink toilettes keeping the white muslin between them.

Dinner over, the party reappeared in the same order.

"And now for some music!" cried Blodgett. "Mr. Hazard, you should hear my daughter Minnie go it on the piano. Minnie, just sit down and rattle us off some-thin' with a dash to it."

"Oh, father, I haven't practised for so long," Minnie said, with a distressed look to John.

"Tut, tut! What were you doin' this mornin'? You know you're a rattler. Wait till you hear her, Mr. Hazard."

Minnie, thus gracefully introduced, approached the piano with many protestations, settled her pink skirts, felt of her net, glanced appealingly about twice at her mother, and pounded off something which was announced in a whisper to be, "The Black Key Mazurka."

"Phemie, my darling," said Mrs. Blodgett, at the close of the thundering performance, "help your sister with her music."

"I can read a bit," volunteered Jack, as the scarlet toilette glanced beseechingly at the white muslin.

Miss Minnie gave him a killing look as he presented himself at her side, and fell upon another piece, which, being "Monastery Bells," was too well known in the community to require identification. When Minnie had risen, flushed and modest from the struggle, Jack, without waiting to be asked, plumped down in the vacated seat, and sang them a couple of his funniest songs, which set the room in a roar, and brought on such a fit of the giggles in little Florilla that that young lady had to be revived in the hall. Every one was surprised and delighted — Jack had taken them all by storm.

"Now, that's something like," said Blodgett, applauding vociferously. "That's the sort for me, John. It's worth all them everlasting mazurkies Minnie's always playin'. I'd trade them all for that last song of your friend's — and I'd hate to tell you, John, what my girls' music's cost me. What's this, Mr. Hazard, you're not off? What, already? Put another cigar in your pocket. You must come often, and give us some of them songs again."

"Thank you, sir, I will have a cigar — two? Well,

if you press me." Jack made his adieux. Was it only his fancy—or did Miss Euphemia really squeeze his hand a little tighter than the others?

"You will explain my absence to Mr. Wingate," said John, going to the door, as Jack, nodding, disappeared in a furor of good-bys.

"Now, John," instantly began Blodgett, his whole manner changing, "follow me, and we'll get down to business."

"Oh, father!" exclaimed Mrs. Blodgett.

"Now, pa!" came a chorus of remonstrance from the girls at this sudden kidnapping of the only remaining gentleman.

"Tut, tut! you know the carriage is waitin', and it's time you were off to the party. Come, make your best bows, and no sparking."

John made his excuses as gracefully as the circumstances permitted, and followed his host into the study.

"There, no more women," cried Blodgett, turning the key in the lock. "John, I want to talk to you on a couple of big things."

He threw off his coat, lit another cigar, settled down in a chair, put his feet on the desk, and said suddenly,—

"What will you take for the wharves?"

"The wharves? I never have given it a thought."

"Fix a figure."

"Well," John said cautiously, studying his man, "suppose I say—all I can get."

"Will you sell, anyway?"

"H'm," said John, non-committally.

"Exactly. What do you think you can get?"

"Show me the man who wants them," said John, with a smile, "and then tell me how badly he wants them."

"John, John, you don't trust me yet."

"I trust no one in business," John returned, with great frankness, "as I have often told you. Is it the Lake Company?"

"Right."

"H'm. I've been expecting it. What do they offer?"

"One hundred thousand."

"No good. It isn't worth that to me, but it's worth a good deal more to them. They've bought up everything else; they must buy this."

"Exactly." Blodgett puffed away, his sharp little eyes twinkling through the smoke. "Said so myself; but I'd sell, John — I'd sell."

"Have you an interest in the Lake Company?" John stopped short, looking down upon him suspiciously. "How do I know your motive?"

"Because, my boy, they've come to me and offered me a commission to buy it on the quiet, and I've told you. They will go 125,000, or 60,000 with an interest in the stock. Raise both figures 5000, my commission, and that's what you can get direct. I tell you again, sell."

"Why do you want me to sell? I know you have an object. Now what is it? I should take the interest."

"You'll do no such thing," Blodgett cried, with a snap of his fingers. Down came the boots, crash on the floor. He began to talk quickly, in his characteristic manner punctuating his remarks with slaps of his hands. "Now, you listen to me. [Slap.] Why did I sell out to you? Because I saw it wouldn't last. It won't last. [Slap.] The railroads are goin' to get the trade, mark that; I don't say all, but in ten years you can't get a third of what's offered you to-day. I never yet found a good thing that would last. [Slap, slap.] There's big money in railroads now. The time will come when competition

will cut their profits down too, mark that. But at present there's money in it — not a hundred thousand, John, but millions. [Three slaps.] The Lake Company is a fool to offer you what they do; but you're not the man I've sized you up for, if you lose the chance."

"There's a good deal in what you say," answered John, toying with a pencil. "I don't think the lake traffic will be ruined — but it's going to be cut down more and more. That's right. So you want me to get out of the wharves — to do what?"

"I've a notion to go into the Western railroad — had a big offer last month, and I want you to join hands with me. There, that's my object. Think it over, John. It's a chance that comes once in a lifetime. It's big — the biggest thing to-day. That railroad is goin' right through to the coast in time. I'm makin' up a pool. Hutton's in it, and so is Senator Wingate."

"What is your pool?"

"Fifty thousand shares."

"What figure?"

"Fifty per cent."

"To what extent could I go in?"

"Seventy-five thousand dollars."

John stopped, pursed his lips, turned on his heel, went to the desk and began to scribble on a piece of paper.

"So you accept?" cried Blodgett, springing up.

John nodded. "I am writing the Lake Company they can have it at 125,000."

"The best stroke you ever did, or ever will do in your life. Give me your hand. There, I'm proud of you. Good for you! You never will believe it, but, John, I'd do anything to help you along."

John shook him heartily by the hand.

"Just to you, John: the Western wants more capital.

They are going to spread out and lay more lines. The offer holds open for several months yet. We're takin' our time. Nothing hurried about it. May take a year before everything's ready. Come in Saturday and talk it over more. It's late now — I know your habits."

"I'm glad to hear Senator Wingate's in with us," said John, as they walked to the door. "I have a fine opinion of him."

"Well now, he don't seem to dislike you," Blodgett added, with a chuckle. "Had a talk with him to-day, told him a few things; how you got ahead of me, you know, and about the Irishman."

"My past is bound to stick to me wherever I go. Heaven only knows where you've stretched the story to by this time. Well, be easy on me; good night."

They shook hands and parted: Blodgett well satisfied to have joined his friend to him, and John to tramp home under the stars, turning over in his mind the memories of his first days in Cleveland.

CHAPTER XXII

ONE day six years before, John and Jack, having been then a week in Cleveland, had gone into Shinn's restaurant for lunch. Looking about them somewhat bewildered by the rattle of the dishes, the sharp call of the bells, the swift waiters, and the hum and the eyes of many men, they had finally installed themselves at a little side table, already half occupied by two young fellows with whom they had a speaking acquaintance, Morton and Francis, both, like themselves, in search of work.

As they were ordering a modest meal from a sandy-haired waitress who prompted them impatiently, a dry, gaudy fellow lounged up and began talking to their table companions, regardless of the fact that he was blocking the passage to the neighboring tables.

"Mr. Blodgett — Mr. Hazard, Mr. Gaunt," vouchsafed Morton.

The newcomer turned, gave them a half-nod, said, "How dee do, gentlemen. Cigar, any of you? you, Francis? Worth taking," and after a slight altercation with the waitress, continued, "Well, ta-ta! See you to-night. I'm off to the office. Governor's all riled up about Cable."

"What, Cable, superintendent of the wharves?" cried Moore, catching his sleeve.

"He's thrown up the job — too rough — constitution too tender. I say, Morton, you're strong enough. Why

don't you apply — you or Francis? Pay's good. Well, ta-ta!"

Moore looked at Francis, John at Jack.

"Well?" said Moore.

"Well?" echoed Francis.

"I'm going to write now."

"So'm I."

The two gave a laugh, pulled out pencil and paper, had a boy summoned from the street, and scribbled away at their applications. John, who had been looking steadily at Jack, closed the farther eye and rose.

"Get a cigar for me, too," Jack said carelessly. "And while you're about it, drop out and get a paper."

Ten minutes later John was before the magnate.

"Griffin says you insisted upon seein' me," said the burly figure in shirt-sleeves, without looking up from his desk. "Young man, do you know my rules about office hours?"

"I do not, Mr. Blodgett; but if I had, I should still have insisted on seeing you."

"What!" The ponderous figure whirled about, and the twinkling little eyes covered John from head to foot. "State your business."

"First, sir, am I right in saying that the position of superintendent of the wharves is vacant?"

There was an angry clang of the bell.

"Griffin, show this young man out."

"One moment; not yet," said John, resolutely, turning his shoulder on the appearing clerk. "Mr. Blodgett, I want that position. Ten minutes ago, while lunching at Shinn's, your son informed some friends of his that Cable had thrown up his position. I happened to overhear him."

"Stop," said Blodgett, suddenly. "Griffin, what have you got in your hand? give 'em to me." He took two letters, tore them apart, and mumbled through them. "'Dear Sir [h'm — h'm], I write you applying [h'm — h'm], shall call upon you at your office hours to-morrow morning.' Signed R. or B. or P. Francis. Now for the other. 'Mr. Blodgett, Dear Sir [h'm, that's better], make application [yes, yes], reference [yes]. Shall take liberty to call on you as soon as I have finished my lunch.' Signed, Norton — Horton — no, Morton. H'm, h'm, them the ones, young man?"

"They are, sir."

"And you?"

"I left in the middle of the meal," said John, sitting down.

"Humph! Suppose it had been at night?"

"I should have gone to your house."

"Griffin, what are you standing about for? Leave the room," cried Blodgett, abruptly. "And so, young man, you want me to give you that position?"

"I do not."

"What?"

"I ask a week's trial."

Blodgett glanced at the card, and said sharply, —

"State what experience you've had."

"Absolutely none, excepting managing for a while my own estate."

"Can't do it, then, can't do it; can't give it to you, Mr. Gaunt. I like your ways, but I can't give it to you, if you've had no experience."

"You continue to misunderstand. I am asking for a trial to convince myself, as well as you, what I can do."

"You don't know a thing about it. Cable is the fifth

in three months, and they almost killed him. There's a riot there every week."

"Good! that's what I want. Now I *must* have it."

Blodgett ran his eye over the young fellow's proportions, scratched his ear a moment, clicked his lips, and said: "You have an answer ready for anything. Do you think you can force me to give you this place?"

"Mr. Blodgett, how would you have done?"

"There.—answered!" Blodgett brought his fist down with a crash. "You shall have your chance. When will you begin?"

John, seeing how to take him, sprang up. "How long do you make it to the wharves?"

"Young man, you have begun well; I like your ways," said Blodgett, getting up in turn, and taking down his hat. "You come with me."

On the morning after Blodgett had shown him his duties, John started forth to begin. That his path would be no easy one, he fully realized. The wharf-gangs were composed of the blackguards and bullies of the city, scarcely one whose name was clear of the police-court records. The element of danger roused the adventurous blood in the young fellow, and he resolved to give them an object lesson. Down the crude streets he went, splashing over muddy crossings, breathing all the zest and feeling all the future of the soaring city. Here at last was his element; here were life and ambition, energy and success. He caught the alert look in the eyes of the passers-by, and his own step gained a quicker swing. Everywhere was growth, everywhere were the signs of the builder.

As he entered the yard two stout fellows were groan-

ing under a block of granite, while a dozen villanous-looking hands were lounging about the pier.

John cast his eyes about, saw the situation quickly, and, striding up to the two who were carrying the granite, broke out in his sternest voice: "Here, no shirking. What are you grumbling over—you at the back?"

The loafers stopped their aimless wandering, looking on in anticipation, as the man behind growled surlily, "If you think it's so damned easy, try it yourself."

"Put that down!" the new superintendent roared so fiercely that the block dropped with a thump to the ground. "I've a mind to break your head for that. Get back; I'll show you! Where is this to go?" He flung off his coat, stooped down, seized the block in both hands, and bore it off to its destination.

The men came crowding around in amazement. John placed his burden on the ground and drew back.

"Here, bring up that coat," he cried; and a man obeyed quickly. "Now, my men, you know what I can do. Understand me, I am going to be master here. I don't expect to convince you without a fight, and you'll have one if you want it; but when you do, look out! Get that into your heads, and we'll get along very well together."

The time will never come when men will cease to admire brute strength; the tribute is involuntary. From that moment, John had won his battle over all except Fenn, the chief bully of the gang. He resolved not to let the sun go down without settling the crisis once for all.

That afternoon the opportunity came as they were working out toward the end of a covered pier, storing up a cargo of barrels for shipment. They were clearing a space, when Fenn lounged up—a strapping Irish-

man, three inches over six feet, and a solid mass of brawn. John, from the corner of his eye, watched him stop undecidedly, as though hesitating how to resent the intrusion of the newcomer. Resolved to catch him beforehand, John wheeled sharply and cried, —

“Fenn, take charge of this rope here.”

“Give your orders to some one you can lick,” the other growled back impudently, with a scattering of oaths.

They were standing by an open doorway. In a flash of anger, John caught him suddenly around the waist, and with all his strength in his back, flung him headlong over his shoulders splash into the lake.

“He’s drowning, mister!”

“He’s under once!”

“He can’t swim!”

A chorus of shouts arose amid the scramble to the side. John stepped to the window, saw a foaming circle in the black water, and a frantic arm outstretched, and crying, “Shore — send boat!” dived in, and caught the sinking man by the collar. The pier stretched into deep water, and the man was crazed with terror. It was all John could do to bring him under the rope some one threw out. Indeed, it might have gone ill with both had not the rowboat, arriving at the moment his strength was ebbing, brought them safe ashore.

So ended all attempts at rebellion. From that hour his rule was undisputed, while Fenn would have gone through fire at his bidding.

On the fourth day of his trial, Blodgett called him into the office, clapped him on the shoulder, his eyes twinkling, as they always did when he was pleased, and said: “Well, Mr. Gaunt, I guess I’m convinced. How ’bout you?” And as there seemed to be no doubt in

the young fellow's mind, it was decided then and there that John should thus begin his business career.

His coming wrought a revolution on the wharves. Blodgett used to vow, with a laugh, that John kept him awake of nights trying to keep him busy. At the end of the second year an unexpected bit of good fortune befell him, in the shape of a legacy of twenty thousand dollars from Colonel Pickstaff, who at the last had remembered Emily Orkney's child. With this sum, he was received into partnership by Blodgett, who two years later, having many interests to watch, sold him a controlling share, and retired from active participation. During all these years, John had shunned society. He had thrown himself absolutely into his business, building new storehouses and piers, until the firm had become a power.

“One hundred and twenty-five thousand in six years,” thought John, as he picked his way over the ill-paved streets. “That is something accomplished, at least. Well, I have had to bury myself to do it. How little we know what we shall do. When I came here, I thought I should fall into a wild life, to drown the ugly memories I had left behind. Instead, here I am—a steady, matter-of-fact business man, absolutely absorbed in my ambition. I don't see why I have escaped, except that I am such an old corner-lover. What an unsocial brute men must think me! So I am. Six years gone,” he added softly, as he came in sight of his windows. “Six years out of my life, and what have I learned in them? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Yes, one thing—not to seek what I cannot know. Do all men learn to close their minds—to become mere automatons, I wonder. Lord, that's all I am. Heigho,

what a queer world this is! I used to feel so cock-sure of my opinions when I was a boy, and now!" He lifted his shoulders and continued musingly: "Will some one please tell me what things our moods are? Here I have made a splendid stroke, with the prospects of a great opening ahead, everything to excite my ambition, and yet, at this very moment, I vow I am as glum in the bottom of my heart as I can be. Well, thank Heaven, Jack is at home."

He slipped the key into the door, and flung into their rooms, crying, "Where is the favorite?"

A little figure, standing on a chair against the opposite wall, looked round and cried, "Guilty, your honor."

Pedigree, the yellow cur, and Raggs, whom Jack always spoke of as a connection of the Skye terrier, came barking up in welcome.

"Jack, really, the Duns are irresistible."

"Didn't it go fine, though?" said Jack, with a grin, still maintaining his precarious position. "Methought Euphemia — But stop, that is a confidence. You bear me no ill-will?"

"None at all. Now what are you up to?"

"Here, pass me up the hammer. I'm getting virtuous. I'm going to make the room respectable."

John passed up the hammer and installed himself curiously by the fire, while Jack proceeded to weed among the sporting prints on the wall until a whole *corps de ballet* lay scattered on the floor. Then he dropped to his feet and surveyed the work with great satisfaction.

"Well, what is the meaning of this?" the senior member of the rooms inquired, with a quizzical rise of his brows.

"I suppose you'd like to know?"

"I am curious."

"Well, I'm not going to tell you. It suits me to do it. There, I defy you!" Jack stooped and thrust the scraps into the fire. "Ugh, good riddance! I never could understand how you took any pleasure in such vulgar subjects."

"I?"

"Change the subject. By the way, you're not shaky in a certain direction, are you?"

"What direction?"

"The Blodgetts."

"Explain."

"You don't fancy—that is to say, contemplate an alliance in that direction. The old man would come down handsomely to get you, I should say."

John burst into such a roar that Jack's doubts were at once dispelled.

"Because they've set their caps for you, every one of them, my boy."

"Absurd."

"And the mother, worst of all."

"But that's bigamy, Jack."

"Don't quibble. You know what I mean. And it is my opinion, having lived with you over eight years, John Gaunt, that you are not as innocent as you look."

The next moment a book went flying by his head.

"Even so. Don't you do it, John, don't you do it."

"Do what, you old fraud?"

"Marry one of them—not for all the old boy's gold. I don't often talk against people, but it simply won't do!"

"So you think—" said John, rising, and taking down a pipe from amid the assortment of Derby winners, champions of the ring, sabres, and nondescript weapons on the

wall — “you think I’m becoming so absorbed in commerce that I’d marry for money? Thank Heaven, I’m not tempted that way. Here’s a piece of news for you.” And stretching out on the green divan by the window, slowly, with many puffs, he told his chum of the night’s transactions.

“Whew — whew-ew!” Jack whistled in astonishment, at the close. “You old luxurious rascal! I knew you were making money, but I never suspected this.”

He stood looking down at the great figure spread on the divan. “So John’s a rich man — my humble room-mate. Sir, I salute you. Puff away, cross your legs, take it easy; so would I. I say, magnate, is there any humble position at your disposal, such as blacker of the imperial boots? Also, how soon will you forsake these modest rooms?”

“Never,” said John, solemnly; “never, unless you go with me. Don’t think because I am beginning to rise I can forget my old friend. No, no, Jack; you don’t mean that?”

“Very properly answered, and I should be ashamed of myself.”

“You might send me in a bill for good advice,” John continued, with a smile; “only my account wouldn’t stand it yet.”

“Your most humble, obliged, and obedient servant,” said Jack; and he put his hand to his heart, and bowed to the floor in true Hazard style.

John, with a yawn, shook out his pipe, put down the cat who had snuggled up to him, and began to undress.

“Well, Jack, the senator is a fine old fellow, isn’t he?”

“That he is; but Mrs. Wingate — I don’t go in so much for her.”

“You don’t, eh?” said John, examining a boot.

"Reckon she makes life pretty hard for him, doesn't she?"

"Too virtuous. He bears it like an angel, though." He glanced about at the blank spaces on the wall, where a moment before a dozen coryphées had pirouetted and smirked. "And John, I say, Marjory — you must meet her — she is one of the finest."

"Hello!" John bobbed out of his room in surprise at a statement from such a quarter.

"Yes, I mean it. She is true and kind and simple and frank, and I tell you, John, if — if — "

"If what — what next?"

"If you ever marry, as I know you will, I hope you won't be caught by any vulgar, flaunting woman, but'll find some one as good and sweet as Marjory Wingate."

"And why not you?" asked John, coming up and looking him earnestly in the eyes; "why don't you go in and win her?"

"I?" — he turned a little under John's questioning glance — "I? Well, you see I'm a kind of a strolling troubadour. I hang my guitar on everybody's door, and sing to any one. My themes are light. I think I am put in the world to laugh and make others laugh. What! win a woman, a fine woman's love? No, no — John, you see, though you've often envied me my temperament, I know better. He who gets every one's friendship can seldom win one person's love. There, what a long speech!"

"Jack, Jack, what is in you to-night? Why, you're a confirmed bachelor."

"So I am," said Jack, hastily, with an attempt at a laugh. "I'm not a marrying man. I'd drive a woman crazy at the end of a year with my pets and my

eccentric ways, or — or she'd drive me. Thank you, no. I know my limitations." He looked up quickly into his friend's puzzled face, and twirled the ends of his Dundrearies with an effort at gayety. "Why do I talk like this? Well, John, just as you get downhearted and dissatisfied sometimes because you are not more hail-fellow-well-met, so you see I, too, sometimes get unutterably tired of laughing and making other people laugh, and wish to change. *Voilà!*"

"I give you up," said John, going back to his room. "I've lived with you all this time and watched you right close, but I don't understand you a bit. I think there's a good deal of the woman in you."

"Perhaps. I've thought so myself. Ho, ho!"

He stretched his arms above his head and gave a prodigious yawn.

"Jack!"

"What?"

"You gave the senator my excuses?"

"I did; but he expects you soon."

"I'll go around to-morrow night," said John, turning over on his pillow.

The junior partner, thus deserted, opened the window and examined the cages, took out the squirrel, who ran through his pockets for nuts, coaxed him back into the cage again, put puss, rubbing at his leg, away for the night, tucked the dogs into their boxes, stood a moment before the glass pulling the silky whiskers, drew a heavy sigh, twice shook his head slowly, picked up the lamp, and stole into his room and went to bed.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE next night, Mr. and Mrs. Wingate going out, Marjory was left alone. She went to her room, drew up her chair by the window, lit the lamp, and prepared to read, very well content. But it was not long before the volume dropped on her lap and her head fell back meditatively. For a while she remained thus, until at last, obeying an impulse, she turned down the lamp and flung wide the curtains to let in the stars.

From her earliest childhood, in her deepest moods she had been a lover of solitude. No one, except perhaps her father, had ever understood the shy, sensitive child. She sought seclusion—poring in the library; rummaging out its secret treasures; revelling in the glorious "Arabian Nights" and the satisfying Waverley Novels; weeping over little Nell and trembling at Fagin; and at night she would lie awake and build stories, finer than all of them, with the most bewitching heroines and the manliest heroes.

As she passed into girlhood she gathered the younger children at her knee, and held them in open-eyed attention with delightful or thrilling tales that she spun, hour after hour. But when, longing for sympathy, she sought for further audiences, the older boys, in brotherly fashion, with their rough teasing, put to shame these shy outpourings of her imagination, so that they shrank away and hid themselves. The child, after the first few rebuffs, withdrew into herself. She never dreamed of

seeking out her mother. Mrs. Wingate frowned sternly upon such frivolities as novels, and did her best to substitute Baxter's "Saints' Rest" and the "Lives of the Three Mrs. Judsons."

So the child hugged her darling fancies to her breast, and roamed through the wonderlands in secret, in summer lying in the shade of a tree, or in winter camped by the hearth with only her favorite dog to wink approval.

At fifteen she had already assumed the burdens of the household. The mother, whose time was precious, and was needed for higher things, willingly accepted the transfer of responsibility. Thus the girl stepped quickly into the woman. She had hardly known the careless joys of a free girlhood. Her true nature was fettered under the further responsibilities and worries that fell upon her when Harry and Steve forsook their home, and her mother began to turn on hot-headed Dick, and she saw the trouble stealing into her father's face.

Her real nature no one knew — not even she herself. At the bottom of her temperament she was all sunshine, a merry, laughing spirit, full of poetry and romance, of love of the woods and skies, — a serious little thinker, thirsting for knowledge. But her real nature was yet in bondage, under the lock and key of hostile influences.

Something of all this, in a vague, unconscious mood, came to her as she lay back in the chair watching the stars from out the hidden room. Her soul was straining at its leash, longing to be free, unfettered, with liberty to roam at will.

"Why am I so restless?" thought the girl. "Why is my life so aimless? What good am I doing any one? I sometimes feel that I should like to give myself up

to charity, instead of drifting—drifting.” She turned the word over in her mind. “I am drifting, drifting, drifting. How different it all was ten years ago! What a little dreamer I was—what a hopeless little dreamer!” She put her hand under her cheek and slowly shook her head. “What is it that I lack? I know, and yet I do not know. What is wrong?”

Suddenly there broke in upon her thoughts a shuffling in the hall, a rap on the door, and the voice of the butler calling. She sprang up hurriedly, lit the lamp, and called, “Come in.”

A black head peered round the door.

“Gen’leman see you, Miss Ma’jory.”

“Rufus, I expressly told you I would see no one,” she cried in dismay at this rude forestalling of her dreams. “Go right downstairs and say I am out. Give me the card.”

Rufus, looking miserable, extended the platter.

“Oh, Mr. Gaunt!” exclaimed Marjory, as she glanced at it. “Wait a moment, Rufus. Well, say I will be down.”

“So this is Mr. Gaunt,” thought Marjory when the door had closed, “whom I have heard so much about—the man Dick has picked out for me,” she added with a smile. Nevertheless, she proceeded to dress with more than ordinary pains.

“I wonder what sort of man he is. Something like Mr. Hazard, probably, who is a dear. He’ll rattle away, a little more gravely maybe, but of that class. A good fellow, with of course something in the background, like all the men I know. Rather immature, looking like a man and talking like a boy, and it’ll try my wits to keep him going. A man’s a man. Oh, don’t I know the kind!” She rejected three brooches before she

found the proper one. "I've half a mind to begin solemnly, 'My dear Mr. Gaunt, what do you think of this Transcendentalism Mr. Emerson is preaching?' Wouldn't I like to see his face! But no, he's been good to Dick, and that shall be his passport." She stopped a moment, then with a playful gesture she caught up a piece of paper and scribbled down her prophecy. "There! we shall see. Well, anyhow, I am looking my best to-night."

She tripped down the stairs lightly, and there at the foot, without cause or reason, she waited a full minute with her hand on the door, the corners of her mouth drawn thoughtfully down, her head bent, pensive, hesitating, before she stepped into the room.

She saw a strong figure pacing to and fro before the fireplace, that at the rustle of her entrance wheeled and came forward. The moment her eyes met his all the lightness of her demeanor vanished. "What a noble face, and what a sad one!" she thought. A wave of sympathy swept over her, and she held out her hand and looked up at him kindly.

John saw a slender figure full of sweeping grace and dignity, in a soft cool gown of turquoise blue, collar and sleeves of soft lace, masses of brown hair under a net of blue, and the truest, frankest eyes that ever looked into his.

"Jack is right," he thought, as he took her hand and met the glance that was saying with friendly curiosity, "And this is John Gaunt?"

"And so this is Marjory," his eyes replied, but he said, "You are like Dick; I should have known you."

"And indeed," said Marjory with a smile and a blush, "I have heard so much of you, that I almost feel I know you. Then Dick's friend is my friend, you know. I

am sorry to tell you that both father and mother are out." ("O dear," she added to herself, "will he spoil everything with some commonplace remark?")

"I am disappointed to miss them. I was counting on a talk with your father," said John. "I have taken a great liking to him."

"I cannot judge—I am too prejudiced," Marjory answered, looking up merrily. "Take this chair."

"Let me stand," John said, as they passed over the red carpet. "It is an old habit of mine; I like to talk on my feet. And so you have met my friend Mr. Hazard. Isn't he a great fellow?"

Marjory nodded, with a suspicion of a smile.

"What, did he make some blunder?" John cried, perceiving the look. "The rascal! He never told me of it."

"Well, yes," Marjory admitted, with a return of her smile.

John laughed and shook his head.

"The rascal never told me. Poor old Jack, he is always running against some wall. Somehow, no one minds it—he's always been a privileged character. Then, too, he's never gone out much; perhaps I'm to blame there."

"I think you are," said Marjory, frankly; "you have been here six years, and no one has had more than a glimpse of you."

"I reckon I am a little pessimistic," admitted John, and he began to walk before the hearth. "It isn't that I don't like people; I do; but I reckon it's because I ask more than they want to give, or I have a right to ask. I can remember when I was a young fellow, how hungry I used to be to meet a friend to whom I could talk without reservation, and see what he was thinking

in return. But I never found one — not a true one. I must have puzzled a good many with my questions, and it used to puzzle me that people should be so afraid to show me their thoughts."

"I think I know what you mean," said Marjory, and she nodded as John paused.

"And so you see," continued John, looking down at her with an apologetic smile, "I grew tired of fruitless questionings. I care very little for making new acquaintances. I am tired of aimless conversations. Why should I give up my time trying to please people who are never anything but masks to me? Then I have had my business. I'm afraid it's all very pessimistic."

"No, it isn't," Marjory said stoutly. "I know just what you mean. Still, all the world is not the same. I too have never met any one to whom I could talk without fear of being misunderstood. Still some there must be and some there will be. No, I don't think you are a pessimist. I think," she added, with a smile, "you are perhaps a little impatient with commonplace people."

While he had been talking, Marjory, with the instincts of a first impression, had been scrutinizing his face, striving to penetrate his reserve. "No, no," she said to herself, "he is not cynical, as he believes; his eyes are too kind. How strongly I can feel his real nature — self-restrained, but sad and solitary. I wonder if even he realizes it."

John meanwhile looked down, somewhat surprised at the accusation.

"I — I know something of your past life," began Marjory, hesitatingly; "and I can understand. Don't think I am condemning you."

"You mean the loss of my fortune? Well, that has

turned out to have been my first real good luck." He locked his arms behind his back and began to walk again. "I have had a good many things to make me bitter, and perhaps they have touched me a little. But I think, anyway, I should have come to feel the same way in the end. It may be the age, or that I have met only one class, but in my experience, I must say, to speak the truth, I am disappointed in men. I never shall understand them. Here they are, a vast horde thrown into this world with a thousand wonderful questions to be asked and answered, so much to seek and find. And what do they do? They shut themselves up like automata, machines to eat and drink and sleep. They pass through the world and fade away and leave no mark behind, no memory. They have no curiosity." He looked up a moment out of the impetus of his emotion and smiled a little. "I suppose that is all unjust and untrue, and that by himself each man thinks out his own problems, and that the fault is only that he keeps his thoughts secret. Yet I have no patience with such narrow modesty, such timidity. When I meet any one, Miss Wingate, I want to sit down and say to him: 'What are you thinking about? What are you?' I want to go to the bottom. Do you know, there is really nothing so wonderful in this world, after all, as your own self? There is the great mystery. That's what I want to talk about to each person. I want to find out how much he can understand of himself. I can understand so little."

"Ah, yes—but think. You ask so much. What would you be willing to give in return? Not your real self, for I know from what you have said what that would mean."

"I have never yet met such a person," said John,

taking up an ornament meditatively ; " but when I do — yes, I shall show him myself."

" Oh, I know — I know so well what you mean." Marjory sprang up and began to talk, gesturing unwittingly. " I should not question you ; I feel the same. You mean the world is so bare, so — out at the elbows, where it should be so rich. What you say about our own selves being the greatest of mysteries comes like a revelation to me. You make me think. My own self has been hidden so long that I can scarcely see it. That — don't you see ? — is one of the saddest things in life. To think that one's nature can be so shut in by uncongenial surroundings, by lack of sympathy, that it retires and conceals itself till even one's own eyes cannot find it. You, you are a man." She moved under the radiant crystal chandelier, her face flushed with her unconscious feeling. " You make your own atmosphere. No matter what sorrows you have to bear, you have freedom to act, to think, and to grow. But a woman, don't you see ? if once she finds she is not understood at home, no matter how well she is loved, soon gives up her little thoughts, the beginning of the true self, and accommodates herself to what those about her think. She must ; it is such a subtle influence when it begins from childhood. But you have given me the key." She stopped short. She had been carried away by the force of her emotion, and by the subtle magnetism of John's encouraging eyes.

He saw the blush, and guessed the cause. He said simply, " Please — don't stop," and Marjory, with her hungry soul, and John, with his restless, doubting one, looked into each other's eyes frankly, as though they had known each other all their lives.

" Yes, I know I can talk to you," Marjory began at

length, but with a little questioning shyness. "I know friendship must come by intuition, and a woman follows her intuitions, you know. How different we are," she continued, reassured by his quiet look; "what I need is some one to stir me up, to make me think. You—you have made mistakes in your thinking. You see I am very truthful—too truthful, sometimes, I'm afraid. I tell just what I think, and I think you must have had experiences, when you were very young, which shook your confidence in human nature."

"Well, I did. Some day I will tell you. Perhaps you are right and I all wrong. I do not know." To be there watching the play of emotions across the sweet girlish face suddenly scattered the shadows of the past and let in all the sunshine of life—the fair and the good.

The clock struck eleven before he noticed, with a guilty start, how late was the hour.

"Good night," he said, as they were in the hall. "I am coming often to see you."

"Please do," she answered, giving him her hand. "I have not thanked you yet for what you have done for Dick—but I do now. He is the nearest of all my brothers."

They were at the door when John turned suddenly, and said: "Will you tell me one thing? I have seen you look at me often to-night, and each time I thought there was a look of—pity in your eyes. Why was that?"

"I have seen many men," answered Marjory, without a thought of her words (they were in the dim circle of the hall lamp), "but I have never seen one with so sad a face as yours, one that seemed so unhappy and so solitary."

The moment the door clicked behind him, a feeling of dismay rushed over her. "Oh, why did I say that?" she cried. "Oh, why did I? What will he think of me? Will he think me forward—unwomanly? He can't; he must have seen how kindly I meant it. Oh, why—why did I say it?"

She ran upstairs, full of distress. On the bureau lay the sheet of paper on which she had written her prophecy; but though her eyes saw the scrap, she swept beyond it without a thought.

"He is a man!" she cried aloud. "He is, he is! How strong, how vital, how alive he is! It makes human life so much greater, so much nobler, to meet a man like that." She passed to the window, and pressed her hot cheek against the cool pane, looking up breathless into the now overcast sky, where only a star or two found a path through the clouds.

Suddenly from below she heard the front door open, and the voice of her father calling her. She slipped to the table and put out the light; for she felt she could not see any one just then— not even her father.

She undressed in the dark, and slipped into bed, and lay silent, her hands drawn across her breast, her soul too exalted to frame a prayer in words. She did not ask herself, "Am I in love?" Deep natures seldom are conscious of love at first sight. She was waiting, trembling and reverent, at the threshold of the great gates.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN old age men too often see only the failures (and, in the light of one's ambition, what life is not a failure?). In youth they forgot them. It is a difference of standpoint rather than a limit of years that makes the division between the human seasons. Each man passes a turn of the road, after which the way lies clear ahead, and he comes to realize that to the end of that beaten path he must continue. There, where the last bend has turned, youth has ceased.

Before then, what is sorrow? What is one disappointment? One failure, or two, or three? Ahead is the boundless future, and the wheel of fortune moves. Everything is possible, for everything may lie in a trick of the turn. If age reckons all the bitter, why should youth count anything but the sweet? So, when men are in the morning of life, they often clothe themselves with their hopes, refusing to acknowledge the canker sorrow in the depths of their hearts.

This was John Gaunt. He was young. He was ambitious. He was eager for success. He turned his face toward the future, and told himself the past was buried, that he was a different John Gaunt, that certain memories were forgotten. And so he had gone his way, repeating to himself that he was successful and therefore happy. It is not in the nature of man long to endure sorrow. If he cannot rid himself of the ache he must deceive himself, and deny that it is there. Hence

the shock, when a chance gleam slips through the barriers and lights up his true self.

John stood with one hand on the gate, immovable, bewildered. Revelations that break over some in a clap of understanding, to others unfold gradually — the more oppressive for the lingering. Slowly the mist rolled back, and he saw himself, the shadow and the unrest.

“Is it true?” he asked, rebelling at the suggestion. “Why unhappy, sad? Yes, something tells me she is right, that it is all a mask. What fools we are! We deceive ourselves, and ourselves only. I thought I drew out admiration, and it is only pity.”

He thrust open the gate and started down the street, staring up at the lighted windows sprinkled on either side, with that peculiar melancholy abstraction which, with him, preceded periods of thought. He was in a great city among a multitude of his fellow-beings. Only a wall, six inches of brick or stone, stood between him and a sea of life, of sorrow, of longings, seekings, gropings for the light. He felt the impotence of the human and the immensity of humanity — the little hour of man and the immortality of men that build, like coral insects, higher and higher, eternal in their death.

When he would turn from man, the sky held but a dozen stars, but each recalled that night of his childhood. All his early struggles, questionings, and anguish, that had lain six years under the surface waiting to cry out at a touch, now started up. Weak before the sudden onslaught he cried out: “Can I never escape from that past? What does it mean? my father’s spirit? Oh, no, no, no!”

When he reached his windows the lights were still showing. He stopped, looked up at the cheery rooms

like a beggar before a palace, hesitated, then passed on down the street with long feverish paces. There was something taking place within him so sacred that he wanted no eye to look upon his face just then.

He had built himself a philosophy by which to live, as every man must do, whatever he believes, whatever he doubts. It was an unselfish philosophy, cold and cynical, born out of his ambition. He had never really believed in it, — a philosophy that was no philosophy, only the mask needed to wear before the world. Now, all at once, the words of a girl had overturned the false idols. He felt the shock of the upheaval, and trembled. False gods are still gods, but as he paced and wrestled in spirit, he found no gods at all. Everything was swept away; nothing was left — yes, a ruin out of which he must fashion something.

It was a hard, cruel battle he fought out that night, along the whispering streets, window after window dropping back into the darkness, a harder and a crueller battle for coming so late in life.

Jack was held fast in the land of dreams when John awoke the next morning, sprang up and dressed. No traces of the night's battle remained. The storm had passed overhead and vanished beyond the horizon. The night before his soul was torn and laid bare, and he stood gasping, trembling, before thoughts which he had chosen to ignore and to cover up, for years. Now he surveyed himself calmly and impersonally, with the eye of a spectator, — wondering, as he adjusted his cravat, where lay the mark. He finished his dressing, peeped in a moment on the laggard Jack, and hurried down the stairs.

Breakfast over, he started toward the wharves, not

with his accustomed alert step, but at a more reflective gait. A telegram had come the preceding day from the Lake Company, accepting his terms and notifying him that they had despatched an agent to ratify the transaction. And so he was going that morning to set his name to a contract which would shut up the home of six years, and give his handiwork over to strangers. Something of what was in the air had transpired at the wharves. The crowd, huddled noisily at the gate, grew still as he passed, and followed him with silent questioning. In the hall old Ben the porter met him with a bob of his head and said, —

“Two gentlemen to see you, Mr. Gaunt — and — and, sir, is it true what we hear — about your leaving?”

“Yes, Ben, I reckon it is,” John answered, touched by the old fellow’s dismayed expression.

Two men were deep in whispered conversation as he entered: a short, small, nervous man with the eyes of a ferret, and a skin pock-marked and baggy; and a large, stolid companion, who kept up his part in the conversation with deliberate nods and a steady combing of his beard, which was spreading and grizzled.

“Young man,” cried the little fellow, “will you have the goodness to tell us when Mr. Gaunt is expected? What are his hours?”

“I am he,” said John. He knew the speaker by sight. “This is Mr. Kane, I believe?”

“John R. Kane, sir. Your pardon for mistaking you,” exclaimed the spokesman, not a bit abashed. “Mr. Gaunt — my friend, Judge Shelby.”

“Of the Lake Company?” John asked, shaking hands. “On time, and ready for business.”

“You are a very young man for such a success, Mr. Gaunt,” Judge Shelby began, scrutinizing him sharply.

"Yes, I have to be. One moment, gentlemen." He turned to the rack and put up his hat slowly, opened the window, sorted his mail, and occupied himself at the desk straightening out his papers. It was a method of his while making up his mind about a visitor, to appear to neglect him for a few minutes, while secretly scrutinizing him from the corner of his eye. Besides, he knew something of John R. Kane's methods. The result was according to his wishes. Kane fidgeted a moment on his chair, then bounced up, exclaiming:—

"Mr. Gaunt, let's come to the point. We're here to talk business. We want your place. We'll pay for it. But we can't give one twenty-five. Can't do it, sir; thing won't stand it. We've been over it. Come, Mr. Gaunt, give us a fair figure, say ninety thousand."

"So that's the game," thought John, and he glanced beyond the speaker to where the shrewd eyes of the judge were studying him. There are some people who overreach themselves by a show of too much cunning, where only a mask of simplicity is needed. John walked to the window and returned to the desk, smiling.

"Gentlemen, let me understand you, then; you withdraw your proposition made through Mr. Blodgett and accepted by me?"

"Yes, sir; we mean just that. We can't give the price. Anything reasonable, now, you'll find us agreeable to, and ready to settle in cash on the spot."

"So, Mr. Kane, you want me to make another offer."

"That's business." Kane relapsed into his seat, shooting a glance toward the silent judge. "A cigar, Mr. Gaunt."

"Try mine, instead," said John, nonchalantly; for to meet a sharper at his own game was his delight. He passed the box. "Mr. Kane? Judge?"

"Now, Mr. Gaunt, what do you say? Ninety? Place ain't worth seventy-five. Course we know a man's in business for what's in it, and he gets what he can get. But of course there's a limit now that can't be met, and it pays not to put on a price that can't be met. Between you and me, now, Mr. Gaunt, as good business men, that bid of a hundred and twenty-five thousand ain't right."

"Certainly," said John, weighing his words, "I've been thinking that myself, ever since I accepted your offer, and I thank you for leaving me free. It isn't right, gentlemen. I must have a hundred and thirty-five."

Judge Shelby raised his head quickly. Kane fairly bounded from his seat, then resumed it, saying with an uneasy laugh:—

"Oh, come now, Mr. Gaunt, you shouldn't give us such a scare. That's a good joke; I call that an infernally good joke."

"Yes, I reckon it is," John said, and he turned on him with an innocent smile.

"Mr. Gaunt, that's pretty sharp work!" Kane was on his feet gesticulating angrily.

"You ought to know, Mr. Kane," John answered grimly. "Now you had better understand me at once. I know what the property is worth, and what it is worth to you—I know you have got to have it, for if I'm not much mistaken, when you received my acceptance, your company immediately closed its other contracts on the lake." The guess hit home; Kane's face showed the truth. "Now, sir, if you had come to me in good faith this morning to carry out your promise, I should have met you in kind, even though I knew the advantage of my position. You chose to do otherwise. I am not

compelled to sell. I am making an excellent income. Whatever extension of lake traffic your company effects, I profit by it. Come to Cleveland you must, and use my property you must, whether you buy it or pay me for the use of it, and now, frankly, you have made a great mistake in employing such methods with me. I will sell you this property for one hundred and thirty-five thousand in spot cash, the offer to hold until ten, for every hour after which," he drew back and looked Kane in the face, "I add a thousand to the sum."

"Mr. Gaunt?"

John turned. It was Judge Shelby who had broken silence, and now rose and advanced in front of Kane.

"Mr. Gaunt, you are right. Mr. Kane does not represent the company. He is here simply as my friend. There never has been any question. Of course we stand by the contract. We will settle at once at a hundred and twenty-five thousand."

"I am very sorry for the company, sir, and very grateful to Mr. Kane. That offer no longer stands. I hope you won't tempt me, Judge, by any further delay, for you don't know how hard it is to refrain from putting up the price again, now that I see how badly you want the place."

The judge stopped short and looked at him from under his bushy eyebrows.

"Do you mean that?"

John glanced at the clock.

"Very well, we accept."

"At one hundred and thirty-five thousand?"

"Yes."

"Cash?"

The other drew out his pocket-book, "Only waiting the drawing-up of the contract."

"That is all prepared," John said, drawing out a paper as they sat down.

So it happened that a week after this conversation John, having regulated all his affairs, surrendered the keys of the establishment to Judge Shelby and wished him luck. He shook hands with Kane and joked over the encounter, little realizing under what circumstances they were soon to meet again.

After a long handshaking among the men, he tramped out of the yard at last, and wandered off up the street to the rooms. Jack was out, but the two dogs came bounding up against him. He put them away and sat down on the sofa.

"Well, that's over," ran his ruminations; "I am now a man of leisure for a while. But I confess I don't feel very happy. An American man's business is pretty near his home — and, well, I feel as though I had been turned out of mine."

He put his feet up and leaned back luxuriously. "Now what the deuce is a man to do when he's through business? Hello, I'll take a holiday — never thought of that. I'll get a horse and try a gallop; haven't done that since I came."

He slipped into his riding clothes, after whipping out the dust of years, and went downstairs. At the bottom he stopped, moved a step, and stopped again. Then a smile of pleasure came to his face, and he said, "Why not? I should like to talk to her again. How different she is from all other women! Somehow she brings out all the good in life to me. I like her; yes, I like her."

He glanced at himself twice, and then returned upstairs for repairs, an act that would have caused Jack to turn somersaults of astonishment, had he been present to witness it.

CHAPTER XXV

MARJORY was in the garden, gathering flowers for the house, Shadow and Frolic frisking in circles about her, when a clatter of hoofs came from the driveway, and she saw John's stalwart form riding up. Her arms were still filled with white asters, as she went slowly to welcome him, the dogs skirmishing curiously in front.

At her approach John flung himself off and threw the bridle over his arm, standing erect beside the pawing horse, with bare head and keen, insistent eyes. He held out his hand and her slim one went into it and lay there a moment.

In such matters it is the second encounter that tells. Then are gauged the impressions of the first meeting. Under all the will and the melancholy, she saw now the humor and the kindness, and was satisfied. He had wondered if she would show as fair under the light of the sun. He found her a child of the day, who caught the sparkle of the sun and the freshness of the wind. Each emotion and thought swept her whole face with a new expression. Her beauty was full of sudden surprises, taking its glow from the fountain of all true charm, an innocent and happy soul.

What she wore John did not quite apprehend, except that it was something soft and green that went well with the white asters against her throat. With that boldness tempered with a smile that appeals so to women — the command that confesses the desire — he said : —

"My first holiday, Miss Wingate. I have come to carry you off for a scamper over the country, in old Maryland style—if you will let me."

"A scamper in the country—splendid!" she exclaimed, with a laugh full of anticipation, as Peter came up and took the bridle. "Come into the house. I was going to scold you for being so long in calling, but I forgive you now. I have been longing so for a ride. Wait in the library. I promise to do my best."

"In the library; all right."

But somehow John lingered just long enough to watch the sweep of light green disappear above the stairs, before he could make up his mind not to place his hat upon the rack, and went into the library with its high gothic shelves.

Shadow followed, begging for attention, but John did not notice him. "What a fresh, wholesome color she has," he thought, pacing the floor, "and how graceful she is! What is it gives her so much charm? I think it must be her smile," and with an elbow on the mantel-piece, he fell into a reverie.

Often afterward, in the press of later times, amid the cares, trials, responsibilities, and honors that crowded upon him, he looked back to that quiet afternoon in the library of the Wingates, with its distant ceiling and its windows opening to the scent of the garden—to a young man walking back and forth, with meditative head, who stopped every now and then at the door to listen for footsteps on the stairs—a day without a night, a garden forever green.

Down the stairs at last came Marjory, in habit of blue and sweeping hat of black, skirt over one arm, whip in hand. She stood a moment, shyly, at the bottom, waiting, aware of his curiosity as he turned

to her. The soil of the wharves, the cunning and the struggle of men, the stains and the rough contact of the world, the easy, careless standards, the tolerance of the ugly, were yet drumming in his ears while he looked and looked at Marjory, — the girl, innocent and ignorant of all unloveliness.

“Will you come?”

He started quickly at her voice; he had been unconscious of her waiting. He stepped forward and opened the door, already with a pride in being at her side. Something of the old boyish spirit, the joy, the zest, the humor of life returned. He turned to her with a defiant, laughing glance, and said, with a resolute shake of his head: “Miss Wingate, I shall sit my horse very straight this afternoon. There, I believe I have actually made a compliment. Heavens! what *would* Jack say?”

Marjory turned her head away; she was already on the stoop, beckoning Peter with the horses. Yet, by the flush of her cheek, despite all previous declarations against such forms of flattery, she did not seem much to regret this very plain evidence of backsliding on the part of John. Every woman, of course, disdains a compliment — unless, coming from the right quarter, she is positive of its sincerity.

The horses arriving, John stooped, took a little foot in his great hand (with just a trifle of selfish curiosity), and had his companion up in her saddle in a trice. They rode off, leaving Peter behind, staring and grinning and scratching his head.

At the very first corner, who should appear, coming up the avenue, but Jack. He took off his hat and made them a very gallant bow; then, discomfited, unmindful of a knot of jeering urchins, he stood blankly watching them out of sight. The fact is, neither saw him. They

were looking at each other, talking as freely and frankly as though they had known each other all their lives.

Twice, as John reined in his horse, to fall a little behind, Marjory had hastily checked her own. The strange, sudden shyness that only comes to a woman when in the presence of one man out of all the world, was upon her that afternoon — a vague timidity, a sense of being scrutinized.

All at once they were off racing over long stretches of flat highway, until Marjory, with flaming cheeks, cried a halt. Then they turned by unfamiliar ways through fields and under trees, to halt at last while their mounts buried their noses in a little brook.

“So this is your first long holiday?” she asked, patting the glossy neck.

“Yes, and I feel sort of turned out of house and home,” said John, pulling at a low, fallen branch. “You see, all these years I have hardly had a thought outside of my business; it was all of life to me. Now that it is suddenly wrenched away, why, I feel like a fish out of water.”

“What a worker! I believe you.”

“I’m afraid I have one bad habit. If I take a thing up, no matter what it is, I can think of nothing else. It absorbs me. I throw myself into it heart and soul, and I’m afraid nothing else exists much until it is finished. I shall have to confess that I’m a man of one idea.”

“Very true,” she responded, with a positive shake of the head; “and that one idea is —”

“Is what?”

“To underrate yourself.” Marjory glanced back at him mischievously. “There, sir, that is my candid opinion. Now to ride fast; we have a good way to go, and the dusk will soon overtake us.”

"Pretty soon, but not just yet," said John, reaching out and laying his hand on her reins as she was about to urge the horse forward. "We have had our gallop, let us talk a little while — will you?"

She turned to his earnest face, hesitated a moment, and then nodded assent.

"I am a terrible one to take the bull by the horns, Miss Wingate; you will see." He had settled back into the saddle and was proceeding a little uncertainly. "You remember that night as I was leaving — what you said to me?"

Did she remember? She had thought of nothing else all the ride. She put her head down, and her cheeks were struck with confusion.

"I should not have said it. I was sorry afterward. I hoped you had forgotten such a foolish speech."

"Forgotten? and why? You are the first person in the world who has talked to me as I want. You are not going to regret that, are you?" he said gently. She felt his quiet strength. The same feeling that had impelled her at their first meeting to speak without consciousness or constraint, returned to her, and she said: "I was only afraid I had hurt you. That was all I regretted."

"No, I have only to thank you. I should like to ask a promise of you: that you always will tell me just what you see in me. I reckon, though, I shouldn't ask it."

"It is a promise."

They rode on silently awhile, until Marjory said abruptly: "You told me you would tell me something of yourself. Don't you want to do that now. That is, I mean, just what you would tell any one. You understand, don't you?"

"Yes, I wanted to tell you." He drew himself straight

up in the saddle, looking ahead steadily. When he began to speak it was simply and quietly as though it were a matter of course. But at times, when in his earnestness his voice sank almost to a whisper, she saw, under all, how vital was the memory.

“You see, Miss Wingate, when you told me so frankly how I impressed you, it came as a shock. I don’t believe I ever quite realized what I was before. I hid things, ignored them; that is, I tried to. Perhaps that is why I deceived myself. So you see that night after I left you, why, it came like a clap of thunder to me. I don’t deny it was a hard moment. I am not going to believe that I am the only one who passes through such a revelation. I think there comes just such a time to every man—well, perhaps not every one—no, I hope not; but to those who are like me. Usually it comes earlier, and it is easier to root out the old delusions and find new ideals to cling to. You understand me? A time when you see your true self, when you know it, and can no longer live with anything that is not just as true.”

“Oh, yes,” Marjory cried, bending her head, “oh, yes, I do know. In a measure, it does come to all, I’m sure; and some submit—many.”

“I am going to tell you all, Miss Wingate. Don’t imagine it is because I ask your pity; that is not my nature. It is—well, because I want you to know me just as I am.” He waited a moment, bending his brows and striving to recall. “My father was always having gambling parties in the big hall, and I used to wander around the table watching the play. I don’t know that that is very relevant, but I remember, as though it were yesterday, looking down from the balcony one night as I went to bed, and seeing them at the cards.

I was just leaving my childhood, a wild, impulsive little fellow, full of imagination, with my mother's love of nature. When I went up to my room, I stood out on the balcony and began to look up at the stars. They had never been real to me before; that night they were. I was carried right off my feet. In all my life, I think I never have been quite so happy as then — those few short hours. I wish I could have gone on as I began, but who knows? something else probably would have happened. I stole outdoors and roamed about the fields, and it was then, as I came up the stairs, that I overheard my father in his room. I listened. My father was — a —”

“Never mind,” Marjory said softly, “don't tell me too much; I shall understand.”

“I trust you. I want you to hear.”

He had been speaking quietly. Now he went on with sudden rapidity.

“My father was a slave to a drug. I have learned to pity him since. He had a horror, a loathing of death that never left him, and in his spells it would break out with fearful intensity; his cries were too horrible for words. And that is what I overheard. Poor little beggar, I had a pretty hard time of it, for I hid it from my mother, that it might not break her heart. She died soon after, without knowing that I knew. And in this shadow I grew up, without any one to help me. The world was all black those days. Lord, I sometimes wonder if I can ever forget that loathing that was over all my youth.

“My father didn't die until I was nineteen, and then — well, I fancied myself in love with an older woman who was only amusing herself. You see I am telling you all; if I really had been in love, perhaps I shouldn't.”

"Thank you," said Marjory, but in a voice so low that he did not guess the meaning.

"On top of all this, my father's friend, my guardian, the one man I had trusted implicitly, absconded with all my inheritance, leaving me a beggar. So you see how everything in my early life was of a kind to make me doubt. I cannot help what I am, or if people think me cynical and bitter. That is all; that is everything."

He ended inaudibly. The yellow dusk was closing fast over the fields, everything about them was melting into the evening. The road ran white and clear for yet a way ahead; only they two and the moving horses beneath were real, saved out of the deluge of shadow and mist. At some object in the road Marjory's horse shied, rubbing against his companion. She put her hand gently on his arm and looked at him, her eyes filled with tears, as they were wont to do at the recital of a sorrow.

"Tell me, that shadow—it is still in your mind to-day, is it not?"

"Yes."

"Back of everything?"

"Yes."

The horses parted again. He had not noticed that her hand had rested on his sleeve; she also was unconscious of it.

On and on they went in the silence and dusk.

"Why did you tell me so much? I know it hurt you."

"Because I want you for my friend. I want you to understand why I am as I am."

They were close together now. She put out her hand without a word. He took it with a low "Thank you," bent over it, just touched with his lips the ends of her glove, and rose again in the saddle.

"It is getting fearfully dark," Marjory cried, with a happy laugh; "but I don't care, I am so safe with you."
"Now for a race home!"

She nodded, and away they flew. He hardly knew himself, he was so full of spirits and the joy of life.

All too soon they were at the steps. Peter ran up, the door swung open, and her father came out to welcome him. She was down under the glare of the lamp, giving him her hand, and vanished behind the door, all in a score of seconds.

At last into his restless, searching soul there had come a sense of quiet and a sense of peace. After all life might hold something in store for him — a repose, perhaps a home. He left the horse at the stables and swung through the dark streets to the skurry of the city's pulse. There, amid the glare of the shop windows, were the bulletins of the *Herald*: —

WILL SOUTH CAROLINA SECEDE?

THE HORIZON STORMY.

He mingled in the curious crowd. Some were shaking their heads incredulously; a knot of young fellows beside him were laughing.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN the early days of January, 1861, John, coming into his rooms at dusk, with cheeks aglow from a long ride into the frozen country, found Jack pulling on his pipe, turning his palms to the roaring grate.

"Bad news at the office, John, worse and worse," cried Jack, at his friend's frosty entrance.

"What! more, Jack?"

"Mississippi passed an ordinance of secession yesterday."

"Mississippi?"

"And the governor says Florida is expected to do so to-day. There are all sorts of other rumors in the office. It's a bad day for the country, John."

"Mississippi and Florida," repeated John, staring into the fire. He stood silent, without thinking to draw off his coat. "What do they say about Maryland?"

Jack glanced up quickly.

"What did you say, Jack?"

"I — I said nothing."

John looked down curiously.

"Jack, what are you thinking?"

"I — why, I don't know — nothing."

"You are wondering what effect the secession of Maryland would have on me, aren't you?"

Jack paused. "How did you know? You are Maryland bred."

"So I am." And without further answer, John turned on his heel and began to throw off his coat.

Since the 7th of November and the bonfires of Lincoln's election, rumor had followed rumor. On the 20th of December came the shock of South Carolina's secession, and the day after Christmas the news of the evacuation of Fort Moultrie. Dismay was in every eye, uncertainty in every mind. The streets were spotted with anxious groups scanning the newest bulletin or weighing the latest rumor. The political sky, instead of clearing, became charged with ominous clouds from every quarter. Men still insisted that no crisis would come, that the alarms were hollow, that the threats of disunion were made for political advantage; but this confidence soon receded before report after report of speeches in the South, of the resignation of South Carolina's representatives in the Federal government, of treason in the cabinet, of timidity and indecision in the Chief Magistrate's chair.

"Maryland will stay in the Union," said John, decisively, lighting a cigar.

Jack, by the fire, putting Rags through his tricks, started up.

"It must," continued John. He came forward and stood absorbed, looking down at the begging cur. "Jack, what will you do in case —"

"In case of war?"

"Yes."

"I enlisted to-day in the Light Guards."

"There will be no war."

"Think not?"

"You think there will be?"

"I do."

They were silent for some time, each drawing back in his chair, rolling out volumes of smoke.

"Jack."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"You misunderstand me; I am for the Union, first, last, and always, and if blood must be spilt—which I don't believe—you'll find me by your side, marching with the Light Guards."

"Good Lord, John!" The little fellow dropped his head on his hands. "Why didn't you speak before?"

"Jack, do you mean if it had been the other way—"

"Don't ask me, John."

"I never realized you could make any mistake," said John, glancing with amazement at the emotion on his friend's face. "I have never had any doubt from the first."

"Then why in—"

"Maryland," John cut in, abruptly. "It's the horror of it, Jack. It is home; after all; there's no getting away from that feeling. Pray God, Jack, Maryland stands firm."

"Amen to that."

Another silence.

"John."

"Well?"

"You won't undertake any business till this is cleared up?"

"You mean the railroad deal? I don't know what to do about that. You see, Jack, we heard all this four years ago."

"Frémont wasn't elected."

"Then there was General Jackson's affair."

"Well, I don't know; I don't trust my own opinions," Jack cried, taking down a sabre gloomily. "Jack is too modest, mark you. But, John, there are some pretty cool heads down at the *Herald* office. Don't risk any

venture until you know just what is going to happen, says your most humble, obliged, and obedient servant, Jack Hazard," and the little fellow, who never long could keep a serious face, made him a valiant salute with the sabre.

Senator Wingate and Blodgett, when appealed to for their opinions, took the same view, and at the end of a long evening's conference it was decided to remain passive until a crisis should arrive, and it could be seen how far South Carolina and her sympathizers would carry the menace of secession.

So, for a time, John was forced to content himself with a life of inactivity and ease. Leisure sat heavy on his shoulders. Without a daily purpose he was completely adrift. He resorted to long walks in the morning, and to scouring the country on horseback in the afternoon, or, if the weather were hostile, he installed himself by the fire, surrounded himself with books, and dipped into former favorites. In the evenings he grew to be a pretty constant visitor at the Wingates', where the senator would discuss with him the stormy times and the outcome that now looked so ominous. Marjory was usually the third in these little parties in the library, — the father, deep in the high-backed, cushioned chair, with one hand resting on the shoulder of his daughter, who, camped at his knee, followed eagerly the guest, as he measured the carpet with his long strides, and in the earnestness of his argument slashed the air with his cigar.

"You must not forget, Mr. Gaunt," the senator began in one of these talks, with an assurance belied by his thoughtful forehead, "that much, if not all, of this talk of secession and rebellion is to be discounted. It is party material conveniently fanned into flame every

four years. These threats are twenty years old, and yet somehow the country still sticks together."

"New conditions, Senator; a Republican goes into office for the first time."

"True; I admit that conditions are different. But I cannot believe that when the test comes such threats will ever be carried into execution."

"I wish I could think so," said John; "but events have forced me to see the truth. Only to-night came the report of Louisiana's secession. I saw it as I passed the *Herald* office. Six states have now passed the ordinance. It is rumored that they intend to form a separate government."

"What, Louisiana too?"

The senator and Marjory looked up in amazement.

"Mr. Gaunt, that *is* terrible news — terrible!"

"It is, and yet I think it is inevitable," said John, grimly. "I believe the question of the right of a state to withdraw from the nation is a question so vital that it will have to be settled by force, and by force alone, to be settled finally."

"The 'irrepressible conflict,' you believe?"

"Yes, that is it." John halted before the fireplace and threw his cigar into the grate. He had been speaking to the senator, but his eyes had been constantly on the slender figure at the foot of the high-backed chair. "And yet I may be taking a very gloomy outlook. Should secession be carried out, perhaps the insurrection would disappear before the first show of force. There is the precedent of General Jackson, Senator."

"We have not our Jackson!" exclaimed the other, rising. "We have a very timid, and therefore a very dangerous, man. No, sir; if there is trouble coming, it means not a riot, not an insurrection, but war, civil war,

the South against the North. You know the Southern people—they are brave, desperately brave—” He stopped suddenly and looked at John. “But you are a Southerner?”

“I am a Marylander, but my father’s people were from Delaware.”

“I am an old man, and I dread to see a conflict provoked. We are too young a nation, I fear, too closely knit together, to bear such a test. In such a crisis any compromise seems better than an appeal to arms. I am asfounded at the growth of this movement. What state next! Marjory, I think I will go out and talk this over at headquarters. You will excuse me, Mr. Gaunt. I will turn you over to the hands of my daughter.”

He said good night and left them. Out with him went all the threats of war, the gloom, the worry, and the rumor of those waiting days, and John was alone, sitting by her side, listening to her voice in the still library with its high oak shelves running to the ceiling. It was a spot removed from all the rout of the outer world, consecrated to her alone. When he entered her presence, it was like stepping out of shadow into a sudden burst of sunshine. When he left, up sprang the discordant world, at the click of the lock.

Mrs. Wingate, who had contracted a violent dislike to one who was confessedly not a church-goer, beheld with alarm the frequency of John’s visits.

“Mr. Wingate — Bushrod,” she began one night, during the confidential hours, “you may not perceive what is taking place right under your nose. I do. Is it your desire that our daughter should marry an unbeliever?”

“Unbeliever? Eh, what’s that?” cried the husband, startled out of his drowsiness.

"Nonsense! Do you mean to tell me that you don't understand that young man's intentions here?"

"Maria, whom do you mean?"

"Mr. Gaunt, of course!"

"Nonsense, Maria! Come now, go to sleep," the senator mumbled, turning over. "You have married the girl off a dozen times. If a man looks at her, you are sure he is in love with her. Let her be. She must have friendships. I know her mind; she isn't even giving a thought to such matters. Besides, Mr. Gaunt comes as my friend, to talk business and politics."

"Therefore he stays two hours after you leave, and is forever taking your daughter out riding."

"Well, and if he does? Let them enjoy each other's friendship. Now, good night."

"Friendship!" persisted the lady, with the rising inflection. "Bushrod, I say no more. I no longer expect to be listened to with respect. I am through with warnings. I only tell you now, that you may remember it in your sorrow, and not say that I was blind, or that I shirked my duty as a mother and a—"

"There, there, Maria! No one ever accused you of that."

"As a mother and a Christian!" exclaimed Mrs. Wingate, refusing to be mollified. "Mr. Wingate, you are nourishing a viper in your bosom."

"All right, then, Maria," the senator said, settling his pillow. "Now, do go to sleep."

"Sleep!" cried Mrs. Wingate, thus abruptly shut off; but in time even her conscience succumbed before the demands of the mortal nature. Thenceforth her manner toward John never failed to be distant and chill.

February now arrived, with its news of the organization of the Confederate government at Montgomery, and the disaffection of Texas. Still Blodgett, and in a lesser degree Senator Wingate, deprecated all notion of a conflict. The feeling was still strong throughout the North that no overt act would be committed, and that the use of a little diplomacy would soon restore the good understanding between the sections.

But when the matter of investments was next discussed, John had a suggestion to make.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we are agreed that if there is to be a war we cannot risk investments. At present we cannot tell truth from rumor. I have thought the matter over, and I have made up my mind to start South at once, and satisfy myself how far the so-called Confederacy will carry its opposition."

"That's a good idee," said Blodgett, rubbing his chin. "Senator, what d' you say?"

Senator Wingate nodded. "I say yes — that is, if there is not too much danger in the undertaking."

"No, there is not. The situation is not so critical as all that. Then it is decided. I leave Monday morning."

On Sunday night, after a day of preparation, John made his way up Euclid Avenue. The windows of the Wingate house were blazing with light, and as he came up the path he heard the sound of a closing hymn, and then the clatter of many voices as the door swung open.

"Rufus, tell Miss Wingate that I would like to see her a moment," he said.

The gathering in the parlor had started to sing "Jesus, lover of my soul." He stood in the hall, listening, wondering from how many a home through the broad South that night the same prayer was rising.

“Hide me, oh, my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven' guide —
Oh, receive my soul at last.”

And on the last bars Marjory came.

“I have come to say good-by,” John said. “I wanted to see you before I went.”

“Father told me,” she answered, leading the way into the library. “Are you going to be gone long? There is no danger, is there? I—I must not stay long. Mother will be sending for me.”

She was unaccountably nervous, a sudden timidity showing in every action. John, puzzling over the change, watched her as she took her seat in the big arm-chair before the fire, wondering with a sinking dread why her glance had not once met his.

“Danger? No, not a bit,” he said at last, still watching the girl as she stared dreamily into the grate. “How long shall I be gone? Oh, six weeks — two months, perhaps.”

The same embarrassment that had taken possession of Marjory came over him. He went before the grate, holding out his hands, and stealing a look at the blond head buried in the deep of her palm. Then he drew up a chair, and dropped into it, saying:—

“Well, I won't keep you long. I must hurry off myself.”

“Forgive me. I have something on my mind,” she said, with a bright smile, recovering her poise. “I will try to be a better companion.”

At her manner all his fears dissolved, and rising again, he turned his back to the fire, and, looking down upon her, said:—

“How queer we two are! I begin to suspect that you know me better than any one, even than Jack, though he has lived with me more years than you have

known me months. Then I think I know you too, in the same way. That is because you have let me see yourself, isn't it?"

Her eyelids seemed to lift without her will. Her eyes shone into his, and she said very low, "Yes."

"Do you remember the night we met?" John continued, wondering at the look. "Why should you have known at once just how I felt — you, out of all the world, to have seen it? I have never understood."

"I — I don't know," Marjory forced herself to say. She was frightened at something within her. She rose hurriedly. "I — I must not stay any longer, mother will be calling me; and so —"

"So good-by." He sprang up, not understanding, hurt by her manner. "Good-by."

She held out her hand, bowed her head, and moved toward the door. Then all at once, the thought of his absence, of the risk he would run, of the one chance, though it were one in a thousand, that she might never see him again, — all this came over her, and drove out her timidity. She returned, holding out both hands, and said with ill-suppressed emotion: "Not good-by — that is too harsh a word for friends. Until we meet again."

He took her hand without an answer, while she, divining how he misunderstood her, added gently: "Don't think there is anything strange in me to-night. You are wrong. I am only — only not quite myself. You will be careful — won't you?"

"For your sake?" He looked into her face, and saw there the same look that had puzzled him a moment before. "For your sake?"

"For my sake. Now, go! oh, do, please go!" and dropping her head, her heart beating wildly, she almost compelled him from the room.

CHAPTER XXVII

Two months later, on the 13th of April, responding to a telegram announcing his return, Senator Wingate and Mr. Blodgett went to John's apartment. They found him just arrived, busily unpacking his valise, an operation which was being superintended from the lounge by Jack, who at their entrance discreetly made his bow and withdrew.

"Well!" Blodgett inquired sharply, when the greetings were over. "Come to the point."

"The worst."

"What! You believe then —" the senator began.

"I believe that before three months are over this country will be in the midst of a great civil war."

Blodgett rubbed his chin, the senator walked silently to the window and drummed upon the pane.

"We have heard enough here to leave no doubt of the approaching conflict," he said. "What we want to know is the extent of the opposition."

"South Carolina, sir, is but the leader. The crisis is with the whole South. I have visited almost every state. There can be no doubt that they will all fight at the first provocation."

"What of Virginia?"

"She will secede."

"How 'bout Maryland?" put in Blodgett.

"I don't know," said John. "I can't tell."

"Say there is war, John," Blodgett began, tapping the back of a chair as he spoke, "how long is it

goin' to last? You ain't goin' to tell me, John, that South Carolina, or the whole lot of them Southern states, can stand up against us for over three months? They ain't prepared, they ain't got the money."

"They are prepared, Mr. Blodgett. Companies have been drilling night and day for months. They have money, they have ammunition in plenty, and every day they are adding to their store. To-day they are better organized, better prepared for a conflict, than ourselves. You cannot overestimate the preparation in the South."

"He is right," said the senator, returning. "Blodgett, it's a long war we have to face, a hard and cruel one."

"Yes, but how long, John, how long?"

John shook his head.

"Eight months? Will it last over that? Come now."

"I should say, rather, three years—over two at least."

"Fully that," Senator Wingate concurred gloomily. "Blodgett, we can't afford to take risks; we must give up the railroad scheme."

"Let her go then." Blodgett moved off, clicking to himself as he always did when things displeased him. "Of course, of course, that's up. Devilish hard luck though. Well, well; if things are that serious, I must look for my securities." He sat down at the desk, and pulling out a note-book, busied himself with figures.

"Mr. Gaunt," the senator asked, moving over, "I hope you had no disagreeable experiences?"

"Well, nothing serious," John answered, "a little unpleasantness in Louisiana—I wouldn't care to repeat the trip."

"We have missed you at the house," the senator con-

tinued, examining curiously the odd assortment upon the walls. "You have quite a collection here. You will come around soon and tell us of your experiences?"

"Indeed I shall. How is Dick doing? I only had a word with Hazard, but he gave me a good report."

"I have to thank you for that. I do not forget such things easily. Dick is doing better than I dared to hope."

"Miss Marjory — she is well, I hope?"

"Yes! I would urge you to come in to-night, but I believe she is going to a dance."

"Oh, to Mrs. Blodgett's, at the Inn? Yes, I supposed so. I have a card here." He stood a moment thoughtfully. "I am going also. If she has no escort, I should like to take her. Do you think," he added with a smile, "I could make the invitation through you? It is late, and I could not see her before dinner."

"I shall be glad to have you take her," the senator answered simply, but his eyes searched his companion's face. "Dick was to have gone. Come, then, at half-past eight. I had put you down for a Benedick in such matters."

"Well," said John, consciously, "I'm beginning to see the error of my ways."

The senator shook hands with him, it seemed to John a little more cordially than usual, and with a nod to Blodgett, went out.

"Hello," cried the latter, "we didn't calculate on you. Refreshments may not go 'round, you know."

"Well, here's a promise to refrain," said John, laughing.

"Oh, come now, you ain't takin' me in earnest. Bless your soul! wait till you get there. When Sam

Blodgett gives a party, he don't play second fiddle to any one — put that down, John Gaunt."

"All right. Then the promise is withdrawn."

"It's at the Inn — drive out with your girls, you know," cried Blodgett, trying the easiest chair, and putting his feet up on the lounge. He pulled out a cigar, champed on the end of it, and continued: "Sit down, sit down, I've a lot to talk over with you. Well, John, that railroad scheme is up in the air high as a kite. Well, let her go! But John, listen. I've got a scheme worth two of that. You say there's goin' to be a war; you are sure of it. It's goin' to be long. We're not ready for it. John, just look at the chance for big money; railroads are nothing alongside of it. What does it mean? Horses! mules! hay! fodder! provisions! clothes! thousands of them, millions! It means — are ye listenin' to me? — it means fortunes to them that sees what's comin'. What do you say to that?" and he went on to elaborate his scheme, punctuating it with handclaps, after the Blodgett manner.

"You don't mean, Blodgett," said John, who had listened with growing surprise, "you don't mean you'd make money out of the needs of your country?"

"Why not, why not? Some one's got to sell, why not you and me?"

"You have said there was 'big money' in it. That means only one thing."

"John, you're squeamish. You don't know business. Think it over."

"Thank you, no," John cut in, coldly. "I can't go with you there."

"As you please," said Blodgett, throwing up his hands. "Business is business. If I do contract for the government, I'll give 'em honest goods and full

measure, which is more than most will do. Well, you have spoken your mind — let her go! I wanted to take you in with me, and lift you up. I would have made you, John. Well, let her go. Don't let's say anything more about it."

He thrust his hands deep in his pockets, and moved clumsily about the room, whistling to himself.

"I can't make you out, John, hanged if I can!" The burly figure returned, the sinking little eyes half closed in quizzical scrutiny. "There ain't another man in Cleveland I know would throw over such a chance — not a man. You're different — yes, you are." He closed both eyes reflectively, and then suddenly opening them, exclaimed, "Well, here, give me your hand — there! I like you for it."

"But you," John answered, a little softened, "your mind is made up?"

"Yes, I'm different, too. John," he began, resuming his chair with an air of importance, "see here, now, you've never understood me. I like you. I've liked you from the day you came and defied me in my office. I'd like to boost you along. You mistrust me. You think because I've had hard dealings and shady methods with some men, that I might do the same with you. You're wrong, you're wrong. That's where you don't know men."

He finished, stretched out more luxuriously, threw one leg over the other, hooked his thumbs in his armpits, and began to fill the room with smoke.

"John!"

"Yes."

"Say! You and Phemie strike it off pretty well, don't you?"

"I trust we do," said John, wondering what was coming.

"Good-lookin' girls, ain't they — stylish and eligant?"

"They are."

"Addie's mighty smart, too — bright as a dollar."

"Miss Adelaide is."

"And while you're talkin', Minnie certainly can touch up that pianner."

"I have always thought so."

"Well, John," said Blodgett, coming suddenly to the point, "why don't you marry one of them? They'll all have you, I know, and the one who gets you — well, I'll look after her," he added, with a slap to his pocket.

John was so entirely taken off his guard, that his face went blank, and he barely restrained a smile.

"Really, I have never thought — I reckon I'm cut out for a bachelor."

"Well, if you change your mind at any time," said Blodgett, looking reflectively at the end of his cigar. "You won't do much better, now — with what I'll give 'em, John. I'd like to have you as a son-in-law — yes, I would, and the girls have just been wild over you."

John, not knowing whether to be amused or overwhelmed by this family offer, rallied sufficiently to say with firmness: "No, Blodgett, to be as frank with you, I shall never think of it. My mind is made up."

Blodgett threw away the stump of his cigar. "So be it. I was pretty sure what you'd say, but I promised my Maggie, and — there, there! Now the cat's out of the bag. Don't you tell her, John."

John broke into a laugh, and promised.

"She was set on havin' you," said Blodgett, his eyes beginning to twinkle. "You know the way of a woman when her mind's made up." He stopped and began the next cigar. "Go on with your unpackin', John, I'll sit and watch a bit — I've nothin' to do."

John, taking him at his word, passed to and fro, sorting out the contents of his valise, throwing a curious glance at the big form puffing meditatively on the fat cigar.

"John, between you and me," resumed Blodgett, stirring out of his reverie, as his host came and took his seat by the fire, "between you and me, I'm glad you said what you did. Lord, John, what's the use of hidin' from you how things stand; they've not been good daughters to me. They only care for what I give 'em. Little Florrie is the only one of 'em all who's got any affection for her old father. I'm glad you said what you did.

"Money ain't everything in life, John," he went on, rising. "Don't you make that mistake. I've had it all, but I ain't been happy. My children don't care for me. They're always pickin' on me in public, always criticisin' me, laughin' at me behind my back—Sam the worst of all. It ain't right. They shouldn't be ashamed of me because I've had to work to give 'em the learnin' I wasn't able to get myself. It ain't right, I say. I sometimes wish I hadn't made all that money. I think I'd 'a' been happier in the old saloon as I was twenty year ago. I go there now when I'm down in the mouth; it cheers me up. Ah, well, ah, well!" He cleared his throat vigorously as John went over and laid his hand on his shoulder. "You've a good heart, John. You'd better wait for little Florrie. I know what it is; you're a gentleman, a real one, and that's somethin' money can't buy. That's the whole trouble with my children, they want to be ladies and gentlemen, but they're not, and they can't! Here, here, I'm talkin' you to death. What's the time? What! I'm off this moment—good-by, good-by. You're the

right sort, John, I'll keep my eye on you. Good-by."

John saw the burly figure go lumbering down the steps, and then, returning to the fire, threw himself into the vacant chair, and a feeling of tenderness came over him, as he thought of this unsuspected side in the shrewd man of business. Then the humor of it broke out above the pity, and he put his head back and burst into such a boisterous fit of laughter that the dogs came tumbling up to learn the cause.

"Well, that was a wholesale proposal! Won't Jack collapse when he hears of it! Rags, you old bundle of curiosity, what do you say to that? That's why he was sounding me about the girls. Poor old fellow! I never suspected this in him."

John started up a little guiltily at Jack's entrance, forgetting to make any mention of the extraordinary events of the afternoon.

"What the deuce is the matter with you, old man?" cried Jack, when they were in the room again, after supper. "What are you pulling at your watch for? Come down out of the clouds. I swear you haven't heard a word I've said."

"What! Why, yes, I have. Here, Jack, you're a judge, what do you say to this?"

"A new coat!" Jack emitted a long whistle as John produced the garment from his room. "The very latest style. My, what a fop you're getting, John!"

"Nonsense; the other was in tatters."

"Well, good for you, old fellow!" said Jack, drawing back with a sudden fall of seriousness; "I like to see you at your best. You'll stand with the best of them to-night, and it's right you should."

"Hello!" John cried, breaking into a laugh at this

sudden turn in Jack. "Now, what is the meaning of that?"

"Don't know. There, stand up. Yes, you'll do. I like to see you blossoming out, Johnny Glum—you should have done so long ago."

"Are you going, Jack?" John said, still wondering.

"I? Perhaps—yes, a little later—I don't know."

John finished dressing, pulled out his watch, and came and sat down decisively. "Jack, you told me once—long ago—that you were going to tell me something about yourself. You never have. Can't you tell me now? I know that's what is on your mind."

Jack, hugging his knee, started back, looked down a moment curiously, and then answered, with a peculiar smile, "You think, then, it's that I've been worrying over?"

"Yes, frankly; I've seen it all the evening. Come, Jack, let me help you, as you've stood by me."

The little fellow drew a heavy breath, rose, and moved to the window, John watching, shook his head twice slowly, and said, without turning, "Well, I can't now; I've changed my mind."

"Why, Jack?"

"There is a reason—I can't tell you what now, but I will soon."

He came back and looked into John's face wistfully, and said, "Perhaps to-morrow, but—but soon, anyhow."

CHAPTER XXVIII

“WHAT *has* come over Jack?” thought John, as he hurried down the dim stairs and out into the street. “It’s that something back in his past; but why should he act so queerly about telling me? I don’t understand him.”

The buggy was waiting indistinct at the curb. He sprang in, took the reins, and drove off, all thought of Jack vanishing from his mind. He resorted again to his watch—still a quarter of an hour early! So he turned up a round-about way, the horse falling into an easy jog, and sank back into the depths of the buggy, staring down where the running flare of the side lamps lighted up the black road underneath. Men and their handicraft, the glare and the noise of the city, the black streets and the blazing slits in the curtained windows, once to him so alert with the pathos and the tragedy and the thirst of human life, were now of the realm of the unreal, whirling by him like a fantastic panorama. Out of a hundred faces he saw one, amid the jumble of sounds he heard one voice. He did not think what he should say, he did not plan what he should do. He knew all he cared to know: he was going to meet her.

When the door clicked he looked up eagerly. The senator came out and gave him his greetings, followed by Mrs. Wingate in silent brown. He felt they were studying him, the mother persistently, the senator gravely, with a touch of sadness. John, instantly grown

conscious, began to answer questions at random, to laugh and to talk without quite knowing what he said, until suddenly a footstep sounding in the hall he stopped on a word, looking up so eagerly, as the door creaked and swung, that he did not see Mrs. Wingate in the shadow pluck at her husband's sleeve.

It was Marjory at last — Marjory, under the glow of the flaming lamp, drawing her wraps across her bare throat, her cheeks glowing, her eyes hesitating, forget-me-nots in her hair, and a glimpse of a soft blue gown underneath the scarfs.

She gave him her hand and away they rolled in the carriage, down the echoing street, without a word to say to each other.

“Straight ahead — isn't it?” said John at last, irrelevantly.

“Straight ahead, yes,” answered Marjory, and then she forced herself to break the silence. She hurried on to talk of a dozen different topics, lightly, hastily, feverishly, skipping from one to another, at times appealing for his answer. They had now left the city, and were speeding out through the darkling country. He drew in the reins and checked their speed, saying apologetically, “I have been away so long, and we shall be there so soon.”

At the first sound of his voice, Marjory had sunk back in the seat, trembling, scarcely moving. If it is hard to love and ask, what is it to love and wait?

Carriages bound for the dance began to roll past them, leaving in their trail snatches of laughter and song.

“I'm afraid I am not made for a good time,” said John, impulsively. “I never can fall into other people's moods. Now these people — their gayety seems to me so feverish. Some people seem to live in the world only for the

good times they can get out of it. Well, perhaps it is my fault — or my misfortune. And just now I am even less in the mood than usual. I have just been through the South; I know what's coming. There is something ominous in all this." He paused awhile, drew a long breath, and continued: "Well, now, I'm not going to think of that, I am too happy to be here with you again. It seems as though I hadn't been a day away from you; as though it were only yesterday I said good-by — well, so it is."

The crowd grew thicker. They saw in the distance the twinkle of lights.

"What a night!" he said. "It is just like the one in my boyhood I told you of." He drew his whip along the line of the sky. The night was brilliant. On the west a sheath of clouds spread out on the horizon like mountains of mystery. "Do you know, I used to envy the stars. They had seen so many races of men blotted out: they would see so many more. They would go on and on forever, cold and eternal, when I, the child that looked at them, would be dust. I used to envy them — I don't now. They live — but they can never know what the life of a man can bring," he added softly, as though to himself. They were within the strains of music — almost there. The lamp at the gate shone in their faces as he laid his hand on her arm, and said: —

"Do you understand?"

She could only answer him with the soul in her look of comprehension. You may look into a hundred eyes that love you, but through only two may you see beyond.

Then upon their ears fell the babble of voices. The glare of lights enveloped them. They were at the stoop, looking up into a throng of promenaders. Some one

handed Marjory down, and she ran in with bowed head as John drove on to the stables.

He walked up and down, picking his way among the crowded vehicles, and at last back to the Inn, glancing curiously at the moving crowd within. Two or three of his acquaintances came up and shook hands with him, and began anxious inquiries, for the purpose of his visit to the South was known. One by one they fell off, and he was left alone. He moved over and stood in a knot of men about the door, looking in at the polka, his serious face high above the rest, scanning the glittering company. It was a strange antithesis: within, the light and sparkle of the dance, laughter and careless merriment; outside, shadow and the ominous talk of war. Here, he thought, are the men that before long are to lie on Southern battlefields, and here the women, already recoiling at the summons of the trumpet. He wondered if these careless young fellows were the stuff out of which the nation's heroes must be fashioned. He lived to learn that Fate, not so choice as Love, takes her favorites where she finds them. As he gazed, with prophetic face, the words came to his lips, —

“There was a sound of revelry by night,”

and half aloud he repeated them.

All at once he caught the flash of a blue gown, and Marjory was on the floor, surrounded by a dozen partners. He screened himself, moving a little farther into the shadow, and watching each movement. The violins sounded the gay summons to the quadrille. For a moment the floor was clouded with couples crowding to their places; when at last John turned, the gleam of the turquoise gown showed directly in front. He saw nothing else. The group about the door thickened, as

those not then dancing came crowding up to watch where Marjory, like the spirit of motion, led the quadrille. She courtesied, and her whole body swayed in rhythm. She advanced, and the fluttering fan became a part of the movement. Her face seemed inspired, her foot bewitched. Her eyes wandered from window to window, until suddenly resting on the group in the dim doorway, they went down to the floor, and searched no more.

“How graceful she is,” he said to himself softly, “so fair, so pure. She fills the whole room with her beauty.” He heard the men about him exclaiming at her charm, and suddenly he could look in at her no longer. He turned on his heel and went down the steps. It had come over him at last—the might of his love, the force of the longing in his soul, and with it the thought of what it would mean to him if it were not to be. After all, what did he know of a maiden’s heart! Oh, what a fire was running in his brain as he paced along the paths, in and out of the scattered and curious couples. He came back again, and again, as a moth to the light, and at last stopped and searched among the company. She was standing under a chandelier, scanning the room anxiously. He saw her linger several minutes in hesitation before she gave her hand to a waiting partner.

The schottische ended, he threaded his way to where she was standing. She had not seen his coming. At his call she turned quickly, with an inquiry in her face, and slipping her hand through his proffered arm, said: “Take me outside, won’t you? Why didn’t you come sooner? I have been waiting for you.”

“I am a stranger in a strange land here,” said John, a little sadly. “As I told you, I do not dance.”

“That isn’t the only thing, even at a ball.”

They were silent, moving about the paths without a word to say to each other.

“When shall you wish to go?”

Marjory looked about. People were already beginning to leave.

“After the next, then.”

She signalled Dick, who was passing near, and danced that waltz with him. Around and around they whirled, the swimming lights, the shifting floor, the stars peeping through the door, revolving past her—the music beating against her temples. But through all the maze she saw one figure, tall, looming above the fringe of on-lookers, one face serious and intent, whose eyes never for a moment left her figure. She nodded her head, she hummed the music, she closed her eyes at times, urging Dick constantly faster; she wanted no one to see what was in her soul; his showed too plainly in his face.

The waltz ended, and before she knew it she was in the buggy, at his side, speeding back into the friendly night. The dark fields and blacker woods rose up and shut out all the world. Only they two were there, under the emblazoned scroll of the night.

“Marjory.”

At her name she began to tremble. She started to talk, unconscious of what she was saying. Her breast was rising and falling, and everything swam before her.

“Marjory,” he repeated gently, and his hand slipped down and took hers. Her other she put suddenly to her heart. “Marjory, may I tell you?”

On and on they went, minute after minute in silence, her hand throbbing in his. He stopped, tiptoe on the great threshold, listening for the permission that she, in the panic of her waiting, could not utter.

"Listen, Marjory," he said at last, slowly. "I don't know what I am saying, I don't know what I'm doing — only — only, I love you, Marjory; I love you; I *must* tell you." He stopped, turned, waited, and whispered, "And you, Marjory — and you?"

A lifetime hung on the balance of the moment. She was reeling at his side, faint, dizzy, suffocating, hearing as in a dream the ring of his question.

"Oh — oh, John," she cried, putting her hand to her throat. "Oh, of course I do — you know it; you must know it!"

For a moment he could not stir, the seconds of her hesitation had filled him with thoughts so terrible. Then he saw how she trembled, and he put out his arm and drew her to him, crying, "Marjory! Marjory!" as he bent over her.

"Oh, John, oh, my John," she whispered. She lifted her face to his: "Don't — don't try to tell me. You can't. I understand."

Her head rested upon his shoulder, she shut her eyes. Nothing could take him from her now — she was his, his alone. Once he bent down as though to speak, but she said again, laying a finger gently across his lips, "Hush — hush," and he who at first had been awed at the wonder of his own love, waited dumb before the might of the emotion in her.

So he sat, drawing her closer and closer to his side, gazing up into the vast stretch of the glowing sky, seeing there, feeling there, things beyond the reach of words, in the old, old way, as lovers have searched that eternal and inscrutable book, from century to century, since the world began, and as they will continue to do until man and woman shall be no more.

CHAPTER XXIX

WHEN they turned into the driveway a light was still showing in the window of the library.

"Shall it be now?" said John. "Shall I tell him now?"

"Not now — not just now — and not to-morrow." As she spoke, her fingers closed entreatingly over his hand. "Just for one day let us keep it all to ourselves. All the rest of our life will belong to the world — let to-morrow be ours. Don't you understand?"

He lifted her fingers to his lips and kissed them. She turned suddenly, put her hands on his shoulder, and cried impulsively: —

"John, John, do you know what this means — can you know? It means that I am yours, and you are mine, through sorrow and pain and sickness, through death and forever after."

"And forever after," he repeated slowly. "I cannot see your eyes, Marjory, but I know what they are telling mine. I cannot tell you what is in my soul. It is all so strange; I have never stopped to reason. Something divine must have swept us together. To-morrow shall be ours. Good night, beloved."

The lamp flashed out above them and Marjory sprang down. One reluctant look, a wave of a scarf, and she was gone.

John drove home at top speed, threw the reins to a yawning stable-boy, and hurried to his room. He undressed quickly in the dark, slipped under the covers,

and lay quietly, as the dogs, who had been disturbed at his entrance, returned to their beds. From the farther room he heard Jack breathing heavily, in broken slumber.

He was face to face with his own soul. The great love that had come to him, had come, not seeking to be proclaimed, but stealing gently into every sense. He had been content to follow unquestioningly. Now in the silent darkness he began to think.

Before, it had seemed to him as though he had known Marjory all his life. Now, in all the glow of the sudden revelation of her soul, he knew her not at all, and with that perplexing thought came to him the seriousness of the step.

“I am no longer free — no longer alone in this world,” he thought; “a human soul is mine, whose happiness, whose very life, I hold in my hand, — whom I must protect against all the world. How much I must do to be worthy of her!” Suddenly he felt all the weight of responsibility. It was the irrevocable step; her life was in the cast as well as his. Instinctively he recoiled before the final answer, while doubts and memories, dark suggestions and uneasy thoughts, rushed through his mind and tortured it.

He drew his hand across his forehead, and turned restlessly in his bed. The recollection of his childhood, the shadow of his father, that strong ominous dread of death that had never really left him, rose again before his eyes. How often he had recoiled at the thought of eternity. To go on and on and on forever, to stretch forever through space and find no end, had been to him a conception too terrible and too incomprehensible. Rather had he longed to die, to cease with the last breath, to pass into nothingness, no thought, no sense, no sound — ending this, to end all.

Now he felt the dawning of life's mystery, and apprehended the wonder of humanity, ignorant, debased, and blind, struggling, through love, for ages toward a destiny of glory.

Slowly, lying there in the quiet watches of the night, the burdens of years slipped and fell away. All the distrust of men, the bitterness toward women, the cynicism and the doubts took flight, like a rout of evil spirits.

"And I am yours, and you are mine," out of the darkness he seemed to hear a voice, "through sorrow and pain and sickness, through death and forever after."

He folded his hands across his breast and called softly upon her name, and the answer to the cry of his soul was peace.

The first grays of the morning had already streaked the sky. The world was beginning to pale with the dawn. He drew his bed down to the window, and turning on his elbow, watched the east flush with the heralds of the sun.

"This is the end of all the old black life," he thought, straining his eyes toward the coming of the day. "It has gone out with the night. This is the dawn of the new. At last — at last!"

When Marjory and her father had passed down the aisle and reached their pew in old Trinity on that Sunday morning, they became aware that something unusual was taking place. There was a stir, almost a whisper, moving through the church. At the sound of every footstep, curious faces were turning from every quarter toward the entrance, and then back uneasily toward the still vacant chancel. Marjory felt a touch on her sleeve, and, turning to her father, saw him holding out his

watch, silently, with an expression of wonder. She glanced down, it was already five minutes beyond the time of service. As she leaned over to whisper a question, there came a sudden rustling over the pews, then an audible murmur, and the next moment her father's hand closed over her wrist, and she heard him cry under his breath, "Look — look !"

The door of the vestry opened, and the tall, thin figure of Doctor Starkey crossed the chancel, passed with firm tread beyond the railing, down the steps, and came to a stand before the pews. Another murmur ran through the church, for he stood, without his robes, one hand raised, waiting.

The murmur faded away, and a quick hush succeeded as the clergyman began that appeal for the Union that no one there present ever forgot.

Sumter had fallen! Marjory glanced at her father askance, hardly daring to break the silence with the rustle of a motion. He was staring ahead, his cheeks reddening with the fire of the patriot's address. The tears were in his eyes as he turned and caught her hand.

"It has come, Marjory, it has come !"

She glanced down the aisle, her eyes, too, half blinded with tears. Old men were leaning forward, trembling with emotion, straining their eyes at the face of the preacher, consternation, horror, anger, or resolve fluttering on their faces as the earnest and indignant words fell upon the congregation, overwhelming every heart with the torrent of their eloquence.

The address ended, Doctor Starkey withdrew, and clothed in the robes of office, returned and began the service. Marjory listened as in a dream, moving mechanically, until at last she found herself on her knees.

Then all at once the tears began to flow and she clutched her father's sleeve. How many a wife and sweetheart throughout the North, yes, and throughout the South, felt the sudden wound of that opening gun on Sumter!

When she rose she tried to read the hymn, but the print danced before her, and she turned her face away that her father might not see it. Gradually, womanlike, before the crowd, her control came back to her, and she grew calm.

They were home at last, without a word said to each other. She went into the parlor and sat a long while by the window, trying to think. Then she shook her head bravely, and said to herself as she rose: "I must be brave. I must not let him see. I will not spoil the beauty of his day." Minute after minute crept by as she walked the floor back and forth before the open windows. All through the lagging, weary hour of the dinner she sat counting the time. Even before she dared to hope, she heard the roll of wheels on the driveway. There was no need for her to look, she knew who was coming. She sprang up and ran out of the parlor, for she knew if they once saw her eyes there would be no secret to keep.

As she came through the door, her cheeks flushed, her eyes shining their welcome, Louisa and Bushrod, thinking it was Dick, came piling after, clinging to her skirts.

She did not dare to look at him, and answering his greeting simply with a gesture, ran back into the house, to make ready for the drive.

"What a strange coincidence," said John, as they drove past the dazed and angry populace about the bulletin. "How strange that this should come just at this time."

"Oh, hurry, hurry!" she cried, shuddering as she spoke; "I want to forget it all."

The words were no sooner said than she repented of them. So, rallying a little later, when they had left the city behind, she took the reins with a smile, and said archly: "See what a tyrant I am. We are going to forget all about everything else, and I am going to drive you into the country away from every one. Oh, John, how much I have to tell you!"

A strange shyness came over them both.

"What is it?" said Marjory at last, trying to fathom his look.

"Are you really there, little one? I look at you and look at you, and I cannot understand. I thought I knew you last night, but I don't—no, not at all. You are new and wonderful and strange."

"I will teach you, John, all there is to learn."

"You must, Marjory, or I shall never know you." He looked down at her with an apologetic smile, and then added gravely: "I, too, am different. I think all that past—that old shadow—has gone forever now. You have revealed me to myself. Oh, Marjory, all night long, in the darkness, I lay awake thinking such wonderful thoughts, and at last I saw the glorious dawn come in,—my dawn, the dawn of a happier life."

"Were you awake all night? Oh, John!" She took his hand, and her forehead drew slightly. "I know what it must have been to you. I fell asleep almost—yes, right away. I felt so safe, so sure in your keeping, John. It was the end, don't you see, of all the longing and the restlessness." They had left the carriage, and were out now among the fields. "There, I must hold your hand in mine, sir, all the while, even while I pick the flowers. I cannot let you go one minute—

not one." She glanced up at him with roguish happy eyes. Then she stooped, gathered a handful of violets, and held them to her hair. "Do you like them? Blue is my color—did you know that?"

"Yes, I knew that."

"Oh, you did? Now farther on—I never can bear to pick all the flowers in one spot. I like to leave a few." All at once she stopped, dropped his hands, and confronting him, cried:—

"Oh, John, John, how little we know of each other yet! There is so much here for you to learn, day by day. But I will help you—yes, John, and you will me."

She made him sit down while she remained at his feet, standing, weaving her violets into a garland. She placed them in her hair, and glanced down at him, laughing over her shoulder.

"Does it please you?"

He nodded, his eyes following every graceful girlish motion, seeing dimly into the soul that was his. She dropped to her knees, crying:—

"Oh, John, no one shall know me as you. I am such a happy, mischievous little spirit at the bottom. I love the hills and the fields, and the breezes in the tops of the trees, and the great stretch of the water, and a hundred thousand colors in the sky and on the earth. And no one, John, has ever known this. To think that I have found you—that I can pour out my soul, and know that you will understand. I have been a woman so long, I want to be a girl, just for a little while."

She suffered him to draw her to his side, and nestled on his shoulder.

"Marjory, what a rare nature you are. What did you see in me?"

“A man who has weathered a thousand trials and temptations, and kept unsoiled his divine nature; who is humble and noble and true. No, John, don't say that—”

They were quiet for a while, each understanding the other's silent mood.

“Tell me about yourself,” Marjory said at length; “were you ever—ever wild? Oh, it isn't that I care, John—not that. Oh, don't you know?—it's the past, the long years you've been away from me, I am so jealous of. I want to know all.”

“I have been wild, Marjory,” he said slowly; “very wild for a while. I gambled and drank a good deal, too much at times, I am heartily sorry to say. That was before I came to Cleveland. It was a very black time.”

“Don't I understand? How small that is.” She stopped, turned her head away, crushed the violets in her fingers, and said impulsively, “Oh, John, you can tell me anything; don't fear. Even our faults are now sacred to us.”

“You mean—” he checked himself, then added, — “thank God, there never was any woman in my life.”

Her head fell again on his shoulder, and she said very low: “Thank God. I could have forgiven you—I would have—without a thought, if it had been different. But now, oh, John, you cannot understand what—”

“What, Marjory?”

She shook her head; that she could not tell him.

That evening, as Jack was idling in the window, looking out, John went to his side and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

“Jack, I want you to be the first to know my happiness. I am going to marry Marjory Wingate.”

The other wrung his hand silently, with not even a start.

"I knew—I knew. God bless you, John! God bless you!" he said, after a moment.

They stood looking out into the street together, in the shadowy room.

"There is no one like her in all the world, Jack."

"I know it, John."

"I tell you, Jack, it is a wonderful feeling. Please God, I will be worthy of her."

"You are—you are, John. I know you as no one else can—not even she—and I say you are."

"Thank you, Jack." A hand went out and found another. "I can't tell you what I feel, Jack. I am going over now to tell her father. I will see you when I come back." He drew his arm a little tighter about the little fellow's shoulders. "Dear old Johnnie Gay, what would I have done without you?" he said, and left.

The little figure stood immovable at the window, staring blindly at a light twinkling in a window across the way.

"The friend that sticketh closer than a brother," he said slowly, aloud; "eight long years,—oh, Jack, Jack!"

He moved into his bedroom, closed the door slowly behind him, and then turned the key.

Comes there ever a great joy in this world but some one must taste the sorrow of it?

CHAPTER XXX

THE day following, President Lincoln's call to arms was telegraphed throughout the North. The country that on Sunday had seemed to toss in a gigantic nightmare now rose in the majesty of its anger.

The national flag was flung to the breeze from store and church, from private dwelling and public office. Every square became a drilling-ground. Every occupation furnished recruits to the ranks. Companies sprang up in an hour, regiments in a day. The call had been made in uncertainty and suspense; the response was electric.

On the third day after the President's proclamation, Senator Wingate called John into the library. He had seen what was brewing in his mind, and his heart went out to him in the struggle — to him and to Marjory.

"John, I want a talk with you. You are thinking of enlisting, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"You have not enlisted, have you?"

"I am going to, this morning."

"This morning?"

"Yes." He took up a paper-cutter from the desk, bending it in his fingers until it threatened to snap. "I can only see it as my duty. One of my men on the wharves came to me this morning and told me he was going. He leaves a wife and children. I am not the only one who leaves all. I think we should be the leaders at such a time. Jack is going."

“You have said nothing to Marjory?”

John shook his head. “No, not yet.”

The senator, looking very grave, took his seat at the desk, drew a slip of paper from his pocket, and, twisting it in his fingers, began slowly :—

“John, you are right. We must be the leaders in such a crisis. I have already given my son Dick. He joins to-day. And I say to you, no matter what the heartache, serve your country. I am too old to stand a campaign; but I shall work night and day to help prepare the army—and that brings me to what I want to ask you.” He ceased turning the paper in his hand, and his eyes rested steadily on the other’s face.

“John, this will be a terrible war—a long and costly war. Others may scoff. I am now undeceived. The government will need soldiers in the field, but, more than that, it must have men to protect it from thieves and scoundrels at home, to see that its armies are properly clothed and fed and armed. Think of the millions to be spent, carefully and honestly.”

He picked up the slip and said abruptly: “John, I want you to go into the commissariat. You will win no glory, your work is not likely ever to be known, but we must have honest and able men there or the war will fail. I have been appointed on the military board, and I want you to begin serving under me. I have a commission here in my hands. If you accept, you will at once take charge of the forwarding of stores and of the making of contracts here in Cleveland. You will, in this, be acting for the state. If you accept, I will write immediately to Bates, my personal friend, for a position in the national service. What do you say?”

John reached out and took the commission, and held

it in his fingers without glancing at it, hesitating, troubled.

"Senator," he began deliberately, wrinkling his brow, "you have not done this to keep me out of danger?"

"I have done it, John, because I believe you are needed there; because there are high places in the commissariat that need your executive ability and your honesty."

John, not noticing that the direct question had been evaded, opened the commission, ran through it, raised his head, and said thoughtfully:—

"I must think of Marjory, sir. I will see her and give you my answer."

He left the senator waiting in the high-backed chair, and went undecidedly into the hall, calling, —

"Marjory?"

"Here I am, John," a voice answered from the parlor, and Marjory, looking very quiet, came through the curtains. He handed her the paper without a word, following her into the parlor. She sat down by the window and read it through, and laid it on her lap and looked out into the garden.

"And after that?"

"After that the national commissariat."

He went the length of the room, and then returned and took her hand.

"This is the least I can do. I thought I ought to enlist, but your father thinks I can do more good here. We're not the only ones who love in all this wide country, Marjory."

She nodded, put his hand from her, rose and stood at the window, leaning against her arm.

"Promise me one thing, John," she said, turning and facing him.

"I promise."

She faltered, and then said, —

"That you will take me with you."

"Oh, Marjory!" was all that he could answer, but he bent over and tried to raise her head.

"Don't, don't!" she cried, covering her face with her hands.

"Why, Marjory! what have I done?"

"Oh, John, you know so little of women, you can't understand how hard it was for me to say that. Don't think badly of me for asking it."

"Marjory!"

"I know."

"I may be called in two weeks."

"Whenever you will," she answered, and she suffered him to look into her eyes.

In the afternoon he went down and took charge of his new office. Within a few hours after his appointment was made public, he was besieged by a throng of bidders. Their greed astounded him. He saw at once that if he dealt with them the state would be outrageously mulcted. So, selecting a number of trusted men, he commissioned them as his agents to scour the country. Foreseeing the duration of the struggle, after consultation with Senator Wingate, he began the purchase of large stores on every side, not only to supply the state quota, but at a later date to come to the rescue of the national service.

On the afternoon of the third day, as he was sitting in his office, busied with telegrams to contracting firms, he heard a well-known voice crying from the hall: "Young man, I guess you'll let me pass, or answer to Mr. Gaunt for your impudence. I am Sam Blodgett,

d'ye hear? Sam Blodgett;" and a moment later a familiar face, framing a fat cigar, loomed up from behind the door.

John rose with a smile and suffered his hand to be pumped lustily the requisite number of times, while the clerk, seeing that everything was peaceful, retired.

"John, I hear great reports of you. You're doin' well."

Blodgett, red and puffing, sank down into a seat and flapped out his bandanna. "Curse those stairs! Why don't you have an office on the ground floor? Stairs'll be the death o' me yet. The contractors swear you're a regular Jew to beat them down."

"What do they call themselves?"

"What? oh — ah, yes, ahem!" Blodgett tucked in the handkerchief around his collar, and his snapping little eyes followed John curiously.

John finished a telegram, called a boy, pigeon-holed a number of papers, and then tilted back languidly in his chair.

"Well, Blodgett, what is it? I see you have something to sell me."

Blodgett lifted his eyebrow and said cautiously, "I didn't say so."

"No, but you look it."

The other laughed. "Well, yes, I have."

"What is it?"

"Fifty thousand round of ammunition."

John drew out a pad and jotted down the figures.

"What firm?"

Blodgett closed his eyes and smiled contentedly.

"Very well, that ends it. I must know with whom I'm dealing."

"Smithson Brothers, then."

"The firm is good. What else have you?"

"Twenty thousand rations and a hundred head of mules."

"And the price on the whole?"

Blodgett mentioned a sum.

"You will have to come down two thousand." John pushed back his chair decisively, and rose.

"Now look here, John, I've asked you a square figure. It's high, and I'll make a pile on it, I don't deny it. But it ain't what I can get on it at Indianapolis or Chicago, and you know it. I give you the chance, because I know your huntin' high and low for just them things. See here, John, hang it all, you don't seem to see I'm doin' you a favor."

"Blodgett, I want you to know two things: first, you are not going out of this room without selling me those options; second, you've got to sell them at my figures. At that you make a tremendous profit."

"I'm not sellin' to you; the state can pay."

"You are selling them to me. My honor and my ability are at stake. I need them for the regiments of this state—for the brigade your son and my friends are marching in; and I will not take them at your figure."

"See here, I've come down once, I told you," he said, flicking his cigar coolly, "I won't again; that's flat!"

John knew his customer too well to waste further words. He hesitated a moment, and then with a sudden impulse he walked to the desk and drew a check for the amount.

"There, I take those options. Here is your check. Make me out a receipt in full."

He rang the bell, wrote out three telegrams, and when the receipt was signed, passed them over to Blodgett.

"Look these over. Order to Smithson Brothers to

forward ammunition on instant of receiving ; also orders for rations and mules. I have signed your name. Will you direct them to your confidential agents? So — thank you."

The boy took the telegrams and departed. Blodgett looked the check over, scratched his head, clucked loudly to himself, thrust his hand in his pocket, and glanced over curiously at John, who was still busied with his check-book.

"What you doin' there?"

"Do you want to know?"

"Oh, I'm curious."

"Well, making out a check."

"To who?"

"To the — state — of — Ohio (there!) for two — thousand — dollars."

Blodgett rose and grasped him by the shoulders. "Look here, John, what do you mean by that?"

"This: as you won't sell those options to the army — the army your son is going to fight in — at fair figures, why, the difference goes out of my pocket. For milk the government I will not see any man do!"

"John, you didn't dare tell me that before!"

It was John's turn to flick his cigar.

"You waited till you got them options in your hand."

"I did."

"And you made me send them orders; for you knowed, as sure as your mortal' soul, I wouldn't sell you on no such terms. You've beat me, John, but I don't consider you've done it square. John, on your honor, now, are you in earnest?"

"I am."

"And you'll pay that out of your own pocket?"

"I will."

“Hell, then!” He picked up the check which John had just blotted, held it a moment beside the other, then shutting his teeth with a snap, tore both in two, muttering, “Now make it over, and make it right!”

That night when John returned to his room he said to Jack: “The orders are out. The regiments go to-morrow. I feel as though I ought to be going with you.”

“To-morrow?” Jack drew a long breath. “I’m glad it’s come.” He glanced about the room, now barren of pets. “I’ve disposed of the menagerie to-day, all but Rags, who is going as the daughter of the regiment, aren’t you, Rags, you old tramp? Everything is packed, and Jack is ready, and he’ll march away at the break of day, eh, John? I’m glad I’ve no women to weep for me.”

“Don’t, Jack!” John broke in solemnly.

“The boys think it’s only a big parade—so why shouldn’t I?”

John shook his head.

“Come, John, no more nonsense!” said Jack, abruptly. “I want to talk with you,” and they sat down, conversing far into the night, in the old frank way. Once started, he unbosomed himself as he had not done in years, spoke gravely of the risks ahead of him, and said:—

“I tell you, John, it makes a man feel very solemn when he realizes, that some day, in a second, he may stand in the presence of his Maker. I hope much will be forgiven me, and I hope if it shall be my lot to die, that I will go out like a brave man.” He stopped, looked for a moment into the sad face of his friend, and added with hesitation “I told you I would give you my reason some day for withholding my confidence. It hurt you, didn’t it?”

John nodded.

“Well, I could have told you, John; I wouldn’t mind your knowing.” Then he shook his head and said quickly, “But what’s yours now is another’s.”

“Jack!”

“No, no! you will tell her everything. If you don’t, you ought to. Don’t withhold anything from her. It is the only way, the true way, and that’s why—don’t you see?” he ended incoherently, with the peculiar smile that always struggled to his face when he was trying to break through a cloud.

John looked at him sadly. It brought a pang to his heart to think that his own happiness had raised a barrier between them. Never before had he felt so keenly the beauty of their friendship.

“Come, old fellow, off to bed, it’s nearly two,” he said at length, starting up. “You must get some sleep for to-morrow.”

A little later, when Jack was under covers, John came and playfully tucked him in, crying: “There, little Johnnie Gay, off to sleep with you, you rascal. I am going to give you some money to carry for me, in case Dick should ever need anything—or you.” Then, as he closed the door, he came face to face with the blue uniform, and the knapsack lying open on the lounge.

In the middle of the day the regiment mustered for the long, long march. The companies drew up above the square, on Superior Street, between Trinity and the stone clock tower of the second Presbyterian church. John, arm in arm with Jack, Rags dodging at their heels, passed up the blocked thoroughfare beyond the rapidly forming Grays to where, near the piles of a lumberyard swarming with boys, showed the blue uniforms and the shining rifles of the Life Guards.

Fathers, mothers, wives, sweethearts, children, and friends were thronging the ranks, saying the last good-bys. The two friends brushed past sobbing women, and stopped at every rank to answer the greeting of an acquaintance. Children were scampering among the disordered companies, playing tag through the files. Men were calling to each other over the heads of the crowd, in bluff good humor. Above all the rout the drums and the fifes were practising the "Star-Spangled Banner." There was Dick, laughing, the senator solemn and determined, and the mother white and haggard. John drew his friend aside from the crowd, and linking arms, they walked up and down in the privacy of the saddened multitude that choked the flag-lined street. John with his head down was talking earnestly, when the bugles blew the summons to the ranks.

"Good-by, old friend."

"Good-by."

Jack held him a moment tight in his arms, gripped his hand, looked into the whites of his eyes, then stepped into the ranks. The next instant the fifes and drums struck up, and the company swung off down the street.

John went hurriedly across the square, running through the crowd, on down Superior Street to the corner of Seneca, and up into a store, where on the balcony he found Marjory. Side by side, with thrilling hearts, they stood looking over the swarming streets, up over the public square, where just a patch of green showed through the massing crowds, beyond to a block of gray, and then a block of blue.

"They started as I left, I don't know why they've halted," he whispered. "They'll be coming soon."

"They don't realize, do they?" she said, looking up

and down over the sea of flags and the windows gay with spectators.

He shook his head.

“There, look — look!”

At last there had come a slight bend in the crowds. The street, a moment choked with humanity, rapidly widened from a thin stream into an open space.

“See, Marjory, there they come!”

The flags began to wave, the handkerchiefs to flutter, as over the heads of the crowd far up Superior Street came the crash of the Grays' band. The escort of citizens came into view, stepping quickly, Mayor Chapin leading the way, and behind him the backbone of Cleveland loyalty.

John leaned over to Marjory and pointed out the tall Indian-like figure of the senator glancing up at them. They waved down to him, and the next moment he was past, and the air was swelling with the thunder of martial music.

“Jerry Ensworth and the Grays,” announced John, and as the familiar company and its captain came by, he scanned the well-known ranks and named a score of men.

The colors were fluttering, the band was playing, every one was cheering and applauding as the gray files passed, and the street was filled with blue.

There was Captain Junie Sanford, and young Blodgett and Dick — and there at last in the long line was Jack. John took out his handkerchief and waved it high, his voice choking, when all at once Jack saw him, and lifted his hat. John looked down into the pale upturned face for one vast second. The next he was gone, an individual no longer, only a spot of blue in the advancing, inexorable line. John drew back, seeing no more what was passing below, straining his eyes after

the familiar little figure. Soon he could only tell where he must be by the flag that hovered over the blur of blue, steady and distinct. Then, as the regiment wheeled around a distant corner, even that was lost. He drew back, and suddenly something clutched his wrist, and Marjory fell in a faint against his shoulder.

Two weeks later the senator handed him his commission.

"Captain Gaunt, you are assigned to New York for orders. You leave in four days."

"I am ready," said John, simply, and he looked at Marjory.

She answered his silent question with a brave nod.

"I will be ready, John."

"Jack is gone, and Dick is gone, there will be none to stand with me. Can you be ready so soon?" he said.

"I will come to you just as I am. It is no time to think of wedding outfits. Oh, John!" The father had gone out; they stood there looking at each other.

And so in the quiet of Trinity they were married, while outside the street was noisy with preparations for war. As they came down the church steps, a company was defiling at the very door.

The train on which they left was laden with stores, and packed with officers, soldiers, recruits, hurrying to the defence of Washington. The old wooden station was surging with masses of friends shouting good-by, weeping, cheering, and singing the "Star-Spangled Banner." One face alone they saw amid the flurry of handkerchief, flag, and hat, towering above all the rest, kind and wrinkled, a face like that of the great leader who sat in the White House and held the destiny of the Union. John and Marjory stood on the crowded plat-

form of the last car as the train pulled slowly out, and gazed back, as long as their eyes could distinguish, at the tall figure, who had knotted his handkerchief to his cane, and was waving it back and forth slowly, in wide swaths high above the fluttering crowd. Then they returned into the jammed, ill-smelling car, hot and noisy, that ran on and on, ever with ringing bells, through the turbulent multitudes that lined the railway, on and on, racing toward the front. And this was their wedding journey.

CHAPTER XXXI

THERE were stormy days in the Department of Subsistence at Baltimore in February of 1864. The Baltimore that had stoned the Sixth Massachusetts had become the Baltimore of the contractors. They had swarmed into the city, set up their establishments, besieged the underlings, and slowly won their way, step by step, by judicious "favours," toward the main office. Corruption went brazenly through the streets unmasked. The clerks in the lower departments used to nudge one another and exchange glances whenever one of these bluff suppliers of the army's needs stamped through the room, in a pleased-with-all-the-world mood, nodding right and left, on his way to the executive desk. They knew to a figure what Schneider had cleared on the last pork bid, who were in receipt of little favours from Crafts, how Honeyman Brothers had got the last contract for flour, or for that instalment of shoes that had drawn such a slashing rebuke from the "Old Man" at the front.

But a day of reckoning had come at last. The new head had now been in command for over a month, and great had been the havoc; the sword of suspicion had fallen among high and low alike. Already two officers had peremptorily been transferred to the field, and there were whispers each morning of investigations, of sharp rebukes, and of overhaulings of accounts. Many an official started nervously, amid general consterna-

tion, whenever Stimson's bland little face was seen peering through the door, and a sharp voice called Mr. —— to the office.

Intense was the excitement, therefore, one afternoon when, in the midst of the monotonous scratching of the pens, the hall door was flung violently open and an angry personage bursting in, demanded in an avalanche of oaths, who in —— was in charge, and show him up mighty —— quick!

A delighted whisper ran about the desks, that Governor Slade of a neighboring state had come to ask explanations of the colonel.

"This way, this way, sir," a clerk cried, springing up with alacrity. "Follow me, sir. Don't know's though the colonel'll see you. Here's the orderly."

"Damn the orderly! Get out of my way! Do you know who I am? I'm Governor Slade, Slade, Slade — d'you hear?" And breaking past the astounded orderly he hustled into the room, crying furiously: "Here! Who's in charge here! I'm Governor Slade!"

Two figures were seated at a desk in the back of the room, — a bland, red-haired little man who stared up in astonishment at this sudden cyclone, and an officer of great breadth of shoulders and determined eyes, who rose to his full height and answered grimly: —

"I command here — Colonel Gaunt."

"Oh, a dashed, dashed boy," sneered the other, halting at his youthful appearance. "I might have guessed it. What I want to know from you is, what in the eternal hell, sir, you mean by countermanding my orders? Who in —— —— are you, to challenge my authority? What in the ——"

"Stop!" came the colonel's voice, like a clap of thunder, with a blow that shook the desk and brought the

outer office crowding to the door. "Stop! Who are you? Who are you to defy the authority of the government of the United States, which I represent? Governor or no governor—I don't care a damn! My orders shall be carried out to the letter, d'you hear? Not another word. Yes, I know you! and I know what you've been doing, and it is to stop your blackmailing and rascality that my orders were issued. I dare you to resist them! Do so, and in twenty-four hours I'll make public something that'll send you to jail as quick as we can lay our hands on you. You dare to call me to account?" He brought his fist down on the desk with another crash. "I won't have another word from you. Get out of this room, sir,—get out—get out!"

The fire-eater was quite overwhelmed. He glanced about wildly for a door, gave Gaunt an ugly look, cried, "You shall hear from me yet, you damned little clerk," flung open the door, boiling with defeat and rage, caught his foot and went tumbling headlong into the crowd of eavesdroppers. Then, amid a titter of laughter, he picked himself up, swearing at one and all, bumped into a clerk, grabbed him by the shoulder, flung him aside, and went out slamming the doors behind him.

"Better look out, Colonel," Stimson spoke up, as the sounds of the departure died out, and the shuffling of the clerks was heard returning to their desks; "you're not through with him yet, as he says. He'll send up a pack of lies to the War Department. Better get ahead of him."

"Well, Sergeant, I reckon you're right. We'll do it," said John. His face was still flushed with the heat of his sudden anger. He walked the floor a moment, rallying himself, and then dropped into his chair with a laugh. "Sergeant, you'd better keep a pitcher of ice

water handy, if we're going to get many more like that. Did you see those clerks listening in the hall?"

"I—really—were they there?" Stimson responded, wondering if another storm was brewing.

"I reckon, by rights, I should call them up and give them a good dressing down—pretty flagrant breach of discipline, that. But—well, Sergeant, we'll overlook it this time, considering it may do them good."

Stimson laughed outright at the turn, and said: "Colonel, I guess you hit it that time—it will make them stand around a little livelier," and he proceeded to take down the letter to the Secretary of War.

As John was signing it, a card came to him from a contractor. He turned it over and back, thinking the name was familiar.

"John R. Kane—oh, yes; I remember. Stimson, what do you know about John R. Kane?"

"Had big contracts here, Colonel."

"Is he honest?"

"He is a contractor."

"Humph! I see. Well, I'll see him now."

Stimson started to the door.

"Wait a moment." John asked suddenly, "Who is delivering that hay contract we're weighing down at the depot? Isn't that Kane?"

"John R. Kane; yes, sir."

"Very well; call him in."

He reached into a pigeon-hole and took down the memorandum of the hay contract and was studying it thoughtfully when a snappy little man, with a pock-marked skin, loose under the eyes, came in, stepped rapidly up to the desk, removed his cigar, and exclaimed as he shook hands:—

"Colonel, we meet again."

"Ah, Kane, how are you? You call on business?"

"Oh, no; not exactly. Been out West for a couple of months; dropped in to renew the acquaintance—there you are. Guess you bear me no grudge for putting an extra five thousand in your pocket on that wharf business; eh, Colonel?"

"None at all."

The visitor took off his overcoat, folded it up, placed it on a table, his hat on top, selected a chair, fingered the diamond in his shirt front, and said, "How d'ye like it here?"

"Oh, I like it well enough," John said, drawing. "I'm trying to get on to the ropes. You seem to have been the favored contractor, Kane."

"I admit it. Expect to be this time. There's frankness for you. I guess I can please you," he bent over, flicked his cigar, and closed the farther eye meaningly, "in—in every way. Well, now, Colonel, suppose we talk business. You see I know your ways, I'm coming to the point."

"Agreed," answered John, with a half smile. "I didn't really flatter myself it was simply to renew the acquaintance that you came."

"Eh? What? You're a sharp one, I see; same as ever, eh, Colonel?" Kane responded, with the utmost good humor. "Now, to the point. I'm interested in this contracting, as you say. I've done some pretty heavy work for the government, and I'm looking for future favors. That's about it, Colonel, and I hope we'll come to a good understanding."

"So you want more contracts, then. Brought your figures on the new bids I put out?"

"That's why I'm here." Kane sprang up, drew out his pocketbook, and selected three slips. "That's on

the uniforms, that's on the pork, and that's on the flour. I guess I don't need to take the oath of allegiance again, eh?" Then he added, reluctantly: "See here now, Colonel, I'd rather hold on to them awhile, until them other bids are in; you know, I might want to scale the figures down a bit. That's where a little understanding could come in."

"The bids are in—the contracts go out to-night," answered John, ignoring the insinuation. "It is almost three now; you have two minutes to get them in."

Kane ran through them again, turned them over, laid them gingerly on the desk, and withdrew a step to watch the effect.

John read them through without a sign of interest. When he had quite finished, he laid them down, and said coldly, "Mr. Kane, your figures are exorbitant; you stand no show whatever for the contracts."

"Now, Colonel, see here," Kane laughed back, throwing open his coat and dangling his fob; "you beat me once at Cleveland, but it won't go again. And I don't mind telling you I know every figure on those other bids right there in that pigeon-hole, and there ain't one under mine. No, Colonel, it won't go. Come to business now."

"Well, Mr. Kane, your information is not correct, however obtained. Here's one bid—T. K. Bellews—right at hand, that discounts you."

"He can't do it! Colonel, take my word, I'm honest, I'm not lying to you—he can't do it! It ain't an honest bid. He'll skin you on the quantity, he'll put false bottoms in, or load up with rocks or sand. Don't you take it; don't have anything to do with him. He'll milk you to the last cent—he'll cheat you on every turn."

"I have reason to think otherwise," said John, who

indeed had good reasons. "No, frankly, Kane, you're out of the race."

"Very well, I'll come down; here, give me those bids." He took a pencil and made the correction rapidly. "There, ten thousand off. That's the best I can do; experience and quality has got to count something."

John shook his head. "The bids closed at three."

"I see you want me to come down to the point," said Kane with a wink, misconstruing the refusals; "to that little understanding, eh?"

"Do you mean to *bribe* me, sir?" exclaimed John in a loud voice.

Kane glanced back suspiciously, and answered still louder, "No, sir, I *refuse* to *bribe* you!" He took a quick survey of the room and stole to the door, opening it sharply. John, at the desk, shook with laughter at his sudden alarm.

"Colonel," the other said, grinning in appreciation as he returned, "I was afraid you wasn't dealing square with me. We'll suppose it's this way," he added, sinking his voice, "supposing I get the contracts. Now, just out of gratitude, I'd feel like giving something, say five or six thousand, say — well — to the hospitals. I'll leave it right here in this drawer, put it into your hands to use. Well, that way, or any other way suits you better. Are you on?"

"In plain words, you'll give me five thousand dollars to throw the contracts into your hands."

"I never said that, I never said that! But, after all, what's the use of being squeamish now? You're going to give the contracts to some one, ain't you? Well, make up your mind, and then get something for yourself. It won't have influenced your decision, will it?"

Lord bless you, Colonel, you're new here; why, they expect it. Government can't afford to pay you what you're worth, so they let you make it up in this way. Now I ain't asking you to take anything to give me the contracts, but if you should send them this way, I want you to know I ain't a mean man, I'll be grateful — d'ye catch my meaning?"

"There's not much doubt as to your meaning, Mr. Kane," John said grimly. He had been studying the hay contract, wondering where was the flaw, for the figures were exceedingly low, and he knew the man for a trickster, so he said, "By the way, this hay contract we're receiving to-day belongs to you, doesn't it?"

"Correct — John R. Kane; I'm the man."

"Humph! You made good figures there, Kane! I'm surprised to see them so low. How did you do it?"

"I think I know my business — yes, thank you," said Kane, leaning back. "Any complaint against them figures?"

"Certainly not; what I complain of is that your other bids are not on the same basis."

"Couldn't repeat that, Colonel. There were outside reasons in that — too cheap — nothing in it."

John had been following his man closely, and the belief strengthened in him that there was some trickery in the transaction. He rose abruptly and said, "Kane, I'm going down to look over that order of yours."

"That's the ticket," responded the contractor, to his surprise, jumping up. "Satisfy yourself; Colonel, I guess that's the way to convince a man. I'll go with you."

Without further words they went across to the store-houses, in and out among drays and clamoring drivers, mules, rubbish, barrels, and crates. A few men who

recognized John saluted respectfully. Kane had a nod and a smile for every one; he knew them all, from the superintendent to the lowest carrier. A sergeant advancing, John hailed him, and ordered him to lead the way to the hay shipment.

"How much have you done of it, Tim — goes hard, eh?" asked Kane. He knew him, too.

"Pretty hard, Mr. Kane; we're 'bout half through it, sir, I should say. This way, please."

"Oh, here we are at last," Kane broke out, again nodding to half a dozen men. They were under the roof of the great warehouse, standing beside the scales. Through an open door to the left great bales of hay were being lugged in from a train of cars, cast on the scales, weighed and ranged in stacks to the right, ready for shipment. Near them an under-officer was checking off the weights and writing the account in a notebook. John examined a number of bales carefully; the hay was everywhere of satisfactory quality.

"Look it over, look it over, Colonel," Kane exclaimed, plucking out handfuls here and there. "There's nothing to hide here. That hay, sir, is like Cæsar's wife — you know the reference — above suspicion."

There seemed to be no fair ground of complaint. John, doubting and puzzled, wandered from one group to another, seeking the explanation. At one time he stopped before the open door where a car was being unloaded. A sweltering Irishman, cursing and protesting under his burden, caught his eye, and just as he was puffing past, John stopped him with the remark, —

"Well, my man, you look rather tired."

"You may well say so, sor-r. The domnedest heaviest hay I ever carried, sor-r."

Like a flash the memory of Kane's insinuations came back to him. If a barrel of flour could be loaded with stones, why not a bundle of hay? Without a word he followed the man to the scales, and, as he was about to cast it on, prevented him.

"Stop! Throw that down. Sergeant, open that bale of hay."

The next moment Kane had flung himself in front, crying, "Colonel Gaunt, I protest. You have no right, sir."

"Protest at what?" said John, sternly. "Stand back. Open that bale."

The sergeant bent quickly to his task. The bale was broken, the hay fell apart, and disclosed to the view of all four six-inch logs.

"Colonel, I swear before God I didn't know it," Kane cried, darting forward. "I'm innocent, I swear I'm innocent!"

"Stand back! Sergeant, open that bale and the next." Two more bales were cut, with the same results. The swindle was apparent to all.

"Sergeant, four men and a corporal! Mr. Kane, consider yourself under arrest. Sergeant, I shall hold you as a witness that this man protested against my opening the bales."

Kane, white and struck with terror, stepped forward and whispered: "You've got me, Colonel. For God's sake, don't prosecute me. I've got a wife and children. I'll make it up, every cent of it, I swear I will. I swear on my honor."

"On your what?" said John, abruptly. "Step back. There isn't a power on earth can keep you out of prison now."

"Twenty thousand, if you'll let me go," insisted Kane.

He clutched him by the sleeve. "Fifty, seventy-five — oh, God! a hundred — a hundred thousand dollars, Colonel."

John freed himself with a shudder. "Corporal, take charge of your man. Forward! March!"

He went back to the office, and angrily paced the floor, while Stimson, with under lip drawn in, listened meekly.

"By heavens," John cried at last. "I shall not stop until I've unearthed every scoundrel and thrown him into prison. It is about time people began to understand what I'm here for. There's dishonesty right here in this bureau. I know it, and I'll find it out. Just remember that! I'll do it, if I have to throw the whole bureau out." Stimson went out shortly after this, and a sudden hush fell on the outer room.

It was now six o'clock. John lit the lamps and worked for an hour at the mass of correspondence on his desk; requisitions from depot headquarters, complaints from the front, urgent demands for mules and ammunition, department orders, and what not. Stimson had gone, long ago, and the outer offices were dark when he pulled out his watch, pushed aside the heap of communications, and arranged the desk preparatory to leaving. At the very last he took up a small letter and broke the seal. It was anonymous, and warned him to change his homeward route of nights. He looked it over carefully, seeking some clew to its authorship, pursed his lips and drew out a drawer and dropped it on a heap of similar warnings and threats, alike unsigned.

The building was empty, save for his presence. He could hear the stairs and the floors creaking from cellar

to roof. He looked down on the ominous pile, ran his hand deep into it up to his wrist, and said to himself with a queer shake of his head, "And to think I didn't want to enter here because there was no danger!"

Then slipping a revolver into his pocket, and locking the desk, he started for home. He walked on resolutely, under low, flickering lamps, and down lugubrious, cramped streets with blind alleys opening at his side every few steps, disregarding the warning as an attempt by his enemies to frighten him, but nevertheless glancing quickly from right to left. Three-quarters of the way were passed when suddenly a brick whizzed directly behind him, waking the silent streets with the crash of its breaking. He glanced up sharply, and thought he could distinguish a figure, even in the blackness of an open window. He had not stopped for a moment, but his fingers closed around the weapon in his pocket.

"Humph!" he thought, "maybe the warning was from a friend, after all." He had known for a week that there was an organized cabal to oust him, but he had not thought it would come to this. "The scoundrel—I hate to give cowards a chance to say I am afraid of them."

His lips tightened, and he shut his teeth with a snap, and hurried on his way. All at once he shook his head and added, "No, I must be careful, I must change my path; my life is not my own, it belongs to another now. Yes, to two others, if God be willing." And he drew his hand across his forehead as though to brush away all troublesome thoughts. "Brave little woman, she must not know the danger, come!"

He turned down the narrow street that held their home, and saw afar off the welcoming lamp blazing cheerily from the window, where some one had placed

it. He reached the gate and opened it with a click, sending a signal whistle through the air. Instantly the curtains in the window trembled; as he tumbled up the dark steps, he heard some one running to the door, and the next moment he was in a flood of light, and Marjory was in his arms. He closed the door behind him without letting go of her, and said, as he bent over her, "Very tired of waiting, little one?"

"I have been waiting so long, John," she said, dropping her head on his shoulder; "what makes you so late?"

"I've had a stormy day of it," he answered, and when they had gone in to dinner, he told her of the events in the office. "Why do you look at me so strangely, Marjory? You weren't frightened about me, were you? You mustn't do that, little wife."

She looked up at him with a smile, half pleading and half sad, and answered, as she shook her head, "I couldn't help it to-day — I was so lonely."

He shook his finger at her, and when Aunt Sally had bustled from the room, he leaned over the table and pinched her cheeks. "What an idea! Do you think if there was any danger, I'd hide it from you?"

They were at a cosy little table, the candles beaming upon them cheerily, three bright logs snapping in the fireplace in the parlor and filling the rooms with the sound of their singing. He put out his hand and took hers.

"Well, Marjory, you've had a pretty rough time of it, dearie. How you have stood by me, sweetheart; but we've got our little home at last, — haven't we? — and we don't care what goes on outside."

The meal ended, they went together hand and hand into the parlor and drew the great arm-chair before the glowing fire-dogs.

“Why, there it is again,” he said, holding her off at arm’s-length. “That same strange, wistful look. Why, little woman, there are tears in your eyes.”

The next moment she was in his arms, whispering, “Oh, John, be very good to me these days, I am so lonely, I cannot help it. Oh, hold me in your strong arms.”

He drew her down into the chair, upon his knees, and in his arms, so that she lay with her head against his cheek.

“Don’t you understand, John, why I look at you so?” She sank her voice to a whisper. “It comes over me so strongly to-night—the wonder and the mystery, the awful mystery of another life so soon to be ours, yours and mine, another life, dear, and we—we can’t understand it, can we?” She put her arms around his neck, and raised her face to see his eyes—the eyes that were deep in the secrets of the fire; then she dropped her head, and lay like a child on its mother’s breast, silently taking long breaths. Then her arms tightened, and she cried, “Oh, my husband, watch over me!”

CHAPTER XXXII

IN the deep of the night, long after John had fallen into a troubled sleep, Marjory lay at his side awake, her mind thronged with the new emotions of the evening, awed before the wonder of the life so soon to be hers. She lay there quietly, at rest and at peace. The long waiting was over — she had her home at last, and in his keeping she was safe. She put her hand softly over his shoulder, as though surrendering herself to his guardianship, and turned peacefully to fall asleep. All at once, perhaps prompted by her touch, she felt him start uneasily at her side, and he began to talk rapidly, sitting upright. She put her arm out to wake him from his nightmare, when suddenly, through all the incoherence of his rambling, she caught a word that checked her and made her listen breathlessly. Through it all, one phrase was repeated again and again, "I must not let her know!" Through the scattered phrases she divined the weight that was pressing on his mind, the danger which he would keep from her.

Hurriedly she woke him, hiding her emotion, and when at last he was conscious, she said sleepily: "What a nightmare, John! Have you been fighting the whole war?"

He turned to her, dazed and startled. He had been dreaming of plots and conspiracies, and the horror of it was yet working in his mind. "What did I say?" he asked anxiously.

"An awful jumble," she answered indifferently, "and now let General Lee alone, — I'm going fast asleep."

But she did not. Long after he had fallen off again quickly, she lay there trying to see her way clear amid the responsibilities and worries so suddenly awakened.

"How quickly he is asleep," she thought. "He is worn out. What did he mean by those terrible words. Has his life really been threatened? Oh, I have feared as much, ever since the morning he hid that letter from me. And so he is afraid that I shall know, that I shall worry — that is it."

She closed her eyes even in the pitch of the room, as though to shut out the sudden longings that came into her heart, the longing to be free of care, to be guarded, to surrender herself into his keeping, away from all the drags and worries of life! Just a moment her heart was left empty and hungering, and then listening to the uneasy breathing by her side, she closed her lips and said: "What other women have done, I can do. God helping me, he shall never know that I suspect."

The next morning John had already gone when she rose and went downstairs. The postman was clamoring at the door. She opened it, took a handful of letters, and went into the parlor to sort them over. There were several cards of invitation, one to a reception at the governor's, at which they would have to be present; a letter from the wife of a soldier imploring assistance; two marked "private and personal" from contractors — familiar types of thinly disguised, carefully worded offers of bribes; one unsigned, threatening forcible retaliation if further investigations were pursued in the department; and, finally, one which she had kept to the last, an envelope addressed to herself.

The postmark was Baltimore, the handwriting strange. "What, will they even threaten me?" she wondered, and tore it open to read.

It was of a kind yet unfamiliar; not a threat, but something more ominous, a warning, urging her never to allow her husband to answer the door or sit near a window, and to keep him at home as much as possible after dark. She read the letter over twice, seeking some clew to its identity. Then she rose and walked in her agitation.

"If such a letter can come to me, what must he receive! Why not tell him that I know the danger, and help him. Would not that be the best, after all?" But in the end, after many changes, she shook her head. "No, he would know every night how I hung in fear and trembling on his coming. No, I must not—I must hide my fears—hard as it may be just now."

After lunch she took up a book and went to sit by the window to read. But instead, the page remained unturned, the book lay idly on her lap, and she bent her head to the window, the longing of the night returning. In the still girlish days, when cares beyond her years had fallen on her young shoulders, how often she had dreamed by the fireplace in her room, over a splendid book of love and old romance, of the time when some one would come and banish all the responsibilities, and set the girl free from the woman! It is hard to surrender the old desires, to shut out the old longings. What woman is not called on some time to renounce the dreams and the ideals of her girlhood? When on the night of their betrothal, John lay tossing on his bed under the weight of the great duties and deep awakenings so suddenly taken on him, Marjory was fast in a happy, smiling sleep, her hands pressed under her

cheek, for some one had come into her life before whom she stood as a little child, full of trust and careless confidence. That night she had dreamed of Arcady, all sunshine and beauty, without a burden or a responsibility, without anything to trouble the freedom of its sky; a land where all the dominant instincts of her soul should awake,—the mirth, the laughter, the poetry, the music, the imagination that flushed and thrilled before a beautiful landscape or a glowing sky. She knew that all this was again to recede from her vision. It was not to be. But as she leaned back, straining her eyes into the narrow street, a mist came before them—for the dreams were very real.

She had known only one day of perfect happiness; then the war burst over their heads and swept them out of dreamland into the militant world. Her hurried marriage in the little church, with the tramp of passing regiments sounding without, and the flying journey through the angry, startled country, were like fearful, fleeting dreams, unreal in the occurrence, impossible in the recollection. Bravely and loyally she had put aside all the longing and the seeking from her heart, and placed her hand in her husband's, and stood by his side. She had dreamed of life with John as a time without cares—she found only new and greater ones. From West to East, hither and thither, by train, by packet, by stage-coach, without rest, unceasingly she had followed, often faint, discouraged, longing to cry out for a halt, while John went from one station to another, leaving his mark of administration everywhere, until one eventful morning he had told her of his promotion to Baltimore, saying, with the laugh she loved so well: "Attention, Battalion! Colonel Gaunt, if you please! It means more work, but it means, my brave little girl, a home!"

And now even this hope was dissipated, for here was a new crisis. All this came into her mind as she sat rocking, her hands folded on her lap. Once she cried out in spirit: "Can I do it? Again and again! Will there be no rest?" Then the storm passed, and after a while she raised her left hand and kissed the ring, and said, "Anything—I can do anything for him."

She glanced down at the neglected book, closed it, and laid it aside. It was growing dark, and the hour of his coming was at hand. She rose and lit the lamp, placing it in the window where he would see it. She came back and stood in the centre of the room a pensive moment. Putting her head on one side, she said plaintively: "I feel just like an actress awaiting her cue. I wonder if they ever play as unwillingly as I."

She laughed, snapped her fingers in the air, caught up her skirts, and crying, "My turn," flung herself down on the stool, and played a waltz through with spirit. When it was ended she sat quite still, ran her hand aimlessly up the keys, and shook her head sadly. "I should never do—never!" Then she rose and passed out the door, pacing the walk anxiously to the gate that commanded a view of his approach. Twice she had done this, when she heard a sudden click of the latch, a whistle, and the fall of his step. She sprang up, scampered to the door, and fell laughing in his arms.

"Hello, little Colonel," cried John's big voice; "some one's in good spirits to-night."

"Some one's very glad to see some one else," she answered mischievously, slipping her arm under his.

His face lighted up so at her good spirits that the look smote her heart, and accused her for having been blind so long. She rattled away as she made him

surrender his coat, and hung up his hat, as merry as the Marjory of old. She teased away all the troubled lines from his face until, catching the infection, he began to laugh, and imitated the astonishment on Governor Slade's face when he had returned his fire.

"Here are the cards for the official reception a week from to-morrow — no wry faces, sir — superior orders, Colonel! Attention! Not in that chair by the window. Take the arm-chair by the fire at once, under penalty of all kinds of punishment!"

"What a little tyrant!" John protested weakly, suffering himself to be pushed into the chair; "and what have you been doing all day long? Pretty lonely, little woman?"

"Lonely? Not a bit of it! The idea!" She flung up her head. "I've had my housekeeping, I've been reading the most fascinating book, and I've made up my mind to practise faithfully every day. There! you see how easily the days will slip by." As she was talking, there came a knock at the door. She sprang up from his knee. "I'll answer it — don't you dare to rise."

He sunk back in his chair — he did not see the look in her eyes as she threw the door partly open and stood in front of it. It was only a stranger asking the number, but to her quickened imagination, what might it not have been! She drew herself across the door, eyeing him steadily, and when he turned, she stood and watched until he had gone down the walk and shut the gate behind.

"Who was that?" asked John, when he heard the rustle of her skirt returning. He drew his hand across his forehead wearily.

"Some one mistook the number, that was all," she

said. She could not bring back her spirits, so she laid a hand on his forehead, and said, "Shall I play to you, dear?"

He nodded his head, and she went to the piano. The sweet voice filled the room with its melody. He forgot the office, the greed, the trickery, and the corruption; the constant fight against hidden enemies and doubtful friends; the times, the city, the room; he was back again with her under the sweeping stars, trembling for her answer.

When at last she rose, he had begun to nod. He did not see the sudden change of her face into anxiety, as she half knelt by his chair. Slowly missing the magic from the room, he started from the drowsiness into which the warmth of the fire and the gentle invitation of her voice had lulled him, rubbed his eyes, and glanced up contritely, as she dropped on her knees, caught him by the cheeks, and pretended to scold him.

So it went day by day. The letters continued to come, threats from enemies and warnings from hidden friends. She opened his mail, and burned the letters he should not see. She never allowed him to answer the door. She screened him constantly with her own body from the window; and at last, tortured by anxiety, she hired a detective to follow him night and day, armed and ready to spring to his assistance.

He could not understand the change and bitterly misinterpreted her apparent unconcern.

"Great heavens!" he thought once with a pang, "how little she thinks of any danger that I am running. If anything should happen, the shock would be terrible." And in his heart he was troubled,—yes, even hurt,—at what seemed her indifference to his peril.

During this time an incident happened from which John derived a good deal of amusement. On the night of the reception, as they were starting off arm in arm down the street, he said with a laugh, "Ahem, Marjory, we're going to meet an old acquaintance of mine to-night — can you guess?"

She walked on a moment silently, "Is it Helen Dare?"

"How did you know?" he cried, with another laugh.

"By the way you spoke." Her hold tightened a little, and she drew closer to his side. "Well?"

"She is Mrs. Blackstock now. Husband has lots of money, not a very good character. Looked on with suspicion by the department. Well, Mrs. Gaunt, you shall see her." He gave a slash of his cane. "She was older than I, so she may have become tremendously stout, you know. What a fool I was! Just because she ran off ahead of me! I fancied myself smitten. What a fool vanity makes of a man! Hello, it is altogether ridiculous."

Marjory made no answer, but her pulse ran quicker, and the doubt which is in the bottom of every true woman's heart caused her to be unusually silent during the rest of the walk.

They were hardly down the stairs, out in the pushing, deafening crowd, making their bows, still dazzled with the glitter of many lights, when they encountered a swarthy gentleman with scowling eyebrows and furious mustache, and on his arm a slender lady with dazzling throat and arms and sparkling black eyes, with a rose in her dark curls. Marjory knew at once who it was. Her fan trembled, and she looked up into her husband's face.

"How d'you do, Cousin Nell?" said John, calmly.

"How do you do, John?" answered the other, drop-

ping her eyes under his quiet look. Blackstock nodded vacantly to John, and as they stepped forward, the ladies looked up quickly over the husbands' hands, full into each other's eyes.

When they were in the street again Marjory said abruptly, "Oh, John, I am so sorry for her! Did you see how sad her eyes were when she thought no one was looking? I am sure she isn't happy. But she is very beautiful, isn't she?"

"She is greatly changed."

She clung to his arm a little closer, and said, resting her cheek against his shoulder, "Forgive me, my husband — I — I was so jealous, so frightened, until I saw you look at her."

"What — Marjory! Why, I have never given her a thought until to-night, nor doubtless has she me."

"There you are wrong, John," said Marjory, in a low voice. "I don't know what made her leave, but I know one thing — she loved you."

"And how do you know that, little sphinx?"

"By — by the way she looked at you." Her fingers closed over her fan as though they would crush it. "And, well — because she hasn't told her husband."

"And your reasons, little witch?"

"He *didn't* look at you," said Marjory. "Do you think that if I had told you about such an affair, and you should ever meet the man, you would have no curiosity, sir?" She disengaged his arm, and then drew it around her with an appealing shrug. "She is beautiful, isn't she, dear?"

CHAPTER XXXIII

As Stimson had surmised, Governor Slade lost neither time nor energy in his attack upon the new head of the commissary. About two weeks after the events of the last chapter, the secretary came in with an envelope bearing the address of the War Department. John broke it open, cast his eye over the sheet, and said: "Hello, Stimson, here it is at last. Now we shall hear from the governor." He ran through a page of directions, and then read aloud:—

"I have received at regular intervals during the last three weeks, voluminous communications from S., dealing with your moral and mental shortcomings, in the governor's recognized style. The probabilities are that we shall continue to receive his contributions for some time to come. My only criticism of your conduct is to suggest that in the future, should another meeting occur, you would do well to imitate the governor's frankness. I shall forward you the correspondence later for your own edification."

"I reckon the governor raved a bit," said John, with a twinkle in his eye; "at all events, he doesn't seem to have undermined us with the Secretary."

The rest of the letter drew his serious attention. It warned him to proceed at once to augment his stores and arrange additional facilities for transportation so as to be ready to meet instant demands, and concluded with the hint of a great general forward movement of the Union armies.

The year 1863 had brought the victories of Gettysburg, Vicksburg, and Chattanooga, rousing the whole North to

a renewed clamor of "On to Richmond." Confidence sprang up on all sides, and every one felt that operations on a stupendous scale would begin with the spring.

John had had an inkling of the future movements that were to terminate in the fall of the Confederacy, and it was not long before he received definite notice of Grant's preparations, with increased and urgent demands upon his stores.

Then ensued a month of unceasing activity. He went everywhere, saw everything himself, learned every detail, constantly stirring on his men to greater efforts; now at the storehouse goading them to larger shipments, at times doubling the force, working night and day; now in the offices of the railroad, insisting on better facilities; now at the wharves searching for available steamers. Orders poured in from headquarters, commanding fresh supplies. One day it was 500,000 lbs. of pilot bread beyond the requisition, 30,000 lbs. of soap, 100,000 lbs. of coffee; the next it was 10,000 head of beef cattle on the hoof to be delivered in a week, or an enormous demand for clothing. He met them all. He telegraphed twice a day to the various contractors throughout the country to hasten their delivery, he offered them bonuses on every day's margin of time ahead of contract specifications. He shod the new volunteers, clothed them, put caps on their heads, guns in their hands, raised tents to cover them at night, sent horses and mules to transport their luggage, pontoon bridges to carry them over the rivers, and ambulances to care for them after the battle. Hardly a day passed that new bids were not given out from the subsistence office for pork; new mess and first quality sugar-coated hams; prime white beans, Rio coffee, butter, bacon, tallow, lard, vinegar, and whiskey.

When John had arrived in Baltimore, he had found the department so completely at the mercy of the contractors, that he resorted in desperation to the expedients that had served him at Cleveland. He engaged men secretly to act as his agents, and sent them out to scour the country, apparently in a private capacity.

For a long time he was nonplussed how to meet the syndicate that strove to control all offers on bids to the city. At last he hit upon the following plan. He retained a certain Bellews, who had served him once out West, and in whom he had confidence, to act as his confederate, while ostensibly joining the crowd of hungry contractors; and when it became absolutely necessary to resort to these professionals, as was often the case, by letting slip a hint of a low bid on the part of Bellews, he succeeded in beating them down to more reasonable terms.

At last the demand slackened, the preparations were complete. May arrived, and with it the sudden launching out of the two great armies of invasion that were to cut the Confederacy in two. The strain was over; the commissary paused for breath.

Amid all the hurry and the race of those long weeks, John had been much embarrassed and not a little downcast by the evident hostility displayed toward him by many of his subordinates. Open dislike he minded not at all, but as the weeks went by, he began to feel certain subtle influences constantly directed against him, whose end appeared to be to thwart the effectiveness of his measures, and thus to establish a ground of complaint against him on the score of incapacity. He could never place his hand on anything tangible, — that was what baffled him, — but, somehow, the plainest directions were always being misinterpreted; orders were mislaid, and

blunders, seemingly impossible, cropped up at every turn. Soon he saw, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that what he had feared from the beginning — an organized cabal — was in progress, to effect his removal by any means at its command. His actions were constantly spied upon, traps were laid for his discomfiture, and bribes were suggested — now, he felt, with the sole purpose of securing incriminating evidence.

At length he even went so far as to lay the situation before Secretary Stanton, the difficulties in the way of the successful performance of his duty, the intrigue and trickery that lurked through the department.

“Use all diplomacy,” came the terse reply; “prosecute where it is safe to prosecute; but do so quietly, as it is necessary that this condition of affairs shall be withheld from public knowledge. Have no fear of our loyalty to you. Letters continue to pour in reviling you, but we know from what quarter they are inspired. Count always on our understanding and informed support.”

Intrenched with this letter, John determined to return the attacks of his enemies with a sharp counter-thrust. He at once appointed a board of investigation, and had them overhaul the accounts, and on the unquestioned evidence of fraud thus obtained, he had several officers transferred, and forced three to resign. The result was an outpouring of threats, growing more violent and more open as the dismay began to spread. He was again and again commanded “to desist from these tyrannical and despotic measures under penalty of the worst.” Lieutenant Taft, his right-hand man, was shot down and killed as he was passing along an alley by night. An infernal machine was actually sent to the office, and the life of the negro who opened it was saved only by its faulty construction. The many loyal officers who had heralded his coming besought him again and again to

provide for his personal safety, to take precautions that were absolutely necessary. He was not insensible to the chances he ran. He consented to post a sentry at the side entrance of his office, but when it came to the question of an escort, he refused point-blank. To all intimidations he answered with fresh investigations.

At the first news of the great campaign, prices bounded up, but John had made his moves in time, and, secure in his possessions, was able to enjoy the discomfiture of his enemies. One day there came to him a fresh reminder of the treachery and avarice with which he had to contend. Toward the end of June, there entered his office a quiet, circumstantial man, with a sallow complexion and a drooping mustache, one end of which was constantly in his fingers, — Porter, an agent in whom he placed great confidence. Early was making a counter-dash into Maryland, in a last effort to draw Grant from Richmond, and Wallace was hastily preparing to throw himself in front of the invaders and arrest their progress. For a week the commissary had been busy rushing forward supplies. That very moment had come an urgent demand for more mules. And so it was with a sigh of relief that John greeted his agent cordially, and cried: "Porter, in the nick of time! How many mules have you got for me?"

The newcomer put his hat softly on the desk, thrust his hands in his pockets, and, beginning to walk, said: "Colonel, I'll be plain and straightforward with you. The fact of the matter is, I've decided to set up for myself. I ain't your agent any longer. I'm looking after my own bacon this time."

John was on his guard at once, though it suited him not to perceive immediately the drift of the other's remarks. "You are of course free to leave the govern-

ment service, Mr. Porter, at any time—that is, after you have given in your report. I shall not oppose it, though I shall be very sorry to lose your services, for I have always found you honorable, and a man of your word.”

“See here, Colonel,” burst out Porter, wheeling about defiantly. “Now, none of that. You know what I mean. I’ve got contracts here for them mules and other things. What I want to know is, shall I sell them to you or some one else?”

“Sell?” John answered coldly. “Let me understand you, Mr. Porter. Do you mean that, having secured an option on goods under a government commission, you now repudiate it, and wish to sell me at a higher figure what I commissioned you to buy?”

“Well, you put it rather rough, but that’s the idea.” He picked up his hat nervously, and looked at John. “I’m striking out for myself. I’ve thrown up the commission, and I ain’t used your money, have I? So, what’s crooked about it, I’d like to know?”

“Your word of honor to me.”

Porter moved uneasily.

“So that is it,” said John, quietly looking him over. He shut his lips tight, took up a pencil and began to tap on the desk with it, staring down at the blotter. Suddenly he jotted down a few words on a slip of paper, rang the bell, and handed it to the entering Stimson.

“Well, Colonel, what you say?” began Porter, who had watched this by-play with apprehension.

John rose slowly, stepped from behind the desk, and began to walk the room, until suddenly the door opened again, and Stimson’s red head was thrust in and gave him a nod of intelligence.

“Porter, see here!” cried John, stepping forward so

quickly that the other withdrew a step. "I've trusted you, haven't I? What you are doing is dishonorable, contemptible, and the work of a sneak, and you know it. Did you or did you not give me a solemn promise to act for me?"

Porter shrugged his shoulder and ran his fingers nervously through his mustache. "It don't look nice, I admit. Well, damn it, yes; I did make a promise to you to act for the government. I ain't a hypocrite, and I don't mind admitting the thing to you, though I wouldn't be so outspoken with anybody else. Well, I break it now. It's rough, I know, but I need the money. There, you have it."

"Porter, will you deliver those contracts to me? Yes or no, quick?"

"Oh, come, now."

The next moment John had sprung at him, caught him by the throat, swung him off his balance, and cast him flat on the floor. He pressed his knee on the fellow's chest, throttling him with one hand until he shrieked for mercy.

"Will you give them to me?"

"Yes—yes. Oh, my chest! Oh, oh, God, my throat!"

John allowed him to rise, tottering and choking. "Quick!" he demanded, thrusting out his hand.

Porter, gasping for breath, drew out his pocket-book and held forward two slips.

"Give me the rest," John burst out, "or I swear I'll kill you!"

"I swear—" the other began.

The next moment John had him by the shoulders in a vise-like grip.

"Oh, God—I will—I will—here, and here, and

here!" The options escaped his trembling fingers and fell fluttering to the floor. He dropped down quickly, picked them up, and gave them to John. His fear was ludicrous.

"Porter, you're lying to me — there's another."

"Before God, Colonel Gaunt, there isn't! Here, take my pocket-book — here — look — look!"

"Enough," said John, satisfied, allowing him to sink into a chair. "You've a lot to learn, Porter; another mistake like this might cost you your life."

He went to the desk, wrote out a check, and rang the bell. Instantly the door opened, and Stimson's curious face appeared. "Stimson, you listened, as I directed you?"

"Yes, Colonel."

"You heard Mr. Porter admit he had broken his contract with me?"

"Yes, Colonel."

"Very well, remain here. Porter, this is your commission; I advise you to take it."

The man hesitated a moment, then rose, glanced at it sullenly, and placed it in his pocket-book.

"Good! Stimson, make a note of that. He accepted his commission — without compulsion," he added grimly. "Now, good day. You know what to expect of me. Don't give me another chance. Do you hear? Good day, Mr. Porter."

At the first, John had really lost his temper at the fellow's arrogance; then, as soon as he perceived he had to deal with a coward, he had assumed an anger, to gain his ends.

Before nightfall the affair had made the rounds of Baltimore. Imagine the indignation that broke out in certain quarters. They would have the law on him at

once! No one was safe from such a despot! Think of the brutal assault on a respectable business man! But somehow the tempest never exploded. Strangely enough, about this time, it transpired that Colonel Gaunt was in receipt of a congratulatory note from Washington, which he had allowed a few friends to see — of course, under pledge of the strictest secrecy.

As John went home that night, he became aware that some one was dogging his steps. For weeks he had had a strange, inexplicable feeling that he was being shadowed. Now, as he looked around suddenly, he saw, under a lamp-post, a figure in an army cape and slouch hat, a half block behind. He crossed to the other side of the street and a block farther on, recrossed. He turned down side streets and made a loop, and then returned on his way. The shadow back of him imitated every movement. He put his hand into his coat pocket, and with his thumb on the hammer of his revolver walked steadily on, without again turning his head, wondering all the while when he would hear a sharp singing through the air and feel a bullet in his back. When he came to his street he turned, and saw the figure stop, follow him a moment, and then wheel and retreat into the night.

He went down toward the little white house with the green pillars at the door. The lamp was blazing its welcome at the window. Suddenly all the longing that had been over him for weeks swept into his heart again. How little the wife he loved gave thought to the dangers he ran each night! He was disappointed; he felt the want of something in her; he was unable to understand her. It was not like Marjory. He unlatched the gate without a sound, stole on tiptoe up the walk, and looked in through the window. He could see her through the

curtains, seated at the piano, the volume of the music swelling louder and louder as he came near.

“Perhaps it is best she should not know, poor little woman.” He turned away with a sigh that would not down. “She has all she can bear now, and yet — oh, if just once she had shown me her solicitude! It isn’t the way I thought she would be — not Marjory,” he added; and though he tried to explain it, he went in, heavy of heart.

CHAPTER XXXIV

TOWARD the beginning of July, though Wallace, against considerable odds, was endeavoring with hastily gathered troops to hold Early in check, John's work was less exacting, and he was able so to arrange his affairs that he could return home for lunch and spend the quiet afternoons with Marjory, reading from a favorite book, or coaxing the smiles back to her pale face. Despite her weakness, this was to her the happiest time since their marriage, — to have him at her side, where she could know that he was safe, to resign, for a brief time, her sinking fears for his safety, to give herself over to his care and support — this was a little of the paradise she had sought so long. She never complained. Her face was radiant at every coming of his step. What was suffering or weakness compared to the sickening dread that held her during the weary morning absences?

One afternoon, feeling tired, she threw herself down on the lounge, and he came and sat beside her, with her hand in his. She lay back on the pillow with a half smile breaking over her lips, one hand over her heart, looking into his eyes with eyes that were filled with so much exaltation, that John felt an awe in touching her, she seemed so far removed from the things of the world, so hallowed by the light of things unknowable. They were sitting in silence, each meeting the other's mood, when there came the sound of galloping horse,

the quick flinging open of the gate, and hurrying steps along the walk.

Each guessed by the other's face what had happened.

"It is from headquarters—General Wallace has been defeated," she said, even before he could speak.

He shook his head incredulously, but his face was blank as he ran downstairs to receive the despatches. By the tread of his step as he returned, she knew what had happened—if only it could have waited a few days! Then as he entered with troubled brow, holding the orders in his hand, she looked up faintly, and said, "Well, John, I was right, was I not?"

"Wallace has been repulsed at Frederick, and Washington and Baltimore are threatened. It means we must clear out the storehouses at once. Nothing must fall into the enemy's hands."

"Is it so bad as that? Oh, John, I have been afraid something would happen."

He crushed the papers unconsciously in his fingers, sat down on the lounge at her side and took her hand. At that moment he would have renounced everything to stay with her.

"No, no, John," she said, shaking her head, as she saw his rebellious expression. "It is hard, dear, just now, but if you must, you must. Think of what other women are enduring to-day. Do you think I cannot be brave, too, when you're away? It will only be a few hours, dear."

"It means I must leave you immediately. We must load everything on the transports and the railroads. It will be eleven o'clock, perhaps midnight, before I can return."

"Never mind, John," she whispered, trembling; "your enemies are waiting for just such a chance. You must give them no opportunity. You must see to everything yourself. If you must stay all night, do it."

He bent down and placed his cheek against her shoulder, and when he raised it again it was wet with the tears that blurred his sight, and he said, shaking his head gently, "Marjory, I do not think there is another woman like you in the whole wide world."

"What nonsense! you are just like all the rest of them." But she stirred with pleasure, and putting her arms around his neck, she added, "But I like you to say it."

When he was gone, and she had heard him in turn close the door, pass down the walk, click the gate twice, and his footsteps had faded away up the street, she put her hand quickly to her eyes and broke into a storm of weeping. It was not his absence that she minded so much—to miss his sympathy, and the thousand and one little attentions of his solicitous love, not these, hard though it was to resign them; it was to feel again the sickening dread, to tremble hour after hour, starting at every step for some message of disaster, wondering, each time he left, if she had looked on his face for the last time. In her critical condition her fears had almost unbalanced her mind.

Three days before, despite John's precautions, she had learned from Sarah of the assassination of Lieutenant Taft, and had fainted dead away. The horror worked on her by day and by night; she saw in it nothing but the first step of a conspiracy that would never stop until it had accomplished the death of her husband. She was tortured with terrible nightmares, dreams that lingered with her into the morning or started

up again the moment her weary eyes had closed, and with these spectres came a hundred premonitions, vague and inconsistent, but real.

Now that he had gone again, even the silence seemed to cry out an omen. At last, unable longer to bear the solitude, she called Sarah and made the old negress sit with her until four o'clock, when Mrs. Kail arrived, a kindly little body who was to take care of her. Then, seized with a sinking premonition, and no longer capable of withstanding the suspense, she sent Sarah with a message to John — a message invented solely that the servant might bring news of what her eyes had perceived. It seemed to her that the old woman would never return. She rose and strayed from room to room, pressing her face against the panes. She went down stairs and wandered to the gate. She touched the keys of the piano, idly striving to play. Then she glanced at the clock. It took John twenty minutes to go to the office. She calculated that Sarah ought to return in an hour and ten minutes. When that limit had passed, she went to her room again, to the couch, and lay there motionless, almost suffocating. She grasped the hand of Mrs. Kail, and poured the story into her sympathetic ears, for she felt she would go mad unless she could tell some one.

When at last Sarah came lumbering up the stairs, she began to tremble so that Mrs. Kail, to save her the anguish of suspense, called out, "Well, Sarah, did you see Colonel Gaunt?"

"Yes'm," drawled Sarah, shuffling in out of breath; "he gimme dis yere letter to fetch you."

Marjory sat up eagerly, clutched the note, and ran through the precious writing. It was a message full of love and courage. She sank back with a sigh. She

could hardly believe it : the shadow of death had passed so near her heart.

Mrs. Kail glanced at her curiously, motioned to Sarah, wrote a few directions on a slip, and sent them to a pharmacy ; for Marjory's cheeks were beginning to flush and her eyes to grow bright with excitement, as she thought how futile it had been to send an inquiry in the afternoon, when there could be no danger ; and saying to herself that she should have waited until after supper, she was soon again roaming nervously about the house.

Supper over, Mrs. Kail prevailed upon her to go to bed, and drew the curtains and brought in the lamp. Two hours dragged slowly by, Marjory starting at every strike of the clock, inquiring the hour, catching every sound in the street, listening to every footstep — so that Mrs. Kail in pity had twice gone down the stairs and out to the gate to search the street. When at another single ring of the clock Mrs. Kail informed her that it was half-past ten, Marjory gave her a frightened glance and closed her eyes, as her lips moved in prayer — for it was the exact hour of Lieutenant Taft's assassination.

All at once she sat up with a little cry. Her waiting ear had detected the slight click of the gate. The next moment came the step and the whistle she knew so well. She sank back with a deep sigh, and made a sign to Mrs. Kail to leave her, then stopped her at the door and had her put out the lamp. She had suffered so keenly that she feared to have him see her face.

As he came up the stairs his tread softened as he saw that her room was in darkness.

"I am awake, John," she called, "but the light tired my eyes. Come and sit by my side in the dark."

He sat down and took her hands and stroked them

gently, and away fell all the anguish of the afternoon, as a sick child begins to mend at the first touch of the doctor's hand.

"What a difference it makes when you come, John," she whispered, seeking his face with her fingers. "You are so big and strong, and there is so much strength in the touch of your hand."

They were alone, enveloped in the darkness, only their hands touching, and all the world, sense, sight, and sound, was gone. Just they were left—a man and a woman—a soul and a soul. She caught his hand in her little strength, and placed it under her cheek. Then all at once the tension of the day snapped, and weak under the strength of his arms, she broke down, and her hot tears fell upon his hand.

"Oh, John, John! Don't, don't worry over me," she cried; "say you won't. It's nothing—nothing at all. I am so weak I can't control it; let me cry. It will do me good."

"Yes, I think it will; cry away, little woman," he said tenderly. He slipped one arm under her, and began to speak in his quiet, even voice, until gradually her shaken nerves were soothed. After a while she laid her fingers across his lips, as she had done on the night of their betrothal.

"There—it has passed. Sit quietly by me and hold me close. Oh, John, what a wonderful page we are turning in the great Book of Life! It is overwhelming; I—I cannot understand."

She lay quietly in his arms for a while, until at last she said, running her fingers caressingly through his hair, "John—if anything should happen, you will be brave, won't you, dear?—and remember, I shall always be watching over you—and waiting."

He could give no answer, but his arms tightened, as though to hold her to him forever. Then feeling how deeply the thought cut into his soul, she said, trying to laugh: "That's only a foolish, weak little idea, such as all women must have at such times, don't you know, John? Never fear, my beloved, nothing shall happen; it is a promise. And now don't say a word, just let me think."

He did as she asked. He put out his hand and smoothed her forehead gently. How holy she seemed as she lay there silent, throbbing with all the wonder of the mother that was to be. At length she put her arm around his neck, and drew his head down to her lips, whispering, "I am so drowsy; stay with me until I fall asleep. Oh, my husband—to-morrow, maybe, we shall be three."

She soon drifted into a light slumber. He waited awhile, listening to the gentle rise and fall of her breast, then quietly began to withdraw his arm from under her. She moved restlessly in her sleep, muttering plaintively, "No, no, not just yet," and her fingers tightened about his hand. He waited a moment longer, and then softly disengaged the nerveless grasp, and tiptoed from the room.

Once in the night he heard her cry out, and, hurrying to her side, found her trembling and cold.

"Oh, such a dream—such a dream!" she cried, clutching his arm. "Oh, it is too cruel to torture me so!"

"See; here I am, little woman," he cried. "Tell me what it was."

She came out of the stupor slowly, and when she realized he was there, she muttered hurriedly: "A nightmare, that's all; something terrible, I can't remember

what. There, let me down, and don't think me a very foolish woman. It was so real."

It seemed that he had hardly dropped asleep when he was suddenly brought to his feet by a peal of bells. He looked at his watch; it was half-past five. Other bells began to clamor in various quarters of the city, then came the shrill whistle of steamers and the deeper shriek of the engines. He looked out. People were throwing up their windows and staring up and down; some were already running along the sidewalks. His first thought was, "The city is attacked." He turned and hurried into his clothes. When he stepped to her door, Marjory, worn out by her troubled night, was still unconscious.

"How quietly she sleeps," he thought, bending over her. "No; I must not wake her."

He stopped a moment and glanced about thoughtfully. Then he stepped to the desk, wrote her a message on a slip of paper, and pinned it at the foot of her bed, where she would see it as soon as she waked. At the foot of the bed he lingered, gazing down at her. An irresistible wave of emotion swept over him, and he fell upon his knees at her side. It was not a prayer; it was an instinctive reverence to the deepest and holiest thing that had ever come into his life.

He hurried through the waking city to his office, stopping there only long enough to glance through his mail. One letter, in Jack's well-known scrawl, he singled out and thrust into his pocket. The next moment he was out in the open air again, hurrying to the warehouses.

The newsboys were howling their papers filled with rumors of disaster. Wallace was in full retreat, and the Confederates were even now within striking distance

of Baltimore, burning and pillaging as they came. Governor Bradford and Mayor Chapman had issued proclamations for the fortification and defence of the city. Wherever he turned, the streets were choked with volunteers thronging to the Calvert Street headquarters, ranging from young men to veterans of the Mexican War, some rushing to be armed, a few with whatever weapons they had snatched up. At one corner a crowd of men were forming companies, impressing the bystanders into service. Mounted policemen rode hither and thither, herding negroes, and marching them off to build barricades; horses were being seized in every street, couriers were galloping from one section to the other. It was a scene to confuse the eye, a running babel of sound.

John had received his orders for the emergency on Saturday. He reached the storehouses to find the same wild rush. Men were swarming out the doors laden with boxes and bundles in one unceasing stream over the docks and up the gangways. All night long the work of securing the stores had gone on, and still but half was done. He went the round of the storehouses, stirring up the men to greater efforts, inspecting every department, issuing orders, receiving reports, forwarding assistance. He visited every steamer and saw that it had steam up, ready to run out at a moment's notice. He left the wharves to inspect the loading of cars, and called on railroad officials and arranged for special trains. By impressing men into service, he doubled his force; he was here one hour, and at the farthest end of the city the next, everywhere exhorting, commanding, inspiring. Rumor after rumor rolled in. It was even said that the advance of the Confederates could be seen from the Monument. It was three o'clock before

more reassuring reports were received, and then John, sitting astride a bale of hay, with a hogshead for a table, drew out Jack's letter and read it over a cup of steaming coffee.

“CAMP—

“YOUR EXCELLENCY:—

“J. H. and Dick did full justice to your last box, and the papers have been worn through. They don't waste much time on Yank's amusement, my boy, down here. We have been lying around here for the last few weeks, swearing with the combined strength of the company at the old man who keeps us here out of the forward movement. The men are 'spilin' for a fight,' and don't understand why the Department doesn't take their muzzles off. For God's sake, John, can't you hang up a few of these contractors? We have been swindled and robbed until we don't dare call our teeth our own. Our uniforms are so rotten that they drop off our backs, but they're nothing to the meat and provisions we get. The mules are blind and lame, and the wagons break down if you attempt to load them. The way those harpies fleece us is something fearful. Can't you shoot a few?”

“Dick is doing splendidly, is now a lieutenant—bravery in action at Gettysburg—charged down and took colors in the Wheat Field. Everybody likes him.

“And now to the point of this letter. I have news for you that will strike you dumb. Tuesday the outpost of our command captured a couple of rebel spies, who were trying to return through our lines. As they marched the prisoners through the camp I came out of my tent. John, you could have struck me dead when I looked up and saw that villain, Captain Brace, yes, Captain Brace! He looked at me coolly, and very blank at first, until he saw I knew him in spite of his beard; then he gave a shrug of his shoulders, and said, 'Well, Jack, we meet again.'

“They said at the court-martial he showed a lot of grit, and when he saw the thing was sure to go against him, he came out flat, and owned up, and begged to be shot like a soldier, and got it.

“I was picked out with a file of my men to do the shooting. I tried to get out of the job, but couldn't. He walked along steadily, without the least sign of fear, so that down in my heart I couldn't help admiring the fellow's pluck. When we got to the ground, he looked about curiously a moment, held out his hand and shook mine, and said, quite matter-of-fact: 'Well, Jack, you've got the best of me

in the end. Damn me if I ever expected this. I don't complain — I've lived game, and I guess I can die the same.'

"Then he added, with a kind of a laugh: 'What a pity John isn't in your place. I fancy he'd enjoy it. Well, *au revoir*, and wish you better luck than this.' Then the boys shot him down dead.

"How the above will shock you! I've felt queer ever since. Well, John, old boy, Jack is proud of you. He likes to see you rising up where you belong. God bless you, I say, and the best of luck to you. You'll remember me, of course, to the Missus, and tell her when this cruel war is over, if I have a whole skin, I'll give her the history of your illustrious youth. Well, good-by, and bless you again, old fellow. I hate to close, for to be writing to you, don't you see, is like being up in the old quarters again, among the pets, swinging my legs over the desk, and chattering away to you in my usual foolish fashion. By the way, Rags is still with us, Providence having preserved his skin too. Dick sends love to Marjory and you. Good-by once more, old Johnnie Glum.

"Yours in Auld Lang Syne, JACK.

"N.B. — Have used some of that money you lent Dick and me — I knew your purpose from the beginning. It helped us out of a tight pinch.

"P.S. — Bad as a woman. Suppose you see, by what goes before, that they've made Jack a lieutenant — well, it's true.

"VALE."

When John had read this letter he fell into such a revery that the sergeant who came up for orders was forced to cough discreetly before he gained his attention. Then a score of demands moved in upon him, and for two hours he had time for nothing else. It was dusk before he could arrange the affairs of the department and tear himself away, with orders to summon him by courier in case of urgent need.

The streets were swept by crowds hurrying to the Camden Street Depot where the trains with the wounded were beginning to arrive. A regiment of volunteers in nondescript uniforms were defiling noisily down the avenue as he passed. Carriages and laden trucks were

jolting over the cobblestones in deafening confusion, men were hallooing to each other across the crowd, shouting warnings and rumors. It was like the panic of a great army. Once among the crowd he caught a glimpse of a short stumpy back directly in front of him, which was so like Captain Brace that he was startled, broke step, and was making forward, when the man turned and showed his profile. The incident recalled Jack's letter, and he thought of Brace's death with a shudder, and then with a breath of relief. The last grim link that bound him to the hopeless past was snapped. In his heart he was thankful that the swindler had not fallen into his hands.

He went on quickly now; he could hardly restrain the impulse to run. He turned down the familiar side street and saw the green pillars afar. At the sight of the little white house gleaming ahead, the fret and worry of the grief-stricken city, the discord and the strife, the pettiness and the treachery, fell away from him like the casting off of a cloak. But another year, and their home would be a home in reality. He was at the gate now, entering quickly. An instinct prompted him to look back up the street. There was the same slouch figure that had followed him night after night, wheeling into the dusk.

As he opened the door Mrs. Kail came quickly down the stairs, with a finger to her lips.

"Sh-h! it is all over. It is a girl. We sent you a message, but could not find you."

"But my wife? quick!"

"She has had a hard time. She is very weak and very wrought up. Go quietly."

He stole noiselessly up the steps, and said from the hall, "It is I, Marjory."

"Come in," a faint voice answered, and he pushed through the door.

The doctor was standing at the foot of the bed, but John did not see him. He was looking at Marjory, lying helpless and pallid, the color of the sheets, and at a little bundle that lay at her side.

He dropped on his knees, and bowed his face over the weak hand on the coverlet, and cried with a voice wrung by the pinched lines in her face, "Oh, my poor wife, why couldn't I have been with you? Oh, my dear wife, how you have suffered!"

"Hush, dear," she said weakly. "It is nothing now—that I have her." She tried to raise her hand, but it fell back helplessly.

"There, there," the doctor cried; "you must lie perfectly still."

A little fist closed over John's finger, and he looked down into two staring blue eyes full of the mystery whence they came. Then his gaze went back to the mother, who was watching him with eager, happy eyes. At the thought of the pain she had endured, alone and forlorn, away from him, he rose suddenly, choking, and went to the window and put his arm on the sill and his forehead on his arm, striving to control the tumult in his breast, and the tears that drowned his sight.

Then, just as he heard for the first time a tiny voice uplifted from the bed, and was turning from the window; just as the doctor, who had summoned Mrs. Kail, was giving her some parting directions; just as Marjory, with a smile that broke through the gathering tears, was calling him to her side—there was a sudden explosion, a crash of glass, a cry from Mrs. Kail, and John, with a bullet in his side, stumbled and fell headlong to the floor. At the same moment came a shriek from

the bed, and Marjory sprang up, wavered, and then dropped back insensible.

They hurried John out into the adjoining room and dressed his wound, which proved not to be serious. An hour later, when he managed to totter to her door, they would not let him enter.

“Not now, Colonel, not now,” the doctor cried, barring the way firmly. “Your wife has been in a critical condition for a long while, and the shock has been a hard one.”

He caught the banisters, he clutched the doctor’s arm, he sought to read the truth in his face with eyes that were wild with a sudden fear.

“No, no—great God! What do you mean? You are hiding it from me. For God’s sake, don’t torture me, Doctor! What is it? What has happened? She—she—is not—dead?”

“Not dead—no, Colonel,” the doctor answered, forcing him gently away; “she—she is—she has lost her mind.”

At that very moment below, the door opened, and the voice of a courier was heard crying pantingly to Sarah, “Send Colonel Gaunt to headquarters at once!”

CHAPTER XXXV

IN late March of the year 1871, a small military figure disengaged himself from the crowd and clamor of Broadway, and marching rapidly through Twentieth Street, reached the quiet precincts of Gramercy Park. Arrived there, the twirling cane all at once subsided into a lazy swing, the brisk step was broken for a more reflective saunter, and a thumb and finger went up to the sweeping mustaches—a captain's, at the very least! He looked along the houses, curiously selecting his number, and then, with a sudden sweep of his cane, ran up a flight of brown stone steps, down which at that instant a messenger was whistling his way.

The maid, seeing the newcomer, held the door open and said inquiringly, "Major Hazard, is it?"

"Major Hazard it is," cried Jack, throwing off his gloves and surrendering hat and cane. "The general upstairs?"

"In the lib'ry, sir, the next flure, in front, to your right. He said as how he was expectin' ye."

"Very well, Anna—or Katie, which is it?"

"Anna, sir."

"Anna, then; knew it was one or the other. The trunk will be here directly."

He tripped up the stairs, stole along the hall, opened the door without a creak, and stepped into the high library. Two figures were camped upon the hearth-rugs, their backs to him, poring over a book by the

wavering firelight, a gray head and a golden one very near together.

For a space the major waited, watching the picture; then he turned, closed the door with a click, and cried, "To arms, my lads! General, the major is ready to report."

At the sound of his voice the little girl bounded from the rug with a cry, and then stopped shyly, clinging to the sleeve of her father, who had risen slowly and come forward with outstretched hand.

Jack thought to himself, "John, old fellow, they'd give me ten years the best of it, any day," for his friend's head was almost gray, and the lines about the strong cheek-bones were rigid and deep. He was smiling a welcome, but in that smile there was more of sadness than in the repose of the face.

"Well, Jack, have you sent the trunk around? It'll be rather dismal here for you, I'm afraid."

"Lord bless you, John Gaunt! If I can't put you in good spirits, well, it'll be the first time I've failed. Come, come, where are your manners? Aren't you going to present me to the Duchess?"

"This is Emily—my little girl," the father said, drawing out a giggler from behind his back, "and this is your Uncle Jack, the best friend in the world."

"H'm! monstrous fib! What did you say her name was? Emily? I prefer the Duchess." And going gallantly down on one knee, as a duchess should be approached, the major took the little hand and raised it to his lips.

"Behold! Aha!" he cried in a challenging tone, and drawing forth a package of sugarplums, he offered it to the child with a face of amusing wonder.

"Is Uncle Jack coming to stay?" the little minx

cried, with shrieks of rapture. "Oh goody, goody, goody!"

"So you're glad Uncle Jack's going to stay, Duchess?" the major asked, with a chuckle, pulling her up to his knees. "More sugarplums, eh?"

Emily stole a sly look into his face with her big, calculating, light-blue eyes, then, as though apparently satisfied with her power, she bobbed her head vigorously, speech being then impossible.

"The little rascal! So that's all you want of Uncle Jack!"

The eyes fairly sparkled with mischief.

"Very well, Duchess," — the major gave an exaggerated scowl, — "I'll have the general confiscate the candy at once!"

"No, he won't!" the little tyrant managed to enunciate, with a shake of her curls.

"Won't?"

"I'm father's pet," continued the child, reaching for another bonbon, and jouncing on his knee, "and he does just what I want — yes, he does!"

"Lord bless you, child!" said Jack, looking beyond her, "I believe he does, and so would I. There, run along to your father. John, take her back, and hand over a receipt. I swear," he added, watching the sudden change in the father's face, "you're jealous every moment your darling's away, even of your old friend Jack."

"Maybe I am," John said solemnly, as he gathered the child on his lap. "Yes, I am. She's everything to me now."

"She'll grow up, and what then?"

John waved his hand. "Ten years; that's a long way off."

"Tut, tut," Jack broke out; "to hear you talk, I'd think you had one foot in the grave. Come now, a man's young at twenty-six," he added, with a slap to his chest.

"Twenty-six?" said John, elevating one eyebrow.

"Twenty-six or thirty-six, Methuselah, what does it matter?" exclaimed Jack, with a wave of his hand, satisfied now that his object was attained. He drew his chair up before the fire where John and Emily already were installed, and stirred the embers, lighting up the dark recesses of the room.

"Ah, that feels good — like the old rooms in Cleveland, isn't it?" He threw himself back into the low chair, and took out and lighted a cigar. "By the way, forgot to tell you I met your cousin Nell last night."

"Mrs. Blackstock?" John's gaze for a moment left the fire. "Yes, she's in New York. I have seen a good deal of her lately."

"It was at a party at an old army friend's I saw her. She's a widow?"

"No, divorced," replied John, shortly. "Blackstock gave her a pretty hard time of it: lots of money and position, but a thorough scoundrel. I suspected him of some pretty close work in Baltimore, but could never quite lay my hands on him. Nell's been very kind to me here."

"Remarkably clever woman, I should say," added Jack, with a wise nod; "as far as my humble knowledge extends. Rather haughty style, but had all the men about her. She insisted upon talking to me when she found out who I was. But there's something queer about her; now what is it? I was watching her pretty close last night, and I say, do you know what I've made up my mind to?"

"No," said John, absently, his glance returning to the deep of the fire, the glowing cañons, the miniature valleys and mountains, the buried fiery cities. "No, what?"

"Well, I think she's got some fatal disease, probably consumption; she doesn't look earthly."

"What nonsense, Jack! She has a good deal of color, that's all, and very bright eyes."

"No, no, it isn't that," said Jack, obstinately; "it's not so much the way she looks, as the way she makes me feel. Can't explain. Just a notion, you know; I have a lot of them—always had. What do you hear from Cleveland?"

"Mrs. Wingate and I have never agreed, as you know," said John; "and since the senator's death, I don't hear much from there. The Blodgetts are here."

"What! old Samuel C?"

"No; S. Cadmus—they're starting in for New York society. Florrie is the belle now; she's grown into a fine woman. That's the way it goes in this country."

"Florrie and I were always sweethearts," cried Jack, with a teasing glance at Emily. "I'll go around and recall myself. And the three sisters?"

"Married long ago—can't remember to whom—"

"Hello," said Jack, with a cough, "they consoled themselves, then. Oh, about you I say nothing, but I did think Phemie could not forget me so soon. Ahem! I say, John, what a night that was when we first dined there! Weren't they just going it, though, when we came in? Well, well—I suppose the old man made his pile during the war?"

"Yes, he had big contracts, but I think he acted fairly by us."

"I say, John, this is like old times," said Jack, keep-

ing up the cheer with another log. "It does me good to talk of the old friends. How we do scatter in our old age! You abroad, and then here, Dick in California, and Jack everywhere."

"But that's done with now," John broke in, facing him. "You're going to settle down here with the old chum, in the old way."

"For a while, anyhow," answered Jack, looking at him curiously. "It is good to rest. What a rover I have been since we broke up!" He put out his hands before the fire and smiled a smile of satisfaction. The father put Emily from his lap and whispered something in her ear, at which she ran off, presently returning with a guitar.

"Here, Jack, give my little girl some of your old songs. It's just right for music."

"Must I, Duchess?" said the major, taking the guitar.

"Yes, you must," cried that young lady, with an imperative stamp of her foot.

"Heigho, there's no escape, then." Jack made a long face. "Pull down the curtains and shut out the storm, and I'll begin."

The wind was rattling the panes and calling down the chimney. Anna, coming in at this moment to light the lamps, was sent away, and they sat on in the dusk, their faces glowing in the firelight. John drew back in the low arm-chair, one hand covering his eyes, and listened dreamily while Jack touched the strings and sang the old war-songs.

He sang "Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching," and then stopped and said: "That always brings back Tom Bayly. How he used to make the air ring with it around the camp-fire! He died almost in my arms. Here, I won't sing those songs. They bring

back too many things. I'll sing something else—
'Annie Laurie.'

He had sung only the first low notes when there came the sound of light footfalls from the hall, the rustle of a skirt, the slight click of the opening door. John was on his feet in a moment, Jack sprang from his chair, looked up, and saw — Marjory! She stood there against the dark wall in a loose floating garment, a gentle smile on her face. Emily, crying "Why, it's mamma," ran forward and took her hand, all the child's imperious ways gone, as she stood looking up with wondering eyes. When John slipped his arm around Marjory, she nodded a little, and came quickly forward out of the shadow into the soft focus of the firelight, so that the major, who was trembling like a leaf, could plainly see her features. Nothing seemed to have changed. There were few lines in her face; the thin, sensitive nose, the sweet break of the lips, and the flushing cheeks were the Marjory of old, but it was as though an eraser had passed across the eyes and left them empty of meaning.

"She will not know you," said John, seeing how the guitar shook in his hand. "She does not know any of us; she is very gentle and quiet, but," he added, touching his forehead, "there is nothing there."

He placed her in his arm-chair and made her comfortable, drawing her feet up on a stool. "She likes to follow the fire. It was the sound of the music that brought her. Play some more, Jack."

"In a moment, John, in a moment," the major said. Emily, coming to his side, whispered: "Mamma is ill; you mustn't mind it. She's going to get over it soon, if we are very careful of her."

Jack put the guitar down and went to the window. He stood a moment, gazing through the curtains across

the gusty clouds, then he closed them and came and took up his guitar, and struggled bravely through "Annie Laurie."

Marjory sat staring into the fire with big, dreamy eyes. She nodded to the rhythm of the strings, and beat the time with her slender hand, and when it was over, an expression of delight crossed her features, and she waited eagerly, turning her face toward the player, like a little child.

Emily came and stood by her side, and took the slim white hand in hers and pillowed her round cheek against it. She watched over her slightest movement, eased the cushions overhead, and straightened the stool beneath her feet. She was a child no longer, by that strange turn of Providence become a little mother.

"Hang it, I'm so hoarse I must have caught cold," Jack said apologetically. He cleared his throat, and tried to begin another song, but halfway through he saw the slender hand begin to beat the time, and the smile returning to the vacant face. He stopped, his voice broke, and crying, "Oh, John!" he put down the guitar suddenly and buried his face in his hands.

"Jack, don't," said John in a low voice; "it is almost more than I can bear."

At the tone of his voice Jack straightened up and went to the table. "Here, I'll light up; where are the matches?"

Emily, understanding nothing of the scene, brought him the box, and in a moment the room flashed into light. When the music had broken off an expression of bewilderment had passed over Marjory's face, and as the gas flared out she moved uneasily.

John came forward and turned down the jets, saying

apologetically, "It dazzles her when it is so bright. She is restless now; I will give her Emily's picture-books to look at. The colors catch her eye and seem to amuse her."

He brought the book and opened it on Marjory's lap. Her eyes immediately lighted up, and she began to roam through the bright pages with a low humming. Emily came, and, standing at her side, turned the leaves and pointed out the pictures; the men, withdrawing a few steps, watched them.

"She has never recognized you, John?"

"I have thought she did, sometimes. I'm afraid it was because I wanted to believe it. No, she sees everything, but her mind is a blank. Sometimes I think she does distinguish Emily, but I am never sure." He stopped, and they stood in silence watching the two until the maid came up to announce the dinner.

"What!" exclaimed Jack, when they were at the table, cocking his eyes at the rosy, sparkling Emily. "Hello, I say, does the Duchess rule everywhere?"

The child giggled, and put her imperious little nose an inch or so higher in the air, with a twinkle of her eyes in the direction of her father.

"She has taken her meals with me ever since she was big enough to keep in a chair, if that's what you mean," John answered, taking the soft hand in his big rough one. "I couldn't sit down alone, and I tried to make it bright for the young one. I shall have so much to tell her mother of her, some day; for you know, Jack, I have never given up hope," John said, lowering his voice, "and I never shall;" and there, as the Duchess was looking questions, the conversation ended.

Jack departing to pay a call, John and Emily went to the library, where they built impossible houses of cards,

and demolished them in a breath, played a game of dominos and one of checkers (each of which he had much difficulty in losing), and took a journey into the land of the "Arabian Nights." At eight, the inexorable clock rang out the retiring hour.

"What, already?" The father closed the book with a sigh. "No more for the night, then."

"Just one more, a short one," begged the child, with a pout, "please — p-please!"

The father put the book away and rose, saying, "Come on, little girl, not another bit to-night, you rascal."

"Shan't go! I'll read it myself."

"Emily!"

The child threw one shoulder forward in protest.

"Emily! Are you going to disobey me?"

There was a slight hesitation, another pout, a decided "Yes, I am!" and then Emily, looking up and catching sight of her father's face, suddenly repented, and came flying across the room, crying, "Oh, you funny papa! I was just teasing you."

John put her up on his shoulder, and carried her thus up the stairs and to her room, as he had done night after night from the beginning, taking care that no harm should befall the curly head. He undressed her with his own fingers, smiling at the babbling confidences she poured into his ears, or waiting patiently until the squirmer subsided, and another button could be freed. He picked up the scattered clothes, folded them, and hung them over a chair, captured the straggling shoes, and ranged them toe to toe, in military precision, at the foot of the bed, as he had done for years.

"Oh, what a funny star!" the child cried, as he put out the light and was shutting the curtains; "see how it winks and winks. How big and way off it looks,

doesn't it? Oh, I hate so to have you shut out all the stars, Papa."

He drew the curtains and put out his hand and felt his way to the bed and sat down.

"What are you thinking about so hard, Papa?" she asked, noticing his silence. He was thinking of just such a night years ago, and of a little boy who looked up at the stars with just such eyes as hers. The years were gone, like an autumn twilight, and he was a boy again, ignorant of sorrow and pain.

"Promise me, little girl," he said, thinking of the awakening that was to come, "promise me that when you cannot understand anything, you will come to me."

The sleepy child mumbled assent, then, tumbling from the bed, she knelt at his knees in prayer, burying her head in his lap. Once back in bed, she turned drowsily on her pillow, still clutching his hand, and muttered, "You — won't — go 'way — till I'm — fas' 'sleep? Promise!"

"I promise," he answered, and he waited until the tiny fingers relaxed; he would have waited the whole night if she had asked it. Then, he rose slowly from the bed so that it scarcely creaked, and listening for a sound to call him back, tiptoed from the room to another bedside, that of the other child.

CHAPTER XXXVI

IN the morning John, who was an early riser, would hover about Emily's bedroom, every now and then glancing in for the first sight of a fluttering eyelid; this once detected, he would watch in delight from the foot of the bed the squirmings and protesting grunts which accompanied that young lady's tardy awakening.

Breakfast over, they resorted to the library. Out would come primers and fine Spencerian copy-books, arithmetic, pencil and paper, and the father would intrench himself by the fire for the morning lesson. He thought the child's learning something beyond words — astounding. She was just in the magic days of childhood, days of golden wishes and fairy dreams. When she read to him out of Hans Andersen's good old book, he would glance beyond her to the brown fronts, the chimneys and the spires showing through the window, and then back at the eager little face — he, too, was under the spell of a little witch. All too soon the spell would break, and the big castle would come tumbling into a thousand pieces.

In the afternoon he would take Emily for long rambles in the park, where that young lady was greeted by every keeper of merry-go-round, swan boat, swing, or goat cart, with as much consideration as though she were in reality a duchess. To these purveyors of childish amusements she was a constant windfall, and her preference was sought by all the arts diplomatic.

It was in the evenings, after he had seen his charges safe asleep, and Jack was out, that time lagged heavy upon the father. At such times he was lonely, restless, and quite at a loss how to beguile the stretching hours until the welcome drowsiness arrived. He tried to read, dipping into the books he knew he ought to know. The efforts were perfunctory — the book was relaxed, closed, abandoned. His chin dropped to the palm of his hand, the lips tightened, the eyes fell in reverie to an open page on the table, to Sinbad and the Roc's egg, with a longing for the years to hurry past, that Emily might be sitting at his side of nights reading to him. The dreams fled, the emptiness remained. Then he would draw himself up straight, shut his lips sternly, shoulder a cane, and, with a special adjuration to Marjory's nurse, would go out, marching grimly down Broadway, finding a little distraction in the current of humanity that swept past under the glare of the lights.

Gradually, of late, when solitude hung too heavily on him, he would trudge over to Cousin Nell's, to listen to her music and chat with her about the old days. More and more he began to turn to her for silent sympathy. He was at the solitary period of life, when friends, and kindred have dropped away. In all the world, until Jack had come, Nell alone recalled his boyhood. Home again he would go at last, tramping along with listless cane and downcast eyes — home once more to his bed beside his wife's, ready to spring up at her slightest motion.

One peculiarity he had developed in these late rambles, — he never could learn to pass a beggar. Once or twice he had gone on resolutely for a block, and then, hesitatingly, had retraced his steps, and finally dropped a coin in the rattling tin box. His sorrow had made

him tender toward the suffering of others ; his sympathies were quick to be touched, now.

Jack, who was with him on one such occasion, laughed and said, "What, again? That makes the third beggar you've tipped to-night, you old philanthropist. They know your beat."

"Well, Jack," answered John, gravely, "if I should pass one, I don't believe I should sleep all night. I'm falling into funny ways lately. You see, down at the bottom, it's a selfish reason."

"Impostor!" growled Jack. "Humph! I warn you I am not to be taken in."

"Jack," said his friend, after a few moments, "you used to be somewhat of a hand at French — now what do you think of this Miss Gringoire? Is her accent good enough for Emily?"

"What, the Duchess again?" cried the major, pinching his arm. "From morn till dewy eve do you think of any one else? Tell me that, sir!"

"Only one other," said John, as they turned the corner and the library lights shone out ahead ; and at that point, as always, the conversation ended.

This then was John's life. Somewhat with the fanaticism with which the heathen prostrate themselves before the great god Shiva, blindly and utterly, he worshipped the child. His eyes were constantly on her face, fearful lest one fleeting flush of childish mirth, one downcast glance, one pensive mood should escape him. At times he dropped his head, unable longer to look at her — so painfully was she like her mother. At other times, as she stood imperiously at his knee, he would get a look so like one of his own, — a word just as he might have spoken it, a gesture he might have made

with his own hands, — that he would hold her in his arms and stare, until he would awake with a start, to find the puzzled child with gathering tears in her eyes, and forced to evade her doleful question, why he looked so sad. He was so adrift out of her presence, so content when she stood prattling at his side, that often he said to himself with a guilty twinge, that it was all utterly selfish, all for his own happiness.

When the war had closed, he had left the service quietly, — stealing away from the honors and the praise ready to be showered upon him, — had disappeared from view, and shut himself up with his wife and her baby. His mind was a chaos, his soul was torn with anguish. Alone, unseen, he fought out the bitter fight; and when from sheer exhaustion it was ended, and he had acquired an outward calm, all that he had won was but a mask to wear before the world. The wound was not to be healed.

He gave himself up to haunting the waiting-rooms of the great specialists. He journeyed to Europe for consultations, until even he saw the fruitlessness of the quest. Only a few ventured to assert that it was possible, not probable, that her mind some day might be restored; stranger things had happened. Still, whatever might come, she lay beyond the power of their physic.

All this John told Jack in a long talk after lunch, saying frankly: "I tell you this once, that I may not have to refer to it again, for I — I cannot bear to dwell on it. I never have given up hope, Jack, and I never shall. I know she will come back. She must — she must!"

He rose, more agitated than Jack had ever seen him, walked to the end of the room, and came to a stop before a daguerreotype of Marjory Wingate. When he returned, the storm was gone from his eyes, and he

leaned over, resting his hand on his friend's shoulder, and said: "There, Jack, we understand each other. Now off with you to your appointment. Emily and I are going for a walk."

Jack pulled out his watch, seized his cane, and ran off, while the father waited patiently at the foot of the stairs until the little romp came sliding down the banisters, to the imminent danger of her very best crackling frock. John stopped her at the end of the slide, catching her in his arms, in spite of shrieks of protesting laughter, until Emily, regaining the floor, smoothed her dress reproachfully, and said, "You've spoiled my nice clean dress."

"How about the banisters, young lady?" inquired the father, with a twinkle; "are they good for new frocks?"

The Duchess changed the conversation. "We're going to Cousin Nell's," she said, with a stamp of her foot. "Yes, we are, you know we are, Papa."

"She's not at home, perhaps."

"Yes, she is."

"Well, if you say she is, of course she must be. That settles it. We'll go at once."

Away they went up the avenue, hand in hand, Emily skipping along, trying to keep pace with the strides, which, though he took pains to shorten them, were still a problem for her young legs, until at length she darted off ahead and scampered up a flight of brown stone steps. John, coming up soberly a minute later, found the door open, and Emily clinging to the skirts of a lady, who, turning, showed the blackest of hair and eyes, and a rich, dark complexion.

"The young lady would insist upon coming to see you, Nell," said John, taking her hand. "So here we are. But you're going out?"

"No, no — I had nothing to do, I was going out for a walk," Helen said, looking down at the child. "Merely to make time go a little faster. I am glad you've come."

They went upstairs into the drawing-room, Helen laughing with the pleasure of a childless woman in such affection, as Emily clung to her with both hands, and gazed into her face with wide-eyed admiration; for the child thought her the fairest, loveliest being she had ever known, and secretly likened her to the wonderful enchanted princess in the tower.

The years since the war had made little change in the woman. What change there had been was all for the better. She was of a fuller figure, rounded and supple. The old drawn expression, the haunted look, was gone from her face, that on seeing John lighted up with a soft, happy glow; but back somewhere in the eyes still lay the old restless look.

"You and Jack are marvellous," said John, as they took chairs, Emily cuddling up to Helen, and playing with her jewelled hands. "Really, you grow younger every time I see you."

"Throw things off, John, forget, and you will be like us. That is the only secret."

John shook his head. "An old dog and new tricks, Nell. I reckon I can't change my ways now."

He let his head drop lazily against the cushioned back of the chair.

"And how have you been since I saw you last?" she said with soft solicitude. "No more ramblings at night? You promised me, you know, you would come to me when you were restless. You mustn't forget that!"

"What — three or four times a week?"

"Every night, John, if I can help you."

His eyes were following Emily in her curious seeking

through the shelves. He did not see the expression that went with the words.

"Major Hazard is with me now, and he is the best cure known. He ought to be called Jack the care killer."

"I met him two or three nights ago, and we talked of you. Why did you never tell me of your start in Cleveland?"

"Why, I began about the same as others, I reckon. I never thought you'd a mind to hear it."

"Don't you know," she said slowly, "I care to hear everything about you?" Then rising, she went quickly to the sofa and began to take off her bonnet. "You would like me to play to you, wouldn't you? You see, I know what pleases you."

She sat down and began to play the things she knew he loved, drifting from one melody to another just as they occurred to her, in that most delightful of all ways; John, from the chair, every now and then prompting a favorite. Emily, deserting a gloriously illustrated edition of the "Arabian Nights," came wondering to her side. Helen rambled on for a long while with half-closed eyes, sometimes glancing gently at the child, but never at the father, until at last she ran her hands softly down the keyboard and rose. She had played to the thoughts she could not speak.

"Do you like it?" she asked, laying a hand on the back of his chair.

John nodded. "I like to come and listen, Nell," he said, not quite back from the land of reveries. "It's your expression I like; everything you touch has you in it."

Seeing her standing there, he rose, and they went to the window and looked out on the shifting, nervous

throng, the stiff footmen on the carriages, the horses stepping proudly under their jingling harness, the splendor and the squalor, the real and the sham, the pretention and the striving, and Helen said with a shake of the head: "What is it all worth? I would give all I possess to have something —"

"I too, Nell."

"So would they, probably," she said with a sudden laugh, and she drew the curtain across and said: "Come away. It is a fine moral picture, isn't it? — when you understand. Every one wants what he hasn't got, and when they are my age it's little they wouldn't give to get it — but we can't." He shook his head, still lingering at the window. "Forgive me, John," she said suddenly, touching his arm. "I didn't mean to make you sad — I see I have. Does the wound never heal?"

At the words, John drew back instinctively, his lips growing stern, and his eyes forbidding.

She saw the movement, and she said sadly, sinking her voice that Emily might not hear: "Oh, John, can't I, who have known what sorrow is, speak to you in sympathy without your drawing away. Life is hard enough. Don't let your pride turn all help from you."

He shook his head, and softened, saying: "I know how kindly you meant it, Nell. But I cannot let you speak to me of that — I cannot, Nell — it is my nature."

"Very well, then."

Thereafter she spoke hardly a word until he called Emily and went away. Then she went to the window and watched him until the crowds shut him from her sight. Her hands dropped bitterly. She glanced up at the little Chinese god on the wall and cried: "As soon ask the love of that stone; he does not even see. Oh,

what are riches, money, jewels, when in a year, a month, a day, they will be no more to me than dust! What is anything, what has anything ever been to me, compared to his love!"

She pressed her palms against her forehead passionately, and went to her room. On the table, wide open, lay a copy of "Vanity Fair," into which that morning she had been dipping. She turned to a passage that had caught her imagination. She read it carefully, and cast it down on the table. It balanced a moment and fell to the floor, where she let it lie with a disdainful glance.

"'A woman may marry whom she likes'—how often I have heard that quoted!" she cried impatiently, and then, her mood changing, she shook her head and said more quietly, "Ah, but what when another woman must be reckoned with?—a woman dead to him, but how alive to me!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

DURING these years many business offers had come to John, but to all he had returned an unqualified refusal. Lately there had come another proposal, a tempting offer to embark in the new transcontinental railroad, with the information that a director would wait upon him to make explanations and urge his acceptance.

So one day a burly form came laboriously up the steps, puffing and swearing, and a familiar face, round as a squash, with roving eyes, loomed out of the shadow.

"What? Blodgett!" cried John, as the other pumped him by the hand in the old familiar way. "You in the railroad too?"

"I'm in pretty much everything these days, John. Whew! hold on, let me get back my breath. Curse that foot!" Blodgett cried, falling into the nearest chair, and mopping his forehead. "Pretty much everything—either trying to get in or out of it. I like your quarters. Where's your little girl? I brought her a present. Out? Too bad."

John allowed him to rest a moment, for the combined exertion of climbing and talking had left him breathless, and his hands were shaking. He looked at him again, and saw the change. Blodgett had become a man of the hour; the brag and the bluster had rubbed off, and the shrewd, persistent speculator of the small city was now a man of national affairs, the engineer of colossal enterprises. Under the weakening body was the iron will, the alert, deep-reading eye.

"Palsy, John," said the promoter, stretching out a quivering hand, "and gout in the foot. I'm paying for my sins. Now to business. I'm here from St. Paul to get you, and I won't take no from you."

"My mind has long been made up," answered John, quietly. "You'll have to go back empty-handed, I reckon."

"Hang me if I do!" cried Blodgett, bringing down his fist with a crash. The emphasis started a fit of coughing. When it was over he began more mildly: "You won't refuse this, John. What I said, I stick to. I won't take my answer now. I'm here to state my opinions, and you're here to listen and think 'em over for a month. I'll take your answer then, and not before, and I'll fetch it myself, if I come from 'Frisco for it."

"Well, what are your opinions?" asked John, with a smile.

"Look here, John," the other began, producing the inevitable cigar, and rubbing a match. The smoke poured forth furiously, enveloping his features, but the twinkling eyes shone through, gauging their man. "You're a tough customer—the toughest I ever run against. I never know just how to go at you. Any other man I'd talk money, but, hang it! I don't believe you care a continental about that, when your mind is set up."

"I don't," John answered frankly. "I made my money, I have invested fortunately, I have more than enough, I am satisfied."

"There, there; right there. There's the point," cried Blodgett, snapping up the opening. He leaned forth and brought one hand down on the other with a resounding slap. "Are you satisfied? I say you're not [slap]. You can't be satisfied doing nothing all these

years. You? You're the man to lead [slap]. You have energy [slap], force, power [slap, slap], you can't shut 'em up! You had ambition when I knew ye, more than I ever seen in any man. You've got that now. Ambition don't die. You shake your head. I know ye better [a tremendous blow]. I'm talkin' plain, John. I don't mean to hurt you; I'm an old friend. You don't know yourself. You're restless, you're uneasy; I can see it. You want to be up and doin' things, big things fit for your abilities. Mark my words, you won't be happy till you do. And that's why, when you've thought it over, you'll go in with us. It's a big thing—the biggest thing to-day. You can name your salary. I know that's no object; I wish it was. We need men like you, John. We've got to have you [slap]. There's the point. I don't want your answer now; don't shake your head at me, it won't do. You've got to take a month, and that's all there is to it."

John made no answer. During all his visitor's talk, one thought had run through his mind. Ten years ago Blodgett would have made him the offer through pure friendship; to-day, underneath all the protestations, he saw the selfish reason, the desire to gain a useful weapon. Men had become mere instruments to the promoter. John studied him long, wondering at the hunger for money and power that would never be fed.

"Well, that's over; we'll talk of other matters," Blodgett put in, rousing him from his study. "Twenty minutes to the good yet—I'm on my way to Chicago in an hour. I know—I know, bless you, what I've been tellin' ye. Didn't I try a couple of years of takin' it easy myself? Don't I know? I didn't go in for any more of that society business—can't go them prancin' snobs and their ways—but I took the good woman and

Florrie for a tower, as they say, over the water. It's all right, of course, if you like that kind of a thing; but it's slow—slow all through, and they give you nothin' to eat. I was just runnin' to seed, pinin' for the excitement of the old days, and—well, one day when we had a little count or something on hand, that Florrie'd picked up, I come right out at dinner, and I says, says I, 'Maggie, I can't stand it no longer; I'm goin' back to the land of the livin'; we sail next week.'

"I fixed the women as smooth as anything, right here in New York, and then I cut out for the West. John, it makes another man of you. There, there, now, I'm done with business—let it drop." He dug out his watch from the swelling waistcoat, glanced at it, and started up. "Well, I'm off. Give us your hand; glad I got your views, anyway. Give the present to your little girl. Good-by. Think it over, John, and I know what your answer'll be."

He went down the steps slowly, got into his cab with a lunge, and drove away. At the corner, whom should he meet but Jack, marching briskly down the street. He stopped the carriage excitedly, and, thumping on the window, beckoned Jack to him, and made him acquainted with his desire.

"Hang it, I'd be willin' to put up a little sum to get him," he added, with a shrewd glance, "if I thought you'd take it."

"Thanks," responded Jack, with a laugh, "but I do such things without the commission."

"You're a good one, a good friend, Major," said the magnate, withdrawing into his seat, and the next instant he was whirling away to his train.

When Jack came whistling into the library, he found John in a brown study before the fire.

"Blodgett's just left," said his host, without looking up. "You've missed him by just three minutes. He's been talking me deaf, dumb, and blind about his railroad."

"Lucky fellow! When are you going into it?"

"I? Never. Why should I? I'm as happy as it is possible for me to be. He won't take a refusal for a month, so he says — very foolishly."

"What, you refused?" cried the major, preparing for the attack.

"Refused? Of course I did. Here, I'm taking all the fire; draw up and toast your heels. What nonsense are you talking, Jack? Do you think anything could tempt me to leave Emily? — and that's what it would mean."

The major, being brought face to face with the enemy, crossed his legs, leaned back, made a cage of his fingers, and said, after a long whistle: "I believe the saving point in my life, Johnnie Glum, was when I began to give you lectures, and yet I'd rather charge into grape and canister than begin another."

"What, not a lecture!" cried John, with affected anxiety. "Well, go easy, Major. All right; I'm ready."

"There, now, that's just the kind of a provoking cuss you are," Jack began, fidgeting with his mustache; "there you go, assuming those defensive tactics, and it means no end of trouble before I can get you down to a serious and respectful frame of mind."

"Bosh!" broke in John; "go on, you humbug! It's part of your art to get me good-natured."

"I haven't often talked to you this way. Lord knows I'd rather not; but I've got to do it. See here, John," he began now very solemnly, "I want you to take up that offer. I want you to put on the harness again, and

be the old, alert John Gaunt. Why, John, you're so changed you shock me at times. You're moody, you're restless, you have no faith in yourself. The trouble is, you're stagnating, John. And to talk plain, it's nothing but a sort of suicide you're planning for yourself. Now I know what you say: you want to be with the Duchess every hour of the day; I know how you feel. Don't think I'm hard; God bless you for it! But—" he sat up a moment and stirred the fire—"John, it will hurt you, what I'm going to say, but it's the truth. You haven't a right to keep her all to yourself. You must send her away to school, where she can play with other children, and learn things you can't teach her. You can't keep her all to yourself, because, don't you see? it won't be good for her; and John, that time is coming soon. I—I don't mean to be hard."

"You, too, Jack!" the other said bitterly. "Has any one any pity for me? How wise you are! Blodgett is a fool beside you. You know how to go straight to the heart."

"Oh, I say, John," Jack broke in, seeing how deeply he had pierced. "I'm not trying to get the better of you in an argument. Be just—it's the truth I'm showing you." Then he added resolutely, "You see, when the Duchess must go off to school—"

"Enough," a hand came out suddenly, and checked his arm, "enough, Jack; I know all you have to say. Don't go on. You have said enough; I must think it over. Hush! There she is now, on the stairs."

Often and long, doggedly, defiantly, he did think on what Jack had said: in the morning lessons when Emily waited at his knees with mischievous eyes; in the afternoon trips through the park, as he followed the imperious little pleasure-seeker; at evening, sitting by

her bed in the darkness, hearing the childish heart pouring out its faith and belief in ways he could not follow; most of all, in the solitary, wakeful night. The better to think, he even separated himself of afternoons from Emily, sitting by himself for hours on a bench in the little park. He found with a pang that the child did not even notice the change; that indeed she was happier in her own solitude. Quick on the pang came the strange feeling that he was only living over the emotions of his own mother. He recalled the day she told him he might go to school, — how happily he had run off, careless of everything but his new delight! how, glancing back a moment, he had seen her sitting silently in the fall of the dark, leaning wearily against the back of the garden-seat among the roses. Only now, in the immutable cycle of life, had he come at last to understand what she had felt.

One morning, shortly after this interview with Jack, a day in April, after a sleepless night, he had risen earlier than usual, and gone out into the park, to his accustomed bench. It was a forward season. The slate clouds and gusty skies of March were gone, and instead, but one lazy, fleecy, drifting cloud hung against the sweep of blue. The air, moving gently among the swelling buds, was soft against his cheek. The spirit of rejuvenation was abroad — in the open windows inviting the breeze, in the springing step of the pedestrians, in the crack of the coachman's whip, in the far-heard sounds of children's voices, in the perfume of the air, — the newer color in the grass, a few bursting twigs, the warmer earth, the song of building wings, proclaiming, despite brick and stone, the spring. The gardener, moving among his beds, tipped his hat to him and said good morning. Only one other person was near him,

an old gentleman, with hands folded over a cane, who was regarding him from a neighboring bench, a figure John had often noticed during the winter months.

When he raised his head again, the bent form was standing before him, and he heard a thin voice say, "Good morning. May I share your seat with you?"

"Certainly. Sit down, sir," said John, noticing the veins that stood out like furrows on the sallow hands.

"I wanted to talk to somebody," the other began apologetically; "I am not feeling very cheerful this morning, you see."

John could not suppress a feeling of irritation at the intrusion. A certain melancholy had always grown upon him during this season, and he wished to be alone; but he said kindly:—

"I have not seen you here, sir, for a couple of weeks. I hope you have not been ill."

"What's that—ill?" said the other, shading his ear. John repeated the question. "Ill—no, no—I always get feeling low and restless when the spring's coming. I suppose I'm queer—I can't bear to see it come."

Astonished at a note so in harmony with his mood, John turned and studied him. The old gentleman saw his surprise, ran his hand undecidedly through the stained gray beard, turned stiffly to face him, and said: "I presume you're wondering why I come here then, eh? I thought as much. Well, I'll tell you."

He put out his hand and touched John's arm. "I'm getting on in life, don't you see? and it always makes me think of that. I'd get away from it if I could; I'd go to some place where there isn't any spring, but I can't. I'm queer, I know. When I feel it's coming, I don't come around these parks. I want to pretend it isn't so, you know. I go and bury myself down on the

East Side, where there are no green things, and I won't know it's coming. It's different to me, now — I — I I'm not a part of it any more."

He drew his hand away, settled back, and looked straight across the lawns. "It is terrible, terrible. Did you ever read of the way the Turks took Constantinople, and how they entered the streets singing their battle songs over the dead and the dying? You have? Well, that's what the spring is to me. There isn't any pity in it. It isn't for old age; it laughs at it. It conquers me and laughs at me. What are you and I before this thing in front of us? I try to run from it, but it's no use. This year I buried myself for two weeks away from everything, and this very morning as I turned the corner of Irving Place and Nineteenth, right there waiting for me were three blades of grass, waiting up among the cobblestones. It's no use. I can't escape it. That's why I'm here."

He drew himself up erect, with a soldierly showing, pointed to a bed of symmetrically arranged crocus, and said scornfully, with a melodramatic wave of his hand, "There's a man's cheap imitation; this is the real," and with his cane he poked the weeds among the gravel.

The next moment he was gone, bending over his cane. The gardener came up, grinning. "Old boy been telling you some of his stories?"

"Yes, poor fellow."

"Out of his head these ten years."

John looked at the gardener with a sort of relief. Here was a toothless old man, grinning and winking, who did not fear the spring. What he had heard was false, then, the mere wandering of a disordered mind. As he began to walk down the street, he felt glad at heart that all he had heard was mere imagination, that there existed no

one in the whole city who fled from the approach of spring. Suddenly he stopped, and a strange quiver ran through him. He had come to the corner of Nineteenth, brought to a full stop on the cobblestones before a splash of green against the gray — the three blades of victorious grass.

It was true then. He stopped, startled. Then suddenly he stooped, plucked the grass by the roots, and holding it before him on his open hand, went slowly back to the house.

“Jack,” he said that night, when the major had returned to find him akimbo before the fire, crushing in his hands a tuft of green, “I have been living for days in my mother’s heart, learning what I did not see as a child — what Emily does not see now. Queer, isn’t it? this life we live in. And now, do you know, to-day, I can understand my father — his horror of death — I know now how he felt in — in the spring.”

He saw a look of alarm in Jack’s face. He sprang up, flung the grass in the fire, clapped him on the back, and cried with a bluff laugh, “What nonsense, Jack! I’m not afraid of that;” and then, looking at the shriveling grass, he added, “it is merely that I begin to understand it.”

But despite his protestation, he was secretly worried at certain black thoughts that had begun to crop up in his mind, and he said to himself more than once: “Where will it end? I don’t know; I cannot see.”

During this time Jack went out often of nights, and John was much alone. When he went to call at his cousin’s, the maid informed him that Mrs. Blackstock was out of town for two weeks; and so, left to his own devices, he wound through the dark city trying to tire mind and body, that he might escape another sleepless

night. "Where will it all end?" he said to himself again; but down in his heart he knew that the struggle was only about to begin.

One night when he had finished putting Emily to bed, the maid informed him that there was a man downstairs who had asked to see him. John glanced at the card,

ROBERT GRAVES.

The name was strange to him. He went down curious at the object of such a call. At his entrance a clerical-looking man, shabbily dressed, rose and made an awkward bow.

"Mr. Graves? You wish to see me?" said John, eyeing him sharply. "What can I do for you? Take a seat."

The other thanked him with the conscious punctiliousness that distinguishes mediocre breeding, and said hurriedly: "I'm sorry to trouble you, sir. I'm not taking your time? I—I wouldn't have done it—if I wasn't in such a bad way, you see."

John looked at him again and, seeing an open countenance, answered kindly: "Go on. I will help you if I can."

"You mistake me, sir," Graves answered, moving uneasily. "I am not a beggar; I'm only asking for what is owing me."

"What?" exclaimed John, instantly on his guard. "Why, I never saw you before in my life."

"Not you; I don't mean you, sir. It was your wife that hired me. It isn't much, Mr. Gaunt, a bit over twenty dollars; but it would help me out a good deal just now."

"My wife! What do you mean?" John broke in sharply, planting his chair directly in front of him.

“Wait — I am mistaken, I have seen you before; now, where was it?”

“In Baltimer, sir.”

“In Baltimore?”

“Yes, sir, about '64. Your wife, she hired me to follow you around the streets, to be on hand in case of foul play.”

John sprang to his feet and seized him by the shoulder. “You are lying to me,” he cried, his voice choking. “It isn't true. I won't believe it!”

He saw the anger on the other's face, and he dropped his arm and fell into his chair, eying him as though he were an apparition out of some fearful dream. When he had recovered his voice he said hurriedly: “No, no, not that—I—I beg your pardon. I don't know what I am saying — go on — go on. Stop, did you wear a black slouch hat and a light military cloak?”

“Yes, sir. I saw you thought I was something different; but the lady made me promise I wouldn't let you know. She didn't want you to think she was worrying, I guess.”

John, too much agitated to speak, his brain reeling, sat and stared at him.

“After I heard what happened to the lady,” the man went on, “I didn't want to bother you, just then. I never would have, sir, if I hadn't been in need. And then I enlisted — here's my honorable discharge — and when I got back I lost track of you. It's only a little bit over twenty dollars — but I haven't got anything to prove it. I'm afraid you'll have to take my word, sir; but—”

“Enough!” cried John, rising at last. “I believe you. I know you're telling me the truth. Wait here

a moment." In a few minutes he came downstairs again and thrust a slip into the other's hand, saying: "Take this, it's a check — never mind the amount. No thanks, no, no thanks; it is I that owe you everything."

The man, seeing his agitation, went out quietly, while John shut the door, drew the chain, turned slowly and went up stairs, trying to think clearly through the turmoil of the revelation. His brain was hot with the agony of repentance and vain regret as he stood outside the door of her bedroom. He entered quietly. She was in bed, asleep — one arm thrown back under her head, the other straying on the coverlet; her hair fallen free over one shoulder, against the open throat; the shallow smile hovering on the lips. It was the Marjory of old, serene, beautiful — the Marjory he had so often surprised thus as he came home late from his office.

He stood at the foot of the bed, supporting himself by the post, trembling and swaying. The present, the reality, the fact, were swept away by a whirlwind of emotion. He stood before his Marjory again, waiting for her eyes to flutter, to open, — to call him. He went to her side. He fell on his knees and laid his hand gently upon her arm and called, "Marjory! Mar-jory!" He had forgotten how vain was the summons.

She stirred uneasily, and turned her head. Her eyes opened, rested a moment blankly on the pleading face, then shut again in sleep.

He stretched out his hands and cried, "Marjory — Marjory, how I have wronged you! Oh, come back, come back just for a moment, just to forgive me!"

The shock of his own voice frightened him. He

buried his head in his hands, crying out: "It is too cruel—too cruel! This is worse than death!"

What could he believe? He could believe in life beyond death—but a life without a soul, a living body without a mind, this eclipse of love, this death in life—this was indeed inscrutable!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

AT the close of the two weeks Helen returned to her home. "Has any one called during my absence, Margaret?" she asked carelessly, as the maid was unpacking her valise.

"Yes, ma'am," said Margaret, rising to her feet, "several gentlemen: Doctor Pancoast and Mr. Gaunt, and —"

"My cousin! has he been here?"

"Yes, ma'am, three times."

"Three times? Why, Margaret, you should have told him I was away."

"Please, Mrs. Blackstock, I did — the second time," Margaret said, with a smile her mistress did not see. "I did forget the first time. And then he was here last night, to know when you was comin' back."

"Oh, very well." She took out her combs and let the long black hair tumble over her shoulders. "Margaret, take the brush and smooth it out. Well, was that all? Did no one else come?"

"Please, Mrs. Blackstock, I'll tell you now. Indeed, there was lots of others," and she proceeded to enumerate a dozen, as she plied the brush.

"What! was Mr. Cameron here?" the mistress said, stopping her suddenly, with a show of interest. "What a pity!"

"I think now, he'll be around to-night, ma'am. And shall I say you are out to all the others?"

"No, that is unnecessary," said Helen, coldly. "Say nothing until you have brought me the cards. Put my green silk ball-dress on the bed, and then that will be all."

"Is it goin' out you are to-night, ma'am? And will we stay up for you?" Margaret asked, secretly wondering at the toilette.

"No, I shall be at home to-night," the mistress said, with a little hesitation. "The trip was so dusty, I should like to get into something fresh."

"Well?" said Ann, the second maid, when Margaret, with a show of great cunning, had retailed the conversation to the kitchen.

"And she thought she was foolin' me, did she?" said Margaret, closing one eye, "askin' so particular about Mr. Cameron! Ann Reilly, you should have seen her face when I proposed to say she was out to them all except Mr. Cameron!" She ended with a dig into the listener's ribs. At the sound of their laughter the cook came up, and Frank, the utility boy, and they, too, must have their fun over the tale.

"And you think it's a dead set at Mr. Gaunt?" asked Ann, wisely.

"Ann Reilly, have I eyes in my head? What did she mean when she w'u'dn't go to the opera that night with Doctor Pancoast, sayin' as she had another engagement? And did she go out? She did not. She stayed in all evenin', a-lettin' on to read, and when the bell'd give a ring, and I'd bring up a card, w'u'dn't she jump! And why did she say she was out to all o' them when she had nothin' to do but hold a book in her hands? It's my belief she didn't read a word of it, either. I sneaked a look over her shoulder three times, and she

hadn't turned a page. Why? Because she was expectin' him, you see. And when he come the next night, she was that nervous when she saw the card, she turned her back on me that I sh'u'dn't see her face. They're some sort of cousin, I think; and it's my belief she has been in love wid him all her life."

"He be a widow, ain't he?" put in Frank, grinning.

"That, or he's fixed the way she is," retorted the other, with a laugh.

"Do you think she'll get 'im?" inquired the cook.

"She ought to! Mercy on us! The number of men she's kept a-danglin' at her heels is somethin' awful!" She threw up her hands, and then added, with a nod of conviction, "Besides, he's pretty regular in his visits."

Meanwhile, unaware of the basement tribunal, Helen was dressing for the evening. A battle of clashing desires and impulses was going on in her heart, as she stood in the middle of the room, debating.

"What a fool I am!" she thought to herself; "he has called three times. It is just as I wished. He misses me; he needs me. I should have stayed away another week. No matter; I will be wise; I will say I am out to-night; I—" She gave a scornful laugh. "Oh, no, no, no! Why deceive myself? I know I will see him, I know I couldn't have stayed away another day."

In her agitation she began to walk like a caged animal. "What an actress — what an actress! All my life I have played at love. I have made a score of men adore me, I have been everything to every man, I have played with myself until there isn't a single genuine emotion left in me except — except when I stand in his presence."

She stood still a moment, tapping the floor with her foot, then twice she shook her head slowly, and the corners of her lips wavered.

“I know it cannot be, and yet I go on striving—he thinks only of her—of the dead! He will never think of any one else; and out of all the world, yes, all the shallow, trifling world I have known, he alone is true and noble. Oh, I love him so that I sometimes want to throw myself at his feet and tell him, come what may. No, no, no—I don’t mean that, I can’t mean that! Oh, where do I stand? If he should love me, it would not be he. I know all that, and yet I cannot give him up; I cannot decide anything.”

Suddenly she stopped and clutched at her heart, and her lips grew blue. By a supreme effort she reached the mantel, poured out some whiskey, and drank it down. Then, faint and dizzy, she fought her way to the bed and lay down, her heart beating like a trip-hammer. There she lay, rigid, without even a finger stirring, for ten, twenty, thirty minutes, until the attack had passed.

“And this is why I cannot give him up,” she said at last, coming out of the dark valley. “When it is only a question of a few more months, a few more weeks—who knows? perhaps days—what do I care for anything else in all the world but that one man? I—I believe I would give my soul for him!”

Then all at once the mood dissolved, and the actress returned. She sat up, rose to her feet, and stood before the mirror.

“What, tears?” she cried, with impatience. “They only make the eyes red and ugly!”

She dressed slowly, debating every detail, scrutinizing every pose. At the end she laughed and said, “Heavens, I am more absurd to-night than even on that first morn-

ing when I dressed so carefully to meet him." All at once she closed her lips tightly and cried, "There! the die is cast. I will not see him if he calls."

A cousin who lived with her was away until the next week, so she sat down to dinner alone. That over, she went upstairs to the library, took a chair nervously, picked up the first book under her hand, tossed it aside, and went to the piano. The clock stared at her from the mantelpiece. It was only eight and he never came before the half hour. Thrice she rose and went to the window looking out over the avenue, where the lamp-posts stood like sentinels watching over the hidden city.

A little before the accustomed time came the familiar two quick rings, and as though to drown out the summons, Helen started to play hurriedly. Then, remembering he would hear, she went hastily to the table and began to arrange the books, and in this attitude Margaret found her as she came in, beaming, with the card.

Helen took it, called up all her courage, and glanced at the name —

JOHN GAUNT.

The letters almost seemed to speak the words. She became so calm that even at that moment the dominant emotion was one of astonishment at her own self-possession.

"Say I am out, Margaret."

She watched the maid leave the room and begin the descent of the stairs, when all of a sudden the strength of her resolution snapped. She ran to the door and called her back. "I have changed my mind; ask him to come up," she said, standing in the shadow where the servant could not see her face. When she heard his step, woman of the world that she was, all her

training forsook her. She had meant to receive him with her back to the curtains, one arm holding them so as to throw her figure against a flood of light. Instead, she stood nervously in the dark at the head of the stairs, her arms by her sides, until he came. Then she put her hand into his, and said quickly, turning away, "It's cosier in the library; shall we go up there?"

She led the way up the dim flight. Once her hand touched his on the banisters, and she thought — a slip, a single misstep, and she would be in his arms!

"What, Nell! all this is not for me?" exclaimed John, when they were in the library under the lights.

He glanced down at the figure in green, the sweeping skirts, the rounded arms and bright shoulders, the deep red rose in her hair, the black tresses without a touch of gray, and he thought to himself: "There's something about Nell you don't see in women nowadays. It's in the way she moves and carries her head, I suppose."

"All for you," she answered, with a bow that hid her cheeks. "Well?" and she looked up archly at the tall figure that seemed to overshadow everything else in the room.

His face, that had been sombre as he entered, relaxed, a twinkle came into his eyes, and he said quizzingly: "Pshaw, Nell, not for an old man like me! Come, who is it? That young Cameron? You know you're going to marry him."

She looked at him so strangely, and became so quiet, that, manlike, he felt quite satisfied with the accuracy of his guess. When she had placed him in the easiest chair, she brought him a box of his favorite cigars, and presented them to him with a mock courtesy.

"At least acknowledge I know how to make you comfortable."

"Yes, Nell, you do. It's a big temptation to impose upon you."

"You called while I was away," Helen said suddenly, gambler that she was, seeking some sign of embarrassment in his answer. "I meant to tell you."

"Yes, three times." He sank back in his chair and rested his head against the cushions, glancing sidewise, in smoker fashion, at the eddies whirling off the end of his cigar. "What a good friend you are, Nell. You're always bright and cheery, and never complain of my glum ways. I don't believe another person would stand it. Even Jack runs off at times. I wish you'd been here last week, Nell, more for my sake than yours."

The moment she had looked in his face her instinct had told her something had taken place during her absence, something that weighed heavily on his heart. "Has it been hard again, John?" she said. She reproached herself with the caprice that had taken her from town.

"I have been a little restless."

"What is it, John?"

He shook his head twice slowly.

She winced at the barriers to his confidence which were always rising up between them.

"Won't you let me help you? Oh, John, think; we are man and woman. We are not children any longer. We have each known sorrow. Why should you conceal yours from me? Why not tell me? Let me help you. If it is a confidence, can't you trust me? There isn't a thing I would hide from you."

"No, Nell," said John, resolutely. He had been staring ahead all the while, never glancing at her face. "No—I must fight out my battles alone, without saddling the burden on you. And besides, it is not my nature

to do otherwise. No, Nell, no, you've a good heart and a kind heart, though I once misjudged you. I thank you none the less."

Such a starved feeling as came into her woman's heart! To love hopelessly, impossibly, was terrible; but to be barred out of his heart, to be forever checked from pouring out to him her sympathy and help—that was cruel beyond words. She shook her head, she put her hand to her throat to subdue the lump that would rise there. "How absolutely," she thought, "all my plans fall to the ground the moment I look into his eyes. I don't know what I say, I have no control over what I do." Then aloud she said, merely stumbling on his words in her search for something to be said, "What do you mean? You misjudged me—once—when?"

"Don't you remember?" he said, smiling. "We can talk it over now, and take a hearty laugh over it. Why, when we were boy and girl together down at Uncle Nim's. I thought I was desperately in love with you for a while, and when you went off—why, I decided that you had only been amusing yourself, and had flung me over when you were tired of—of a young country fellow, don't you know?"

Every word he had said to her that night had somehow left a wound in her heart.

"And so you thought that, did you?"

There was such a dry note in her voice as she spoke that John looked up startled.

"Why, Nell!"

"Listen," she said, with a compelling gesture. "I want you to know the truth." She rose and went to the end of the room, clenching her fingers until the nails cut into her hands, for the time had come, and she feared what she might say.

"No, don't rise; sit where you are," she said, coming and standing before him. "As you say, we can now talk over these things, and so — I want you to know the truth. I have feared, yes, known, that you misjudged me. I told you there was nothing in my life I would fear to tell you, and there is nothing. I want you to know me just as I am, John, not as others know me." She paused, drew her hand heavily across her eyes, and said: "Tell me, John, did you never connect my leaving with Captain Brace? Did you never guess who it was warned you of him?"

"What! *you* — wrote, Nell?" He leaped to his feet. "I did think so — I did for a moment, at the time." Then he stopped, looked at her, and said, "But Brace — what can you mean, Nell?"

"Please sit down," she said, pushing him gently into his chair, "and don't interrupt, I beg of you; I want to finish. When I was a girl in school, only just sixteen, I met Westlake, whom you call Ned Brace. I — I don't want to go into details. I — I was not a wise girl, I was very romantic, very silly, and I believed what he told me. I — I promised to marry him, and wrote such foolish, such compromising letters, that his hold on me was fearful. He wanted me to run away with him. God knows how I ever escaped; but I did. I sent him away, but what I had written I could not recall. John, you understand, don't you? a schoolgirl, only sixteen, her head turned with novels." She stopped again a moment to regain composure, and continued more quietly: "John, you have made the mistake. At first I did mean to play with you, just as I had with other men, but I did fall in love with you, John, truly and deeply — that day I tried to jump the roan. It was you that deceived yourself. No, John, you never loved me —

not then. For I saw it all—and—and such temptations would come to me to win you anyway. For I could, yes, John, I could have done so. But, don't you see, I loved you. It was your love, not merely you, I wanted; and that I saw I could not have, saw it plainly the day we passed Captain Brace. When I saw him and thought what he might tell you, blindly, without thinking, I ran away. That is the true story."

He again made a move as though to speak, and again she checked him with her hand.

"Not yet, John, just a little more. Don't you see why I have told you? My life has not been a happy one—no, nor a good one. It has been selfish and shallow. But that chapter in my girlhood is the one true spot in my life, and I could not bear to have you misjudge that." She moved a step forward, her eyes brightening, her hands stretched out toward him, and swept away by her emotion, cried: "For I did love you, John; I loved you so it seemed my heart used to stop when I heard you galloping up the avenue, and I used to search your face to see something in your eyes that never came. Aunt Hester saw; she could have told you. I only mean this: that was a time! a love! yes, a man! I have never forgotten. I married, but I did not love my husband—no woman could have. All my life I have remembered those days. That feeling I could not forget, though of course I had to conquer it. Oh, yes, of course I did that." There was a pitiful quaver in her voice. "Don't you see why I wanted you to know me as I am? I—I'm going to tell you something else, so that you may understand. I have known for a long while that I might die any day. Don't start so, John, I am not frightened. Yes, a great shock would do it any day, the doctor says; it's heart disease. No,

don't, John! Do you think I care? I have no fear. I don't believe, but I don't care. It will be a relief."

She turned and walked away, and then came back and tried to smile, and put her hand on his shoulder, and said sadly: "I think, John, if fate had been kinder to me, and I had stayed and you had married me — I think I should have been to-day a better woman. Oh, John, when one can see the gate at the end of the path, yes, almost touch it, do you think one cares for anything but the truth? Oh, say you pity me — you do, you must!"

"Yes, from the bottom of my heart," he said, and he stood up and took her hands. "God knows I — I pity you. How you have suffered!"

Only pity! She looked imploringly into his eyes, faint under the touch of his hands. She wanted to fling herself into those strong arms and cry, "Oh, don't you see? I love you now!"

But she did not. One thread still held her, — the thought of the look that would come over his face.

"Please," she begged, "please," and drew her hands away, and half turning from him, covered her eyes with one arm; "just a moment, John — a moment and I shall be all right."

He stood waiting awkwardly, ill at ease, not knowing how to meet the situation, until at last he said in desperation, "You never told your husband?"

She shook her head; she felt herself going. All the world, honor, good fame, were nothing now. She must tell him, she must implore his pity — beseech him.

Then through the chaos of her brain she heard him say: "How strange that is! Marjory was right. She knew you loved me, and said you had not told him."

Her name! That was the answer. Her body quivered at the words, she straightened herself up, flung

down her arm, and cried, "I am not well—you will have to go—now—yes, now—oh, quickly, quickly!—go—I beg of you!"

"I will not leave you," he protested, frightened at the pallor that had come over her. "You must have a doctor, Nell. I dare not leave you."

"No, no, no, I'm all right. I must go to my room. It is only the usual attack. I must go to my room. I know what to do. Good night—no, nothing, nothing, good night!"

She pushed him to the door, closed it behind him, and then fell on her knees, clutching at the curtain and crying, "Thank God! he is gone."

Then as she heard the fall of his steps on the stairs, a single word was torn from her—"John!"

The steps ceased. She put her head between her hands, and prayed, "O God, bring him back, bring him back, and let him see me thus!"

All at once the steps fell again, lower and lower, and at length the door slammed through the silent house. She waited a second, all the hope gone from out her face. Then she struggled to her feet and tottered to the window, straining her eyes into the night, and when he was quite gone, she dropped her head and whispered, "The End."

When she reached her room the sight of her face in the mirror shocked her. She put her hands to her throat to check the sobs, and cried aloud: "O God, why couldn't he see? I told him, I told him—and he would not understand! Oh, if he had called me, I would have followed him to the ends of the earth! My God, my God, what will become of me?" And in a torrent of tears, choking, panting, she cast herself headlong on the bed.

At that moment John, hurried home by the intensity of his thoughts, was saying: "She knows she is going to die, and she is as calm as that. She shames me;" and for the first time in many days, as he went his way home, he dwelt on another's sorrows.

"Poor Nell!" he said, as he reached the park. "I wonder if she did tell me all; they say we never do. She doesn't realize it, but I fear she still loves me. What a wonderful kettle of probability and accident life is, after all," he continued, musing. "If she had stayed, who knows what would have happened? I wonder if I should have married her? And if I had, I wonder what my life would have been to-day?" The next moment he would have given anything to have recalled the words.

CHAPTER XXXIX

ON the next afternoon John hurried off to call on Helen. All the sleepless night he had been seriously alarmed at her condition, and now he was going to talk over her health, to insist upon some precaution. Then, too, he reproached himself for having been so cold on the preceding night.

"She came to me for help and sympathy," he said to himself, as he took up his cane. "Poor little woman! I gave her little of either. What pluck she has!"

He went to meet her eagerly, with new-born curiosity and admiration. Towering above the crowd, he passed along the crowded thoroughfare, with its boisterous acclaim of life. At Twenty-third Street he turned gratefully into the comparative quiet of the avenue of mansions, and losing interest in the throng beside him, he began to turn over in his mind the story he had heard on the night before. So engrossed was he with his thoughts, that he ran up what seemed to be the right steps, without noticing until he reached the top that the bell was hung with crape.

"Good heavens, what a mistake!" he cried, startled by such a reminder of his darker nature. "I am really getting absent-minded."

He turned his back hurriedly on the unwelcome sight, and went on down the sidewalk, looking for the number. All of a sudden, before the next house he came to a dead stop, and a cry escaped him. He went back and looked up. It *was* her house.

“Great God, not that, not that!”

He forced himself up the stairs again, and bewildered, incredulous, and stunned, rang the black-hung bell. He was forced to repeat the summons twice before the door at last swung open. He stepped in hurriedly, glanced at the agitated servants, and poured out a string of questions. “What does this crape mean? What has happened? Who is dead? Where is Mrs. Blackstock?”

“Oh, sir, don’t you — don’t you know?” stammered the maid, her eyes swollen with terror. “We found her in her room this morning, on the bed, with all her clothes on. The doctor has been here, and says it was heart disease. Oh, won’t you come in and see him? No, he’s gone, you can’t. I — I’m so worked up, sir, I — I don’t know what I’m saying.”

He checked the hysterical woman sternly, and made her answer his questions, listening dumbly to the replies. The family had been summoned, everything was being attended to, a brother had charge of all. There was nothing to be done. He hurried away out of the dark, still house, where the dead seemed to cry out to him through the silence, and went down the street without glancing behind.

He wanted to put his hands over his eyes and shut out the terrible sight, he wanted to run. For even on the shock of her death, swift and accusing came the memory of his thoughts of the night before, of the many times he had sought her. All at once he saw himself standing blindfolded on the brink of a precipice; the next moment, snatched away by the hand of Providence. Bitterly he remembered his words, his mind exaggerating and swelling them beyond all proportion. He drew a deep breath: he could hardly understand how he had escaped.

Wretched and self-accusing, he went home and knelt down and asked forgiveness of the eyes that knew him not. He sat broken in spirit all the afternoon, watching her as she strayed about with the sad sweet smile, and the eyes that were always searching. What would he not have given to recall those few wretched words! But they were beyond recall, a constant, ever present reproach. He asked himself again and again, was he guilty?—would he have been? At one time he wanted to rush to Jack, to pour out the whole miserable story, to seek his verdict—to tell some one—not to be forever his own accuser and his own judge.

That night as he sat alone in the library, holding a book listlessly, the storm burst over him, the conflict which he had known in the bottom of his heart could not be avoided. The book had dropped into his lap; he was thinking of Helen's death, and he had said, almost aloud, "How terrible is death! Always sudden, always a shock, always unexpected," when something entered his soul, and there and then broke over him the full horror of death, his father's horror. Stunned, impotent, he sat gripping the arms of his chair, as though he would crush them in his palms. Then as once the stricken *Œdipus*, with bleeding eyes, cursed his fate, out of his soul went up the final cry of agony.

"Was it for this that I was born? To come into the doom of my father, to fight night and day against a spectre? It is unjust, unjust, unjust, to give a human being to such an inexorable fate!" The hopelessness of inheritance, the fruitless battle, the decreed end, out of the pursuing cloud flashed up before him and fell like thunderbolts into the panic of his brain.

Long after midnight, Jack, coming in, found him leaning forward in his chair, his elbows on his knees,

his chin in his hands, staring ahead with sculptural intensity. At the sound of Jack's voice he started up wildly, crying: "Who's there? Oh, Jack, you at last!"

"John, for the love of Heaven, don't look at me in that way!" cried the major, drawing back at his friend's haggard face. "What is it?"

John checked himself, ashamed of having exhibited so much emotion. A moment ago he had been groping in the dark, praying for a hand to grasp, for some one to whom he could lay bare his soul, to whom he could surrender the barriers. Now that another man was there, even in the hour of his agony, the human instinct checked him. Show Jack a little corner of his soul he must — but into his voice no trace of his emotion should come.

He sat quietly a moment, his lips tightening; then he looked up, and said coldly: —

"Jack, sit down — I am glad you have come. I'll tell you what it is. It is fate. It is the inheritance of my father. I have felt it coming for months — the old horror of death. I've got to tell you, Jack. I've got to have some help. I am talking to you calmly in a matter-of-fact way, but, Jack — as I sat here, all at once everything seemed to fall away, and I could feel that fearful, inexorable force in the house, on the stairs, coming into —"

"Stop, for God's sake, stop!" cried Jack. "Man, are you in your senses? Think now. These things don't begin of themselves. Something has started you, something has happened."

"Helen died last night," said John, shortly, watching his friend's face; "just after she told me she was awaiting it at any moment. She must have died as I was closing the door."

“Horrible!”

The cry broke from Jack. He turned his back and began to pace the room. The words John had spoken, words which should have been told with a voice wrung with emotion, had overwhelmed him by the irony of their calm. He came back and grasped his arm. “John, think! Are you sure this means what you say—are you sure it is your father coming out in you?”

The other bowed his head. “That is why the fight is so desperate. It doesn’t seem right to have to inherit such a curse—and oh, Jack, what of little Emily?”

“Yes, what of her? That is the question.”

John rose, deliberately turning his head until he met Jack’s firm glance.

“That is the question,” he said, as though to himself. He stretched his arms up to their fullest, and drew a long breath.

“Come, Jack,” he said abruptly, “I must have a walk.”

Jack nodded and led the way, and for an hour, arm in arm, without speaking, they went stalking around the park, while the sidewalks echoed with the sound of their passing.

That was the beginning. Night after night they would go through the same routine. Day and night Jack watched over his friend. Often waking out of a heavy slumber, he heard John tossing restlessly, and, pretending sleeplessness, would go into his room, sitting patiently on the foot of the bed until at last he heard him drop into an uneasy sleep. Jack made it a point to stay at home of evenings, and long past midnight he would sit up, rattling away in his own style. Sometimes, dozing off from sheer weariness, he would wake with a start, to find John deep in reverie, and would

jump to his feet, clap him on the shoulder, and say, with a resolute shake of his head, "Next round, John, my boy!"

"So it is," John would say, straightening up and trying to laugh, "so it is, Johnnie Gay."

One night when they had been sitting a long while in silence, broken every now and then by the thrumming of the guitar, John went to the mantelpiece, and came back, holding in his hand a pack of cards.

"Here, Jack," he said, dropping into a chair, "let's try these. They'll keep my mind busy."

Jack took the pack with a grave face. "Do you dare, John Gaunt — remembering some one else? No — if you conquer this with something else — cards, drink, or drugs — that thing will have conquered you. You've got to fight it alone, old fellow, and even I can't help you much." And looking him a moment steadily in the eyes, he threw the cards into the waste-basket.

"No, Jack, you can't help me," asserted John. "There is only one who could do that. You know whom I mean — Marjory — and that's why I miss her so. Well, well — there — enough — it's queer sometimes, Jack; do you know, I feel at times as though it were my father and my mother fighting out the battle for my soul, and that I had nothing to do with it. At times it seems as though I could distinctly feel her influence."

"Of course I believe it," Jack cried, grasping at the straw. "If you inherit something from your father, why, of course, you get something too from your mother."

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamed of in our philosophy."

I was reading that the other night — who knows?"

Once or twice, waking up in the middle of the night, little Emily had found her father standing by her bed. When she questioned him he hurried away. The child never knew how often he visited her bedside and knelt there — nor could she see the look on his face of evenings, when in the dark she clasped her hands and poured out her simple, childish faith, rising to realms where he could not follow. What would he not have given so to believe, without a seeking or a doubt!

At other times, in the stillness of the night, he would get up and walk the floor until again his strength came, and he would close his lips and say, "Never — I will never give in to it!" It was as though his will were against the universe.

Out of the shadow he came at last, weak and halting, and Jack, who saw the dawn in his eyes, wisely left him to his own thoughts.

Perhaps it was the old strong feeling of pride that saved him. For at first he turned to stoicism, and steeled himself against the inevitable, like those grim philosophers of old. But gradually a truer mood came to him. One afternoon, when the tide had turned, he stood at the window and looked up into a broken sky banked with clouds. At times the sun broke through a crevice and flooded him with light. He stood wondering at the massive architecture of the sky in a deeply reverent mood. And there — all at once — he looked back over his life and saw himself as he really was — the truth, the courage, and the strength. It was a revelation. He drew a deep breath, and throwing back his head, gazed up through the white gates into the deep of the blue beyond. He had apprehended his soul at last — the good in it, the humbleness, the patient search for the ideal, the resignation, and the nobility.

And quick on that awakening came the thought that if through temptations, through sorrow, through the real blackness and the false shadows of his youth, he had come into the strength of his manhood, there must be a something divine in him. This it was that had carried him through doubt and discouragement and unbelief — too strong to let him fall, even though he invited such an end. All at once, as though the heavens had opened, a light came into his eyes, and he said almost in a whisper, "Yes, I see;" and that night, when he had heard Emily say her prayer, and she had fallen fast asleep, he knelt down by her bedside, and, covering his face, he prayed. It was not a prayer — it was the simple acclaiming of his own soul, the recognition that within him something greater than his understanding had existed and would exist, forever and ever.

He went to bed that night before ten o'clock and slept like a child. He came downstairs on the morrow, to find Jack already at breakfast. His friend started up at the sight of his face.

"It is done, *Veni, vidi, vici*," said John, holding out his hand. "And this morning I am going over to send my acceptance to Blodgett." There was the old light of ambition in his eyes. Jack dropped down in his seat, saying, with a comical face, "John, I feel like a woman — I'd like a good cry."

"Well, Johnnie Gay, we've stood together, you and I, until thirty-six," said John, with a genuine laugh. "I don't believe any other man ever had such a friend as you; and we'll stand together — until — until it please God to take us."

He walked to the nearest office and sent the telegram to Blodgett. There was a spring of elation in his step, and a flash of triumph in his eye as he came back, as

though he were prepared for any good fortune. He had learned much in a day of the wonder and mystery of life, where every soul, whatever aids it may get, must work out its own end, sooner or later, fighting alone until its battle is ended.

As he came in sight of his home, he saw the figure of a woman staring from the window into the park, and said, "Somewhere I know she is; somewhere I know I shall meet her again."

He went up the steps, turning with a new zest to inhale the fragrance of the flower-beds across the street, and let himself in with his key.

Then just as he had put away his cane and had his foot on the step, there came from above the shock of an explosion, the crash of broken glass, and then a cry in his wife's voice. He bounded up the stairs — up another flight — into a room filled with smoke. In the centre Jack was standing with a puzzled look, a smoking gun in one hand, a cleaning-rod in the other. A shattered pane in the window told the rest.

"John!" came a voice out of the past.

The two stood still, staring blankly at each other. The voice was from Marjory's room. John began to tremble so that Jack put out his arm to steady him.

"John!"

John broke from him, great beads of sweat standing on his forehead, and went reeling, swaying, along the hall into her room, and closed the door and leaned — fell back against it.

He saw her in the chair by the window start forward and draw her hand in a dazed way across her eyes.

"John, John — are you hurt? Oh, speak to me, speak to me!" Her words fell on his fainting senses. "Why — where is — where is the doctor — and my

baby? Why, John, how strange you look! What is it? Where are you?"

The furniture, the walls, the room, whirled about him; the light of day went out black to his eyes. He groped, he stumbled, he fell forward on his knees, he stretched out his arms, calling in a heart-rending voice pierced with the pain of a great joy, "Marjory — my Marjory!"



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