

# OLD HARBOR



WILLIAM JOHN  
HOPKINS



By William John Hopkins

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BY

WILLIAM JOHN HOPKINS

*Author of "The Clammer"*



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# OLD HARBOR





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## CHAPTER I

MISS JOYCE was dusting the old china, the china that was used only on state occasions. For it had been her great-grandmother's china, and her wedding china, at that; wherefore it was considered sacred, — it was regarded with reverence. It had always been sacred, as far back as Miss Joyce could remember, and that was beginning to be a good while.

As she took up the platters, one after another, carefully wiped them, and put them back, she became thoughtful. With the plates, her thoughtfulness grew, so that she stopped now and then, clasped her gloved hands upon the spotless apron, and contemplated her possessions gravely. The little frown below the hair, that was smoothly parted and already streaked with gray, grew deeper; then, in an instant, the frown had vanished, and she laughed.

“Well, there!” she said aloud, nodding her head emphatically. “I’ll do it. What fun! I’ll do it. And there’s all the silver, too. Oh, what fun! And what a fool I’ve been not to do it before!”

And she laughed again, sitting there all alone, her gloved hands clasped against her apron. Somehow it

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was not just the kind of laugh that one would have expected from a gentlewoman who was beginning to be middle-aged, as she thought, and who always dressed in black — unless one chanced to notice her eyes. They were pleasant eyes, kind eyes that seemed ever to have a laugh just behind them; and so it bubbled out now in little ripples, very pleasant to hear, but low and well-bred. You did not expect anything that was not well-bred from Harriet Joyce.

She rose and went at the cups like a loving whirlwind, — a very gentle whirlwind, — wiping them carefully and putting them back tenderly. Suddenly she stopped.

“Well, I never!” she cried. “I’m losing my seven senses — or is it five? They have to be washed, of course, and I’ll do it now.”

She went into the dining-room, moving with quick decision, but silently, and came back with a tray. For the china was in the closet of the back parlor, which is not to be thought strange. Where else should one’s great-grandmother’s wedding china be? And no sooner was she back and setting the tray down, than she heard the great front door boom gently. It always boomed like that, even when it was shut carefully. She half turned her head to listen; then, with a smile, she turned back again and began to take out the platters one by one.

“Abbie,” she said. “She’ll find me.”

Presently she heard somebody in the next room. She called softly:—

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"Here I am, Abbie, in the back parlor."

"Oh!" answered a relieved voice. The door opened and Abbie Mervin came in. "I wondered where you could be, Harriet. I've been nearly all over the house. What in the world are you doing? Dusting your ancestral china?"

"My ancestral china," replied Miss Harriet, "is about to enter upon a new career. I've decided to use it."

"Why," said Miss Mervin, wondering, "you always have used it on occasions."

"Yes. But, Abbie," — Miss Joyce spoke in subdued tones, — "I am going to use it *every day*."

Miss Mervin was silent for as much as a minute, taking in the full meaning of this announcement. Then she laughed. "Oh, Harriet! what would your great-grandmother say to that?"

"My great-grandmother," said Miss Joyce, decidedly, "has nothing to say about it. Besides, judging from what I have heard of her, she would be the last one to want it kept in the back-parlor closet, and dusted every week. She would probably think it was a sin and a shame that it was n't all broken fifty years ago. Anyway, *I* think it is better to use it, even if it does get broken, than to keep it put away to be taken care of; and it's what I think about it that's important."

Miss Mervin was still smiling. "That is all true enough, Harriet," she said. "No one but you has a right to say a word. But they will," she added.

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“Let them,” Miss Harriet retorted. “It was borne in upon me, Abbie, as I sat here, that we have too many *things*. A new thought — quite new.” She smiled. “Why, I spend *days*, every week, in keeping things in order that I don’t use. I’ve got through doing that. And I’ve got through cleaning a lot of old silver — it is beautiful old silver, too, you know — that I don’t use. It takes me a whole morning long, every week.”

Miss Mervin was not smiling now. “Why, Harriet!” she cried. Her voice held a hint of horror. “Just think how it will get to looking — all black and horrid. Nobody will see it, to be sure —”

Miss Harriet turned suddenly. “Ah, Abbie,” she said, “but they will — the whole of it. I am going to *use* it — every identical piece. It will not be half the trouble to clean. As for stealing, why, it is better stolen than put away. That is rank heresy, I know; but it’s what I think.”

“Well,” said Miss Mervin, sighing, “it’s of no use to argue with you, Harriet —”

“No use at all,” broke in Miss Harriet.

Miss Mervin went on, calmly, as though she had not been interrupted. “It would only strengthen your determination. And I am not sure that I want to argue with you. Perhaps it would be better to help you wash your china; that is, if you think I am to be trusted not to break it.”

“Oh!” cried Miss Harriet, “will you help? Take off your hat and gloves, then — oh! you have n’t got

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them on — and come into the dining-room. It will be a great deal easier for two.”

Miss Mervin was already taking off her hat. She deposited it carefully on a high shelf in the closet, above those occupied by the china — a shelf devoted to hats and already occupied by two of Miss Harriet's. Having thus settled matters to her satisfaction, she followed Miss Harriet to the dining-room.

Miss Mervin was not a beautiful woman. She was not even a pretty woman. But little older than Miss Joyce, — an age about which one does not inquire too closely, — she had little of that lady's daintiness and charm, although her nose and her eyes betokened a pretty wit and a sense of humor which was sometimes a cause of embarrassment to its owner, if not to her friends. The two things in which she would have had a right to feel a certain pride were her beautifully clear complexion and her small, close-set ears. Not that Miss Mervin did have any feeling of pride in her complexion; a good complexion was no more than every lady owed to her position. She certainly would not have been willing to discuss the question, and if it had been alluded to in her presence, she would have dismissed it with as few words as possible, and with a fine air of contempt — a contempt which she really felt. As to her ears, — well, if she felt pride because they were her ears, — the only regular feature which a kind Creator had vouchsafed her, — she was to be excused, perhaps. They were very dainty, beautiful ears.

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Some such thoughts as these were stirring in Miss Harriet's brain as she stood behind Abbie Mervin, wiping the pieces of china which Miss Mervin had washed. It was necessary to be quick about it, — and quite natural for Miss Harriet to be quick, — for Miss Mervin washed dishes with a thoroughness and a speed which would have put the ordinary maidservant to shame. She had before her a tiny wooden tub, which had been reserved for the silver and the precious china of the Joyce household since the beginning of time; and pinned about her dress was a rubber apron of Miss Harriet's. Miss Harriet, having in view only the back of Miss Mervin's neck and the aforesaid ears, was surprised to see a crimson flush rise from somewhere below the ruching, — neither Miss Mervin nor Miss Joyce had ever acquired the taste for shirt-waists, — and spread until even the tips of her ears were glowing red.

“What is the matter, Abbie?” asked Miss Harriet, quietly.

Miss Mervin turned a flushed face for a moment. “These platters, Harriet,” she said. “They won't go into the tub.”

Miss Harriet laughed. “Is that all? Leave them out, then.”

Miss Mervin was redder than ever. “Of course, Harriet Joyce,” she said, “I shall have to, if they won't go in. But I guess I can manage them well enough.”

Miss Harriet did not laugh again. She knew better.

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But her eyes were merry. Abbie could not see her eyes. They washed and wiped in silence for some minutes, Miss Harriet still wondering. At last Miss Mervin spoke again.

“Harriet,” she said, bending low over a platter, “have—have you ever heard anything of Eben?”

Miss Harriet’s eyes were no longer merry, but in them was a great pity.

“No,” she said, “no. Not in these fifteen years, Abbie. It is fifteen years to-night, since he—went away. Poor Eben!” She sighed as she laid down the dish she had been wiping.

“I know,” said Miss Mervin, softly. “I remembered. I sometimes think that your father was unnecessarily hard toward Eben. Yes, Harriet,”—Miss Mervin stopped washing platters and faced Miss Harriet, a round red spot in each cheek,—“he was—he was positively harsh. You know he was. Why, the very idea of—”

Miss Joyce was smiling as she raised her hand and interrupted Miss Mervin. “Don’t say it, Abbie. I’d rather say it myself, if it has to be said. Father thought he was only doing his duty by Eben. It was harder for him than for Eben. I think he was wrong, and I always did, but he seemed to take it very hard that he had to—to—”

“Thrash him?” asked Miss Mervin, quietly. “Why don’t you say it, if you prefer to? Oh!” She turned back to her platter again. “It makes me nearly sick to

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think of it. Harder for him than for Eben! Just think how a man of twenty, — almost a man, — just think how he must have felt to have to submit to that! I don't wonder that he ran away at once. I don't wonder that your father never heard from him again. And I don't blame Eben — not one mite." She moved quickly away from the tub. "It's no use, Harriet Joyce. You'll have to wash that platter, yourself. I shall smash it if I try to. I'd just like to smash something!"

There was nobody else who would have been allowed even to hint as much as that against her father in Miss Joyce's presence; but with Abbie Mervin it was different. They had been close friends since before they wore pinafores. So Miss Harriet laughed; and there came upon the face of Miss Mervin an unwilling smile.

"I don't care," she said. "I meant it."

"I agree with you," said Miss Harriet, "even to the occasional desire to smash things. But as all the things that happen to be conveniently at hand are mine, I restrain that impulse. You'd better try it, Abbie. It is a great builder of character."

"Fiddlesticks!" replied Miss Mervin, returning to her duties.

When the last of the great-grandmother's china was washed, Miss Harriet set it out in the china-closets — displayed it. For there were two china-closets, one on either side of the fireplace, and they had great glass doors, the glass in diamond panes. And there was the silver to be got out. There was a great quantity of silver



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— altogether too much, one would think, for a maiden lady who habitually dined alone. To be sure, she frequently had company for tea, the company usually consisting of Miss Abbie Mervin and a certain William Ransome; or of Colonel and Mrs. Francis Catherwood and their daughter Constance, with their son Jack whenever he was to be had, with or without Miss Mervin.

Mrs. Francis Catherwood was Miss Joyce's sister, so that it is not to be wondered at that she should be asked to tea; and in Colonel Catherwood's title Miss Harriet felt an inordinate pride, which she flattered herself she did not show — although all of her friends were well aware of it, and would have laughed at her for it if they had not held Miss Harriet in such sincere affection. Colonel Catherwood himself would have been the first to laugh at Miss Harriet's reverence for a title, and would have dropped his if Miss Joyce and his other friends and relatives would have let him, although it had come to him honorably from years of service in the Civil War. For her nephew, Jack, Miss Harriet had a great affection and admiration, which that young man had done little to deserve, if he had done nothing to forfeit either affection or admiration. He was but ten years younger than Miss Harriet herself.

As for William Ransome — well, he was just William Ransome; a convenient person to have about and to be able to depend upon. He was obliging and considerate, even self-sacrificing, — Miss Harriet would have

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acknowledged it, — if unimportant. At least, that appeared to be the view Miss Joyce took of him. She realized his virtues, but failed to appreciate them. They did not seem to be very virtuous virtues; not positive enough to impress her strongly. He had reached the age of forty — a convenient age, be it said — without having accomplished anything in particular. He was not even a captain; which was certainly no fault of his, for he was but ten years old when the war ended. But if — and Miss Harriet was wont to sigh as she thought upon the matter — if he had only been a captain, or, at least, a lieutenant!

William Ransome, well knowing her views upon the subject, smiled quietly to himself. He did not enter the militia; a captaincy in the militia would not have appealed to Miss Harriet. And there were certain things — ambitions, hopes, if unacknowledged — what you will — which he no longer confided to her. Of course, she knew it, and she knew the reason; and she was sorry.

It happened that she was thinking about William Ransome as she took the silver out of the trunk in which it had reposed, with weekly interruptions, for so long. She often thought of him, vaguely, much as one thinks about a brother or a sister or a cousin who is seen almost daily, and she was aware only of a feeling of pity for his failure to do things. A man cannot expect to be called anything but a failure when he has reached the age of forty without accomplishing something in

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particular — something tangible. What Miss Harriet really meant by something tangible was probably something that one could brag of, in a quiet way. But whatever William Ransome might have done, he certainly never would have bragged of it — and it is to be hoped that Miss Harriet would not, either. Indeed, one may be sure that she would not; it was something that *could* be bragged about that she wanted — something braggable.

“Abbie,” she said, coming into the dining-room with her arms full of ancient pieces of silver, “I was wondering — what do you suppose William will think?”

Miss Mervin glanced up. She had been engaged in arranging an old silver tea-set on the great mahogany sideboard, and the arrangement did not please her, and she was frowning.

“What did you say, Harriet?” she asked, taking a moment to get the full import of the question. “Oh, what will William think?” She laughed. “It does n’t matter what he will think, does it? I did not suppose that you considered his opinions, on any subject, important.”

Strangely enough, Miss Joyce seemed to resent this view of the matter. She colored quickly, and was about to say something; then she thought better of it and said something else.

“I don’t consider William’s opinions on most subjects of value — of any great value,” she added, correcting herself. “But he has excellent taste, you know. I

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should be inclined to give some weight to his opinion on this subject."

"Well," said Miss Mervin, stepping back to regard the tea-set from a distance, "I suppose that, if William knew that you had arranged that tea-set, for instance, he would perjure his soul and say that the arrangement was admirable. The queen can do no wrong, you know. But if he knew that Abbie Mervin had arranged it, he would feel free to say that it looked like fury. It does, Harriet. There is too much of it. It spoils that sideboard, and the sideboard is too handsome to be spoiled by such trumpery."

"Don't be absurd, Abbie." Miss Harriet smiled in spite of herself. "William would be as likely to be pleased with any arrangement of yours as with mine. That trumpery, as you call it, is an extremely handsome set, and very old."

"Oh, I know. And I know the history of it quite well, so you need not trouble. But, on the sideboard, it looks like trumpery. With its tray, it covers too much of that top. It might do on the table," she said doubtfully. "The sideboard, Harriet, needs a few handsome things — things that will show it off and not conceal it."

Miss Harriet smiled again, quietly. "You were arranging it, Abbie, not I."

"So I was." Abbie Mervin laughed. "And I was talking for my own benefit. If you will take that side, Harriet, — it's pretty heavy and awkward."

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Together, they moved the offending tea-set to its place upon the table. Miss Joyce stood looking at it thoughtfully, for some minutes.

"It looks well there, I think," she said, at last. "I'm going to ask William to tea this evening. You'll come, won't you, Abbie? It will be a sort of anniversary; not altogether a cheerful one. I'd ask Mary, but I know she is going out with the colonel."

"You flatter me, Harriet," replied Miss Mervin. "But I'll come, so long as there is no one else available. It would be simply disgraceful for you to have William in to tea alone."

"Yes," said Miss Harriet, "it would."

And Miss Harriet went off to write her note, which she dispatched by the hand of her only maidservant. She did not ask for an answer; it did not occur to her to doubt William's acceptance of her invitation. Indeed, it was rather of the nature of a summons. William had not failed to heed invitations of that nature in the past twelve years, not once. Why should Miss Harriet doubt his joyful response now?

## CHAPTER II

WILLIAM came; and if there was no evidence of his joy in coming, at least there was no reluctance which was apparent to Miss Joyce. If he felt any reluctance, he succeeded in concealing it under an admirable manner, quiet and deferential. But Miss Mervin looked at him queerly, smiled the very least bit, and looked away. William wondered at that smile. He was a little afraid of Miss Mervin—just a little; he felt that he did not understand her. But he understood Miss Harriet, or he thought that he did. She seemed less complex.

William thought that he understood, too, why he was there. He admired duly, saying something complimentary, in his quiet way, about everything that, as he judged, was brought to his attention; which he could do with no undue strain on his conscience. There was an air of finality in his utterances which pleased Miss Joyce. She was set up.

“There, William,” she said, smiling happily, “that will do nicely. I only hope that you have meant it all, and I believe that you have. For I am going to use these things every day.”

“A wise decision, Harriet,” replied William. “Things are meant to be used, even silver things and china

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things. I assure you," he added, smiling in his turn, "that I have meant it all, every word of it—much more than I said. A man must approve your decision, whether his approval be asked or not."

"Very worthy sentiments, William," observed Miss Mervin; at which William, not knowing how to take this remark, said nothing, but looked puzzled and rather helpless.

Immediately Miss Harriet foresaw a silence which would be embarrassing to William and annoying to herself. Apparently such silences gave Miss Mervin some pleasure. They were usually caused by some remark of hers. Miss Harriet did not approve.

"William," she said hastily, "do you know that it is just fifteen years to-night since Eben ran away?"

She said it bravely, for she well knew that Abbie would say it if she did not. She would have preferred to put it differently.

William dropped the spoon with which he was eating, rather daintily, some of Miss Harriet's excellent gooseberry preserve.

"No," he cried, in a low voice. His sincerity could not be doubted. "Is it possible! Poor Eben! It was immediately after an — er — an interview with his father, if I am not mistaken. You have had no word from him since?"

Abbie Mervin broke in before Miss Harriet could speak. "No, she has not, and we can't blame Eben — or I can't. You should not call it an interview, William.

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His father gave him an unmerciful thrashing, and he submitted. Think of that, William. He submitted!"

William seemed to be in some distress of mind, between what he considered that loyalty to Miss Harriet demanded and his natural feelings.

"Very painful!" he murmured. "A very painful affair. It seems," he continued, gathering courage as he proceeded, "to have been a most unfortunate thing — most unfortunate in its results: unfortunate for Eben, and equally unfortunate for his family."

Miss Harriet was grateful. "Thank you, William; Abbie is too hard on father. His intentions were as good as any father could have had."

"Yes," said William, sympathetically. "Nobody who knew your father could doubt that. But there seems to have been some fault in their application, as we see it now. It is easy to judge of wisdom after the event."

Miss Mervin laughed. "One cannot doubt that they were well applied, or, at least, thoroughly."

William smiled in his quiet way, and even Miss Harriet could not forbear.

William hemmed a little. "I should like, Harriet," he said, "to propose Eben's health, if you can spare a little of your excellent sherry for the purpose. One hardly likes to drink a health in tea, however good it may be; and water, I believe, is fatal."

Miss Harriet, beaming, was about to ring; then she thought better of it. "I'll get it, myself," she cried.

She rose and took from the sideboard a decanter, —



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it was one of the heirlooms, come out for daily service with her great-grandmother's china, — and she produced from one of the mysterious recesses of that ancient piece of furniture some thin old glasses.

“There, William!” said Miss Mervin. “Now you may deliver your soul.”

William stood, and raised his glass on high, and, as he spoke, he looked over the heads of those other two, and the look in his eyes was as if he saw far and as if the walls of that room had not been. Abbie Mervin wondered at his face. It was transformed. This was not the William that she had known all her life.

“Here's to you, Eben Joyce, wherever you may be,” he said softly. “If you have life, God grant that it is a life of peace and content, and bring you back to us. If you have not, may God rest your soul.”

Miss Harriet's eyes filled, but she said nothing; and Abbie Mervin's eyes were very hard and bright, but she said nothing, either. They drank their sherry in silence and very solemnly.

“There!” cried Miss Mervin, with a little laugh that sounded forced. “Now let's not say any more about him.”

William smiled understandingly, and sat down again; and Miss Harriet, furtively wiping her eyes, meanwhile, with a diminutive handkerchief, made a remark. This was partly to change the subject, and partly because she felt deeply grateful to William Ransome.

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“William,” she said, “why don’t you ever read me, now, the things you write?”

“Because,” replied William, quietly, “you would not be interested in them, Harriet.”

“How do you know that I would n’t?” insisted Miss Harriet. “You still write them, don’t you?”

William ignored the first question. It would not have been an easy one to answer, although it is to be supposed that he did know. “Yes,” he said modestly, “I write them — on a very limited scale.”

“Well,” remarked Miss Harriet, turning to Abbie, “they were very nice things, I am sure; about — I don’t seem to remember what they were about. What was it, William?”

Miss Mervin laughed at that, with uncalled-for glee.

“Come, now, William, what were they about?” she asked gayly.

William smiled as if he enjoyed it. “They were about — er — a little of everything.”

“Mercy!” cried Abbie Mervin. “What a wide range!”

“Yes,” said William, “rather wide.”

“Well, anyway,” said Miss Harriet, “they were very pretty things, and quite grammatical. I remember that distinctly, because so many things that are written now are not grammatical at all!”

“Thank you,” said William. “You are very kind.”

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Miss Harriet looked at him suspiciously. "Well," she said, rather sharply, "they *were* grammatical, were n't they?"

"I hope so," William answered. "I meant that they should be."

"Well, William," asked Miss Harriet again, her suspicions allayed, "why don't you — or why won't you — read me some of them?"

William would have sighed if he had dared. "I don't because I thought you would not be interested, Harriet. But if you wish it, I will, of course."

"Oh!" cried Abbie Mervin, her eyes sparkling, "and may I be there to hear?"

To which question William made no reply, but he found himself smiling again at Miss Mervin. He had smiled at her rather often in the last few minutes. He would have been astonished, and perhaps a little afraid, if he had realized that fact.

So that matter was settled to Miss Harriet's satisfaction, and she felt that she had done a good deed. Indeed, she was pleased to find that there was a little glow at her heart. She had an indefinable sense of gratitude to William, — she could not, for the life of her, have told why, — and she wished to do something which would give him pleasure. She could not imagine anything more likely to give him pleasure than the reading of his own creations to an audience consisting of Miss Joyce: a cultivated and a sympathetic audience. That she was sympathetic, she had not a doubt; but

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why, oh, why, did William waste his time in writing such — such stuff!

All of this may have represented William's point of view, too, or it may not. At least, he did not say that it did not. He probably would have forgotten the matter completely, but for Miss Mervin, who seemed to have an interest in listening to some of his productions. He was surprised to find that he looked forward, with some degree of pleasure, to reading to an audience consisting of Miss Joyce and Miss Mervin, an audience cultivated and sympathetic, — at least half of it would be sympathetic, he felt reasonably sure. That comforted him for the rest of the short evening.

“Now, William,” said Miss Harriet, solicitously, herself going to the door with her guests, “you will see that Abbie gets safely home, will you?”

It was rather a command than a question. William smiled. “Yes, Harriet.”

Abbie Mervin laughed. “How absurd, Harriet!” she said. “As if I could n't go two steps alone, after dark! But I want to talk to William, so he may go home with me.”

They went, and Miss Harriet watched them as far as she could see, which was not far. It was very dark on the front walk, and a long way to the street. And she shut the door, not without misgivings as to her wisdom in sending them off together. If Abbie wanted to talk to William, why could n't she have said what she had to say before she went?

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“Pshaw!” she exclaimed suddenly. “What a fool I am!”

As for William and Abbie, they heard Miss Harriet shut the door and missed the faint gleam of light; then heard nothing but the soft crunch of the gravel under their feet.

“My!” cried Miss Mervin, softly. “It *is* dark, under these trees, is n’t it, William? Oh! What’s that?”

For a form had crept out from behind a tree close beside them: a strangely grotesque, misshapen form, with a big head and curious wobbly legs and long arms which waved about. Of course they could not see all that clearly, for it was almost as dark as pitch, but they saw enough to recognize the familiar figure. Miss Mervin heaved a sigh of relief. And the figure gave a harsh, clattering laugh.

“Man in there,” it cried, waving its long arms. “Man in there.” Again it laughed harshly.

“It’s Clanky Beg,” said Miss Mervin; “only Clanky Beg. I never came nearer being scared out of my wits in my life. — Clanky,” she went on kindly, “you must n’t creep out at people from behind trees, that way, in the dark. It would be sure to scare them. You won’t, any more, will you?”

“No, ma’am,” said Clanky Beg. Then he laughed again, harshly, and touched William familiarly on the arm. “Man in there!” he cried, with an evident relish of something, though it was impossible to guess what.

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“Man in there.” Once more he gave his clattering laugh, and vanished in the darkness.

“Now, which way did he go?” asked Miss Mervin. “Could you tell?”

William laughed shortly. “Not I,” he answered. “Clanky has a most mysterious way of disappearing. You call good-night to him, and see whether you can tell where the answer comes from. He probably would not answer me at all.”

“Good-night, Clanky Beg,” called Miss Mervin.

“Good-night, ma’am,” came the answer, instantly; but where it came from, whether from before, behind, or from either side of them, neither William nor Abbie had the least idea.

“That’s a curious thing,” said William.

“Yes,” assented Abbie. “Clanky seems to have an idea that you go to Harriet’s too often.”

“Oh!” said William, stopping short. “So that is what he meant.” He again took his place at Abbie’s side. “Well, now,” he murmured gently and reflectively, “I wonder if I do.”

## CHAPTER III

CLANKY BEG was the son of a drunken father; a brute, who had amused himself, when in his cups, by keeping the boy under the table and kicking out of his head what little sense God had put into it. Clanky was a very small boy during this period of his existence, and the casual kickings by his loving father, merely to ease his mind, were mostly about the head; which is not generally recommended as a pastime, in bringing up boys — or girls, either, for that matter.

They were frequent enough, these kickings, if casual; and it is not strange that they resulted in a condition of partial idiocy, and in a consequent abnormality of growth, which will account sufficiently for Clanky's big head and wobbly legs, although it may not explain the unusual length and strength of his arms. Indeed, he would undoubtedly have died of the kickings to which he was subjected, if his father had not been killed first, providentially, in a street fight. As his mother had died some months before, from injuries inflicted, also in a casual way, by his father, — she had made an ill-advised attempt to prevent him from abusing the boy, — Clanky was left as a legacy to the public.

He was the only legacy, as it happened, and he naturally fell — when he was found, which was only two

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days after the sad demise of his father (two days of starvation, which did not materially improve his condition) — he naturally fell to the Overseers of the Poor; who, being overjoyed to get hold of such a promising citizen, relegated him to the Poor Farm with all possible speed and with many shrugs and wry faces, and thus washed their hands of him completely. They never visited the Poor Farm.

It was during the first year of his stay at the Poor Farm that he got the name of Clanky Beg. He insisted that that was his name, and seemed to know no other, though what was the association of ideas in his poor misshapen head, it was impossible even to guess. But nobody took the trouble to guess about Clanky Beg; and Clanky Beg it was, from that time on, and his real name, if it ever had been known, was forgotten.

The years at the Poor Farm were, on the whole, happy years for Clanky. To be sure, he became the drudge of the place, at the beck and call of every old woman and every boy,— he had not the wit to avoid imposition, or even to recognize it. He was made to fetch and carry for the other inmates when he had done his hard day's work for the farm; which was as much as the superintendent thought he could get out of him; much more than he could have got out of any man in his senses, and Clanky was a boy. But he was happy, though chronically tired. Poor boy, he knew no easier life. And so he stayed there until he was nearly twenty



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— nobody knew his age exactly — and Mrs. Loughery chanced to see him.

Mrs. Loughery was a poor woman with troubles of her own and a kind heart ; which was not the least of her troubles, for it would not let her pass lightly by the troubles of other people. So, no sooner had she seen Clanky Beg and realized what his life must be at that institution of a free people, than she tried to get him. In this she had not much difficulty. The Overseers of that time were easily persuaded that she was a woman of sufficient means to support one more, although one would have thought that she had enough on her hands already. But the Overseers of the Poor did not officially know that she had a worthless son to support who contributed nothing and an invalid son who could do little — he did what he could, poor boy ! So Clanky went with Mrs. Loughery and began a life full of joy to him ; fuller of joy than any he had ever known. That is not to say that it was a life of ease. Very little joy had Clanky Beg known up to that time. He did the chores for Mrs. Loughery, which were light, compared with the chores at the Poor Farm ; did cheerfully anything else that she would let him do ; and had many hours to himself. And he wandered wide and free, tolerated, even liked. For he was pleasant and obliging and good-natured to a fault, and there was no harm in him.

Miss Mervin's explanation of what Clanky Beg had said did not seem entirely satisfactory to William Ransome, and the more he thought about it, the less

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satisfactory it seemed. He was more troubled than he would have been willing to acknowledge, and his replies to Abbie Mervin's remarks were so random and wide that she laughed at him.

"What is the matter, William?" she said. "Do you know what it was that I asked you, just now?"

He flushed quickly and smiled, although she could not see either the flush or the smile, in that darkness. "Well, no," he answered slowly, "I am afraid I don't. What was it?"

"I asked you," she continued, "whether you had ever tried to get any of your writings published."

"Oh, did you?" he said, chuckling. "And what did I say?" His answer must have been very far from answering that question, he knew.

"You said," she replied, "'No, he could n't have meant me, I think.' Now I submit, William, that that is not an answer — not a proper answer — to my question." Abbie laughed again, gayly. William laughed, too, softly. "I'm afraid," Abbie went on, "that Clanky Beg troubles you."

"I'm afraid he does," he acknowledged.

"I won't press you for an answer — a proper answer — now," she said. "But you have to tell me all about it, some time. For I am interested, William."

"Thank you, Abbie. I am glad. Now Harriet —" He spoke hesitatingly, and did not finish.

"I understand perfectly — exactly," she said hastily. "Harriet — well — I am really interested, William,

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and Harriet is — is not, to put it plainly. You could not reasonably expect it. We need not say more. So, be prepared.”

“Thank you,” he returned gratefully. “I will.”

“Now,” she said, “here I am, quite safe, at my own door. So I will release you, William. Good-night.”

Having bidden her good-night, he started briskly home. He was thinking, as he walked under the shadows of the great elms, of Miss Harriet and of Abbie Mervin and of Clanky Beg. He had not known Abbie Mervin well enough, it seemed. Suddenly he became aware of another shadow, stealing from trunk to trunk, sometimes behind him, sometimes at his side, but never very near.

“Clanky Beg,” he called softly, “please come here. I have something to say to you.”

Clanky came up, readily enough, and as he came, he laughed his clattering laugh.

“Clanky,” said William, when the laugh had stopped for a moment, “did you say there was a man in Miss Harriet’s?”

Clanky laughed again. Evidently he thought it a good joke.

“Do you know who it was?”

Clanky made no reply, but there was a cunning gleam in his eyes. It was a pity that William could not see it; for, not seeing it, he concluded that Clanky did not know.

“Will you show me where you saw him go?”

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“Yes, sir,” answered Clanky, and started off at once.

William had great difficulty in following him, in the darkness, for Clanky had reached that stage of development where he had his greatest joy in “playing Indian,” and he devoted all of his spare time to cultivating the art. He slid from tree to tree with consummate skill, which completely baffled William, and Clanky’s skill accomplished no useful purpose whatever, for they were some distance from Miss Joyce’s. William tried to follow him at his usual dignified gait, but found that he caught only an occasional glimpse of Clanky’s shadow flitting from tree to tree. Then he began to run; but he saw no more of the flitting shadow. Clanky had evaded him. He stopped, laughing.

“I shall be taken for a burglar,” he said to himself; “or I should be, if anybody were about.”

He went on, quietly, until he was at the Joyce gate. All was quiet and all was dark; very dark, except for a dim light in an upper room, which was probably from Miss Harriet’s bedroom candle. And here was he, at her gate, gazing up at it. If he were not taken for a burglar, he might be taken for a lover; and at the thought he laughed again, quietly. Ten years before, he might have done such things from a lover’s motives; but now — his laugh died and he sighed. He wished that he knew. If only he knew!

“Clanky!” he called softly.

Clanky stood before him; but where he had come from, it was impossible to guess. William did not try.

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“Keep still, Clanky,” William commanded; and Clanky choked off one of his laughs. It would have been a horrible noise in the quiet night.

“Now, please go on,” said William, “and remember that I am not as skillful as you are in tracking. Don’t lose me.”

Clanky grinned with pleasure and led him up the walk, then around by the piazza — taking care to walk on the grass of the terrace, for it would not be stealthy enough, for an Indian, to step upon the piazza — to the side door. It was easy to look into the dining-room windows from this point, and William noticed, with something of a shock, that one of the shades was not pulled completely down. He tried to remember whether it had been so during supper, but failed. Clanky had stopped, and had made a motion with his long arms to indicate that here was the place where the man should be. William began a search, which would have been thorough, but there was the sound of a window being raised, and Miss Harriet’s voice came down to them. Judging from the voice, Miss Harriet was not afraid.

“Who is there?”

William smiled, there in the darkness. His discovery meant so many things. “It is only I, Harriet. Clanky Beg said there was a man in here, and I thought that I had better come and investigate.”

Miss Harriet’s voice was softer as she answered. Such devotion touched her. “Oh, William,” she said,

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“you are very good, I am sure. But I am equally sure that it is unnecessary. There can’t be any man there. I looked around most carefully before coming up. Thank you, William, and good-night.”

With these words, delivered with an air of kindly condescension, — at least, so William thought, — the window was closed again. He stood there for a moment, grinning like any fool.

“Well, William,” he murmured, at last, “you’ve put your foot in it now.” He turned. “Come, Clanky, go home now, like a good boy. You don’t want Mrs. Loughery worrying about you.”

“Oh, no, sir,” said Clanky, somewhat anxiously.

When William would have bidden him good-night, he could not find him.

“Slipped away,” he muttered. “Would that I had done the same before — well — William, you are a fool.”

He laughed grimly and went home, making as much noise by the way as he pleased, which was nearly as much as he could. The man was but a creature of Clanky’s disordered brain, after all. Hereafter, he would try to mind his own business.

And the man for whom William had been looking — for there was a man — had been cowering in his hiding-place all this time, trembling, filled with fear. It was a good place that he had chosen to hide in — an excellent place. One would think that he must have been very familiar with hiding-places about that house to hit upon

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this at once and in the dark. The chances were that he would not have been found if the search had been allowed to continue. But the man did not consider that; nor did his trembling stop when William and Clanky had gone away. For three hours he lay there and trembled — he seemed to have spasms of shaking — until he thought that surely the rattling of his teeth must wake the woman who slept above him — the rattling of his teeth and the knocking together of his knees.

If there had been any one to see him, that one would have concluded that it must be something more than fear that made him tremble so; that, perhaps, the man was more in need of a doctor than of the police — and the doctor was more accessible, in Old Harbor, than the police. When the three hours were up — he thought it was five hours — when the three hours were up, and he tried to get out of his hiding-place, that opinion would, perhaps, have been strengthened. He seemed pitifully weak.

He was out, at last, with many groans. He tried not to groan — not to make a noise of any kind; and when a groan was forced from him, in spite of all he could do — when he felt it coming, he tried to stifle it. In this he succeeded only indifferently well; and he stood upon the ground and looked about him and listened intently, fearing, he did not know what.

“Good thing she has n’t a dog,” he muttered; and, stealthily, he drew near to a window of the dining-room.

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It was hidden from the street, that window, around the corner of the house. For that matter, he might as well have chosen a front window. They were all invisible from the street, in that darkness, even if there had been any one abroad to see; and the house was set well back, and there were many trees, which would have hidden him well enough. He drew his knife from his pocket, a stout knife with a thick blade, and, choosing his place just where the catch showed dimly, he jabbed it into the wood.

“Now,” he muttered, “if they have n’t fixed this catch, it will — ah!”

For, with a quick pry on the knife, the window moved slightly sidewise and was free. It was loose in its casing. He raised it slowly, an inch — a half inch at a time. It responded, not without objection, but it did not make so very much noise, not enough to wake a maiden lady with a clear conscience and in her first sound sleep. Now it was high enough to admit a man, if he were careful. He drew out the knife blade and slipped the window back, and the catch caught with a click.

He let up the shade carefully. “Now for it.” He sighed. “I wish I had more strength.”

He struggled up into the opening, pulled himself through, slowly and with great effort, — it brought perspiration out in great beads upon his forehead, — and fell in a heap upon the floor.



## CHAPTER IV

MISS HARRIET had been smiling to herself as she blew out her candle and got into bed. It was so good of William to take all that trouble for her. Of course it was useless, but William was forever doing useless things, and it was like him to do this. His intentions had been good; of that she felt sure. Well, William was — yes, he was a dear. And with an unaccustomed warmth for him in the region of her heart, she composed herself to sleep.

It was some hours later, although it seemed to her the next minute, — which may be taken as proof of the clear conscience already alluded to, and of some other things, — that she suddenly started wide awake. She had no idea what it was that had wakened her. She half rose upon her elbow and listened. There was no sound except the ticking of the tall clock in the hall, and that was a friendly sound which she was well used to hearing. With a low exclamation of impatience she put her head back upon the pillow and once more composed herself to sleep. To her surprise, sleep would not come. After a half hour of vain effort, she began to get angry. She rose upon her elbow again, turned her pillow and pounded it, then sank back upon it. She was wider awake than ever. She turned over upon her other side,

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and in the course of fifteen minutes she turned back again; and after ten minutes more of wakefulness, she sat up.

“It’s no use,” she said. “I’ll just look around once more. Then I shall go to sleep quick enough.”

She slipped her bare feet into her bedroom slippers and put her wrapper on. She always kept that on a chair, with the candle, by the side of the bed. Then she felt for a match and, having found it, she lighted the candle. They were sulphur matches, which made no sound; and there had been nobody to hear it, of course, if it had exploded like a cannon. And with the candle in her hand, her slipped feet making no sound, she went downstairs.

There was a light shining under the crack of the dining-room door. It seemed to be quite a bright light. “My silver!” thought Miss Harriet; and she hurried. She grasped the knob and turned it noiselessly; then, slowly, she opened the door.

Her first impression was that the room was afire. Then, as she stood there looking in, and as her eyes got used to the light, she saw that the illumination was caused by six candles, — there were no more than that number of candlesticks in that room, — and four of them were upon the sideboard and two of them upon the table; and all of her brightly polished silver was spread out upon the sideboard or upon the end of the table nearest it. It shone bravely. How it shone! She realized it with a little thrill of pride, even then. The

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two candlesticks that were upon the table stood one on either side of the place William had occupied — the head — or the foot, as you prefer. In that place was — not William — Miss Harriet would have been glad enough of his presence at that moment and in that place. It was a man, a strange man, with clothes that were threadbare and worn, and with a week's beard upon his face. There seemed to be a certain refinement in his features, so far as Miss Harriet could see them. The man had his face turned away from her. But he was strangely familiar. Miss Harriet found herself puzzling over that, wondering where she could, by any possibility, have seen him before. The man was standing, apparently gazing at the silver so temptingly arrayed before him. Miss Harriet suddenly realized that, and she realized that it was very tempting. No doubt he would be putting it into his bag in a minute; they always carried bags, these men, great gunny-sacks for just such occasions. A vision came to her of a huge melting-pot and all her beloved silver going into it, piece by piece. She would have cried out, but the man himself, strangely enough, began speaking before she could make a sound.

He raised his hand on high, and in his fingers was one of those thin old glasses.

“Here's to you, Eben Joyce, wherever you may be,” he said softly. “If you have life, God grant that it is a life of peace and content, and bring you back to us. If you have not, may God rest your soul.” He drank

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his sherry at a gulp. "A life of peace and content!" He laughed low and harshly. "Ha! That's good. A life of peace and content! I wish to God I might have."

Miss Harriet had got over her wonder. She had got through puzzling about him. She knew. "Eben," she said.

He turned, at the sound, as if he had been shot. He seemed stricken with fear. He still kept his hold on the little glass, and it waved about as he spoke.

"Harriet!" he whispered hoarsely. "Harriet!" His voice failed him, apparently. He could not seem to raise it above that hoarse whisper. "Harriet," he repeated pleadingly, "I did n't mean to steal. I was n't going to steal your things. I was going to put everything back, just as I found it. Truly, I was. I only — only wanted — to see them — once more — the old place — things — once — "

His voice died out and he swayed and fell where he was, a crumpled heap. The little glass splintered on the edge of the table as he fell.

Harriet Joyce was not one of those women who are accustomed to scream and clasp their hands and gaze with wide-eyed horror, when anything happens — when there is anything to be done. Doing things was her strong point. She did them now; did what was necessary, what was best, until she had Eben lying there on the floor of the dining-room with his eyes open and with sense in them.

"Now, Eben," she said, "you lie here for a few min-

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utes while I call my maid. I'm going to get you upstairs into your own room, and to bed. I can't lift you, alone."

"No, Harriet, no! Let me go. Please let me go."

He struggled to raise himself, but Miss Harriet held him down — with one hand; did it easily.

"Fiddlesticks!" she said, and smiled. "You're ill, Eben. Why, I can hold you there with one hand. You're not in condition to be trusted to go anywhere. You'd faint again before you reached the gate. Then we'd have the trouble of bringing you all the way in again. No." Eben found her smile a comfort. "You're going to your own room, to your own bed. I've kept your room in order, and I have only to make the bed. That won't take me a minute."

Eben's eyes filled with tears and he turned his head away. He was very weak, poor man!

"You're very good, Harriet," he whispered; "very good to me. But, please, — I don't want any one else to — I can manage to get upstairs with a little help — a very little help."

Harriet spoke quickly. "Well, Eben, — well, if you wish. We will try it. Only go slowly, and rest whenever you feel tired. Or wait! I will go up and have the room ready in a jiffy and leave a light. Then I will come back for you. Will you promise to wait here?"

Eben smiled faintly. "Yes, I promise. Never fear."

Harriet rose and started towards the door. Then she came back and shut the window. There was a flicker

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of amusement in Eben's eyes, but he said nothing, only watched her. She found him in the same place — in the same position — when she came back. Then, together, they started up the stairs. Eben was stronger than she had thought. He had to rest only twice on the way; then, with her help, he got to his room and to bed — the bed that he had not been in for fifteen years. How well he remembered his feeling, that night, fifteen years ago! He had felt very bitter, then; he remembered thinking that he should never lie in that bed again. He had been glad to believe that he should not. But now —

He shut his eyes, and the tears slowly trickled from under the lids and down his cheeks. Harriet saw them.

“What is it, Eben?” she asked gently. “Are you feeling badly? Have you any pain?”

Eben opened his eyes. “No, Harriet,” he whispered, “no pain. A little light-headed, perhaps.” He smiled at her, and the corners of his mouth quivered as he smiled. “Harriet, I have dreamed of this. It is heavenly. But I did n't expect — I did n't hope for it.”

Harriet's own eyes felt hot. “I don't know why not, I'm sure. It's been yours for the asking for a long time, Eben.”

She turned away quickly, and began to put the little things in the room to rights. Not that they needed to be set to rights — they were right enough, already; but she felt safer so. Miss Harriet had all a man's dislike to being seen crying, and there was a great lump in her throat. She could feel Eben's eyes upon her, following

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her as she went about the room, moving the things on the washstand a fraction of an inch, then going to the dressing-table and performing the same useless task there. There was an old pincushion that she, herself, had made, twenty years before. It was fat and hard. She had thought it lovely when she made it. She lifted it and held it for Eben to see. It had suddenly come over her that she was doing useless things, and she thought, with a pang, of William Ransome. Just what sort of a pang it was that she felt, one can only guess. But the pincushion did not matter, and she knew it. Neither she nor Eben said anything. Eben smiled again at her, and she put the pincushion down again, before the old Dutch mirror, where it had been these twenty years. At last she could trust herself to speak.

“Now, Eben,” she said, without a tremor, “I must go down to the dining-room and put out the candles. You go right to sleep. If you need me, call. My door will be open, and I wake easily. Good-night.”

“Good-night,” returned Eben, softly, “and bless you, Harriet.”

She blew out his candle quickly, for she felt the lump in her throat again. Then she went down to the dining-room and put out the candles there. The silver she left till the morning.

Miss Harriet did not go to sleep immediately. Once she heard Eben talking in his sleep — an uneasy sleep, apparently — and she went in to him. She could not make out what he was trying to say, but he seemed to

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be in fear of something, and his hands were working uneasily together and he moved his head from side to side. Harriet laid her cool hand upon his forehead and found it somewhat hot. He had a little fever, then. At her touch his head stopped its uneasy rolling and he half woke, and reached up and grasped her hand with both of his.

"It's only I, Eben," she said; "it's Harriet. You were talking in your sleep, and I came in to see if you were all right."

He was wide awake now. "Talking in my sleep?" he cried apprehensively. "What did I say, Harriet? What did I say?"

"I could not make out," she replied gently. "You seemed to be afraid of something. I suppose it was only a bad dream."

He laughed shortly. Harriet could scarcely hear it. "A bad dream!" he exclaimed. "I have a great many of them. I am afraid, Harriet, — afraid of everything."

"Well, go to sleep now," she said soothingly, as if he were a sick child. "There is nothing to be afraid of now. You are in your own room, in your own bed. Go to sleep, Eben."

He sighed contentedly and turned over, and she left him. But in the morning his eyes were dull and listless and he scarcely spoke. Harriet stood looking down at her brother and thinking.

"I don't know what's the matter with him," she murmured finally. "It might be anything, anything



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at all, or nothing but excitement. He needs the doctor.”

So she sent for the doctor, summoning the surprised maid from the preparation of her breakfast for the purpose. Having sent, she went back to Eben's room and sat down in a low rocker that stood by one of the windows, a window through which the sunshine poured in a great flood. And there she sat and rocked noiselessly except for the slight creaking of the old chair, and she thought. The measured, rhythmic creaking of the chair, with the flooding sunshine, seemed to soothe Eben, and, gradually, he fell asleep again.

## CHAPTER V

HARRIET JOYCE did not seem to belong in a rocking-chair; there was something incongruous about the combination, especially if the chair was being rocked regularly and methodically, as it was now. She would have said so herself, at once, and perhaps with unnecessary vehemence. Indeed, she believed, in her own private heart, — although she might not have been so ready to say that, — that the rocking-chair was a device suited only to invalids, nurses with babies to care for, and persons of an inferior intellect; such a person as William Ransome, for example. She could think of him in a rocker, rocking quietly, although she had never known him to be guilty of that offense — or she could have thought of him so, within a very few days. Now, the fact that she found it harder to think of William rocking, with his feet banging on the floor with every forward swing, was evidence that her opinion of William was undergoing some subtle change, of which she may not have been aware.

None the less, she sat there and rocked gently, and found the motion and the rhythmic creaking very soothing, as Eben had. She may have needed to be soothed, for she had had an exciting night, although she would not have acknowledged that it had excited

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her. As she sat rocking and looking out of the window, watching for the doctor, her thoughts — her musings, rather, for she was not thinking — passed unconsciously from Eben to William and back again.

She remembered Eben best as a half-grown boy. She had always rather looked up to him, she could not quite tell why. Handsome, well-bred, with distinguished manners, even as a boy, — she said it to herself with some pride in him, — and weak! What could you expect? And he had gone to college and had done only fairly well, when his father had expected great things of him. To a man like her father, who made no allowances for neglect of duty, it must have been a great disappointment. Then, in the middle of his junior year, he had come home — to stay, as he said. He did not stay long, for his father, learning the cause, — Harriet had never known the cause, — had considered it necessary to give him a sound thrashing. Harriet recalled, even now, her father's look of grief and sorrow. No one could accuse him of acting in anger. She recalled, too, easily enough, Eben's white, set face, his eyes like two burning coals, as he followed his father out. He had said no word to any one, did not open his lips to speak, and in the morning they found that he had gone. Now, here he was. Harriet looked long at the quiet form on the bed, and the creaking of the rocker stopped; the quick tears came to her eyes, and, with a shivering sigh, she turned to the window. She saw the doctor's horse just stopping at the gate.

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It was an old white horse, that seemed to be clad in furs and always made Miss Harriet think of a polar bear. He was accustomed to stand before a house — dozing, perhaps, if it was warm, or looking about him with an air of the most lively interest — he would stand there for a time, which was as long as he was quite comfortable, and which varied in length with the weather. Then he would proceed to investigate anything which aroused his curiosity, and which seemed to him to be worth an investigation. If he was cold with his standing, he would walk up and down the street, turning carefully at the ends of his beat, and stopping occasionally at the gate and gazing in inquiringly to see if there were any sign of the doctor.

Doctor Olcott himself was a man past middle age, stout and afflicted with asthma, but active in spite of it. Miss Harriet watched him now getting slowly out of his low buggy and laboring briskly up the long walk. Then she saw him wheezing up the steps. She rose quickly and went out of the room. The front door opened and boomed shut again, and the doctor sat down on the settle in the hall to get his breath. Harriet started down the stairs, and he heard her coming.

“Hang it all, Hattie,” he called, “what’s the matter now? Why,” — as she came within his view — “why, confound it, there’s nothing ailing you. You ought to be ashamed to send for me and make me walk this mile uphill from your gate. There’d be a great deal more sense in your coming to see an old man whose heart is

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skittish and who has n't any breath left. Come, why did n't you?"

Miss Harriet smiled at him affectionately. "You did n't send for me, doctor," she replied. "Send for me, and see how quickly I'll come."

The doctor was standing now, and he patted her shoulder.

"Yes, yes," he said. "I believe you would. I believe you would. Well, what is it, Hattie? What did you want? For I know you would n't send for me for nothing."

Miss Harriet sobered at once. "Doctor Olcott," she said, looking earnestly at him, "Eben has come home."

"What!" he cried. "Eben come home? Bless my soul! Is it good news — good or bad, Hattie?"

"Good news, of course, doctor," Harriet answered, somewhat indignantly. "How could it be anything else?"

A smile of amusement flashed into his eyes. They were merry eyes, and the wrinkles about them were pleasant to see.

"Well, — it is conceivable — conceivable. But I beg your pardon. Of course it would be good news to you. Somebody to take care of. When did he come, and where did he come from?"

"He came last night," said Miss Harriet, guiltily conscious that she was telling less than the whole truth. "I don't know where he came from. He has not been well enough to talk about it."

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The doctor's manner changed at once. "What's the matter with him?" he asked brusquely. "But of course you don't know. He has some fever, I suppose. I'd better see him. Where is he, in his old room?" He moved toward the stairs. "No, Hattie, don't you come, yet. If I need anything, I'll call you."

So Miss Harriet waited, with what patience she could muster, there in the hall. The doctor was a long time with Eben, and she opened the door and leaned against the jamb, looking out. The air was cool, for it was October; but the sunshine was warm in the doorway, and she basked in it, her eyes half closed. The trees had not yet lost their leaves, which were well turned. The elm leaves were not pretty, — they never are, being but a dingy yellow, — but here and there along the street, a maple showed gorgeous colors. The Polar Bear had gone over to investigate, according to his habit, a particularly brilliant clump of scarlet; but, seeing what it was, and that it was well beyond his reach, and probably not good to eat, anyway, he was turning around with his customary care, looking up at the houses, meanwhile, inquiringly.

Harriet watched him as he retraced his steps, and as she watched, she saw Abbie Mervin just beyond, waving frantically. At the same moment she heard Eben's door shut and the heavy tread of the doctor coming down the stairs. She waved to Abbie, but her waving was far from frantic. She hoped that Abbie would not come over. Somehow, she did not want to see her just

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then. She turned to meet the doctor, and saw that the tears were standing in his eyes. He was evidently under considerable excitement, and when he was near enough, he exploded.

“Damn it all, Hattie!” he cried. He spoke low, lest Eben should hear. “Damn it all! I beg your pardon — but you’ll want to swear when you hear. The only matter with Eben is that he has been starved. He’s been underfed for the last six months or more, and the least little thing wears him out. He’d have had too little clothing, too, but that it has been warm weather. And now anything may get hold of him if he is not taken care of — any sickness. Resisting power all gone — his fighting power — in mind as well as body. Feed him up, Hattie.” She started at once. “No, no, I don’t mean now. Nurse him up, and then feed him. I don’t know his story; it is n’t necessary that I should. But that’s all he needs. There is no reason why it should be difficult. You know well enough what to give him now.” He glanced out toward the gate. “Here’s Abbie coming in. You won’t want me now. I’ll drop in this afternoon. Good-by, Hattie. You’re a good girl.”

The doctor was gone, lurching down the steps and down the walk to the gate. Abbie Mervin would have stopped; but the doctor did not stop, only calling a cheery good-morning. Then he whistled for his horse, got into the buggy, and drove away. Harriet waited at the door while Abbie came up, somewhat anxious.

“Well, Harriet,” she said, “I saw the doctor’s horse

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evidently anchored here — with a long tether — and it worried me. You're not ill, are you? Is it Bridget?"

"No," answered Harriet. There was a little pause. "Abbie, Eben is upstairs."

Miss Mervin sank down upon the settle, overcome. Words failed her. "Eben!" she gasped at last. "Eben? Are you sure, Harriet?" She laughed unnaturally. "But how absurd! Of course you are. Eben!"

Abbie Mervin's feelings were in a strangely chaotic state at that moment. For years, she had looked forward to such a moment — as a remote possibility. She had cherished an ideal — had hugged it close; but now — she felt a curious reluctance to act as she had supposed she would act in these circumstances. She was ashamed that she was glad of Harriet's next words.

"You will excuse me, Abbie, I know. I have to see about Eben's breakfast."

"Of course. Is he — is he ill, Harriet?"

"Not seriously, I think. But he is not well."

Abbie laughed again. "You — I am upset, Harriet. I will go as soon as I have had time to collect my thoughts. Of course he can't see any one now, but — perhaps — as soon as he is well enough — you will let me know?"

Harriet nodded and was gone. Abbie still sat there on the hall settle. She had had it in mind — yes, she had meant — to renew the old intimate relations with Eben, if he came back — when he came back; for,



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with the years, the feeling that he might come had grown into a certainty that he would come. She had even, in her own secret soul, meant to marry him, as she had once been ready to promise to do, and as he had seemed to be on the point of asking her to do. And if he would not ask her now, she had thought it would be right enough for her — but she never followed that thought to its inevitable conclusion. It frightened her. It seemed unmaidenly. None the less, in spite of her reluctance to confess to herself, she knew just what she meant to do. Eben might well hesitate to ask that of any woman, in the face of the failure he had made of his life. But he was not old yet — he was but thirty-five. What was thirty-five? Only half his life; there would be plenty of time — plenty of time, if he began at once.

The tears stood in her eyes and she had a heightened color, which showed under her clear skin like a tint upon porcelain. She would not see Harriet again — now. She could not bear it. With a glance toward the dining-room, she rose hurriedly and went out.

Slowly she walked down the path, beneath the trees, and out at the gate. She held her head erect and her eyes were wide open, but they told her brain nothing. Her physical eyes saw well enough to guide her feet by the old familiar places, but little of their message reached her consciousness. She was trying to think — and not succeeding very well. She felt the need of adjusting herself to the new circumstances; though why there should be need of adjusting herself to these circumstances she

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could not have told. She had settled all that, time and time again; or she thought she had. But she found herself much disturbed — upset. She did not like to be upset. It did not happen to her often.

A man was approaching, and she turned out, although she was not aware of him. He stopped, and smiled to see the look on her face.

“What’s the matter, Abbie?” he asked. “Walking in your sleep?”

Quite a different look came into her eyes, and again the quick color flooded her cheeks. Again there was that rose tint upon porcelain.

“Oh, William!” she cried. “I ’m afraid I was walking in my sleep—and dreaming. I didn’t see you at all.”

“Evidently,” said William.

“But I am particularly glad to see you now,” she continued. “Where are you going? Have you time to walk a little way with me — or I will walk with you, if you are in a hurry.”

Apparently William had time, for he turned at once. “Well?” he asked.

Abbie regarded him for a moment. “I have been into Harriet’s,” she said. “I saw the doctor’s old white horse apparently hailing from there, and I went over.”

William looked sympathetic. “I hope there’s nothing the matter.”

“No,” she returned, “not with Harriet.” She was

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silent for the space of two breaths. "I may as well out with it at once. Eben has come home."

To her surprise, William laughed. "So that was it," he remarked.

Abbie stopped short. "William," said she, "what do you mean?"

William told her, as briefly as he could, his experience of the night before. "And," he concluded, "she took the pains to assure me that no man could be there. So there was nothing left for Clanky and me to do but to take ourselves off as fast as possible."

Abbie was looking at him intently. "Do you mean to say," she asked, "that you believe that Harriet knew it all the time — knew that Eben was there? For I suppose it *was* he."

William nodded. "I suppose it was — naturally. But I distinctly do not mean to say that I have any belief about it. Those are the facts. You can draw what inference you choose — or what you must. Of course, you or I would much rather not attach any importance to the circumstance at all. The fact remains that I was packed off very unceremoniously and finally. And," he added, with some slight show of feeling, "I did n't like it."

There was silence for a moment, and Abbie gazed at him with wide eyes. "Of course you did n't like it," she said. A laugh was growing in her eyes, and at last she smiled. "It's too absurd, William, to think of Harriet as a conspirator. She's the essence of truth. You

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would be the last person whose feelings she would wish to hurt — ”

William interrupted her. “That’s just it,” he said earnestly. “Harriet does n’t think about my feelings. She seems to feel that I have n’t any.”

Abbie laughed. “Well,” she returned, “it’s just as easy — is n’t it? — to consider the whole thing as just happening so and of no importance. So let’s.”

William laughed out at that. “All right.”

Meanwhile, Eben’s fever had increased. He could eat nothing of the breakfast which Miss Harriet had prepared with such care, but tossed as he lay, and babbled of something — Harriet could not make out what — of which he seemed to be in great terror.

## CHAPTER VI

THE street that Harriet Joyce's house was on had been the highroad, and during the prosperity of Old Harbor there had grown up on it many an old square house. They were generous and dignified, these old houses, standing well back from the street, high on their terraces, the lawns shaded by noble old elms. In summer, the cool winds blew through the wide halls, which opened at front and at back; and in winter, fires roared in the great chimneys, and the firelight shone on queer deep-sea shells, or on grotesque carven idols, or on tables inlaid with ebony and ivory.

The prosperity of Old Harbor had been due to its ships. Now that there were no ships, — or next to none, — there was no prosperity worth mentioning. There was nothing left but memories and these relics: the shells and the idols and the inlaid tables. The sons and daughters of the old shipowners would not have had it otherwise — since the ships were not.

The street that Harriet Joyce's house was on was the highroad yet, although it had fallen from its high estate when it bore on its hard back two express stages a day — two each way. Its back was as hard as ever; but, beyond the limits of the aforesaid old square houses, it felt no greater burden than the occasional farmer's

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horse, trotting heavily to a market, such as it was, with his load behind him.

Out on this road, just where it forked, was the Old Green — the New Green being nearer the town, and itself a century old, although it had been embellished, more recently, with a curb of cut granite and a fence of bronze, the result of the activity of the Improvement Society. The Old Green was guiltless of any such embellishment, and continued to mark, humbly and unobtrusively, the dividing of the ways; and just beyond the Old Green there stood, corner to the road, a little old house with sagging roof and one big chimney sticking up through the middle of it. It was a very old house, planted there before the right fork of the road was a road at all, which sufficiently accounts for its position. It had a pleasant prospect: woods and fields, — more woods and less fields than had been, — and it must have had a good view of the stage for a half mile in either direction, when there was a stage to see.

For the prosperity of the little old house was past, too. Now, it looked tidy, to be sure, but decrepit; there was an occasional squawk from one of the hens that stood on one leg in the sunshine — no doubt much as it had been in the day that was past; strings of sliced apples hung over the door and under the windows, drying in the sun — which was also, no doubt, much as had been; and, on a bench beside the door, — and this was not at all as it had been, — on this bench, I say, sat Clanky Beg.

Clanky Beg sat on the bench, in the sun, blinking

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and thinking upon nothing in particular after the manner of domestic animals, — I say nothing about wild animals, knowing nothing about them except what I have seen, and I have no competent witnesses of that, — and he stretched at his length and had his great hands slipped into the pockets of his trousers and his big head leaned against the shingles of the house. He was gazing out, with a look of content, over green fields and pastures new — no, not new, for things that were new were not in fashion in Old Harbor, except with the Improvement Society. They never had been in fashion. And the fields were no longer green. What Clanky Beg saw, as he sat there in the warm sunshine, were fields that were sere and brown, with, here and there, patches of bay and berry bushes spreading over them; and they stretched away until they met the woods, and they had a fringe of smaller trees at the far side. Those smaller trees ranged all the way from sturdy striplings of thirty years to the slender red seedlings on the outer edge; and somewhere within the fringe would be found an old stone wall. Clanky smiled as he thought of that. He loved those woods.

A little woman who seemed old — as old as the house — opened the door and put her head out. “Clanky,” she called. It was no less than wonderful to hear her voice. It sounded sweet as bells, but it was not a sweet voice.

Clanky started up with an alertness that was pathetic, it told so much of his story.

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"Yes, ma'am, mother Loughery," he answered quickly, dog-like love showing in his shining eyes. "What would you have me do? I'm a'ready to do an'thing for you."

"Bless you, Clanky, boy," said Mrs. Loughery, heartily, "I know that. 'T is not much I 'd be askin' of you. 'T is only that you'll look after Joe whiles I'm gone, and give him his medicine reg'lar, and stay within call of him. Joe 'll tell you when it 's time for the medicine. I've to go down the road a bit, to sell my yarbs."

"Yes, ma'am, I will," replied Clanky, earnestly. "I will, faithful."

"Bless you, boy," said Mrs. Loughery again, "you're a comfort." She turned into the house and shut the door. "It's warm in the sun, but there's the feel of winter — the feel of winter. My Joe must n't get it. Ah, well" — She stopped where she stood. "I wonder, now, would n't he be better for a breath of the air and a bit of the warm sun. I'll ask him would n't he like it. I know I'd as soon die as be cooped up in the house."

She opened the door into the kitchen. A boy of about twenty sat in a rocking-chair near the stove, with a shawl about his shoulders and another about his knees. His cheeks were hollow and his eyes were big. He looked up as his mother entered and smiled at her.

"Now, Joe, dear," she said, "it's come to me that mebbe you'd like to go out where Clanky sits for a bit. The sun's warm and there's no wind there. Would you,



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Joe? He'll take your chair out — Clanky will — and see 't you're wrapped snug." She spoke anxiously.

Joe was smiling still. "All right, mother. I'll go."

Mrs. Loughery opened the door again and called Clanky Beg, who came at once and took Joe's chair and bore it out, and set it carefully where there was not the lightest breath of wind. Then Joe walked, rather feebly, toward the door. His mother watched him anxiously.

"Be good, now, Joe, dear. I'll only be gone a little while."

Joe looked at her and smiled again. His mother was tucking a clean white cloth in around the herbs that filled the basket. "Yes, mother," he said. "I'll be —" Then he coughed. He had to stop, in his short journey, and lean against the door until he was through.

She came over to him quickly. "There, now, Joe," she said, putting her arm around him. "There, there, now. The cough, Joe, darlin', — it's easier than it was?"

He nodded assent — he could not speak, at once — and she kissed him.

"Bless you, Joe! Now, take my arm, and we'll go out together."

Clanky ran to help her and, together, they settled the smiling Joe in his chair. It was a brave Joe, for he knew what he had to expect, and that soon; almost certainly before another winter, and he would be doing well — he would be lucky — if he saw the spring again.

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But he smiled and was cheerful. His mother knew, too, although she was not ready to acknowledge it to herself.

When she had Joe well tucked in, she went into the house again, and came out almost at once with her basket on her arm.

“Now I’ll be goin’. Good-by, Joe, dear. Good-by, Clanky, boy.”

“Good-by, ma’am, mother Loughery,” called Clanky. Joe only nodded, and watched her with wistful affection as she walked briskly down the road.

Mrs. Loughery was not an old woman, although her face, lined and bronzed by sun and wind and weather, made her seem so. It was a witch’s face, or it would have been but for the cheerful smile that was so ready. Old Harbor was well used to Mrs. Loughery’s cheeriness, and as to her witch’s face, why, it never once thought of that.

It was a walk of nearly two miles that she had before her, but she made nothing of it, although she was ready enough to take a lift in a farmer’s wagon, if one came that way. There was no farmer driving to market on that morning, it seemed — perhaps the farmers went earlier. It was early yet, too early, one would have thought, to expect to be successful in an errand such as hers. Mrs. Loughery knew better. She knew that the less the women of Old Harbor had to do, the earlier they seemed to think that they had to get up. Miss Joyce breakfasted at seven, the year around; Mrs. Catherwood, at half-past seven.

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She came, at length, to that part of the road where the road ceased to be a road and became a street; where the old square houses made an array of which Old Harborites were inordinately proud. As she walked along, under the elms, now bare of leaves, she glanced up at each house that she passed, but she did not stop. At last she was walking by a low fence of three rails, with thick shrubbery behind it. She looked up, quickly, at the windows of a house which she could just see above the shrubbery.

“Mis’ Catherwood ’ll want some, mebbe,” she said. “I’ll just step in an’ see.”

She passed the front gate and, a little farther on, entered at a lesser gate. This opened upon a plank walk, which led her up by the driveway, past the old box-bordered garden, and up some steps to the terrace at the side of the house. Here she set her basket down and prepared, in a leisurely way, to knock; but before she was quite ready to do so, the door opened suddenly and a girl darted out, almost knocking the old woman over.

She was a slim slip of a girl, with merry eyes and quantities of fair hair, which, doubtless, had been smoothly confined in the braid that hung far down her back. It was not smooth now, but the straggling locks blew over her face and into her eyes. She brushed them back impatiently with her hand.

“Why, Mrs. Loughery!” she cried. “I’m very sorry. I hope I did n’t hurt you.”

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The old woman smiled affectionately. "Bless your lovin' heart, dear," she said, "*you* couldna hurt *me*."

At this the girl smiled, too. "Now you know that's flattery — pure flattery, Mrs. Loughery. You'd say the same thing if I'd knocked you down and trampled on you. It's not my fault that I did n't. I'm very heedless. What have you got, to-day?"

"Why, I've got some yarbs," Mrs. Loughery answered. "Your ma don't want no yarbs to-day, do she, dear? I just thought I'd step in an' see if mebbe she did." She uncovered the basket, which was full, to the top, of bundles of dried herbs. They gave forth a pleasant, pungent smell.

The girl bent over them for an instant and inhaled their fragrance. "They smell of all sorts of things," she said, "and some of them are pleasant and some of them are not. My last impression is of thoroughwort and wormwood, and wormwood tea is not nice."

Mrs. Loughery laughed. "There's thoroughwort and wormwood here, but there's a lot else. The wormwood's clear to the bottom of the basket."

"Well," said the girl, "I'll call mother, but I hope she won't get any wormwood. Will you come in?"

"It's kind o' nice an' sunny out here," replied Mrs. Loughery, hesitating. "I like to be out whiles I can be. But if your ma'd rather — I'll just set right here on the step, I guess, an' then if your ma wants I should come in, I'll come. An', dearie, wormwood tea's good for

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you, in its season. I do' know 's I should call it nice, though," she added thoughtfully.

"You could n't call it nice," said the girl, "if you are a truthful person — that is, unless your taste has been depraved." She went in, to the foot of the stairs, and called softly.

"Mother, here's Mrs. Loughery with a basket of yarbs. She just thought she'd step in and see if you wanted any, mebbe."

The girl's voice was low and musical, so that it was a pleasure to hear her speak. Her mother must have been of the same opinion, — although mothers' opinions count for little, — for she came to the head of the stairs and she was laughing quietly.

"Is Mrs. Loughery there, dear? I want to see her. I have been meaning to send out to ask how Joe is getting on. But you should n't mimic her, Constance. She's very fond of you, and she has a great deal to bear. She is wonderfully cheerful under it all. I only hope that we should be able to do as well." Mrs. Catherwood, who had been coming down as she spoke, kissed her daughter. "Now, run along, Conny."

Constance only lifted a smiling face and slipped her hand through her mother's arm, and, together, they went back to the waiting old woman.

Mrs. Catherwood had been a great beauty. She was a beautiful woman still; indeed, she was more than that. For, although there was a strong resemblance between her and Harriet Joyce, — Harriet, to be sure,

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had never had such beauty, — Mrs. Catherwood's beauty was mellowed by the experiences which her sister had not had; which, it was to be feared, Miss Harriet had begun not to desire.

Mrs. Loughery was sitting on the step, but she jumped to her feet as Mrs. Catherwood and Constance came near.

“May Heaven bless ye, Mis' Catherwood,” she cried, “an' Miss Conny, too. *Do ye want any yarbs to-day, dear? Do ye, now? An' do ye want I should come in the house, or will it do ye out here? It'll be just as you please, Mis' Catherwood, dear, but — but it's nice an' sunny out here, now, ain't it?*”

Mrs. Catherwood smiled at Mrs. Loughery and at the exuberance of her greeting. It was characteristic.

“Why, I'll just sit down on the step with you, Mrs. Loughery,” she said. “The herbs are more used to sunshine.”

“So am I,” returned the old woman, quickly, “and to rain and wind and weather. We like it well, so be it's not shutting ourselves within four walls. The yarbs 'll show better out here in the sun.”

Mrs. Catherwood sat down on the step, with Constance looking over her shoulder, while Mrs. Loughery showed her wares and praised their virtues. She had some skill at it, so that it happened that the pile of herbs that were to be left included about all she had. Mrs. Catherwood laughed, when she saw that. She would take the rest.

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Mrs. Loughery beamed. "You'll not be sorry," she said. "There's not many has such yarbs as mine, if I do say it. Now I'll just take them in for you, Mis' Catherwood."

"I must get my purse." Mrs. Catherwood rose. "How is Joe getting on, Mrs. Loughery? I hope he is better."

The old woman turned, her hands filled with the herbs, and smiled. "Nicely, thank you, Mis' Catherwood. He don't cough much; leastways, not much more 'n he did. If — I wish 't spring was comin', 'stid o' winter. It worries him 't he canna work, an' coal to buy. But p'r'aps I can think o' somethin' for him to do. I keep a-tryin'."

Mrs. Catherwood looked upon the brave old woman with pitying eyes. "Now perhaps I've got some things that belonged to my Jack. He can't wear them again, but they're pretty good — a coat or two, and perhaps I can find something else. You might take them in your basket."

Tears came to Mrs. Loughery's eyes. "The Lord be good to you, Mis' Catherwood! If you're sure you don't want them things, I'd be proud to take 'em."

So Mrs. Catherwood departed, with Constance, to find the coat or two and the something else. There was a trunk full of cast-off garments in the attic, against just such occasions.

Mrs. Loughery was a widow; so long a widow that the memory of the late Michael had become idealized

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out of all semblance to reality. No one who had known Mike Loughery in the flesh would have recognized the portrait which lingered in the mind of his loving relict. He had been a pleasant, good-natured man, rather inclined to shiftlessness. Many a time, in the years gone by, Francis Catherwood had employed him on small jobs about the place; and many a time he had smiled as he suddenly realized that, for hours, he had been laboring with the spade and wheeling the barrow and doing other things that he had had no intention of doing — the very things he had Mike there to do. Mike, meanwhile, had stood in an attitude of intense admiration, his arms akimbo, throwing in his “Yis, sor,” or an occasional “Look a’ that, now”; all with the air of one who is eager to learn. It was characteristic of Mike that he should let Mr. Catherwood do his work that he expected to be paid for. But that was when Mr. Catherwood was but just married, and before he became Colonel Catherwood. In the process of becoming a colonel, he had learned better. Mike might have learned to do his own work if he had lived — and enlisted, as he surely would have done. Mike would not have become a colonel. He might have become a sergeant, and a good one; for Mike Loughery dearly loved a fight.

He had been a good enough husband. He had always treated his wife well, which, indeed, might have been no more than a piece of nice calculation on his part, for he was somewhat dependent on her industry, and



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he was wise enough to know it. But Mrs. Loughery did not look upon it in that light. If Mike indulged, more or less frequently, in the cup that inebriates but does not cheer, and invariably got into a fight thereafter, it was never his wife who mentioned it. He was meek and biddable during his recovery. And when the time came that he was brought home from one of his frays with a fractured skull, she took care of him, for the few hours of life that were left to him, with an uncomplaining devotion that was worthy of a better man. After that, she devoted herself to his memory and to the care of her two boys. It was for these same boys that Mrs. Catherwood had opened that trunk in the attic.

Mrs. Loughery took the armful of garments and stuffed them into her basket. "May heaven bless ye, Mis' Catherwood!" she said. "Mebbe one o' these'll do for Clanky, too, if you won't mind his wearin' it. He's a real good boy."

Mrs. Catherwood smiled. "Do you really find him a help, Mrs. Loughery?" she asked. "I was afraid you might find him only an additional burden. I think you had enough to do already."

"Lord bless ye, Mis' Catherwood," answered Mrs. Loughery, straightening up from her basket and speaking earnestly. "Clanky's the greatest help. He takes care o' the chickens an' splits all my wood for me an' clears up in the house. I have but to show him the once an' fix the day for it. Why, Clanky's real — real intellectual."

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Mrs. Loughery laughed as she said it, and Mrs. Catherwood laughed with her. "Where is Mike?" she asked. "Why does n't he help with your chores? Has he got work yet?"

"Oh, Mike's home, off and on. He has n't just to say *got* work," replied Mrs. Loughery, with a sorrowful smile, "but he says he hopes for it — that it's as good as promised. Sometimes I think that mebbe he don't want to find it, for he's said the same thing t' me a many times. But there! I won't doubt my Mike. Work's hard enough to find for them as has n't it."

"Mike ought to be ashamed of himself," said Mrs. Catherwood, "to let you support him in idleness. There must be a dozen different things that he could do. He's a man, is n't he?"

"Yes, dear," answered Mrs. Loughery, "and a strong, fine man, too. But he —"

Mrs. Loughery hesitated, and decided not to finish what she had begun. Mrs. Catherwood smiled, for she knew.

"You tell him to come here next week," she said. "There's plenty of work to be done on the place. His father was not ashamed to do it."

Mrs. Catherwood smiled again, remembering how his father had done his work. But the quick tears came to Mrs. Loughery's eyes.

"Ah, his father!" she cried. "His father! If my boy was like him! But it's not ashamed he'd be of any kind of work whatever. Never fear that. I'll see that

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he comes. He'll come," concluded Mrs. Loughery, somewhat grimly.

Mrs. Catherwood nodded, but said nothing, and the old woman bent to take up her basket.

"Well, Mis' Catherwood, I'll be goin'," she said. "'T is good o' you to be minded of us." She hesitated, as though she wanted to say something else, but hardly knew how. "Mr. Eben — is he gettin' on well? Can he be out yet? The sun would do a body good to-day."

"Mr. Eben is getting along nicely now," answered Mrs. Catherwood. There was very little use in trying to make a secret of anything that happened in Old Harbor. "He cannot go away from the house yet, but he has been out in the garden every day for a week. I have no doubt that he is there now."

"I'd like to go into Miss Harriet's an' pay my respects to him some day soon — as soon's he's able to see such as I," said Mrs. Loughery, almost shyly. "It's many a long year since I've seen Mr. Eben; an' he such a handsome, likely boy. I hear 't he hasna been well for a long time before he — before he came back."

"No," said Mrs. Catherwood, "he does not seem to have been, although we do not know what has been the matter with him. But we hope he'll be all right now. Harriet takes good care of him."

"Yes, bless her!" said Mrs. Loughery. She smiled, still shyly, as she went on. "It was at the apothecary's that I heard he'd not been well. I go in there some-

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times with my yarbs, though it's hard enough to sell anything to MacLean. He's canny, MacLean. But he always has the last word of gossip, an' I get my money's worth in that."

Constance's eyes had been dancing since the first mention of MacLean. "Varra fine herbs, Mrs. Loughery," she said, "varra fine herbs. But" — here she looked as cunning as Mr. MacLean himself, and made a gesture that only he would have made — "are ye cerrytain that they're the true medeecinal herbs? An' our price that we pay is twa bunches for a penny." With that, she kicked out her leg awkwardly.

Mrs. Loughery was laughing so that the tears stood in her eyes. "Oh, dearie," she cried, "it's MacLean to the life — but that you're too large for the little man. The way he kicks out with his leg, too. Did you ever see the like of it, Mis' Catherwood — of Miss Conny's taking him off?"

Mrs. Catherwood was smiling in spite of herself. "Constance is a great mimic, Mrs. Loughery. She can't resist every chance that offers. She does n't mean anything ill-natured by it."

"Of course she does n't, the dear!" said Mrs. Loughery. "She could n't mean anything ill-natured if she wanted to." The old woman had had her basket on her arm all this time. "Well, now I'm really goin'. May the Lord be good to ye, Mis' Catherwood! May you always be rollin' in grandeur as you are now!"

Having delivered this parting benediction, Mrs.

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Loughery walked off briskly. Constance laughed softly as she watched her go down the plank walk.

“Oh, mother!” she said. “‘Rollin’ in grandeur as you are now!’ But I see daddy coming and, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll leave you to roll in solitary grandeur while I go to meet him.”

Mrs. Catherwood walked slowly to the steps leading to the piazza from the terrace. She was smiling to herself, although she probably was not aware of it, and there was a light in her eyes that any husband should be glad to see in his wife’s eyes after more than twenty-five years; although she probably was not aware of that, either. She watched the erect, youthful figure of her husband, as he stopped and said a few words to Mrs. Loughery, and she saw that prodigal old woman pour forth a blessing; she could almost hear the words, although it was not one of the “rollin’ in grandeur” kind. People were not apt to say that sort of thing to him, no one could say just why. And she saw Mrs. Loughery go on her way again, and Constance run to meet him. He held out his arms to her, and she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. Shocking! Right there on the public street, with all the elms to see! Then he looked up at the great square house, and he waved his hand to his wife as she stood waiting on the piazza, and she waved back again.

“The dears!” she said. “The dears!”

She watched them both, as they opened the front gate and came up the long walk, Constance hanging

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on to her father's arm, and taking ridiculously long strides in the effort to keep in step with him. They were at the foot of the long flight of steps.

"I'll race you to mother, daddy," cried Constance, and started running up the steps.

"What!" he said. He took the steps three at a time. "Constance, that — was — not — fair. You" — he passed her — "had a start. This — is" — he reached the top — "a most undignified manner in which to compel a gentleman to arrive at his house." Mrs. Catherwood was waiting for him, and he kissed her. "Constance, you forget that your daddy is getting on in years, and is quite — er — decrepit. But your mother is the goal, Conny. She is the goal."

Constance only laughed scornfully.

"Decrepit, Frank!" exclaimed Mrs. Catherwood. "You decrepit!"

"Yes," he said, "I am not what I was, and if I am not decrepit now, I shall be. A man who has a son just back from England has a right to be; he has no right not to be."

Mrs. Catherwood was all eagerness now. "Jack back! Is he back? Have you heard from him?"

Colonel Catherwood took a letter from his pocket and waved it above his head. "Had this this morning. Landed in New York yesterday. Home to-morrow. That's what I'm home for. Why did you think?"

And he placed the precious letter in the hands that were so eagerly upraised.

## CHAPTER VII

CLANKY BEG and Joe sat in the sun before the little old house with the sagging roof. They spoke little. Joe seemed well content to look up and down the old turnpike and over at the pine woods, and to drink in the fresh air and the sunshine. Clanky seemed well content with doing the same thing, although, now and then, he looked at Joe somewhat anxiously. Each time he looked, the patient look of pain on Joe's face was less and the peace and content was greater. His fits of coughing gradually became less frequent and less severe. Clanky smiled with pleasure and thought — but I do not know what or how a man thinks, afflicted as he was; if he had been a normal man, he would have been thinking that perhaps — only perhaps — Joe would be really better if he could have more sunshine and more air. He might actually come to love life again and to cling to it; a love that he had insensibly lost — oh, completely — some months before. As Clanky thought his thoughts that must have been somewhere near the equivalent of these, a change of wind, for an instant, wafted to them the incense of the pines.

Joe sniffed it eagerly. "That's beautiful, Clanky," he said; "it's lovely. I wish," he added wistfully, after a little pause, "that I was able to walk as far as those

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woods. Oh, I *wish* I was." He laughed softly and sighed. "But I 'm not, and there 's an end of it."

Clanky responded to the longing in Joe's voice. He hitched nearer on the bench. "Joe," he said, in a low voice, hardly more than a whisper, as though he was fearful that some one would overhear the news, — "Joe, I got a house in those pines. Don't you tell, now don't you! Mother Loughery don't know it, and Mike don't know it. There don't *anybody* know it but me and you." He hitched still nearer to the chair and whispered, "I'll take you to it — to my house."

"Oh, Clanky!" The eagerness in his voice brought on a fit of coughing. When it was over, Joe knew that it could not be. There was no eagerness in his voice as he spoke again, low and slowly. The love of life that had flickered up for an instant was gone. "Thank you. Thank you. You could n't do it, Clanky. I can't walk so far as that."

"Need n't walk," said Clanky, whispering again. "I'll carry you."

Joe looked down at Clanky's legs — they were wobbly legs and gave no assurance of their performance of this duty. Then he looked at Clanky's broad shoulders and powerful arms, and sighed once more.

"No, Clanky," he said gently, "you could n't. Your arms and shoulders are strong enough. But — but your legs, Clanky, — "

Clanky gazed sorrowfully down upon those offending



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members — gazed at them as if he had but just seen them. He stretched them out and gazed again. Tears came into his eyes.

“I’m sorry, Joe,” he said brokenly. “Clanky’s sorry — sorry that his legs are so bad.”

Joe put out his hands impulsively. “I’m sorry, Clanky — very sorry. I should n’t have spoken of it. Never mind the legs. They ’re good enough to do all kinds of things for mother, and they ’re willing.”

Clanky looked up and smiled. “Yes,” he said, “they ’re willing, and they don’t get tired as they did. At the Poor Farm they used to get awful tired. They were always tired — always.”

He spoke of it in a matter-of-fact way that would have melted Mrs. Loughery’s heart — if her heart ever needed to be melted. Joe looked away. Again the gentle wind wafted to them the incense of the pines.

“Oh!” said Joe, almost crying with his longing. He craved to be among those pines, although he could not have told why. “Oh, just smell it, Clanky. I *wish* you could. I *wish* you could!”

Clanky looked troubled and was silent. He was silent for so long a time that, at last, Joe asked him what troubled him.

“I been tryin’ to think of some way,” Clanky replied, without looking up; “some way to get you there. And I can’t.”

His eyes met Joe’s and, at the look of helpless longing that he saw there, he began to cry. Suddenly he

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stopped crying and beamed, though the tears were still running down his face.

“I’ve thought of a way, Joe. I’ve thought of a way.”

In his delight at it, he got off the bench and stood on his hands. He often did so, now. Indeed, his arms and shoulders were better fitted to bear him than his legs were. Still standing on his hands, he walked around Joe three times. Then he got upon his feet and capered weakly.

“The old wagon-wheels in the shed,” he said. “*They* ’ll carry you.”

Joe smiled with pleasure. He and Clanky were like two pleased children with a new toy. They began planning how they should arrange the old pair of worn wheels — the fore wheels of some farm wagon, discarded before Joe was born. Suddenly Clanky stopped.

“Your medicine, Joe!” he cried. “Ain’t it time? An’ I clean forgot. I said I’d do it, faithful, an’ I clean forgot!”

Joe laughed aloud. “Bother the medicine! I don’t want it and I don’t need it, while I can get this.” He looked about him and laughed again. “But — I don’t know. I s’pose I’d better. Mother’d be worried. It’s only half an hour past the time, Clanky. The bottle’s on the mantel in the kitchen with a spoon ’side of it.”

So Joe had his medicine, which may have relieved him somewhat, and would certainly hasten his end if he kept on with it.

“Br-r-r-r!” he muttered, shivering involuntarily.

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"What's the matter, Joe?" asked Clanky, anxiously. "Ain't it smooth? Can't I put somethin' into it to make it smooth? Sugar or — or somethin'?"

"It's smooth enough," answered Joe. "It's almost too smooth. But I don't like the taste of it. It's too — too druggy. It don't taste clean."

Clanky still looked doubtful and anxious. Joe looked up at him as he stood holding the bottle in one hand and the spoon in the other, and again he laughed.

"You look too funny, Clanky," he said. "It's all right. You can put them back, thank you."

"You did n't cough, Joe," cried Clanky, triumphantly. "You've laughed three times without coughing once."

Joe was suddenly thoughtful. "So I have," he said. "So I have. I have n't done that before for — I don't know how long. It looks as if sun and air were good, Clanky, does n't it?" He was silent for some minutes, leaning back in his chair, a smile of hope upon his lips. "I'll tell you what, Clanky, I'm going to try the fresh air cure oftener. When you get those wheels fixed —"

"Yes," cried Clanky, "*then* — I'm goin' to fix 'em right off, Joe. I'll bring 'em out here, where you can see 'em. I don't know, though," he added, the anxious look coming once more into his face, "I ought to do my chores, now. There's some work to do in the house, too, but it won't take me but a little while, Joe. Then I'll fix the wheels. I will, honest."

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“I know well you will, Clanky,” Joe responded, in a low voice. “I wish ’t I was as sure of everybody as I am of you.”

At which Clanky Beg beamed again and, turning, went into the house with the bottle and the spoon. A few minutes later there was a great commotion among the hitherto motionless hens, and they were all running towards a point at the back of the house, their wings helping them; running as if their lives depended upon it. Joe smiled quietly. It was only Clanky, he knew. Clanky seemed to fascinate the hens, and they surrounded him while he was at his work, whatever that work was. No doubt they would surround him as he “fixed” the wheels, cocking their heads to this side and to that, and stepping daintily, with a comical effect of curiosity and without a shadow of fear.

Clanky did his work in the henhouse quickly, shut the door, leaned his shovel against the shed, and carried into the house the solitary egg that he had found. Then he put away the shovel and got the axe. There was already a goodly lot of split wood piled near the chopping-block, and a small heap of wood that was sawed but not split.

“Ho!” said Clanky, as he contemplated this heap. “Must cut some more wood for mother Loughery, Clanky must.” The hens were gathering about him, as was their habit. “Hi! You yeller rooster, Absalom, don’t you come too near, or you’ll get hurt. Shoo!”

With frequent shooing of the hens, he began the

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splitting of the wood. He was not quite through when he heard a voice give brief greeting — not too affectionate greeting — to Joe.

He paused in his work and his face darkened. “Mike!” he muttered. Then the house door opened and shut again.

“H’m,” said Clanky to himself. “Guess Clanky ’d better do his work in the house.” He struck the axe deep into the chopping-block and went in.

He found Mike in the kitchen, beginning what seemed to be a search among the crocks and cups on the closet shelves. He looked up from his search with an expression of impatience as Clanky entered. He did not take the trouble to change that expression.

“Hello, Clanky!” he said, with unnecessary loudness. “Thought you were chopping wood. Got it all done, so soon?”

“No,” replied Clanky.

“Well, then,” Mike continued, “you’d better keep at it till you have. Go chop wood, there’s a good boy.”

“There’s something to do in here,” said Clanky. “Clanky has to do it.” He said no more, but he looked at Mike.

Most people would have thought Mike was very good to look at: tall, broad of shoulder and long and strong of limb, with a dark, handsome face, and black eyes that could be very frank and pleasant when Mike wished. But Clanky was not one of those who found Mike good to look at. He had taken a dislike to Mike

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from the first, it is hard to say why; perhaps only an instinctive dislike, such as a dog or a child will develop, instantly, for some people; a feeling more to be trusted than one that is based upon a more mature judgment.

Mike looked into Clanky's unwavering eyes and, as he looked, he seemed to change his purpose. For his eyes gradually took on that frank and pleasant and friendly look that he knew so well how to assume. The angry reply died on his lips. He smiled ingratiatingly.

"I'll tell you a secret, Clanky."

Clanky drew back. He wanted to share no secrets with Mike.

Mike saw the involuntary movement and his face darkened; but only for the briefest instant. Then the smile was in his eyes again. It had not left his lips.

"I'll tell you a secret," he repeated. "I've had a stroke of luck, Clanky, and I've got some money here — five dollars." He patted his pocket. "I want to surprise mother — put it with her savings, you know."

Clanky was almost convinced, and he reproached himself for his ill opinion of Mike. He smiled doubtfully and nodded. Mike went on.

"You tell me where she keeps 'em," he said, in an eager whisper. "My! Won't she be surprised to find it? Just think! Five dollars extra!"

She would be surprised, undoubtedly. Mike found it interesting to watch the conflicting emotions chase

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each other over Clanky's face, which was like an open book to him. Indeed, he found it easier to read than most books. Clanky did not answer.

"Say, Clanky, where is it, now?" he asked again. "Five dollars, Clanky!"

"She never told me, mother Loughery did n't," said Clanky, at last. "You give it to me, Mike, and I'll manage to put it with the rest."

Mike smiled a slow smile which grew into a low laugh. "Oh, no, Clanky. Oh, no. I don't give it to you." He saw the look of indignation growing in Clanky's face, and he realized what caused it. "It's only because I'm afraid you might have to tell her. Of course, I know you'd mean to do it. But I want to surprise her. Honest, I will, Clanky. Don't you know where it is?"

Clanky dimly realized that Mike could hardly have chosen a way that was more likely to surprise his mother. His instinct for truth was great, and he had been asked a direct question. But he hesitated; he hesitated so long that Mike was considering other means of getting out of Clanky the knowledge which he was sure Clanky had. He did not have to use that other method. There was considerable doubt of its success, anyway.

"You promise to put it in, too, Mike, — the five dollars?" asked Clanky, at last.

"Sure, Clanky. Honest, I will. Do you know where it is?"

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“Yes, Clanky knows. He saw mother Loughery putting money in it, once.”

“Well, where is it, then?” asked Mike, impatiently. This idiot was a long time in telling him, and time was of value to him, just then. “Out with it, Clanky.”

Clanky’s suspicions were stirring again at Mike’s impatience; but not enough. He stooped and fumbled in the corner of the closet and brought forth a porcelain jar with a cover, which he meant to hold out to Mike. Mike did not wait for him to rise, much less for him to offer the jar, but almost snatched it. Having got it, he turned his back to Clanky.

Clanky stood and regarded him doubtfully. “You putting the money in, Mike?” he asked.

“Oh, sure,” answered Mike, cheerfully, removing what was in the jar as he spoke. There was more than he had expected, and he was correspondingly pleased. His hand went to his pocket. “See, I’m getting the money now.” He was; and, tickled by his own joke, Mike laughed.

It was the wrong thing to do, and Mike was not apt to do the wrong thing in such cases. He had only taken Clanky for more of a fool than he was, that was all. Clanky, his freshly aroused suspicions almost turned to a certainty, became aggressive.

“You let me see it, Mike,” he said, in a voice that Mike was unaccustomed to hear from Clanky Beg. “Show it to me. I don’t believe you’ve put it in.”



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Mike turned and tossed him the jar. "Take it, fool," said he.

Clanky was not expecting that, and the jar crashed to the floor, breaking in pieces. Nothing came out. Mike laughed again, but not for long. Clanky's face was convulsed with rage.

"Thief!" he cried. "Stealer of money! I kill you."

He sprang, throwing one long and powerful arm about Mike's body and, with his other hand, feeling for his throat. Both of Mike's arms were pinioned to his body just above the elbows, and Mike struggled desperately to free them and to keep that searching hand from his throat. But he could not free his arms, struggle as he would. Mike was afraid; for the first time in his life he was afraid of the fool.

The struggle was a silent one, except for Mike's muttered curses upon Clanky. Clanky was smiling.

"Going to kill Mike," he remarked pleasantly, "because he steals mother Loughery's money."

Mike replied only with fresh curses, and thereafter they fought silently like two wolves. The two writhing figures were all over the kitchen, but there was no sound but Mike's labored breathing and the dull shuffling of their feet. Suddenly Mike bethought him of Clanky's weakness, and Clanky felt his legs give way beneath him; but he only clung the faster to Mike's body. Mike had gained nothing; he had lost, rather, for he had the two of them to hold up now, and Clanky's hand was finding his throat. Clanky was still smiling.

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The end was certain. Mike knew it well ; and, knowing, he felt a dull, unreasoning terror overpowering him. He managed to make some sort of hoarse noise in his throat. It was a feeble sound, and could scarcely have been heard outside the walls of that room. No doubt Joe, if he heard at all, would think it of no moment. Of no moment! It meant his life to him. As he still struggled desperately, but ever more weakly, he heard a clear old voice from the doorway.

“Boys, boys!” said that indignant voice. “What’s this all about?”

At the sound of the voice, Clanky’s arms dropped from Mike’s body. As for Mike, he never in his life was so glad to hear that voice; that voice that had soothed him through his babyhood; that had spoken never a cross word to him all his life long, until long after he had deserved it. He tried to speak, and if he could not, it was not emotion that prevented him. Mrs. Loughery turned to Clanky, who seemed ashamed.

“Well?” she asked.

Clanky pointed to the pieces of the porcelain jar at her feet. The words came so fast that they choked him. “Mother Loughery,” he said, “the jar — Mike — would — he broke — ”

Mike found his voice, at that, and in a hurry. “Clanky was stealing, mother,” he said thickly, “and I caught him at it. Then he throttled me.”

The utter astonishment on Clanky’s face was something to see; so was the growing rage. Mike noted it,

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and edged towards the door. Clanky could not speak, but he started from his apathy and moved slowly towards Mike. Mike noted that, too.

“I’ll fix you yet, Clanky, you fool,” he muttered. And Mike was gone.

“Stop him! He’s got it! He’s got it!” cried Clanky; and started after him.

Mike had no notion of being stopped and, in spite of the difficulty he had in breathing, he easily left Clanky behind; Clanky, with his poor wobbly legs, and Mike, with his that were strong and well made, and that should have been put to a better use. Clanky gave up the pursuit before he had gone ten yards. He went to the shed and threw himself down on some straw in the corner and sobbed as though his heart would break; as though it was already broken.

Here Mrs. Loughery found him. She sat down beside him and took his poor misshapen head into her lap.

“There, there, dearie! I know well you would n’t be stealin’ from me, Clanky, — or from anybody. You ’re a good boy, Clanky, an’ it ’s all right.”

“But,” he wailed, “Mike’s got your money. He’s got it all. He promised to put in five dollars, an’ so” — here the sobs broke out afresh — “an’ so I gave him the jar. An’ he took it all, he did.”

“Now, don’t you grieve, dearie. Don’t you, now. It’s small matter — small matter — the money. We’ll make some more, Clanky, dear. Did you think I’d

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doubt you — an' I bringin' up Mike from a baby? I know, dear, I know — sorrow to me — I done my best wi' him. God knows I done my best. Now tell me, Clanky, what have you an' Joe been cookin' up between you the morn? What've you been doin' to him? I've not seen him so well this many a day."

As Mrs. Loughery listened to the unfolding of Clanky's vague plans and hopes, her face grew brighter.

"Bless you, Clanky," she said, when he had finished. "Bless you! What's the money to me? If Joe can be better! You go on wi' 'em."

## CHAPTER VIII

COLONEL CATHERWOOD'S business was what Constance called a hand-me-down. She knew that it had something to do with shipping, and that, at intervals, — very long intervals, sometimes, — one of his coasting schooners stopped for a brief visit; and she knew that, whenever she had been in his office, he had appeared to have very little to do. In fact, he was very much at leisure; a state of affairs which, it is to be supposed, suited him well enough. It gave him time for many things: for rambling about the wharves, a form of entertainment of which he was very fond; for much reading, which he did at home, for the most part; and, the thing for which he valued his leisure the most, it gave him time to devote to his family. He might very well, one would have thought, give up a business that was of so little importance. So he might, — he never would have missed the little that it added to his income, — but it was a matter of family pride that it should be kept up. The whole history of the aristocracy of Old Harbor was bound up in its shipping.

It was hard to see what he found of such interest in the wharves, that he was so willing to spend his time in wandering about them. They were tumble-down affairs, most of them, that spoke loudly of decay. But

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he seemed to love them, and whenever he was not to be found in his office, those who knew him well would betake themselves to the wharves. There they would be pretty sure to find him, sitting on a log or upon the top of a pile, digging with his stick in the dust of years at his feet, or gazing out absently over the pretty little harbor to the sea beyond. At the sound of footsteps, he would turn, with a smile that was ineffably sweet, and with a look in his eyes as of one not yet awakened from his dreams. "Well?" he would say gently.

Colonel Catherwood's great-grandfather had begun it, — the shipping business, not the dreaming, — and had done well at it, even starting a shipyard, in a small way, near at hand; had done so well that the great square house, in which, now, five generations of Catherwoods had lived, was built as a visible evidence of his success. His son and his son's son had carried the business on, through many vicissitudes. It was in the time of Colonel Catherwood's father that it reached its greatest prosperity. There were many ships, then, built at his own shipyard, and the wharves were busy. Then came the Civil War. It found him prepared; for he had sold most of his ships, and investment in government bonds had been regarded as patriotic on his part. It certainly was wise.

So it came to pass that Francis Catherwood, returning from his campaigns full of honors, found himself not too heavily burdened with a business which made but small demands upon his time and attention, and

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with an income that was ample. He was thankful for that, very thankful. He said it over to himself, now, sitting in a sunny corner of the old wharf, digging with his stick in the dust of years. There was a sharpness in the air that morning and the sun was grateful.

He heard a step and he turned. "Well, Jack," he said, smiling. "I was just thinking about you — or about your ancestors. I should have got to you in time."

Jack Catherwood was tall and broad-shouldered and handsome; wonderfully like his father — but like his mother, too. Indeed, Colonel and Mrs. Catherwood had grown to look wonderfully like each other, as seems often to be the way with married people who are not only happy, but serene. I do not pretend to explain it.

Jack smiled and seated himself beside his father. He laid his hand, with a little gesture of affection, on his knee; but only for an instant. "I knew you would be here to-day, dad," he said. "I did n't take the trouble to go to the office."

He was silent. The whole atmosphere of the place seemed to compel it. Two men, on the far shore, were getting the sail up, on a dory. Near the edge of the channel, half-a-dozen more dories were grouped, and a man was standing in each one, doing something with what looked like an immense pair of shears, holding a handle in each hand and working them gently on the

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bottom. Now and then the shears would be drawn in and laid across the dory, and the man would appear to be busy examining what had been brought up. Jack watched these men for some time.

“Scalloping,” he remarked finally.

“M-m,” murmured his father. Colonel Catherwood was not looking at them; he was looking at two vessels which were anchored out beyond. There was no sign of life on them; they seemed as if they might have been anchored there for all time; as if they might stay there until they rotted.

There was the whistle of a distant train, and in a few minutes it rose to the bridge and rumbled across, the rumble sounding faintly and not disturbing the silence and the serenity. It was almost a caress.

Jack roused himself. “Jove!” he said, under his breath. “This gets hold of you!”

His father smiled quietly. “It does,” he replied. “It has had hold of me these twenty years. I like to think,” he went on, after a pause, “how it must have looked sixty years ago. There were many ships, then. Why, this very wharf was busy, though you would n’t think it now. The office was not the — not the place it is.” He sighed. “I suppose it would not have appealed to me then as it does now. There must have been hurry and bustle; less of this serenity.”

Jack gave inarticulate assent.

“You know there are still two of the old ships left,” Colonel Catherwood continued. “Your grandfather



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could n't sell them — or, at any rate, he did n't. Possibly a touch of sentiment. They come in here sometimes, and I like to have them. There is one of them, now." The colonel raised his stick and pointed to one of the two vessels lying at anchor. "I keep them here until everybody is impatient." He laughed a deprecating laugh.

Jack smiled understandingly. "For the sake of the landscape?"

"For the sake of the landscape. They make a good foreground, lying out there."

Again Jack was silent. "Dad," he said, at last, "I came down here to talk things over with you. But I—this," waving a comprehensive arm, "does n't lend itself to talk. Come into the office. Do you mind?"

"All right, Jackie." Colonel Catherwood rose. He took Jack's arm, affectionately, and they strode off together; two fine figures of men, you would have thought, if you had seen them. It was but a few steps, for the office was at the head of the wharf.

As they shut the door of the office behind them, another figure rose slowly from behind a pile of old boards, sat up for a while, and looked about dully and rubbed its bloodshot eyes. It was Mike Loughery, who seemed to have inherited, in full measure, some of his father's least admirable tastes, and who seemed to be likely to make a less picturesque end than he. Having sat up and rubbed some of the sleep out of his eyes, and having sat thus for some while gazing at

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nothing in particular, until, you would have thought, he must have taken in every detail of what he was gazing at, Mike rose to his feet, stretched himself, looked cunningly at the closed door of the office within which Colonel Catherwood and Jack had disappeared, muttered something, and turned again to the harbor. He looked long at the ship, lying there with no life about her, as far as could be seen; then made his way, cautiously, to the edge of the wharf which could not be seen from the office windows, — supposing that anybody was watching, — and lowered himself over the string-piece. He did not intend to commit suicide, more's the pity. He swung himself in to a stringer that ran from pile to pile, caught it with his feet, and, at precisely the right moment, let go his hand-hold and took another. It was a perilous thing to do, for the stringer was covered, top, sides, and bottom, with waving green weed; but it was no new thing to Mike. He had done the same thing successfully many times before, and he did not fail now. Under the wharf lay an old dory with the oars in her. Mike got into the boat, carefully, and, still carefully, poked her out at the end of the wharf and rowed away.

Colonel Catherwood and Jack sat in the office, talking in low tones, while the old clerk pattered about the books. They paid little attention to the clerk, beyond Jack's pleasant greeting to him when they came in. He was as deaf as a post, anyway, and had long given up all expectation of hearing anything at all, whether

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it was meant for him or not. Jack was telling his father something of his impressions of England.

Colonel Catherwood sat silent. He was leaning back in his chair, his feet crossed like a crusader's, his elbows propped on the arms of the old chair, and the tips of his fingers together. His eyes, fixed on the far shore, — or farther yet, — had the look of one who did not hear. Jack grew impatient.

“Well, dad?” he said, at last.

His father turned to him, and again he smiled his sweet smile. “Excuse me, Jack,” he said. “I heard you. I was attending. What you said reminded me of my own impressions. They were much like yours — much like yours. You say nothing about the larger matter. Did n't you get impressions of — of life? I hardly know how else to express what I mean. Did n't it help you to decide what you wanted to do?”

Jack hesitated, tilting his chair back and forth. “It may have helped me,” he said. “I think it did. But it was n't an enabling act.” He laughed, in embarrassment. “The truth is, dad, I don't know, yet, what I want. Until I make up my mind, I want to come into the office.”

“The office,” replied Colonel Catherwood, slowly, “hardly furnishes occupation enough to keep another busy. But it will serve as well as another thing, and give you time. Failing anything better, the business is highly respectable, — oh, highly, — and it has been

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in the family a long time. I should be sorry to think you would be contented with it."

Jack would have protested; but Colonel Catherwood went on.

"I don't want to hurry you, Jackie," he said. "There is no need of it, and I believe it would be the worst thing in the world for you. As far as need is concerned, there is no real need of your doing anything. But I should be sorrier still, to think you would be contented with that. Your mother and I, Jackie, expect a good deal of you — very possibly too much; but we shall not be disappointed if you make an honest effort which does not result in a glittering success. By success, I don't mean making a lot of money."

Again Jack murmured something in the nature of a disclaimer; but he looked pleased.

"I have known too many instances," continued Colonel Catherwood, "in which men have had to take up anything that they could do — or that they could n't — without regard to their natural bent. It is the usual way. Sometimes they find out, late in life, what they might have done, often surpassingly well, and it is too late, or their business will not let them, or they cannot take the time for that apprenticeship which is needed. Why," — he lowered his voice, as if there were any one to hear, — "there is William Ransome. He makes a good, honest, steady-going bank clerk — officer, they call him. He is nothing but a clerk. I think that he has — or had it in him to do better things. He

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writes, you know, for his own amusement. If he had begun soon enough, there is no knowing where he might have got. For he writes very well, if I am any judge. I don't want you to make that mistake. You do not have to, as he did."

For some reason, Jack had grown very red. "Thank you, dad," he said; "I — I saw " — But he concluded not to say it. "I will try not to make that mistake. If there is anything that I have a natural inclination for, I ought to find it pretty soon. Then I may consider it settled — that I come into the office with you for the present?"

Colonel Catherwood nodded. Jack was looking out at the harbor. Suddenly he saw a dory rowed swiftly — for a dory — past the end of the wharf and past the empty dock before them.

"Who is that man — in the dory?" he asked quickly. "Is n't it Mike Loughery?"

The colonel had seen. "Yes," he answered. "Mike's a bad lot, I'm afraid. I'm sorry for his mother. Joe's got consumption. I'm afraid he won't last this winter out. I would offer him a passage in the ship out there, — she takes a cargo for Rio next week, — but it's too late. I blame myself for not thinking of it in time to do some good. Poor Mrs. Loughery! She's had a hard life of it." Strangely enough, he smiled. You would not have thought it of him. "I was thinking of the late Michael," he said, as if apologizing for his smile. "He was a case."

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Jack smiled back at him sympathetically, but said nothing for some minutes.

“Dad,” he said then, instinctively lowering his voice, “how is Uncle Eben getting on? Is it true, as MacLean says —”

“Probably not,” his father interrupted. “I beg your pardon for interrupting you. I don’t know, of course, what MacLean says, but it is probably a garbled version of current gossip. I wish that MacLean would learn to mind his own business.”

“He can’t,” said Jack; “and he can’t learn to. It is too much to expect of him. Besides, his own business would not give him enough to occupy his mind. He says, in effect, that Uncle Eben is a hopeless wreck.”

“No. No,” replied the colonel, slowly, carefully considering his words. “That is not true. Your uncle Eben was in bad shape when he came, but Harriet has nursed him back again — Harriet and Doctor Olcott. He is not a wreck, and I see no reason why he need to be hopeless.” He paused for a moment. “Your aunt Harriet,” he continued deliberately, “is a good deal of a woman, Jack, in spite of certain — er — sharpnesses — which she can’t help. They seem to come as natural to her as breathing,” he added.

Jack laughed. “Yes,” he said, “I know. But she is never sharp with me.”

“She is very fond of you, boy,” his father returned. “I don’t know why she should be. I can’t imagine.

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But she is. Why don't you drop in there this morning? You may see Eben, perhaps."

"I will," said Jack. "I'll go now. He rose. "Well, dad, I'll be down in the morning for work."

"Hope you find it," said his father, smiling. "But come along." Then, as the door closed behind Jack, his expression changed. "I must get a keeper for that ship," he muttered.

He rose and went over to the old clerk, who looked up expectantly. "Get a keeper for the 'Susan,' Heywood," he shouted.

"Yes, sir," said the clerk, in a gentle voice, the voice of the very deaf; "I think we'd better."

The colonel returned to the contemplation of the harbor; looking out over it without seeing it — but feeling it, perhaps; yes, without doubt, feeling its influence, as he had felt it all his life — and dreaming his dreams. They were dreams of the past, as he liked to imagine it, and of the future, also as he liked to imagine it — vaguely. It was Jack's future, for the most part. He, Francis Catherwood, had no future to speak of. For he had included himself among those who had been compelled by circumstances to take up anything they could do, and who were finding out, late in life, what they might have done. Jack had not suspected it. Although he was not old, and although his business was not exacting, and although he could well enough afford two or three years of apprenticeship, he knew that he should not do it. He had not the energy, he supposed.

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He had passed that point. He acknowledged it to himself, and was ashamed and sighed deeply. It was humiliating. He wished — but wishes are not horses. At all events, Jack should not be compelled by circumstances.



## CHAPTER IX

NAN HEDGE was driving about town in a village cart. How it happened that she was away down there among the wharves, I don't know. Perhaps she, too, liked the view of the harbor; perhaps she, too, got to dreaming and the horse wandered down there of his own accord. He was much more likely to wander toward his own stable, one would have thought; but he was Nan's horse, and it is to be supposed that he knew Nancy, and that he knew that it was not well to wander home before Nan expressed a wish to go there. A horse cannot tell what he knows. That is unfortunate, perhaps, but it is so. Again, Nan may have been petulant and out of sorts, — if the truth must be told, Nan was often petulant and out of sorts, — and, being in that unhappy condition, may have got it into her head that the wharves were a place where she had no business to be. *Ergo*, she was there. *Q. E. D.* There was another reason which certain ill-natured persons, who disliked Nancy Hedge, might have given for her presence there at that time; but we, who are never ill-natured, will not cast suspicion on her motives by giving that reason.

It happened that Jack Catherwood, coming out of his father's office, saw Nan Hedge the very first thing.

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Strangely enough, she did n't seem to see him until she had turned around and drawn up by the curb. Turning around took all Nan's attention — sometimes, and she needed the width of the street — sometimes. Then she glanced up quite casually and, naturally, she saw him, he being hardly six feet away at the time and being quite visible.

He smiled, thinking — but I do not know what he thought. At all events, he smiled and raised his hat and would have passed on.

She would not have it so. “Good-morning, Mr. Catherwood,” she said, in a sweet voice. Nan could speak very sweetly, on occasion. She leaned out of her cart and smiled at him. He came alongside the cart, perforce, and anchored there.

“Good-morning,” he said. “Have you come down here to see the harbor — to get a near view?”

When she saw that he was well anchored, she smiled again, and spoke as if what she was saying was of the greatest importance.

“So you have been getting this view” — she waved her whip gently toward the harbor — “from the windows of your father's office. I think it is lovely, perfectly lovely to-day. How your father must enjoy it, having his office so near!”

Jack laughed. “Yes,” he answered, “father enjoys having his office handy. He might find it inconvenient if it was far away. Father thinks this is lovely any day. They would have to call him, you know, if any impor-

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tant business came up that needed his attention, — it is so likely to, — and Heywood would have to have a boy for that. He could n't put his head out of the window and speak in his gentle voice; not with any prospect of being heard, he could n't. That's all he has to do now."

Nan laughed gayly. Not that she understood, in the least, what he was driving at, but it would never do to let him suspect it. "Who is Heywood?" she asked.

"Our old clerk," he answered. "He is very deaf, and he speaks in a low and gentle voice in consequence — an admirable voice for turning away wrath."

"The poor man!" said Nan, her low tones filled with compassion.

"The poor man!" echoed Jack. "But I don't suppose he would want our pity. He would probably smile at it — at the idea of our thinking that he needed it." He was silent for a moment, looking at the piece of harbor that was visible through the end of the narrow street. Then he looked up at Nan and smiled. "It is a pity," he said.

Nan found this sort of thing very pleasant, and she smiled back at him. "What is a pity?" she asked softly. "Heywood's deafness?"

"No doubt it is," said Jack, "although that was not what I meant. Heywood probably has compensations."

"What, then?" asked Nan again.

"Why," said Jack, "I meant that it was a pity that you should have your horse with you. The view from

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the wharf is much better. I'm afraid," he added hastily, seeing symptoms of speech in Nan, "that it would not be safe to drive on it. The wharf is very old and has not been kept in repair." For he reflected that his father had his eye on that wharf — a comprehensive eye, a twinkling eye. If he went on the wharf with Nan Hedge — as he would have to —

Nan laughed again. The horse would stand well enough. They both knew that, and both knew that both knew. But Nan wore very high-heeled shoes and was — well, why mince matters? — she was awkward and ungainly on her own feet. To be sure, Jack did not know it, yet, but Nan did, although she was not accustomed to put it that way. She rarely trusted herself upon those members — never, if she could help it; and why begin now? In a chair, a well-upholstered chair, reclining gracefully, — not lolling, — she did very well; or in any sort of a trap, especially if she was driving, she cut an attractive figure, a stylish figure. She knew her good points, did Nan, and she made the most of them. So she laughed. Jack Catherwood was so transparent.

"I'm afraid we shall have to postpone the wharf, then," she said, in her melodious voice. "If you are going up the street, — as I suppose you are, — won't you let me take you?"

"Oh, thank you." Jack got in beside Nan with what grace he could. He did not like village carts. He did not altogether like the idea of being taken up the street

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by Nancy Hedge, either. It was too — too conspicuous. Suppose MacLean should be looking out at the door of his shop.

Nancy Hedge was an enterprising young person, possibly a year older than Jack Catherwood; possibly more. Who can judge a woman's age? She did not look as old as he, this morning, with her brown veil carefully disposed over her smart hat so that the smartness of the hat was not concealed from the eye of the curious; and the veil itself was of just the fineness of mesh calculated — carefully calculated — to conceal any traces of age that there might be behind it. Those ill-natured persons that I have mentioned would have said that it was calculated to conceal, also, any traces of paint and powder that Nan might have found it wise to apply. But I — I am not an ill-natured person — I do not believe that Nan had yet found it wise to apply any paint, although I am bound to confess that she would not have hesitated for a moment, if she thought it was needed. And I am convinced that she used powder only in moderation — and with great skill; she or her maid — for Nan had a maid. So I am forced to the conclusion that Nan did not need the veil, whose mesh was so carefully chosen, at any rate for the purpose for which the aforesaid ill-natured persons averred that it was. But a veil is a harmless thing and, as Nan would have said, it is necessary to keep off the dust when one is driving. As for traces of age in her face, why that seems absurd. There were no traces of

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age in her face. Jack, who had heard some of the reports about the matter, looked very carefully, and he could not see any. Nancy, quite unconsciously of course, let him look as long as he cared to, and held her chin up and only quivered an eyelash occasionally. They were very long and beautiful eyelashes, and Nan gave them every care; she positively cherished them.

Nancy Hedge had lately arrived in Old Harbor, and an arrival — of anybody — was unusual enough to attract a good deal of attention. Naturally, the arrival of Nan completely absorbed the attention of the inhabitants of Old Harbor for some time. This attention had reached the flood while Jack was in England, and was just beginning to ebb when he returned. Considering Nan herself, — and Old Harbor itself, — it was not to be expected that attention would be entirely withdrawn from her, or even reach the normal proportions due a mere inhabitant, for — oh, a long time.

Jack, casting a nervous eye in the direction of MacLean's shop, noted MacLean standing at the door, his nose frankly flattened against the glass and an expression of joy beginning to irradiate his features. Jack, at the time, was in the middle of a remark of the edifying sort already reported; but he forgot what he was saying and became completely muddled.

“What's the matter?” asked Nan, looking around at him. Looking around, she caught sight of MacLean at his door. His expression of entire joy was now complete. “Oh,” said Nan, “is it the apothecary? He is

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amusing, is n't he?" Her tones were cold and impersonal, as if MacLean were a mile-post or a snow-man — perhaps she might have spoken more warmly of a snow-man; and she laughed lightly.

Jack had recovered himself by this time. "In this case," he answered, "MacLean is being amused — apparently, very much amused. I wonder what at."

"Why," said Nan, laughing again, lightly, "at seeing you driving with me, of course. He is likely to be amused quite often. You don't mind, do you?"

Whereat Jack protested warmly, which, it is to be supposed, was just what Nan wanted; and Nan made some reply, it does not matter what.

Nancy Hedge, as I have remarked, was an enterprising young woman, and bold enough to make a difficulty serve her turn. She did not believe in letting any opportunities slip by her, whether they were promising or not. It is so easy to drop what you find you do not want; much easier than to miss a good chance when you have it. So it had happened that she had been waiting at the station when Jack arrived, — oh, quite by chance, — and had leaned out of her cart to speak to Constance. Constance, to avoid an awkwardness, had presented Jack; which may have been Nan's object or may not.

Nan's father had bought the old Tilton place, not very far from the Catherwoods'. Indeed, it could not be very far from the Catherwoods' and still be in the desirable part of Old Harbor — in the part of Old

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Harbor that would have appealed to the Hedges; and that is as much as to say to Nan. For Nan's mother was dead, and there was now another Mrs. Hedge, with whom Nan found herself in frequent disagreement; which, I believe, is not an unusual state of affairs, and not necessarily discreditable to Nan, or to the second Mrs. Hedge, either. So Mr. Hedge had come down, at Nan's instance, had seen, had bought, and had promptly gone back to New York again. The old Tilton place was the old Tilton place no longer, but was duly recorded with the Register in the name of Nancy Hedge. Jack might have found it so recorded, if he had but been minded to look it up.

The two Tilton girls — of about seventy winters of age — had reluctantly found lodgings; reluctantly, I know, and with many regrets, but with great inward relief, and with some outward relief, also. They had lived, for thirty years, on the brink of poverty. Jack, driving with Nan, found himself wondering how it would seem, now, to go by the place and not to find the fence all rotting and breaking down from age, and not to see the lawn all littered with the broken branches and the leaves which the Tilton girls, poor old ladies, had not been able to clear up in their nightly scavenging. Why, many a time, he had gone over before breakfast and done what he could, piling the wood neatly by the kitchen door. The Tilton girls had needed their wood to use, and had never seemed to see him.

They were coming to the place now. There was a



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new fence, a copy of the old one, and the lawn, under the old trees, was swept and garnished. Jack's heart warmed with gratitude to Nan. It was more than he — more than anybody had a right to expect of her.

"That's very nice of you, Miss Hedge," he said.

Nan looked surprised. "Why, I'm going to take you — oh, you mean the fence," she replied. She smiled sweetly. "The old fence was perfect in design. We could n't do better than to have one just like it. And see — there, ahead of us! There are the two Miss Tiltens. They come by here every day, but I've never been able to catch them yet."

Jack made a movement which Nan interpreted, rightly, as preparation for getting out; and she proceeded to cut off his retreat.

"Not yet, Mr. Catherwood," she said. "I'm going to take you home — if that's where you want to go."

She went to meet the two Miss Tiltens. They, poor old ladies, were coming to make their daily inspection of their old home, in which they had been born, and in which they had lived all their lives; coming to see whether Nan was doing or had done anything, since their visit of the day before, which they could reasonably criticise; an event which they expected, as a matter of course, and of which they were in daily fear. Miss Hitty walked stiffly, in her new black stuff dress and her new black bonnet, and Miss Susie pattered along beside her, also in a new black stuff dress and a new black bonnet. All Old Harbor knew how it

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happened that they had those new dresses and those new bonnets. They had not had more than one new thing at a time, between them, for — oh, for a long time — years. Miss Hitty, defiantly, did not care who knew; Miss Susie was content to abide by Hitty's opinion in this matter, as she did in everything else.

“Really, sister,” Miss Susie had said timidly, “it is very nice, I think, outside. The fence, now, — just like the old one, — *just* like it. We could n't have done better, ourselves — if — if we could have done it.”

“Of course it's nice, Susie,” said Miss Hitty, decidedly. “Nancy Hedge could n't do better, and she had sense enough to know it. That's what surprises me.”

“Yes, of course,” assented Miss Susie, in haste; “that would surprise one. But — but the lawn — she has n't cut any of the trees down — and it's so — so neat. I — I wish we could have managed to keep it as neat as that, sister.”

“Well, we could n't,” snapped Miss Hitty. “We did the best we could with it. You know we did. I only wish,” she sighed, “we could see the inside of it. I'd like to see whether she had the sense to leave the inside of it alone, too. But I won't call on Nancy Hedge. I *won't!*”

“Oh, sister!” gasped Susie. “Don't say that — so — so decidedly. Not if she *asks* us especially? Think how much we want to see it.”

“Well,” answered Miss Hitty. They did want to see

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the inside of the house; they wanted it very badly. They had set their hearts on it. "Well," answered Miss Hitty, slowly, thinking of the room that had been their mother's, — the room that they had always religiously kept closed, — "well, if she should beg us to go, as a favor, perhaps I— Why, there she is now! Susie! she 's almost here. Right opposite."

Miss Susie, trembling, tried to focus her near-sighted eyes upon the thing in the road which she supposed must include Nan.

"Now!" whispered Miss Hitty, sharply. "Bow!"

Miss Susie bowed, with a sweet little smile; a much sweeter smile than her sister could have managed if she had tried. Miss Hitty had not tried.

"Susie," whispered Miss Hitty again, "Jack Catherwood's with her — driving with her."

Miss Susie gave a little cry of delight and fumbled for her glasses. They were stuck in the bosom of her dress, and she found them in time and stuck them on her nose at an absurd angle. Miss Susie's glasses always looked absurd on her delicate nose. They had broad black rims, and were always set on at an angle which made them look as if they were about to tumble off; which they invariably did, at the slightest provocation, falling to the limit of their black ribbon. Nan was just drawing up beside them.

"Jack!" cried Miss Susie, giving him both her hands. Then she remembered. Her glasses fell off, of course, but she recovered them, and set them on at an angle

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even more absurd than before. "I — I beg your pardon, Miss Hedge. I have not seen Mr. Catherwood for nearly a year."

It was not necessary for Miss Susie to say that she was very fond of him, and she did not say it.

Nan smiled. "Of course," she said. "I understand how glad you must be to see him."

She waited, silent and smiling a little — perhaps at the very evident joy of the two old ladies; perhaps at — but I do not know what she was smiling at. Nancy Hedge was an inscrutable young person. Miss Hitty smiled at Jack, too, and was evidently as glad to see him, in her way, as Miss Susie was.

"You will come to see us, Jack?" asked Miss Susie, relinquishing his hands at last.

"I'll come, right away," said Jack.

Nan thought it was time for her turn.

"Miss Tilton," she said to Miss Hitty, in her most gracious manner, — Nan's manner could be very gracious, — "won't you both go into the house for a few minutes?" She saw Miss Hitty hesitate. She thought she might be about to refuse. "I beg that you will," Nan went on. "I shall be back in a very few minutes — I have only to leave Mr. Catherwood at his door."

Jack seemed to see a chance, and protested that he would get out there. Nan turned to him.

"I'm going to take you home," she said, in a low voice.

The use of that low voice by Nan — well, Jack

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did n't know what impression it would convey to Miss Hitty and Miss Susie. It is to be supposed that Nan knew. She turned to Miss Hitty again.

"Just for a few minutes," she continued, "as a favor to me." Miss Susie looked at her sister triumphantly. "Mrs. Haight will receive you. Please tell her that I will be right back."

She nodded to both the old ladies, smiling brightly, and drove on.

"She did n't give me a chance to refuse," said Miss Hitty, grimly, "and I suppose we had better go in."

"But, sister," said Miss Susie, "she asked us as a favor to her — and you know you said —"

"Well, I'm going," said Miss Hitty.

Nan, driving on, was explaining. "Lest you should be curious, Mrs. Haight is a widow, not too young, who is staying with me indefinitely — an old friend," she added, with one of her smiles.

Jack laughed.

"Now," continued Nan, "shall I leave you at your house? I have discovered which it is."

Jack laughed again. "I was going to my aunt's," he said; "but if it is out of your way —"

"Nonsense!" said Nan, "Miss Joyce's?"

Jack was accordingly driven, in state, and in great discomfort of mind — and of body — past his own house. Nobody was in sight there, to his very considerable relief; although it did not follow, from that, that nobody happened to observe him. As Nan ap-

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proached the Joyce gate, he saw Doctor Olcott's old white horse ambling away from it.

Nan stopped at the gate, and Jack jumped out. "Thank you very much, Miss Hedge."

For some reason, Nan seemed much amused. "Have n't you had a pleasant drive, Mr. Catherwood?" she asked, leaning out towards him.

"Very pleasant," he answered, smiling. "How can you ask?"

"Well, then," said Nan, "you must say so." She laughed gayly. "Come and see me, Mr. Catherwood," she went on, gathering up the reins. "You will find it perfectly safe. Mrs. Haight will be there to protect you."

Jack laughed. "I will," he said; and Nan drove off to meet the Miss Tiltens.

Jack was still laughing to himself as he let himself in and started up the long walk. After all, there was something very attractive about Nancy Hedge. He did n't quite understand her, but there was something distinctly attractive about her. He said it over to himself, and he knew that he had never more fully meant anything than he meant that last "I will."

## CHAPTER X

JACK was still half smiling as he mounted the steps. He had come slowly up the long walk, that was liberally sprinkled with sunshine now that there was nothing but the bare bones of the trees to stop it, his mind filled with pleasant thoughts. There was the harbor itself, to give the atmosphere of peace and antiquity that was best suited to Old Harbor; there was his father's office, of which he would be a part. It did not undo what the harbor had done, but rather strengthened the impression of peace and serenity. And there was Heywood, who seemed to be of the past, rather than to remind him of it. Heywood was content.

There was Nan Hedge, who was far from content, no doubt, and who had little of the serenity that was characteristic of Old Harborites. But she would acquire it, if she stayed long enough; it might be truer to say that she would not stay unless she found content. She might not find it. Stranger things have happened. There was something very attractive about her; she was even charming, in her way, even if one did not understand her fully. It did not occur to Jack that her attractiveness lay in that very fact, and that Nan knew it very well. He smiled, none the less, as he thought of Nan. And there was

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MacLean, but the less thought wasted on MacLean, the better.

And there were the Tilton girls. Old Harbor was a pretty good place to live in, if you were old, and not so bad if you were young. And there was his aunt Harriet, — she reminded him of Miss Hitty Tilton, in spite of the difference in age, — who was eminently suited to Old Harbor and to no other place in the world, unless there were some other place just like it. And there was his uncle Eben. Jack had been so used to thinking not at all of his uncle Eben that it was with something of a shock that he realized that his was now an actual presence to be reckoned with. He wondered how he should manage that; what sort of a man his uncle Eben was now. It was hardly likely —

To him, mounting the steps and wondering, and half smiling at his pleasant thoughts, the door opened. There was Miss Harriet in the doorway, looking as pleased as Punch and smiling down at him affectionately; and, in the half darkness of the hall behind her, Jack thought he saw another figure dodging to and fro, shy, wishing to be pleased, seemingly, but not knowing whether to be or not.

“Well, Jack!” cried Miss Harriet; and stepped out of the doorway and presented her cheek, which Jack saluted, laughing. “I’m glad to see you. I thought it was about time you came to see me and Eben. The few minutes that I saw you the other day don’t count.”



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She turned to the other figure, which had retreated towards the library door. "Eben!" she called.

Eben obeyed the implied command, and came back. Nearly everybody obeyed Miss Harriet. Jack advanced quickly, with his hand outstretched.

"Uncle Eben," he said, "I'm glad to see you — glad — we're all glad that you have come back."

Eben took Jack's hand — allowed Jack to take his, rather. Jack was conscious of delicate fingers that lay in his hand without response to his slight pressure.

"Thank you, Jack," answered Eben, in a gentle voice that shook a little. "You're very good; everybody is very good to me."

"I know that Aunt Harriet would be," said Jack, heartily, with an affectionate look at that lady. "She's always good; the rest of us don't count much."

The delicate fingers pressed his ever so slightly before he let them go. Eben smiled tremulously and the tears started to his eyes. He was still weak.

"Nonsense!" he said. "Nonsense! You don't know. It means a great deal to me."

He laughed awkwardly and turned away.

Jack was sorry for him; far too sorry to say anything then. They went into the library, and Miss Harriet seated herself on the sofa in the corner, the sofa covered with faded green rep; and she patted the seat beside her.

"Come," she said; "you sit down here beside me, and tell me about yourself. First, what in the world

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do you mean by driving about town with that Hedge girl? England can wait."

Jack laughed. Even Eben smiled sympathetically. Eben had seated himself in a low chair that was drawn into a sunny corner, between two windows, and had laid his head back, as though it was an effort for him to hold it up. Through the long window behind him the sunshine streamed, enveloping him and lapping him in its comforting warmth. Falling on his face, so, it seemed to accentuate the gentle delicacy of his features. Jack found himself wondering; marveling that it should be so. He wondered what could have been his experiences in the past fifteen years; how it was possible that he could have fallen so low as he must have fallen, and yet show no signs of coarsening. Eben did not talk about his experiences. Even to Harriet he had not alluded to them. As far as any one in Old Harbor was concerned, he might have died, that night, fifteen years ago, and have been but just resurrected. Indeed, so far as Old Harbor was concerned, he had been dead for those fifteen years, to all intent.

"England can wait, no doubt," Jack returned. "It has waited for a good while, so that a quarter of an hour, more or less, will make no difference to it. What is the matter with the Hedge girls?"

"Did I say there was anything the matter with her?" asked Miss Harriet, smiling.

"Not in so many words, Aunt Harriet," said Jack.

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“Your manner implied it. However, that is of no consequence. There may be or there may not be. I don’t hesitate to say that I find her rather attractive.”

Miss Harriet sighed, still smiling. “I was afraid you did.”

Jack laughed again. “She must be very terrible,” he said, “to inspire fear in the breast of Miss Harriet Joyce. I thought you were n’t afraid of anything, Aunt Harriet.”

“Well,” she answered slowly, “I don’t know that I’m afraid of any *person*; but I’m not so very brave, after all. The very thought of — but you have not answered my question, Jack.”

“It’s not because I have the least objection to answering it,” said Jack. “Why was I driving about town with that Hedge girl?” A smile, which Jack could not wholly repress, started and grew as he recalled his feelings at the time. “Well, to tell the truth, I did n’t go for to do it. In fact, I—well,—I happened to meet her in front of the office just as I came out, and, of course, I had to stop —”

“‘Of course!’” cried Miss Harriet. “There’s no ‘of course’ about it. You did n’t have to stop unless you wanted to.”

Jack was well aware that he had stumbled and blundered badly in saying what he had said, just as he might have been expected to do if there were any reason for his being embarrassed. He knew, too, that, if there had been any reason for it, he would not have

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been embarrassed in the least. He was sorry that he was giving the impression that he particularly did not want to give. But after all, it was rather amusing. Why should he care?

“That is sufficient evidence, Aunt Harriet,” said he, “that you have had no intimate relations with Nan Hedge — ”

“Intimate relations!” sniffed Miss Harriet, scornfully. “I should think not, indeed. Have *you* had intimate relations with her?”

“Well, — no,” laughed Jack. “Not yet. But I may have. I give you fair warning.”

“Thank you for the warning,” replied Miss Harriet, “but I hope you won’t.”

“The family is safe for the present,” Jack continued. “I was unfortunate in my choice of words. What I meant was that you could n’t know Nan Hedge if you thought that I did n’t have to stop and speak to her, whether I wanted to or not; although,” he added slowly, “I don’t know that I had any rooted objection to doing it.”

“No,” said Miss Harriet; “I believe that.”

“She has a way of making it very awkward for you to do anything that is not in accordance with her plans. At last, she offered to drive me up the street, and,” Jack went on, rather lamely, “so, of course, there did n’t seem to be anything for me to do but to accept. I did so, as gracefully as I could. It was n’t very graceful.”

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“Oh, Jack!” cried Miss Harriet. “As if you were n’t a free agent.”

Jack leaned back in a corner of the sofa. “Well, I was n’t. It would have been extremely rude and pointed if I had not. I don’t know of any reason for being rude to Nan Hedge, except that there seems to be a general dislike of her. That is no reason.”

“N-no,” admitted Miss Harriet. “In fairness, I acknowledge that it is n’t.” Justice and fairness could always be counted on, from Miss Harriet. “But I should like to know what she was doing, away down there by the wharves, and just as you were coming out of the office.”

“I did n’t ask her,” Jack replied. “I should have been no wiser if I had. She may have been waiting for me to come out, but I don’t believe it. All the girls I have ever met, apparently by accident, may have been waiting for me. I don’t believe that, either. Nan Hedge,” he went on, musing, “is a very handsome girl — and extremely — she dresses very handsomely, too.”

“She does,” said Miss Harriet, very snippily. “Her dress is altogether too striking for this quiet old town.”

Jack was playing with a paper-cutter.

“You can hear her presence? Well, perhaps. It is not to be expected that everybody will come up to the standards of Old Harbor.”

Miss Harriet sighed. “I do hope, Jack, that you are not going to be smitten with Nancy Hedge.”

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“You never can tell, Aunt Harriet,” said Jack, solemnly. “I have known such things to happen. In — in fact, I think I feel it coming on at this moment, in the region of my heart.” He looked over at Eben Joyce and winked.

Miss Harriet had seen it. “You absurd boy!” she cried, laughing.

There was one touch yet to come; Jack added it with a triumph which was well concealed.

“Aunt Harriet,” he said, “you must have noticed that Miss Hedge has not done anything to the Tilton place which anybody can reasonably find fault with. The lawn, now, is irreproachable, as Miss Hitty, herself, would have liked to keep it; and the fence, — surely, she gets a white mark for that?”

Miss Harriet gave a grudging assent. “But,” she added, “the fence was exactly in keeping, anyway, if it only could have been kept in repair. Its design was classic.”

“Well, give her credit for sense enough to recognize that.”

“I suppose,” said Miss Harriet, grimly, “that Nancy Hedge has been abroad enough and seen enough to know that, even if she does n’t believe it. Her father is very rich. There’s one thing she’d like to have that her money won’t buy,” she added, with satisfaction. “I’m sure she would like to have the Tilton girls call there. I can’t imagine why she should want them to, but she does. Perhaps — I suppose it would be a tri-

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umph for her, but it would be mean to gloat over them. Miss Hitty said that she just *would n't*."

Jack smiled. "It seems to me," he said, "that it would be as easy to suppose that she would like to show them that the house was unchanged."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Miss Harriet. It seemed to settle the matter. "Do you know it, Jack?"

"No."

"Well, I don't believe it," remarked Miss Harriet, with emphasis. "I would as soon believe that Miss Hitty Hilton had called on Nancy Hedge."

Jack smiled again and leaned toward her. "She has," he said. "The Tiltons are, at this moment, drinking Miss Hedge's tea and sitting, I have no doubt, in her back parlor."

Miss Joyce almost collapsed. "Jack!" she cried. It was a calamity. Miss Harriet's sky had fallen. She gave a long sigh. "Well!" she said. "I never did, in all *my* life. How in the world did she do it?"

"I told you that she manages to make any way but her own impossible. She caught the Tiltons while she was driving me up here. They could n't get out of it, and they went, as I did. I do not doubt that they are having a very good time." Again he winked at his uncle. "Oh, my path is being made clear."

Miss Harriet laughed, in spite of herself. "I'm afraid your path would be only too clear," she said. She sighed again. "Oh, Jack, I wish you would n't."

"Don't you worry, Aunt Harriet," said Jack, reas-

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suringly. "There's no danger" — here he paused and smiled at his thoughts — "yet."

Miss Harriet put out her hand and took his. "Oh, Jack, Jack!" she cried, and then she laughed. It was Miss Harriet's own laugh, bubbling out in little ripples as though she could n't help it. She could n't. It was all the pleasanter to hear for that. Jack laughed, too, and so did Eben, low and gently.

Indeed, Eben had been smiling all the time. He had evidently been glad to see Jack; had rejoiced in his youth and health and strength as in things that he no longer hoped for, for himself. His delicate, sensitive face lighted up in momentary self-forgetfulness. He was happy, for the time, in listening to the talk that seemed to flow so readily; happy in merely being there, in the sunshine, and in not being spoken to. Eben was only thirty-five. Miss Harriet did not see the pathos of it. It had never once occurred to her to think of Eben in that way, but it would have made Abbie Mervin want to cry, if she had seen it. Miss Mervin did not like to cry or to want to. Eben had succeeded in avoiding her, so far. But Jack saw and, seeing, he said nothing; which was just what Eben wanted.

The great front door clicked open and boomed shut again, and instantly the light was gone from Eben's face. He had remembered, and he was afraid. He showed it plainly as he started up and made hurried flight to the door. There he stopped, his hand almost upon the knob. That was not the way he wanted to



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go, right into the arms of their visitor. He knew well who their visitor was. He turned and fled toward the other door, meaning to sneak quietly up by the back stairs — sneak is the word. Miss Harriet's face showed some annoyance. It even showed exasperation, which, I take it, is more than annoyance.

“Eben,” she said, somewhat sharply, “where are you going? Must you run from everybody who comes into the house?”

Eben stopped again, arrested in his flight. He teetered back and forth, undecided. “Why — why — I thought I would — go upstairs. It is time for me to go up, Harriet.”

“Fiddlesticks!” said Miss Harriet, decidedly. “Doctor Olcott has just said that — ”

“Oh, let me go, Harriet,” Eben pleaded. His time was short, for he already heard steps just outside, in the hall. He threw his arm up before his eyes, as if to ward off something, — an involuntary action, — and spoke in a voice that was hardly more than a whisper. “I don't want to see any one. Please let me go.”

The involuntary action and the pleading voice touched Jack. His uncle Eben must have been — what could he have been subjected to, to make him do so? But Miss Harriet did not seem touched by the action nor by the voice.

“Nonsense!” she said. “Sit down, Eben. Will you please to sit down? It's only Abbie.”

“I know,” whimpered Eben. He turned to his cor-

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ner again and sat down like a sulky child, just as Abbie's voice was heard at the door.

"Shall I come in, Harriet?"

She had heard voices, and, at Harriet's impatient "Of course, Abbie," the door opened slowly and she looked in. She saw only Harriet and Jack sitting on the sofa.

"Why, Jack!" she cried; and she came in swiftly, smiling and holding out her hand. She was glad to see him and she showed it. Why should she not? Jack rose and took the outstretched hand. "It is good to see you again, Jack," she said heartily. "Don't you be running away from us for so long again."

Jack made some reply, he hardly knew what; but, no doubt, it was well enough, for Abbie did not notice anything wrong with it. Jack's eyes were on his uncle Eben. The sulkiness was gone — had seemed to drop from him like a garment. He had managed to pull himself together, and now he rose, too, and stood, with the sunshine from the window behind him lighting his figure, which had lost its slight stoop. His face, in the luminous shadow, showed all its delicate lines and all its native refinement. He seemed to have become, once more, the well-bred, distinguished boy of fifteen years before. Those fifteen years were as if they had not been. Even Miss Harriet saw it and marveled at it. It seemed to deprive her of the power of speech.

"Abbie," said the gentle voice, "I hope you have not forgotten —"

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She had turned at the very first sound, her hand instinctively raised to her heart, and the quick color surging into her cheeks. They were porcelain, but it was not rose-tint, now; it was crimson. Then the color left her face as quickly as it had come. She was very white as she answered him.

“Eben!” she said, low and softly. “Eben! I have forgotten nothing, Eben — *nothing*.”

And she went to him, standing there in the sunlight, and held out both her hands.

## CHAPTER XI

WHAT Abbie Mervin's feelings were when she found herself face to face, at last, with Eben, — and the Eben of her dreams, as it appeared, not the Eben of her expectations, — I do not know. Indeed, it is to be supposed that she did not know, herself, if one can judge from her actions. She was not bothering, then, even to try to analyze her feelings, — the attempt at an analysis would come later, — but it was evident that she felt a good deal, and that unexpected emotion was strong upon her. It was rather a chaotic emotion.

She held his hands tightly in both of hers. "Eben!" she said softly, over and over. "Eben!"

As she said it, she was dimly conscious of a wish that Harriet and Jack would go away and let her have her talk with Eben. They might be expected to have much to say to each other after fifteen years. Harriet might know it; she must know it. In fact, Harriet did know it; she knew it very well. Knowing, she made no move to go. For she saw that Abbie was in a very exalted frame of mind, and she knew that, in that state, one is hardly responsible. Abbie might easily commit herself to a course she would regret. There was no hurry. Miss Harriet did not make the mistake of considering herself responsible for Miss Mervin's actions, but

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there was no hurry. Let them get over the first surprise. Then — well, they could make fools of themselves if they must. At least, they would do it with their eyes open. Miss Harriet was not so sure that they would be making fools of themselves. After all —

Eben stood and looked and said nothing. What could he say? Her eyes were very gentle and friendly, oh, very friendly, if nothing more. As he looked into them they grew softer yet, as though tears were coming. They were very soft, gentle, friendly eyes, that had always looked kindly at him. Now, in spite of those years, and all that they meant, — and none of them all knew quite what they meant to him, — the eyes were as friendly as ever. The thoughts that raced through Eben's mind, as he stood there, looking into Abbie Mervin's eyes, were tumultuous but not comforting; no, not comforting; distinctly not. His shoulders once more took on their slight stoop and his face the expression of resignation and of hopelessness. It was only for a moment. He shook them off again, resolutely. What made him, it was impossible to say. Perhaps Abbie lifted him out of the slough of despond into which he had fallen; perhaps she lifted him out of it merely by the force of her faith in him. It was more an apparent faith than a real faith, although it was real enough at the time.

He smiled. It was not his tremulous, hesitating smile that Miss Harriet had got to know — although his mouth quivered a little, too.

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“Abbie,” he said, and his voice was gentle and wistful and gracious, all at once, — “Abbie, I hope you are as glad to see me as I am to see you — as glad as you seem to be. Are you?” They were still holding each other’s hands.

Abbie smiled, too. “I am glad, Eben,” she answered. “I am.”

It would not be difficult for her to carry out her intention, after all, — carry it out completely, — that intention that she had clung to all these years. She might have done it then, if only Harriet and Jack had had the sense — Miss Harriet stirred uneasily. She was beginning to fear that Abbie, at least, might forget that she was there.

Abbie flushed a little and dropped Eben’s hands. It was not yet time.

“It is so good to see Eben again,” she said, turning to Harriet with a little laugh of delight; “to see that he is not changed, not one mite. I thought, from what you said” — She stopped, then went on again. “I almost forgot you and Jack, Harriet.”

“Yes,” replied Miss Harriet, dryly. “I was afraid you had.”

Abbie laughed again and turned to Eben. “It would have been terrible, would n’t it, Eben?”

Eben smiled at her in response; affectionately, Harriet thought. “Awful,” he said. “Frightful to contemplate.”

Harriet again stirred uneasily. Jack was smiling

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broadly. She knew there was some pleasantry afoot, and Miss Harriet did not feel at home with pleasantries. She did not have a speaking acquaintance with them.

“Doctor Olcott has just been in,” she said, “perhaps a half hour ago. He says that it will do Eben good to see people now.”

“Why not, to be sure?” asked Abbie. “Of course, you wouldn’t want to get the whole town in to-morrow, Harriet — no surprise parties. But why not, a little at a time?”

Eben looked grateful for so much. He seemed to have had his doubts of Harriet’s intentions.

“Why, of course not, Abbie,” said Miss Harriet, disgustedly. “Surprise parties! Do you take me for a fool?”

Abbie did not smile. “I beg your pardon, Harriet,” she said. “I ought to have known. Well, why not begin with William, and Jack, of course, and me to tea? It is a long time since you have had William.”

Miss Harriet did not seem to welcome the suggestion, from Abbie, of having William to tea. Abbie seemed to have altogether too much of William’s society. She seemed to think first of William too naturally. But Harriet could think of no good reason why she should not ask him, no reasonable reason.

“William has not been here for a long time,” she replied slowly; “not since Eben came back. I don’t feel sure” — Miss Harriet flushed as she said it — “that he would care to come.”

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“Why, Harriet!” cried Miss Mervin. “What an idea! As if he did n’t always come when you asked him! I will ask him, if you don’t want to write a note. I’m sure I can persuade him, if he needs persuasion. I’m sure he won’t need it.”

This suggestion seemed to meet with even less favor than the first. But again Miss Harriet could think of no reasonable reason against it.

“You may not happen to see him, Abbie.”

“Oh, I shall see him this afternoon.”

Abbie had spoken before she thought. Her forethought came afterwards, and she blushed furiously, and was angry with herself for it. But she went on as if there was no reason for it, — as there was not, she told herself, — or as if she had done nothing unusual. “Harriet, you remember that you asked him to read something of his. Why would n’t this be a good time? He would be glad to do it, I should think.”

“Very well,” said Miss Harriet, looking hard at Abbie; “you ask William when you see him this afternoon. Ask him for a week from to-night. He might as well bring something to read, if he will. I hope he won’t choose a long thing. Can’t you help him to choose?” Miss Harriet sighed. “If you see him so often, you will have plenty of opportunity. I don’t see why you need get so red about it.” For Abbie was blushing again, and only got the redder when she found she was blushing. Harriet had no business to misconstrue her



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motives — to be so — so obtuse. Harriet was obstinate, very. It made her angry.

“Harriet Joyce,” she began sharply; then she hesitated. She saw Harriet smile in what she chose to think was a disagreeable way. Whatever Abbie’s intention had been, she thought better of it. There was no use in having a quarrel with Harriet. “Well, I’ll ask him, but I think I’ll not try to influence his choice.”

Jack had seen Abbie flare up before; he never had seen her get over it so quickly, and he smiled quietly. Eben had seen, too. “A soft answer, Abbie,” he murmured.

It is to be supposed that Harriet had noted behavior that one would not have expected of Abbie Mervin; and Harriet knew very well what one would naturally expect of her. She gave no sign. Harriet must have heard Eben’s remark, too, even although it was murmured, one would have thought. Her hearing was excellent. She gave no sign of that, either.

“I can’t see why not, Abbie,” she said. “You know very well that William has no sense about such things.”

“He is quite capable of making a good choice of his own writings,” answered Abbie, a round red spot appearing in each cheek; “much more capable than I am. William is not such a fool as you seem to think, Harriet.”

“Oh,” Miss Harriet protested, in some surprise at the tone of the reply, “I don’t think William is a fool.”

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“You appear to,” Abbie retorted, “and that’s what I said.”

Miss Harriet sighed. Perhaps she did appear to; but that was no reason for Abbie’s coming to William’s defense. William had been her own property for so long, she was beginning to realize that, possibly, he might be her property no longer. She sighed again.

Jack, hearing the sighs emitted by Miss Harriet, looked at her carefully. She seemed thinner than when he had seen her last, and careworn; yes, unmistakably careworn. Probably, if he had been seeing her every day, he would not have noticed it. No doubt the care of Eben — it was possible —

He turned to his uncle. “Uncle Eben,” he said, “it occurs to me that you might like to come into my father’s office occasionally. There is very little doing there and people seldom come in; and,” he laughed, “there is a very pretty view of the harbor. I start in there to-morrow, to work, if there is any work to do. Why don’t you come down to-morrow? I think that I shall have time to show you what there is to see, if you want me to.”

Eben looked pleased. “Perhaps I will,” he replied, “I thank you, Jack. Perhaps I will.”

Then he began to be troubled. How should he get there? How should he get there, without going through the streets — the principal streets, and meeting — Heaven knows who it might be — anybody in Old Harbor that he had n’t seen for fifteen years, even

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MacLean? He shuddered. MacLean would want to know everything that had happened; he would not hesitate to cross-question him upon the happenings of those years. MacLean would learn nothing. He would fight first, he, Eben, — or run. Yes, running was easier, and would not attract more attention than a fight with MacLean. There were those in Old Harbor who would have been glad of an excuse for fighting MacLean, the harmless little man. But running was easier. Eben was frightened again; he was rapidly working himself into a panic.

Harriet and Abbie had been talking to Jack, and now Jack and Abbie were going. Eben rose and followed them into the hall.

“Don’t forget, Uncle Eben,” Jack called, as he was about to shut the door, “to come down to-morrow.”

Eben smiled mechanically. “I won’t forget,” he said. He was surprised to hear his own voice and to know that he could speak so calmly; surprised that he could speak at all.

“Good-by, Eben,” said Abbie. “I shall see you again soon.” Her voice was almost confidential, and she smiled as she spoke.

“I hope so,” he answered graciously and gently. “Good-by.”

Then the door shut. Eben turned to Harriet, his old manner once more fixed upon him. He even raised his arm before his face.

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“No, no, Harriet,” he whimpered. “No, no. I don’t want to see anybody.”

“Fiddlesticks!” said Harriet, sharply. “It will do you good. And it’s only Jack and Abbie and William.”

“I don’t want to see anybody,” repeated Eben, plaintively.

Harriet sighed. “We can’t help it, now, Eben,” she said patiently. “You’ll have to do the best you can.” She turned and went swiftly upstairs.

She almost ran along the upper hall to her own room, went in, and locked the door. When she was safe, — she had been afraid of doing it before, — she burst out crying, and threw herself into the old armchair that stood at the head of the bed. She did not forget that it was covered with figured blue chintz, and she took good care that no tears should fall upon it. When she had wept, violently but silently, for as much as fifteen minutes, — an unheard-of thing for Miss Joyce to do, — she stopped as suddenly as she had begun, and wiped her eyes repeatedly.

“Harriet Joyce,” she said, as though she was speaking to a naughty child, “you are a fool!” She paused while she dried her eyes thoroughly. “I guess I’m tired,” she said then. “I’ll speak to the doctor about it, when I think of it. There’s no hurry.”

She smiled, and got up and smoothed her hair and went down to Eben again.

## CHAPTER XII

DOCTOR OLCOTT was on his rounds with the Polar Bear. It is hard to see how he would have got along without that valuable fur-bearing animal, for he was giving no attention whatever to his driving, and it is to be doubted if he knew even what road they were taking together. He had one leg out of the low buggy, his foot on the step, and his mind seemed to be wandering — taking a vacation, perhaps, although, judging from the way he was frowning, he was worried about something. For the good doctor did worry, on occasion, over his patients. They were not mere cases to him; and although he was well aware that it was considered bad form, and fatal to the doctor concerned, to worry about them, they were human beings and his friends, most of them, and he did worry over them. He could n't help it. He did n't seem to be getting thin with his worry. There are other things to be feared than getting thin.

The Polar Bear had it all his own way, and he knew it; and he jogged along with his customary care, turning out for any carriage that they met, while the occupant of that carriage hailed the doctor heartily and the doctor replied as heartily, coming back, momentarily, to his surroundings for that purpose. The Polar Bear

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knew well enough where the doctor was going, and he was to be trusted to take him there safely and to stop before the right gate; and then, if the doctor had not come to himself by that time, to look around inquiringly.

“Well, doctor,” the look said, as plainly as if he had spoken, “here we are! Why don’t you get out? It’s your move.”

Indeed, he always said it plainly enough. If what he said was not always understood, it was no fault of his.

So the old white horse jogged on, dragging the buggy, that sagged hopelessly on one side, under the not inconsiderable weight of the doctor. The doctor was aware that it sagged permanently, and that the top was stained and weather-beaten. The fact did not trouble him. He was not a city doctor, with fees that would enable him to keep an automobile and a chauffeur, or a sanitarium, — *and* a sanitarium, I should have said, — and which would have made it necessary for him to dress the part. He did not regret the automobile and the chauffeur nor the dress. He would have found all of them but a burden; but he had longings for the sanitarium. He would put Miss Wetherbee in it and make her work like — like — ahem — other women, Mrs. Loughery, for instance. And he would put Joe Loughery in it, and would not let him work. But Joe seemed to have found a better sanitarium in the pine woods than any ever made by the hand of

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man. It was simply marvelous. As the doctor thought of it, he sighed.

The Polar Bear veered to the side of the road, turned his head inquiringly, and hesitated slightly. The doctor came to himself.

“No, no, Sammy,” he said. “Not to-day. She has n’t sent for me to-day. Go on, Sammy.”

The old doctor chuckled as the old horse took the middle of the road again. “You did n’t know, did you, Sammy? You thought that Miss Wetherbee might have sent for me at any time, did n’t you? Well, so she might. She may even have sent since we started. You are brighter than I am, Sammy. I’ll look.”

The doctor turned and looked through the little window in the back of the buggy. He saw a great house, — almost too great a house for one poor old woman; for Miss Wetherbee was a poor old woman, in spite of her being one of the richest in Old Harbor and inclined to be miserly, — a great house that stood nearer the street than was the fashion, and a board fence about shoulder-high. The board fence was surmounted with two feet more of pickets. The pickets were at just the height to make it most trying for any one walking by the fence when the sun was low, so that such persons involuntarily and invariably closed their eyes; and, in consequence, involuntarily and invariably ran into Miss Wetherbee emerging from her own gate. It *was* inconvenient; possibly as inconvenient for the aforesaid

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persons as it was for Miss Wetherbee. And it *was* annoying to have Miss Wetherbee berate you for running into her when it was rather more than half her own fault. She had no business to have such a fence, especially about sunset. At any other time it was well enough, for you could see, through it, the very formal little garden with its high and full borders of box. The box alone was sufficiently remarkable, every plant almost a tree.

The doctor saw all this. At least, if he did not see the garden behind the board fence, he was conscious of it. He saw more than this; for, leaning far out of a window just over the door, was an old woman. The old woman was frantically waving a handkerchief and calling "Doctor! Doctor Olcott!"

The doctor chuckled again. "You're right, Sammy. She has. But go on. We'll stop on our way home. That'll give her time to get well. If she gets mad about it, so much the better. It'll do her good. I wish, I *wish* I had Sanborn's nerve."

Sanborn was a well-known specialist, who lived at the hotel at which Miss Wetherbee had chanced to stay during one of her visits to Boston. Miss Wetherbee, who, as you may have gathered, was a hypochondriac, knew that he lived there and — but that may not have been her reason for going to that hotel. It would not be any part of her reason for going there in the future. For Miss Wetherbee had been taken, in the night, with one of her ill turns, and had summoned Doctor San-



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born in some haste, as was her custom with any doctor who happened to be handy. The doctor, after much grumbling and many objections to getting up for that purpose, had appeared. He cut Miss Wetherbee short in her exposition of her symptoms, and asked her if she felt as if she was dying, which question made her properly indignant. Then he prescribed some of his pills and went back to bed. The next day he sent her a bill for seventy-five dollars.

The indignation which Miss Wetherbee had felt at Doctor Sanborn's question the night before was as a summer zephyr to that which she felt upon receipt of this bill. She immediately threw his pills out of the window, declaring that they were made of brown bread, — which they were, — and got well at once. Sanborn told Olcott about it, when they met at the convention that year, with much chuckling. He did n't care an old copper whether his bill was paid or not; but he did n't mean to be routed up in the night again. He was n't; not by Miss Wetherbee.

All that Miss Wetherbee needed was something to do. Doctor Olcott had told her so, bluntly; and Miss Wetherbee had scoffed at him and as much as called him an old fool. Doctor Olcott had smiled and gone away, which was not what might have been expected. Yes, if she got mad with him now, why, so much the better. He sighed, but he did wish that he might have that sanitarium. He could make a good beginning at filling it right away. For, besides

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Miss Wetherbee and Joe Loughery, there was Mrs. Houlton.

Mrs. Houlton did not have Miss Wetherbee's complaint. She never complained. She had no time for complaining, even if she had been inclined to it. Indeed, a widow with eight children and next to nothing a year has barely time to eat and not enough to sleep, and Mrs. Houlton was working herself to death. There was no manner of doubt about that, and the doctor had told her so, as nearly as he dared, and that was pretty near. He had urged her to rest; completely, if possible, but if she could not do that, then as much as she could.

Mrs. Houlton had smiled at him cheerfully. "Don't you think I ought to have a piece of the moon for breakfast, doctor?" she had asked, somewhat irrelevantly.

The doctor had growled out some reply about feeble-minded persons doing as they were told, at which Mrs. Houlton had laughed outright.

Then the doctor had gone home, leaving Mrs. Houlton in the kitchen, darning stockings while she got dinner for nine. The stockings were mostly darns; and he knew very well that she would sit up far into the night, after the children were all in bed, mending the clothes that the eight were to wear the next day. So the doctor swore softly to himself and sent her some work. She had been asking for work that she could do, and she embroidered beautifully; or so the doctor thought. And although the doctor was, probably, no

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judge of embroidery, there was reason to think that, in this instance, he was right. He had asked her, in Miss Joyce's name, to embroider the table-linen which he inclosed. What should the doctor do with embroidered table-linen? He had some trouble in selecting the linen; but he did it,

"I'll see Hattie to-morrow," he said to himself, "and make it right with her."

Now he remembered, with a shock, that he had not mentioned the table-linen to Hattie. It would be convenient, in some respects, if he were married. He would not be buying table-linen for widow ladies to embroider if he were married, and he was much more likely to be wrong, in his choice of linen, than right. He would stop in at Hattie's on his way home and consult her; not about his marriage,—and the doctor chuckled once more,—but about the table-linen. Doctor Olcott was in danger of forgetting Miss Wetherbee. When he had settled that little matter of the linen, he might be able to get in a word about Miss Harriet herself. She was looking poorly—run down and tired out with nursing Eben, no doubt. A vacation would do her a world of good. She might manage it, if she would.

Suddenly the Polar Bear drew in to the curb as if he would stop. The doctor was annoyed.

"Damn it, Sammy," he said, without looking up, "go on. What you stopping for?" And he slapped him with the reins.

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Sammy paid no attention to the doctor's evident wishes in the matter of going on, but continued on his way to the curb, his spirits no more ruffled than his thick fur by so small a thing as a slap of the reins. He did not lay it up against the doctor. It seemed to amuse the doctor, and it did n't hurt Sammy; but Sammy's intentions were quite as evident as the doctor's, and Sammy was in a position to carry them out.

"Well, you old skate," remarked the doctor, affectionately, "if you will, you will; and there's an end on't." He sighed, and roused himself and looked around. "Hitty Tilton must want me," he said. "She would n't send till the last gun fired. But Sammy knew."

He got out of the buggy with some difficulty, and went wheezing into the house; from which he presently emerged with a look of great satisfaction.

"You knew, Sammy, did n't you?" he said, as he slowly climbed in. "It's a mystery to me how you did, but you certainly did. We settled Hitty's hash. She'd have been a sick old woman if we had n't, with the cold weather due any day; and pneumonia, Sammy. Hitty's not in the first flush of youth, as you and I are, Sammy, but we settled her. We'll get no thanks from her, either. But we could n't neglect the Tilton girls, could we? Bless 'em! They're the real old sort." He gathered up the reins. "Now go on."

Sammy seemed unwilling to start, and the doctor looked up and down the street. He saw a shrinking,

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furtive figure slinking along by the fence. There was nobody else in sight. The doctor leaned out of the buggy.

“Hello, Eben!” he cried. “Glad to see you out, at last. It’ll do you good. Where you going?”

At that, Eben pulled himself together and ceased to slink. He seemed the man he was not.

“Good-morning, doctor,” he said, in his gentle voice. “I was going down to Colonel Catherwood’s office.” He had come nearer the buggy as he spoke.

The doctor looked him over for a moment, disgust and scorn in his gaze. The state of being afraid, the chronic state of Eben, was one which he could not understand. Then he roared.

“Good heavens!” he cried. “Why, — why, damn it, this is n’t the way to the office.” He sobered again, for Eben had begun to shrink once more. “I beg your pardon, Eben. Do you mind telling me why you chose to go this way?”

“Why,” replied Eben, smiling sheepishly, “I — you know this is the first time I have been out. I — I thought that, perhaps, I should not meet people, if I went a roundabout way. I know this way must seem ridiculous — but — but, doctor, you can’t know” — Eben was not smiling, now — “people will ask questions, and I can’t answer questions, doctor. I can’t and won’t!”

“Well, well,” returned the doctor, kindly, “I can’t blame you, Eben, for feeling so. If people would only

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mind their own business! I think they would, mostly, except MacLean." Doctor Olcott laughed. "He can't. How's Hattie, Eben?"

Eben looked surprised. "Why, she's all right. There's nothing the matter with her, is there?"

"No, no," said the doctor, somewhat hastily. "There's nothing the matter, that I know of." The Polar Bear made ready to get under way again. "Well, good-by. Brace up, Eben. There are plenty of nice people in the world, after all."

He nodded, as Sammy began to jog along again, leaving Eben smiling after them both. They were a pair, the doctor and his old horse. The doctor had some such thought.

"Go on, Sammy," he urged. "Hurry, if it is in you. We shan't get around before dinner, at this rate. But what if we don't, Sammy? There's nobody waiting for us." He sighed. "I'm beginning to wish there was, Sammy. We don't need anybody, do we, Sammy, you and I, two old skates?"

Sammy turned his head and looked at the doctor. They understood each other. They went on together, and Sammy stopped at one house after another, and from some of the houses Doctor Olcott puffed out cheerfully, wheezing to Sammy that that was that. As if Sammy did n't know it! From other houses the doctor emerged slowly, and he did n't tell Sammy that that was that, but he took up the reins in frowning silence.

So it happened that the doctor was weary in body

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and soul by the time the Polar Bear stopped before Miss Joyce's gate. He got slowly out of the buggy, which gave under his weight until the body touched the axles on one side; and he went puffing and wheezing up the long walk. Harriet saw him coming and opened the door herself.

"Come in, doctor," she said, as he mounted the last step.

The doctor was very short of breath. "I'm — coming." He plumped down on the hall settle and wheezed there for a few minutes.

"It's too bad that you should have come in this morning," observed Miss Harriet. "Eben's gone down to the office."

"Yes. I met him," replied the doctor, smiling. He had got his breath by this time. "I came in to see you I want to tell you, while I think of it, Hattie, that if I expire suddenly after getting in this house, you will be responsible. My death will be upon that smooth head of yours."

Miss Harriet smiled affectionately. Not many who knew him could help regarding this rough old man affectionately, in spite of the fact that he was apt to swear absent-mindedly.

"I am glad to see you, always, doctor," she said; "but I am quite well, I think; that is —" She had remembered suddenly that she had meant to ask him —

"Yes, 'that is,'" interrupted the doctor. "You are well enough, but tired out. You must be careful,

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Hattie. You see, I'm selfish, as usual. I only want to save myself some work."

The tears came to Miss Harriet's eyes. It showed that the doctor was right, that the tears should come so readily. "If all selfish men were like you, doctor!" she exclaimed. "What do you want me to do?"

There was a great satisfaction in the doctor's voice. "That's a proper spirit, Hattie. I wish all my patients were as reasonable. Take a vacation for a few days. Go on a spree."

Miss Harriet's laugh bubbled out, at that. "A spree!" she cried. "I almost feel as though I could; as though I wanted to. But what do people do when they are on a spree? Is n't it customary to — drink?"

Doctor Olcott laughed too, a great rumbling laugh. "It is n't necessary," he said, "and it might be dangerous for some. I don't advise it, although it would do you no harm. Go up to Boston and — and go to some show that will make you laugh — and put no strain on your brain-cells. Do anything that comes into your head, except worry."

"Well," she replied, speaking slowly, "I'll think of it. I think I will. You must tell me more about it; prime me, before I go."

"I wish," said the doctor, grumbling, "that you could induce all my patients to take my advice as well, — to follow my prescriptions."

"Why," asked Miss Harriet, "who is difficult now?" There was a twinkle in her eyes.



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"Mrs. Houlton." Miss Harriet laughed.

"Oh, you may laugh," said the doctor, "but she's killing herself. If she does n't take a rest, she'll die."

"Forgive me for laughing, doctor," replied Miss Harriet. "It was not because I did n't appreciate the gravity of the situation. Won't she obey your orders?"

"No," growled the doctor. "Obey my orders! Why, she flouts me and my orders. It makes me mad, so that I say things that I should n't."

"Oh, doctor, you don't swear!"

"I'm afraid I do. And I'm convinced that she'll give me a fit of apoplexy. She laughs at me when I am properly mad. She just laughs."

Miss Harriet laughed again. "I knew it," she cried. "I knew it. Have you been there this morning?"

"No," growled the doctor, again. "I did n't dare to." He told her about the table-linen that was to be embroidered.

"You aid and abet her in evil," said Miss Harriet, when he had finished. "What else can you expect?"

The doctor rumbled in his throat. Miss Harriet could n't understand what he said, except that it was something about feeble-minded and foolish women.

"I'll help you about the embroidering," she said, "and I'll do what I can to induce her to take a rest, but I have n't the least expectation of success. She has no husband living —"

"Ought to have one," rumbled the doctor. "Ought to have one, to make her stand around."

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“Well?” said Miss Harriet, smiling.

“What do you mean, Hattie?” growled the doctor. “What do you mean by your insinuations? If you mean me, by — ahem — well, I’d marry her in a minute, if I thought she’d take orders from me any better. That is, if she’d have me, which she would n’t. Of course she would n’t. She’s no fool.”

Miss Harriet was still smiling. “Try it,” she said.

“Try it!” cried the doctor. “You speak as if it was a cough medicine or a tonic. Well, by — er — well, if there’s no other way, I will. By gad, Hattie, I will. A pretty mess you’ve got me into.” The doctor rose. “Good-by, Hattie. Don’t forget, you’re to go on a spree.”

He rolled off down the walk, while Miss Harriet stood at the door, smiling after him.

The doctor came into his house very late in the afternoon, stopped to wheeze awhile on a chair in the hall, then took off his coat, sighed, and started up the stairs. He thought, with some envy, of Sammy, whom he had left munching his oats with great content. The doctor was hungry, too, and he would have been glad to sit down to his supper with as little preparation and as free a mind as Sammy, who took things as they came. The doctor took things as they came, too. He had to. But he could not hope for a free mind. He sighed again; and, having made what preparation seemed necessary for supping with himself, went down.

He found the dining-room, with its unshaded lamp,

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unusually dreary. The doctor did not like unshaded lamps; that was not the reason that he had it. He had talked to his housekeeper and cook about it until he had grown weary of the futility of talk. His housekeeper and cook was a well-meaning person, who would have done anything for the doctor — anything in reason; but this was not in reason. She had lived in an atmosphere of unshaded lamps all her life, and had not been aware of any discomfort. Why should the doctor ask for a shade? Of course, if he had insisted upon it, as he had for his study lamp, with language that a self-respecting woman could not listen to — he had even bought a lamp, especially for it, with a porcelain shade; and green, at that, with not a single bird or flower on it. And he had said that if she kept that lamp filled and trimmed, she might have what she pleased in the dining-room, and be something to her. She had left the room, at that, so that she was not rightly sure just what it was he said.

The doctor had but just come from Mrs. Houlton's. He had had a glimpse into her dining-room: a pleasant room, warm and snug and homelike, with its shaded lamp shedding a soft glow over the neatly spread table. No doubt his own dining-room seemed all the drearier for that glimpse, and his own supper a dismal function to be got through with as soon as possible.

He finished his plate of apple-sauce and his hunk of gingerbread. They did not seem to merit such haste, for it was good apple-sauce and excellent gingerbread;

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but the doctor seemed to be in a hurry — perhaps it was merely that he wanted to escape from that cheerless room. He pushed back his plate and rose, sighing, and went at once to his study. The lamp was lighted, and cast a circle of light over his table and the pipes and books and papers that littered it; and there was a smaller circle of light upon the ceiling that seemed to be flaring and smoking. The corners of the room and the ceiling beyond that small circle were enveloped in a soft, green gloom.

The doctor glanced about, at the piles of books that cumbered the chairs, and at other piles that showed dimly in the corners, in front of the bookcases, upon everything that would hold books. It was plainly a man's room. That must have been evident, upon sight, to any woman, and to any man, ordinarily observant and of average intelligence. But it suited the doctor, and in its apparent disorder there was the essence of order. He knew where everything was; where to lay his finger on any book that he wanted. He had said just that to his housekeeper, and given orders that they were, on no account, to be disturbed.

“Yes,” she had replied, with a sniff of disgust, “I guess that ain't so hard to know where everything is. I know that, myself. It's on the floor.”

Whereat the doctor had given one of his great laughs. But his books were not disturbed.

He settled himself in a great leather-covered easy-chair by the table, got his feet up on another chair,—

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he was never comfortable until he had got his knees straight, — took up a big, long-stemmed meerschaum pipe, and filled it from a yellow earthenware jar. Then he lighted it, sighed, and began looking over his medical papers and enveloping himself in a cloud of smoke.

At exactly half-past eight there was a knock at the door. The doctor grunted, and his housekeeper came in, bearing a bottle of beer and a glass. To her, the doctor's head appeared above the back of the chair, surrounded by a green aureole of smoke. That was quite usual; and so was her remark. She always said the same thing.

“Here's your beer, doctor. Mercy! How smoky it is!” It was. The corners of the room could not be seen at all. “I should think you'd die!”

“Shall, in time,” growled the doctor. “Not immortal. But I'll manage to stand it for a while.”

She set the beer and the glass by the doctor's hand. “Well, if *you* can stand it, *I* can't.”

“Don't have to,” growled the doctor again. “Don't have to. Thank you. Good-night.”

“Good-night,” said the housekeeper; and the door closed softly behind her. She was not resentful of such shortness, any more than the Polar Bear was of the slapping of the reins, or of the doctor's absent-minded profanity. Indeed, she understood such shortness of speech very well. She was apt to be short of speech, herself. She thought better of the doctor for it.

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When the housekeeper had gone, the doctor laid down his medical journals with evident relief.

“There, damn it, that’s that,” he said. And he reached over to a pile of books that were bound in full calf, and that showed signs of frequent use. “What, to-night?” His hand hovered over the pile of books, while he read over the legends on the backs. Then he swooped for one of them. “‘Merry Wives’ hits me, to-night. ‘Merry Wives’!” And he chuckled to himself, as he got the heavy book into his lap, and opened it.

Then he opened his beer; and having got it open, he filled his pipe afresh and lighted it. Then, with a comfortable snuggle into his chair, he settled himself to read.

## CHAPTER XIII

COLONEL CATHERWOOD sat at his desk in the little back room that served him for a private office. It was a pleasant room, a corner room, with windows giving him a view of the harbor, where the ship "Susan" lay quietly at anchor; and a view down the harbor towards its mouth, at which the "Susan" had come in, some weeks before, and out of which she would go into the broad Atlantic, if the colonel had his way, in another week. The colonel usually had his way. It was a quiet way, with no fuss about it, but he usually got it.

Colonel Catherwood did not seem to be very busy. He had a newspaper open before him, and would have appeared, to the casual observer, to be reading it. The aforesaid casual observer might have wondered why the colonel was reading his paper at his desk instead of at the window, out of which he could glance, now and then, at the scene which he loved. There was a reason; for, half concealed by the newspaper, was a pad of paper on which he wrote. Sometimes he wrote only a few words, and again he wrote, without stopping, until the sheet was full. Then he would tear off the filled sheet and put it on the top of a growing pile in the drawer of the desk. The colonel was writing his memoirs of the war; with very little of himself in them

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and much of the men he had known and the times of which he had been a part. He was very much ashamed of writing it, but he could not help it, and he was terribly afraid of being found out.

A step sounded at the door. It was the slow step of the old clerk, whose hand fumbled with the latch. But if Heywood was deaf, he was not blind. Hurriedly, the colonel covered his writing with the newspaper and began to read anywhere. Heywood entered, as quietly and as deliberately as he did everything, and smiled to see the colonel apparently reading an advertisement of a popular brand of whiskey. The colonel looked up, expectantly, but he did not speak. It would have been a wasted effort.

Heywood answered the look. "You told me to find a keeper for the 'Susan,'" he said, speaking very softly, as was his custom. "I can't find any. All our good men are either at work or away."

"H'm," sighed the colonel. "Where's Jack, Heywood?" he shouted.

"Jack?" asked Heywood. "He's gone down to look over the shipyard." He smiled. "He seems to have the same ideas that we used to have."

Colonel Catherwood nodded. He would have made some remark about those old times, when Heywood was not deaf and they both had ideas and the enthusiasm to carry them out, if it had not been necessary to shout it. Shouting such remarks seemed to take them out of their class. Heywood would understand.



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Heywood did understand; and he stood and waited until the colonel should speak.

"H'm," sighed the colonel, again. It was not probable that Jack knew anything of the duties of a ship-keeper, anyway, although they were not hard to learn. "Be on the lookout, Heywood, for a keeper for the 'Susan,'" he said, at last, "and I'll see Jack when he comes in. We must have somebody."

Heywood nodded. "I think we must," he replied. "There were a number of things missing from her this morning. I went out, myself, to see. I'd go, but that I could n't hear anything." He smiled. His deafness was no affliction to Heywood. He lived in a world of his own.

"No," shouted the colonel. "You could n't hear, and we want you in the office."

Neither of them had heard the outer door open and close. Heywood could not have heard if it had been slammed,—he could have felt it,—but it had been closed very softly.

"Good-morning," said a gentle voice. Eben stood in the doorway, behind Heywood. "I heard you talking —"

Colonel Catherwood had already risen. "Not difficult, eh, Eben?" he asked, holding out his hand. "How far off did you hear us first?"

Eben smiled quickly and took the colonel's hand. He made no reply.

"It was a confidential conversation, you know,

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Eben," continued the colonel, smiling. "Well, I'm glad to see you down here. You're getting well fast."

Eben nodded a "good-morning" to Heywood and shook hands with him. In Heywood's eyes he saw recollection of the old days, before the flood, when —

He turned away. "I'm well enough, Frank," he said; "well enough to act as shipkeeper for you." He spoke hurriedly, as though to get the words out before they changed their minds and refused to come.

There was surprise in Colonel Catherwood's face; surprise and doubt. Eben spoke again, more hurriedly than before.

"I know the duties very well," he said, "such as they are. I can do it perfectly well, Frank, I give you my word. Many a day and night I've spent in doing just that." His voice had been almost pleading, but with the last words, it changed to bitterness. Many a day and night —

"I should really be glad if you would let me," continued Eben. His look dropped and shifted until, finally, he looked out of the window and saw the "Susan" herself. "It's a long story, Frank. Perhaps, some time," —

"Whenever you like, Eben, whenever you like," returned the colonel. "As for going to the ship, — there are no duties, to speak of, — that shall be just as you like, too. If you really want to go, I'll take you out."

Although Eben protested that it was not necessary,

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that he could go quite well by himself, the colonel insisted upon rowing him out, in his own boat.

"The dinghy's there," said the colonel, "or it was there, yesterday. Do you think you can manage it?"

Eben smiled, a smile of amusement. "I've done it times enough to know how."

Colonel Catherwood could not help a feeling of some astonishment at the way Eben went up the side of the "Susan." It offered, one would think, no foothold to anything but a cat and a sailor. Eben showed practiced skill; he showed his weakness, too, for he was not yet strong. But, notwithstanding his evident weakness, he got up the side of the "Susan" much more quickly than the colonel could have managed it. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the colonel would have been willing to try it at all without a Jacob's ladder or, at least, a knotted rope. When he was up, he stood nonchalantly on the rail, holding to nothing at all, and waved his hand. The colonel was very sure he would never have done that; but Eben stood there without a thought of danger, apparently, and as if he was used to it.

"I'm all right, Frank," he said gently. "I'll be ashore in time to go up with you. Good-by."

"Good-by, Eben," returned the colonel. "You went up the side as if you knew how."

Eben smiled. "I ought to," he murmured. "I ought to." He turned and dropped lightly to the deck. It seemed that the colonel had not heard his last mur-

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mured remark, for he was rowing back to shore again.

Eben stood at the rail and watched the colonel make his landing, neatly, with a sweep of one oar; saw him step out, and, almost in the same motion, seize his boat by the bow and draw it high on the stage with one hand. There was more of knack than of strength displayed, although Colonel Catherwood had plenty of strength. Eben sighed as the colonel went up the plank, with his long, light stride, and disappeared.

“I wish” — he began; but the wish was left uncompleted. He sighed again and turned to the ship. “I wonder if everything on the ‘Susan’ is as it used to be. But of course it is n’t. Of course it is n’t.”

He began pacing slowly back and forth on the deck, his head sunken on his breast, his eyes on the deck before his feet. Gradually and insensibly his beat lengthened until it was bounded by the quarter-deck, about shoulder high, and by the forecastle. He stopped his slow pacing and looked over the quarter-deck; then started towards the steps leading to it. He stopped again, suddenly.

“No,” he muttered. “In at the hawse hole. That’s the way; my way.” He walked to the forecastle, his head lifted, and tried the door. It opened readily, at which Eben did not seem surprised. He swung himself down.

It was tolerably clean in there; as clean as could be expected. A casual observer might have been surprised

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to see Eben tumble into a bunk. He seemed to be particular as to the bunk. It was an uninviting bunk, away up in the eyes of the ship. The casual observer might have wondered at his choice, for one would think that the particular bunk he had chosen would get all the motion there was and all the noise there was of tumbling seas and spray and the ocean under her forefoot. Not that there is much to choose among bunks in a fore-castle; but this bunk seemed the most undesirable of all.

If there had been a casual observer to make comments or to think them, it is to be supposed that Eben would have done none of the things he did do. If he had had to bear with such a curious and meddlesome and exasperating person, he would have stood by his side and answered the questions that he could not avoid answering in his gentle voice and with his irreproachable manner, instead of tumbling into his bunk, — he had the air of appropriating it, as if it had once belonged to him, — and tumbling out again, suddenly, as if he had heard a hoarse voice bellowing down the companionway for all hands to shorten sail. It was a wild night and getting worse; and, as Eben tumbled out, rubbing the sleep from his eyes, he staggered. For the ship's bows rose high on a wave, paused an instant, and then she raced down the slope, with a great roaring and rumbling under her forefoot and the noise of many waters. She checked and lifted, the water hissing now; then a sea slapped up against the outer wall of that

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forecastle — not a foot away — with a noise like the report of a cannon. Eben waited for what seemed to him a full minute. Then he heard the patter and crash and hiss of water falling on the deck above his head and running off in rivers to the scuppers. He sprang quickly up the ladder.

He came out, not into the dark turmoil of wind and sea and rain, but upon a sunny deck that was as quiet as though it were on shore. He smiled to himself and sighed.

“It does n’t seem possible,” he muttered; “it does n’t seem possible. It was very real — but I’m glad it’s over — those nights. Those nights! Well,” — he glanced aloft, — “I might as well do my part in taking in the topsails, if I can. But I’m glad I don’t have to go on the royal yard. I should probably fall off, if I got there at all. I doubt if I have the strength.”

He mounted the rigging, quickly at first, then more and more slowly, until he reached the upper topsail yard. It was lowered, of course, for which Eben may have been grateful. He seemed pretty thoroughly exhausted, and stood there, holding on with both hands, to gather strength. It occurred to him, as he stood there, that he was in full view of Colonel Catherwood’s office window; that the colonel might even be watching him, not without some curiosity; that there were other eyes than the colonel’s — it might be just cause for wonder that a sane man should be playing about the ship like a boy, running up and down the rigging, diving out of the forecastle. Eben came down, slowly.

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As soon as he felt the deck under his feet, he turned, without hesitation, and walked to the quarter-deck, picked a belaying-pin from the rail, and began a resolute speech to an imaginary crew. It was more than resolute, it was belligerent; and he cursed that phantom crew well. There was nothing gentle about it. You would never have imagined that it was Eben Joyce who was speaking. Suddenly he stopped and threw down the belaying-pin and shuddered.

“Oh, horrible!” he said. “Horrid! How could I ever have done it?”

He shook his shoulders as though he would shake off the dream that possessed him, — it seemed more than a dream, — and he left the quarter-deck and found a place under the rail that was sheltered and sunny, and there he curled himself up. The gentle breeze, that was scarcely enough to keep the “Susan’s” anchor chain taut, was sharp and cold.

Colonel Catherwood had not been watching Eben; he was busy with his writing and very much interested in it. He had no time, then, to be looking out of windows; but there were other eyes than the colonel’s that were interested in that ship. An old dory, that put out from the shore just as the colonel disappeared into his office, seemed to be bound nowhere in particular, but her erratic course carried her continually nearer to the “Susan.” The man in the dory may have been Mike Loughery or he may not; but after Eben appeared on the foremast of the ship, the course of the dory

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was no longer erratic. It made straight across the harbor.

At the change of course, a figure which had been crouched on its knees at a window of an old deserted, tumble-down house, at the head of one of the wharves, half rose. It was an odd, misshapen figure, with a big head and wobbly legs and long, strong arms that waved about, with no purpose, and it gave a clattering laugh that echoed across the water. The man in the dory stopped rowing, at the sound of it, and he looked sharply along the stretch of shore that he had just left; but he saw nothing of Clanky Beg. It was difficult to see Clanky when he did not wish to be seen, for he was getting the game of Indian down to a fine art. It was a one-sided game, with but one boy playing it. He had been after Mike all the morning. He was after Mike every day. Indeed, it was his first interest in life, after Joe and Mrs. Loughery.

He had left Joe Loughery in the pine woods near the hut that he had made. It was not much of a hut. It could n't be, with Clanky for its builder. It did not keep the air out, not to speak of the wind, and it was all the better for that; but the roof was pretty tight, and Clanky had thatched it afresh with spruce boughs. It would be warmer when snow came. Joe slept there, in the hut, with the night winds blowing across his face; and in the day-time, rain or shine, he was out of doors, well wrapped up, to be sure, and protected against the weather.



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Joe was wonderfully better, already. That fact made Clanky very happy. He had been to Mrs. Loughery's and done his chores, and had brought Joe a breakfast of his mother's cooking. He always did that; it was scarcely more than a step, and Joe's breakfast had n't time to get cold as Clanky ran over with the basket. He had got Joe settled at the roots of a big pine, where the sunshine lay warm and where he was sheltered from the wind, with a blanket under him and another over his knees. Then he had seated himself at the foot of a neighboring pine, and he had looked at Joe with dumb dog-love shining from his eyes. Joe was happy, too, and he smiled at Clanky without speaking. They did not do much talking, out there among the pines. After a while, Clanky became restless and got up.

Joe laughed; but he did not cough. "What is it, Clanky?" he asked. "Is mother coming?"

"Mother Loughery's coming," replied Clanky. "Good-by, Joe."

"Good-by, Clanky," said Joe. "Don't wait, if you want to go."

So Clanky had gone; had vanished among the pines, without a sound, as Mrs. Loughery appeared.

She smiled at Joe, sitting there in the sunshine. "How's my Joe, the morn?" she asked.

"Fine, mother, fine. What do you suppose Clanky's up to, slipping away just as you are coming?"

The tears came into Mrs. Loughery's eyes. "The dear boy!" she said. "The dear boy! Let him go, an'

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he wants, poor lad. 'T is small pleasure we can give him. He's as good as my own, Joe; better than some, better than some, — but not you, Joe."

"I know," said Joe.

Clanky had made a wide *détour*, had come to the edge of the pine woods where he had a good view of the Lougherys', and had waited for Mike to appear. Mike was out until all hours of the night, and he slept late. But Mike had come out, finally, scowling, and had made his way across the fields; he always did that. Clanky followed; he always did that, but Mike knew nothing of it.

That accounted sufficiently for Clanky's hiding and for his laugh; for he believed that he had marked Mike down, at last. Many a man with more sense would have come to the same conclusion, and would not have done his work so well. Clanky knew exactly what he would do next; by instinct, perhaps, — that innate cunning which, I am led to believe, is in all wild things.

He appeared, suddenly, before Heywood. Heywood was not surprised. He smiled kindly at Clanky and, although he did not hear a word of Clanky's question, he surmised what it was. He pointed, with his pen, to the door of the colonel's private office. Clanky thanked him and walked in at the door.

He found the colonel still busily writing. It seemed to awaken memories. No one could predict the kind of thing that would stick in that poor clouded mind. He laughed his harsh laugh.

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The colonel started. "Don't do that, Clanky," he said; "not in here, anyway."

"All right, then, I won't." He pointed to the pad. "William does that."

The colonel smiled quickly. "Ah, yes, Clanky. But he does it much better than I can."

"No," replied Clanky, earnestly; "no. He does it just the same: some words, till the paper's all written up, then he tears it off and puts it in a drawer. It's just the same. I've seen him do it." He took up the pad and looked at it, critically. "This looks prettier than his — prettier marks. I can't read much," he added. "The teacher said I could n't learn."

"Probably the teacher knew," said the colonel; "but perhaps she did n't. It is n't a question of my making prettier marks than William makes, Clanky. It's what the marks mean —"

Clanky was tapping the paper with his finger. "Is this true?" he asked.

"As nearly true as I can recollect," the colonel answered. "Does that make it any the better, I wonder? Or is it better to write fairy stories? But what did you want to see me for, Clanky?"

Clanky, at this attempt to switch him off, made a last effort to establish the connection that he felt, vaguely. "A man that tells the truth is good, and a man that tells lies is wicked."

The colonel laughed. "Harriet's opinion in a nutshell. Poor William!"

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“Yes,” said Clanky, “and Mike — ”

The colonel straightened up and listened; and Clanky, as clearly as he was able, asked to be allowed to act as keeper for the ship “Susan” at night. He would like to begin that night. The colonel, after some hesitation, consented. It would, at least, help Mrs. Loughery out a little. Clanky was delighted when Colonel Catherwood went into the outer office with him and said a few words to Heywood — a few words that might have been heard a block away, if the street door had been open. Clanky managed to restrain himself until he was well away from the office. Then the colonel heard his laugh come clattering down the street.

Colonel Catherwood sighed and turned to Heywood. “Has n’t Jack been back yet?”

Heywood shook his head.

“I think I’ll go and look him up.” And the colonel set out for the shipyard.

The shipyard was about half a mile nearer the mouth of the harbor; a deserted spot, except for the occasional small boy, who played there to his heart’s very great content and climbed about the ancient scaffolding, — the remains of it still stood, after thirty years of disuse, — climbed about it, in momentary danger of breaking his neck. But what does the small boy care about the danger of breaking his neck? He has names for the boy who thinks of it at all, and the danger seems very remote. The place seemed especially adapted to boys’ games, and there were excellent hiding-places

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to be found in the grass that grew rank and tall, and behind the few logs that lay concealed in it; or behind the old blacksmith shop or the remains of the shed where the planks had been steamed — or, in the shed, a boy might conceal himself successfully behind the rusty boiler. The boiler might even serve to conceal a person larger than a boy. Half-a-dozen times in a summer, some boy, more enterprising than the rest, gathered together a gang of boys, and the gang played baseball. The shipyard was an excellent place for baseball; but baseball took nearly all the boys in Old Harbor, and it was not easy to find boys in Old Harbor. Old Harbor seemed, rather, to adapt itself to girls, and to women of all ages, and to elderly men. It had become a good place to retire to and to die in. But the men, having retired to Old Harbor, forgot to die.

Colonel Catherwood had some difficulty in finding Jack. At last he saw him, seated on a log in the shadow of the blacksmith shop, busily engaged upon something that lay in his lap; so busily engaged and so interested that he did not hear the step approaching. The colonel looked down at the thing that lay in his lap, and gave a cry of surprise and delight. All that he had meant to say to Jack — all that he had come there for — slipped from his mind.

“Why, Jack!” he cried. “That’s *good*. That’s *beautiful*.”

Jack started and flushed with pleasure. He held out his sketch-book for his father to see.

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"Do you really think so, dad?" he said.

It was only a pencil sketch of the decrepit old scaffolding and the bulkhead and the harbor beyond, with a hint of the farther shore; and, in the left foreground, the remains of the old steaming-shed. But it was beautifully and delicately done, and the whole picture seemed to shine with light.

"The subject appealed to me," continued Jack, simply, "and I just sat down and did it. I am afraid that I forgot what I had come for." He laughed shamefacedly.

"That is of no consequence," returned the colonel. And he stood looking at the sketch and saying nothing, for a long time.

"You like this sort of thing, Jack?" he asked, at last. Pride and love, which he made an unsuccessful effort to conceal, shone from the colonel's eyes; but there was nothing in his manner, as he asked the question, to indicate either approval or disapproval. Jack was not looking at him.

"I love it, dad," Jack answered; "I love it."

"That is food for thought," said the colonel, slowly; "food for thought." He seated himself beside Jack, on the log, still holding the sketch-book. He did not speak further, and father and son sat there in silence, looking out, each absorbed in his own thoughts.

## CHAPTER XIV

It was a bright, sunny morning in early December, and everybody rejoiced accordingly; everybody, that is, except MacLean, for it bade fair to be a dull day in the drug business. He had not sold a single drug that morning, although he had been at his shop since daylight. He had swept out and dusted. He had not swept in the dark corners; MacLean's eyes were getting to be troublesome and glasses cost a deal, though he feared that he would have to come to them in time. There was a corner or two — perhaps more — on his cases and on his shelves that showed evidence of neglect, probably for the same reason. But nobody looked at the corners, anyway; or so MacLean thought.

When he had swept and dusted, he stood at his shop door for a long time, with his nose almost flattened against the glass, looking out. Nobody passed near enough for him to call him in and exchange a bit of gossip — two bits of gossip that were very interesting. The men who did pass were on the opposite side of the street. It was curious that it should have happened so. When he had been standing there for over an hour, he saw somebody actually approaching on the same side of the street. MacLean watched, with an interest that was almost frantic. It had been impossible

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to see clearly who it was, for MacLean's windows partly hid and distorted the figure until it was almost exactly opposite his door. He had been aware of a very nimble and very sweet whistling; the whistling of a jig tune so enticing that it was all that MacLean could do to keep his feet quietly on the floor. Now, the figure developed into that of a little colored boy, who was shuffling and dancing, anything but walking, down the street in time to his whistling. MacLean's expression changed to one of disgust. The little colored boy slowly shuffled up the steps, opened the door, MacLean making way for him, and shuffled in, his shuffling coming to an end with a very low bow.

"Mornin'," he said.

"Gude-morning," said MacLean, with an awkward kick of his leg. Constance Catherwood should have seen it, although she would have had hard work not to laugh outright. The little colored boy snickered.

"Well, what do you want the day?" asked MacLean, ill-naturedly. He had waited in vain for the boy to state his errand. "Will it be pheesic?"

"Nor, suh," answered the boy. "Whut I want physic fo'?"

"For an ill pairson," snapped MacLean. "Pheesic's gude for ill pairsons, naething else. It 'll be candy, then, I mak' na doubt."

"Yep," said the boy. "Seventeen sticks. That kind." He laid his finger on one of the jars that adorned MacLean's counter.



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“Seven-teen sticks!” exclaimed MacLean, in astonishment. “Ye’ll need pheesic after a’ that.”

The boy laughed gayly, after the manner of colored boys. “Nor, suh, I won’t,” he said; and he began to search his pockets. He brought forth a handful of pennies and slowly counted them out upon the counter. There were but eleven. “Hol’ you’ hosses,” he said. “I got it yere, some’eres.”

From another pocket he brought the remaining six pennies.

“Seventeen,” he said triumphantly. “Knowed I had ’em. There! That please yo’?”

And, beginning his whistling again, he shuffled out.

MacLean counted the pennies carefully into the drawer. “Seventeen pennies!” he said, with a laugh of disgust, as he shut the drawer. “Hap I’ll gie them to Mrs. Loughery for herbs. She should be by soon — and by means in. There’s her Joe,” he muttered, “doing wi’out pheesic an’ in the woods an’ winter coom. He’ll die, that’s a’. Pheesic! Pheesic! Naebody wants plieesic.”

It was a perverse world. MacLean went once more to his door and flattened his nose against the glass. He did not have long to wait, this time, for the Polar Bear came ambling down the street, holding back on the sagging buggy. He drew up, without apparent guidance, at MacLean’s door, which MacLean hastened to open.

“Gude-morning, doctor,” he said; “gude-morning. A varra fine day, doctor. An’ won’t ye come in?”

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“Good-morning, MacLean,” growled the doctor. “It is a fine day, although I don’t see how you can know anything about it. I’ve no doubt you’ve been cooped up in your stuffy little box since before sunrise. Yes, yes, damn it, I’m coming in,” he added impatiently, seeing MacLean about to renew his invitation. “I need time, MacLean.”

“Ha, ha!” laughed MacLean, mirthlessly. “An’ ye’ll have a’ the time ye need, doctor.”

“Of course I will,” growled the doctor again. “Of course I will.” He was in the doorway by that time. He almost filled it. MacLean obsequiously shut the door behind him. Doctor Olcott sniffed for a moment, suspiciously. “Why don’t you air out your shop, MacLean? It smells like a farmhouse in the spring. Your damned drugs don’t help it any.”

MacLean’s imitation of good nature was nearly exhausted. “Do ye need to be told that it’s December? It’s winter, mon, winter. It takes a deal o’ coal to heat all outdoors. *I* winna undertake it.” MacLean kicked out his leg. It was his most characteristic gesture. It meant that he was embarrassed or greatly pleased or greatly exasperated.

Doctor Olcott gave a great rumbling laugh. “That’s it, MacLean. Don’t be picked upon.”

MacLean could not make out the doctor’s meaning. “Drugs!” he went on. “Drugs! I dinna sell any drugs. The people winna buy pheesic.”

“They know a thing or two, eh, MacLean?” said

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the doctor, playfully. "In the long run, they know what's not good for them. Eh, MacLean? But we're not so sure of that, either, or you and I would n't have so much to do."

"I couldna varra weel hae less," grumbled MacLean.

The doctor laughed again, and went in behind the counter and helped himself to what he wanted. Then he gave MacLean his private instructions concerning a prescription that he had left with Miss Wetherbee that morning. MacLean laughed, knowingly. The doctor gave him, too, his private instructions about a prescription that he had left for Miss Hitty; and MacLean did not laugh. The grumbling Scot liked Miss Hitty. He looked rather serious.

"Hitty Tilton'll be an ill woman, then, doctor?" he asked.

"If we don't look out, MacLean, she will be. So do your best."

"I'll do ma best," said MacLean, nodding. "Hitty Tilton's na sae young."

"She's na sae young," repeated the doctor. He turned to go out, but MacLean stopped him with a word.

"I saw that cleekin' scamp, Mike Loughery," said MacLean, "as I cam' doon to open the shop."

"H'm!" snorted Doctor Olcott.

"He was a' wet through," continued MacLean, "sae that his clothes drippit. He was growlin' to himsel' and the waur for wear. He wooldna notice me at a'."

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"H'm!" snorted the doctor again. "Had some sense."

"Then," added MacLean, "I saw the eediot, Clanky, gae into the colonel's office."

The doctor began to show some interest. He looked at MacLean inquiringly. "Well?" he asked.

"He'll be there yet," said MacLean. "Waiting for the colonel, I mak' na doubt."

Doctor Olcott made no reply, but he opened the door and went out. Then he put his head in again. "Here's the colonel now, MacLean. Can't you stop him?"

"Is he?" said MacLean. "I maun try. I hae nae great expectations of success," he added, to himself. He had tried it many times before. "He'll like, fine, to know. Clanky was lookin' main pleased."

Colonel Catherwood was nearly opposite MacLean's door, by this time.

"Gude-morning, Colonel Catherwood. Gude-morning. Clanky Beg 'll be waiting in your office."

The colonel smiled slightly. "Good-morning, MacLean," he said; and he passed on.

MacLean was not to be cheated so easily. He called after the colonel. "It'll be about Mike Loughery, I mak' na doubt."

The colonel smiled the more, on hearing this, but made no sign.

Because of MacLean's shouted information, Colonel Catherwood was prepared to find Clanky, but he was

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not prepared for his laugh. He never got used to that. It rang out, now, and clattered so that one would have thought that even Heywood could have heard it. No doubt he did feel it, for he smiled quietly.

"Don't, Clanky," said the colonel, laying a hand on Clanky's arm; "don't do that in here."

"All right," replied Clanky, readily, "I won't, then. I threw Mike overboard." He was about to laugh again, but checked himself in time. "Mike tore Clanky's clothes. See?" He showed the colonel a long, ragged tear in his coat. "Mike got all soaking wet."

"Come in and tell me all about it." Clanky followed the colonel into the little back room, and the door shut softly behind them.

It was a long while before that door was opened again. Clanky came out, looking more than main pleased. I don't know what MacLean would have called it, what comparative he would have used, but it was more than main. The reason was that Colonel Catherwood had said some things that were very pleasant to hear; for a boy who had been used to thinking himself of no use in the world, but only a burden to, any one who was good enough to take care of him, they were very pleasant things to hear indeed. And the colonel gave him some money; not much, but something, and that was pleasant, too.

As he opened the outer door, he gave a low exclamation and dodged back again.

"Window," he said. Without waiting for the colonel

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to answer, he went silently into the colonel's office, opened a window, and disappeared.

Colonel Catherwood, amused, glanced at Heywood, who was amused, too. "Harmless play," remarked Heywood.

The colonel nodded. It would have been of very little use to answer. Then he went to the door to see whether he could guess the cause of Clanky's behavior. A little, weatherbeaten old woman was walking briskly down the street; not smiling, as was her wont, but looking worried. She would have been there before, but that she had to run the gauntlet of MacLean's. It may have been a lucky thing for Clanky, or it may not; but she had not escaped MacLean.

"Hoh!" MacLean had cried, opening his door. "Gude-morning, Mrs. Loughery."

The old woman had looked up. "Good-morning, Mr. MacLean," she had replied, with as much of an air of finality as she could manage; and she would have passed on. But it would not do. MacLean was not afraid of her as he was of Colonel Catherwood. He would not let her go, and he opened his shop door wider. It was an invitation that she did not accept, although she stood still on the sidewalk.

"Will Mike be dry yet?" he asked, grinning. "He was wet, when I saw him; fair soakin', sae that he drippit with each step. And he was in nane o' the best o' temper."

Mrs. Loughery smiled, in spite of herself. "Oh,

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yes," she said. "He 's dry now. He fell out o' his boat —"

"Oh, ho!" cried MacLean. "Hoh! Now, Mrs. Loughery, ye don't believe that, yersel'! Fell oot o' his boat! Hoh!"

"'T was in makin' the landin' he did it," Mrs. Loughery explained hastily, "an' it that dark he couldna see —"

"Hoh!" cried MacLean again. "Dark! Why, woman, 't was daylight. I passed him when I cam' doon to the shop an' it was fresh-wetted. I'd swear to it."

"Well," replied Mrs. Loughery, "I know naught of it except that was what Mike said. I believe him, Mr. MacLean." She spoke with a touch of asperity. "Ye'll do well to do the same."

She was going on again. MacLean saw that he must have done with that subject.

"Mrs. Loughery," he said hurriedly, "how'll Joe be doin', the day? Puir lad!"

That stopped her. "He's doin' fine, Mr. MacLean. Better than we could have expected. Livin' i' the open air's doin' him good fast. He hardly coughs at a', now."

MacLean slowly shook his head from side to side. "Puir lad!" he repeated mournfully. "Puir lad! It'll be the relief comin' before deessolution. They'll a' be ta'en that way. It'll be a sign that his end is near. Woman," he said impressively, "dinna ye ken it's creeminal to be doin' wi'oot pheesic in a mortal illness? Pheesic's needfu' for ill pairsons."

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Mrs. Loughery laughed. "Joe's doin' fine," she said. She was not impressed. She was going on, once more. MacLean made a last effort.

"Mrs. Loughery," he called. "Ye hae na brought me my herbs. Ye maun be cerrytain they're the true medecinal herbs." He kicked out his leg, with this. "An' the price that I pay is twa bunches for a penny."

Mrs. Loughery nodded. She could not trust herself to speak. As she turned and resumed her brisk walk, she was talking to herself. "If Miss Conny could on'y see the little man! If she could, now! But she got him to the life — to the life."

Her smile faded as she walked; she had too many things to worry about, although she usually succeeded in keeping them in the background. This one was too recent; it had only just happened. What really had happened she could not know until she had seen the colonel — bless him!

So it happened that the colonel was holding the door open for her, and he was smiling.

"The saints in heaven bless you, Colonel Catherwood!" said she.

"Thank you, Mrs. Loughery," replied the colonel, gravely. "Something is troubling you this morning? Come into my office."

"It's about Mike," she said, following him. She saw the open window and smiled. "So that's the way Clanky took. I got just a glimpse of him, and I wondered. 'T is no harm, colonel. Clanky's a dear boy.



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He'll do anything under the sun for me, anything that I'll ask of him or anything that he knows I want done. He tries to be truthful. He tries so hard it hurts me sometimes. He comes nearer than most that have all their wits. Sure, we can't always tell the truth, however hard we try; only as it seems to us. There's few that does that much. Clanky does — always. And there's Joe. He'd have been gone before this but for Clanky. He takes better care of Joe than a woman could. Joe's doing fine — fine."

"I'm very glad," said the colonel; "very glad, indeed."

"Yes, Joe's fine." There were tears in her eyes. "I a'most hope he'll get well."

"There's every reason to hope," said the colonel.

"Do you think so, colonel, dear? Do you think so, now? Well, then, I will. I was afraid to — but I think I did, before. But there's Mike."

The colonel nodded.

"He cam' home about daylight, soaked through; 'sae that he drippit,' MacLean says. MacLean was right. He fair drippit. He said it was because he fell out of his boat. I cannot believe it, although I just told the little man that I did, God forgive me for lyin'. What do you think? MacLean always has his nose in other folks' business."

"Clanky threw him overboard," said the colonel. He saw no object in delay or in deceit. "Clanky was on the ship, at his own request, to guard against thiev-

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ing. There has been more or less of it for some time. As near as I can get it from Clanky's story, Mike came aboard, there was a fight, and he threw Mike over the side."

Mrs. Loughery was silent for some time, looking out of the window. "It's hard for me to believe my Mike's a thief," she said, at last; "hard to have to believe it. But I'm afraid I do. Ah, what can I do wi' him? I don't want Mike to go to jail, an' there's where he'll end if he's not stopped. What is there that I can do?"

"That's just what I've been thinking about," said the colonel. "I've been thinking about it for some days. The best that I can do is to ship him in the 'Susan' for South America. She sails for Rio next week. It's not a solution, of course, not a remedy, but it's the best I can think of. It may do him some good, or it may not."

"Bless you, colonel, dear!" cried Mrs. Loughery. "Bless you! But Mike's of age. What if he wi' not go? You can't shanghai him."

Colonel Catherwood laughed. "No, Mrs. Loughery, we can't shanghai him. I think I can persuade him to go voluntarily — to want to go."

Mrs. Loughery laughed, too. "Well, then," she said, "you persuade him, an' I'll take home a lighter heart than I brought away wi' me. My Joe an' my Clanky 'll be doing well, an' I'll ha' hopes o' my Mike, too. I'll go, now, Colonel Catherwood, an' ca' down blessings on your head."

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"Don't smother me with them," said the colonel, smiling.

"Oh, never fear," replied the old woman, rising. "Sma' fear o' that. An' well I know 't is but a chance for Mike, but I'm thankfu' for the chance. Bless you, colonel, an' good-by."

The old woman was gone, with a look to Heywood and a kind word, walking briskly, as she always walked, up the street.

Colonel Catherwood sat for some minutes, absorbed in his thoughts. Then he sighed and, turning to his desk, pulled open a drawer. There was the slowly growing pile of manuscript. He took out the last few sheets and read them over; then, drawing the pad to him, he began to write. He had not even a newspaper to hide behind. The colonel was getting careless. There was Heywood and there was Jack. The colonel had forgotten about Jack, for the moment, but Jack was due at any minute. But the colonel was safe from discovery, so far as Jack was concerned. Something had happened to detain him; something that had to do with a very attractively gotten up young woman in a smart cart. Nan Hedge had taken it into her pretty head that she would explore the roads; the old roads, the little used roads — until she — well, until she tired of exploration. By a mere chance, of course, she had come upon Jack Catherwood down by the old shipyard just exactly at the time when further exploration ceased to seem desirable.

## CHAPTER XV

NAN HEDGE'S house was rather large; too large for two women to live in alone, Old Harbor thought, and said so, privately. It is not to be supposed that Nan had not heard this criticism, although it was difficult to say who had told her. Nan, herself, had but a hazy idea on the subject. Probably it had floated in as such bits of gossip do. Perhaps Octavia Haight had told her, although that would be but shifting the question one person, for, doubtless, Octavia's ideas on the subject were as hazy as Nan's. It did not seem to matter to either of them. If Old Harbor had asked her, Nan would have said that the house was not too large, with plenty of servants to take care of it; and would have reminded them that the Miss Tilttons had lived there, and had been subjected to no criticism of the kind.

The Miss Tilttons were loner than Nan and Mrs. Haight, for they had had no servants at all, and had been compelled, in self-defense, to shut up the greater part of the house; which was just what Nan did not do. She kept it all open and well heated and lighted. And Miss Harriet Joyce had lived, until within three months, a still more lonely life, all sole alone in a house nearly as large. For Miss Joyce's one maid-servant did not count.

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In response to all of which allegations, Old Harbor would have shrugged its shoulders, — if it did such things, — and would have replied that that was different. It would have thought that the Miss Tiltons' living in the house that had been their father's and their grandfather's made the difference. The house had not been too large for Captain Tilton. Miss Joyce's case was similar. Although Old Harbor would have thought all this, it would not have said it, for it would have considered it ill-bred to say it. It might not have made any difference to Nan if they had said it. She probably would have shrugged her shoulders, — for she did such things, — and have smiled and made no other reply. It might make a difference to Nan what Old Harbor said. At one period she would not have cared at all what the Old Harborites said, but would have set them down as a parcel of old fogies. That period was in the somewhat recent past. It was by no means certain that she would not have cared now.

Octavia Haight was thinking of these things as she moved about noiselessly, lighting the lamps in the two long parlors and in the library, across the hall. The lamps in the hall and the dining-room were delegated to a maid. What Mrs. Haight was doing was not delegated because — well, because Nan preferred that it should not be, and because things were usually done as Nan preferred. Mrs. Haight smiled to herself; not a pleasant smile, somehow, although it would have puzzled any one to say why.

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She was a tall woman, with black hair and an olive skin, and with features which were classic in their regularity. She carried herself well, and her movements were always slow and majestic. Altogether, rather a magnificent person; a fact which, evidently, she never allowed herself to forget. She was a great contrast to Nan. Whatever Nan Hedge was, she was neither majestic nor magnificent. Nan must have been aware that Mrs. Haight had great beauty. Perhaps I should say that she had had great beauty, for she was a few years older than Nan. That was not necessarily old, but — well, it took greater art to conceal the ravages of life — not of time; years do not matter so much — in her case than in Nan's. Nan must have been aware of that, too. It may have accounted for her position in Nan's household. Her position was sufficiently obvious. Nobody knew how it grated that it was so obvious. And it was sufficiently indefinite. Nan looked out for that.

So Mrs. Haight, as she lighted the lamps, smiled her smile that was not quite pleasant. The rooms, with the exception of lamps, and rugs spread over the carpets, and a few other things that made life easier and more comfortable for herself, were much as Nan had found them. There were even the two great shells, with their delicate pink lining, on the front parlor mantel, and the two curious, old-fashioned lamps, for burning whale oil, on the back-parlor mantel. The cabinet of shells, that had stood in the corner of the

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front parlor, was with the Tilton girls, now; so were most of the better and more delicate pieces of furniture that Captain Tilton had brought home from India and China: tables of ebony and teak-wood, inlaid with ivory, and an ebony tabouret inlaid with silver, and many another thing that the Miss Tiltons had been unwilling to part with, although their rooms were crowded until they looked like a shop of antiques. The Tilton girls were of an appropriate presence for such an establishment. But they could not take everything; a fact — an undeniable fact — which they regretted.

Mrs. Haight regarded these relics, as she considered them, with distaste and disapproval. As she lighted the lamps in the back parlor, her glance chanced to fall upon the two old whale-oil lamps — as it seemed to her, filled with intricate machinery.

She smiled again. “Well!” she murmured. “I’m glad that I don’t have to light those. I think I should resign, if that was a part of my duty.” She knew very well that she would not. She would learn the office of the intricate machinery, instead. “It would take a plumber to light those.”

She passed across the hall, and lighted the lamp in the library. A cannel coal fire was bubbling softly in the grate, and she sank into an easy-chair before it and folded her hands in her lap. There was the swish of skirts on the stairs, and Nan came in.

“Well, Octavia!” she said. She was smiling. She

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tried not to, and succeeded; then she would forget, and the smile would come again.

"Nan," said Mrs. Haight, "why don't you clear out all this stuff and make the house modern?"

Nan was surprised. She stood by the fire and looked around at the room and its furnishings — a brief look. Then she looked into the fire and her smile came again.

"It would n't be an improvement," she said shortly. "I like it as it is."

Mrs. Haight made no reply. She knew better. There was a long silence, during which she watched Nan and saw her smile come and go.

"What's up, Nan?" she asked, at last.

"Oh, nothing," Nan replied quickly; "nothing much. Only," she added, as if she could not resist the temptation to tell somebody, — "only I am rather expecting company to-night."

"Steady?" asked Mrs. Haight, with her slow smile.

That smile seemed to mock at Nan, but she paid no attention to it. "Jack Catherwood," she said, and flushed quickly. That flush, at least, was real enough. There was reason to believe that it was not painted on.

Octavia Haight raised her eyebrows the least bit. They were very fine eyebrows and she knew it and used them; but not too much. The effect was good. Mrs. Haight knew that, too.

"Indeed," she said. "Then I presume you can survive without me, after I have met him. Of course, I



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must meet him, for the sake of the proprieties. After that, Nan, you will have him to yourself."

Something in Octavia's speech made Nan laugh shortly. "As you please," she said.

After that there was silence. Nan never talked to Octavia unless she wanted to, and Octavia knew the rôle which she was expected to play; which, as she thought, she had to play if she would keep the place that was hers in Nan's household. She did not have to talk now, for which she was very glad. Instead, she watched Nan for a long time, covertly, and there was something wistful in her look, as if she thought that Nan was getting something that she had missed, and wanted. Whether that was so or not, I do not know. One would have thought that Octavia Haight might have had every experience that Nan Hedge was likely to have, and in fuller measure. But I know nothing of her past; only that she was there, in Nan's house, as I have said: a handsome woman, even a magnificent woman, with a smile that was not quite pleasant.

Nan drew up another easy-chair before the fire and reclined in it very gracefully.

"I met Mr. Catherwood, the other day," she remarked, at last, "quite by accident, of course." Nan looked up and smiled.

"Of course," said Octavia. "I understand that it was quite by accident." And she smiled, too.

"It was down by an old place that must have been

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a shipyard," continued Nan. "He had been sketching. His sketches are very good — very good indeed."

"I can understand that his sketches, being his, must be very good indeed," said Mrs. Haight. Nan flushed again quickly, and again the flush was unmistakably real. "He showed them to you, then?"

Nan laughed. "I insisted upon seeing them," she replied. "That was when we were driving home."

"Oh," said Octavia, "so he came home with you. Of course he seemed to want to."

"He was dying to," answered Nan. "He would n't ask, so I took him in."

"I can believe that," Octavia returned; and they laughed together.

"Then," Nan continued, "I brought him into town, by a rather roundabout way, I'm afraid. You know how my horse wanders."

"I know," said Octavia, sympathetically. "He is a great wanderer — to the stable, by the shortest road."

"Then I dropped him."

"You dropped him!" echoed Octavia.

"At his request," replied Nan. "He had to go to the office. I don't believe he has anything to do there, but he said he had to go."

"So you dropped him at his office?"

"No," said Nan. "I dropped him a block away from the office."

And Octavia chuckled, while Nan laughed her low-pitched laugh until the tears stood in her eyes.

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"I must stop laughing," remarked Nan, "or I shall spoil my complexion. But it was funny."

She wiped her eyes, carefully. "He mentioned his wish to call," she added. "That was while we were driving."

"With only proper encouragement?" asked Octavia.

"Of course," said Nan, "I gave him only proper encouragement. He seemed to need it. I suggested to-night."

"Oh," said Octavia.

"At first, I suggested to-morrow night," said Nan. "He had an engagement, at his aunt's, Miss Joyce's. So, not to discourage him too much, I mentioned that to-night would be propitious."

"He is really coming, then?"

"I think so," Nan replied; "but I shall not be sure of him until I see him."

Mrs. Haight was silent for a few minutes; digesting Nan's information, probably. Her mental processes were not rapid.

"Shall you dress for him, Nan?" she asked, at last.

"I don't dare," said Nan. "Old Harbor is conservative. But just you wait. Some day, or night, I will."

Again Mrs. Haight was silent; and, before she had time to formulate a reply, a soft-voiced maid announced dinner. That changed the current of her thoughts somewhat, for, as your magnificent, mentally slow women are apt to do, she thought a good deal of dinner;

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much more than Nan did. Nan's mental processes were not slow. I say nothing of men and imply nothing.

At dinner, Octavia played the rôle of sympathetic friend as well as she could. She did it pretty well, for she had had a long experience at it. If she could not see that Nan occasionally wearied of it, and if, now and then, Nan made rather sharper remarks than the occasion seemed to call for, Octavia is not to be blamed. Nan, herself, saw that, and, it may be, blamed herself for her impatience — if she ever blamed herself for anything. Perhaps she never blamed herself; she had not been accustomed to. Octavia, who would have liked to dawdle over her dinner and thereby prolong her enjoyment of it, gave what attention to it she could, — not as much as it deserved; she realized that, — but she gave it as much attention as she thought she could, and, between mouthfuls, she made remarks of a comforting and sympathetic nature to Nan, as the occasion seemed to warrant.

As they rose from the table, Octavia thought, with a regretful sigh, that the dinner had been much too hurried. Nan gave a sigh of relief. It seemed to her that they had been an unconscionable time at the table, for just two people. It was nearly eight o'clock. In Old Harbor, people might be expected to call at nearly eight o'clock, Nan thought. She did not know, for she had not had an evening call since she had been there.

Octavia moved slowly toward her easy-chair before the fire, and seated herself, but Nan did not sit down.

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She was restless and moved about the room, stopping, inconsequently, before anything that might serve to arrest her attention. Octavia smiled as she watched her, but she did not speak. She waited for Nan.

"Octavia," asked Nan, at last, abruptly, "I am very domestic, am I not?"

"Yes," answered Octavia, smiling the more, "if you like."

"Well," said Nan, then, "what have you done with my sewing?"

Octavia broke out into a chuckle. "That's a poser, Nan; I give it up. What's the answer?"

"I think, Octavia," Nan said seriously enough, —but there was the suspicion of a twinkle in her eye, — "I think that you will have to find me some sewing, and a nice, domestic-looking basket, right away."

Octavia thought for a minute. "I can get you some embroidery, Nan," she suggested, looking up.

"I've got embroidery of my own, somewhere," replied Nan, quickly, "but embroidery is n't what I want. Can't you find some plain sewing? It should n't be too plain."

Again Octavia glanced up at Nan and smiled. "White goods?" she asked.

"We—ell," said Nan, slowly, "not *too* white."

Octavia laughed. "I'll see," she said, rising. "What do you know about sewing, Nan?"

"I can sew beautifully," Nan answered. "They

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taught me at the convent. I have n't done any since I left."

"Oh," said Octavia, "I did n't know. What makes you think that Mr. Catherwood will like it?"

"They all like it," said Nan, "even the best of them. It's more fetching than embroidery. But bring the embroidery if you can't find the sewing. And a basket," she called. "I must have a basket."

Nan was still wandering restlessly about the room when Octavia came down again, bringing the basket, which was so necessary. She put it down on the table and laid a fresh piece of cambric on top.

"There, Nan," she said. "There's an opportunity to exercise your talents. There's a piece of cambric. You can make what you like." She sank into her easy-chair and proceeded to do nothing with all her might.

"Mercy!" cried Nan, under her breath. "Have I got to decide right away in a minute?"

Octavia laughed, but said nothing. Nan sat down near the table — not too near. Her face was in the half shadow, but the lamplight fell full on her work and on her hands. Nan had beautiful hands: white and soft and with slim, taper fingers. She threaded a needle skillfully, and took up the cambric. Octavia watched her curiously.

"Tableau!" she observed. "Domesticity."

"Penelope among the suitors," amended Nan; "but she was either weaving or spinning, I believe. Spinning is too primitive."

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"Was n't Penelope a widow?" asked Octavia.

"Generally so considered," answered Nan; "but she was n't."

"Oh," murmured Octavia, looking into the fire and turning a dark red. Nan should have known better than to say it.

"And here are no suitors," Nan added.

"Oh, he will come later," said Octavia; and watched the blood flash into Nan's face and flash out again.

Nan worked in silence for some time. Then, suddenly, she got up and cast her work into Octavia's lap. "There!" she said. "How is that? Can I sew?"

Octavia examined it carefully. "It's beautiful sewing, Nan. I guess you can sew, after all. What is it?"

Nan had wandered to the other end of the room. "Oh, *I* don't know," she called, over her shoulder. "Nothing, I guess. Just sewing — plain sewing."

Octavia regarded her for a moment with something like pity. Then she hardened.

"It's time your young man was coming, Nan," she said quietly, "if he's coming."

She placed no undue emphasis anywhere, but Nan understood.

"*If* he's coming, you meant to say, Octavia. Perhaps he's not. He may have changed his mind. They sometimes do." Again Octavia's face burned. It was not the fault of the fire. "I said I should n't be sure of him until I saw him, and I shan't."

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A maid passed through the hall, silently; hesitated, stopped, and closed the library door, murmuring an apology.

"I *think* my young man has arrived," Nan observed.

She was standing rather in shadow. She could not well wear a veil; veils are not usually worn at home, in the evening. As she stood there, she looked very well, almost beautiful. To a young man without experience her complexion would seem real, and it may have been; and the tiny wrinkles about her eyes, if there were any wrinkles, would not be evident. Even you or I, not being inexperienced, would have had difficulty in seeing them. Whether Jack Catherwood was a young man without experience, I do not know.

Both Nan and Octavia heard the front door open and shut again, and they heard his voice.

Nan pressed her hands to her heart and leaned forward eagerly. "He comes!" she breathed. Octavia chuckled silently. The maid brought in his cards.

Nan started forward; then stopped. "I'll bring him in here, Octavia," she said. "It's much pleasanter."

It was with a shock of mingled surprise, pleasure, and regret that Nan saw him, as he came forward to meet her. He looked as if he lived in evening clothes. Somehow, she had not expected that in Old Harbor, she could not have told why. She took him into the library and presented him to Mrs. Haight, and he settled himself in a chair before the fire. Nan sat where she had sat before he came. Her chair had been care-



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fully placed with due regard to the effect. The light fell upon her hands, but her face was in the shadow. Her sewing lay where Octavia had tossed it, beside her basket. She did not feel quite so sure of the need of it.

Presently, Mrs. Haight rose and excused herself for a moment, and Jack felt vaguely uncomfortable. Nan saw it and laughed.

"Octavia has something to do upstairs," she said. "She'll be back before you go. I don't bite."

Octavia had not gone all the way up the stairs. She went only to the landing, sat down on the step beyond the turn, and listened with all her ears.

She did not hear anything worth taking all that trouble for; only the foolish things that one expects when a man calls on a girl for the first time. Then she did not hear even that; only the sound of low voices, principally Jack's, with Nan's breaking in, now and then. But she knew Nan, and she knew, just from the sound of her voice, that she was interested. And she thought she knew that Nan would be interested in only the one kind of thing, said by a man like Jack Catherwood, and her feelings were such as might be expected, under those circumstances.

Octavia, sitting there on the landing, and hearing nothing but the sound of low voices, was mistaken. Jack was not saying the one kind of thing, but he was telling Nan of the life of the Tilton girls in that very house. Nan was really interested. But Octavia was

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right in one respect. It was not the kind of thing that would be expected of Nan.

“The poor old dears!” Nan broke out, at last. “It makes me ashamed of myself.” You would not have expected that of Nan either, if you had known her as well as Octavia did — *only* as well as Octavia knew her. Nan, herself, would have been surprised, if she had stopped to think of it.

“Yes,” said Jack, “they are old dears, if you get to know them. It is not easy.”

“No,” Nan replied, looking down at the piece of cambric. She had taken it up idly, and idly held it. She made no pretense of sewing. “But one can try.”

Nan was silent for some while. Octavia did not hear the sound of low voices; and she thought — but I do not know what she thought. When Nan had been silent so long that her silence was becoming embarrassing, suddenly she tossed the cambric into Jack’s hands, much as she had tossed it into Octavia’s.

“Do you know what that is?” she asked.

Jack examined it at some length. “No,” he answered, rather puzzled, “except that it seems, to my inexperienced eye, a piece of very fine sewing. Sort of a sampler?” he asked, looking up.

“You might call it a sampler,” Nan returned. “The sewing is fine enough. They taught me to sew at the convent.” She spoke scornfully. “I don’t know what it is, either.” She laughed her low-pitched laugh. She seemed amused at herself. “That was for your benefit.”

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Jack laughed too. "What?" he asked incredulously.

"Oh, it's true," said Nan. "I thought it would make me seem domestic, — and I'm not domestic." Nan was embarrassed; a *very* unexpected thing. She was looking down at her hands. "When you told me about those poor Miss Tiltons, it made me very much ashamed of myself." She looked frankly up at Jack. "I wish you'd forget it."

"Well, I shan't," said Jack. He was smiling as he said it. He rose to go.

"Well," Nan observed confidentially, "anyway, I've confessed, and I feel better."

It is to be doubted if Nan could have found a way that would have advanced her cause more, supposing that she had a cause to advance. She may have thought of that and she may not.

"Here comes Octavia," Nan said, in a voice that ill-disposed persons might have called a whisper.

Jack could hear Octavia Haight coming down the stairs.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE "Susan" had sailed away, at last, for New York first, to load, and then for Rio. She had carried Mike Loughery, presumably for Rio, too. Mike had seemed a very cheerful sailor, of an astonishing ignorance, considering the fact that he had been brought up in a harbor town. But his operations had been confined to the immediate vicinity of the shore, and had been limited to dories, for the most part, and he had never been in a deep-sea vessel before. Indeed, his experiences had never carried him farther upon the ocean than a cat-boat or a small sloop will sail with a keg of beer and a crew consisting of half-drunken young men, each with a flask in his pocket, and a skipper who is no skipper at all. It was a wonder that he had not been drowned on some one of these excursions; it can only be attributed to luck that he had not been. But he had not, and he had seemed to have cheerful anticipation of repeating some of these experiences on the "Susan." Colonel Catherwood, watching him, had enjoined the mate to keep a sharp eye on him while they were in port.

Mrs. Loughery had been there, at the wharf, to see him off, and she was tearful and half laughing. Mike paid but scant attention to his mother; what little he

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gave her was well enough, for Mike was a smooth scamp. Mike's attention had been divided between his mother and Nora, who had slipped down from the Catherwoods', and who had stood apart, tearful, too, but not laughing at all. Mike did his smooth best to comfort her.

Joe Loughery was not there, nor was Clanky Beg, so far as could be seen; but if one had looked into the old deserted building that stood at the head of the old deserted wharf a little farther down the water front, he might have seen somebody that looked very much like Clanky, with a broad smile of triumphant glee fixed upon his face. It was not surprising that Clanky should have been there, nor that he should be gleeful; but it might have been just cause for surprise to have found Eben behind the corner of the same building and to note the light of longing that shone in his eyes.

Eben Joyce had longed, passionately, to be sailing in the "Susan." He would not have been as cheerful, perhaps, as Mike, but he would have been no ignorant sailor. He knew that well; and he knew, too, that it would be foolish for him to go, under the circumstances. He had not gone; but the longing was still there when he had watched the ship pass out of sight behind a point of land and knew that she was over the bar and at sea. He rose to go home, with a tightening at his throat and a mist before his eyes.

Colonel Catherwood had seen the "Susan" disap-

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pear behind that same point of land. He turned to Jack, who was standing beside him.

“Well,” he said, with a long sigh, “that’s the last of her for some months, and the last of Mike, I hope. It’s a load off Mrs. Loughery’s shoulders. It’s a load off your mother’s, too, I think.”

Jack laughed. “I observe that Nora came down to see him off.”

The colonel’s smile put Nora from him. “She’ll get over it,” he said. “But I have nothing to distract my attention, now.”

Jack laughed again. “Distract your attention from what?” he asked.

“From my office work, of course,” answered his father; “and there is nothing to interfere with your sketching, Jackie. Not that there ever was, for that matter. I don’t see how you can do much sketching, though, in this weather, and later. Your fingers will be stiff with the cold.”

“It is n’t bad, yet,” Jack answered slowly. “I may have to give it up, a little later.”

The colonel laid his hand on Jack’s arm. “No, no,” he said quickly. “Don’t give it up, Jack. There must be some room in the house that you could use for a studio. I’ve been thinking — but I’ll think further. Run along, now, and sketch. Got your sketch-book? There’s nothing in the world to do in the office.”

“Thank you, dad,” Jack said, smiling. “I can’t carry the book in my pocket. I’ll just come in and get it.”

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So Jack went off, up the street, to his sketching, where, he himself could not, at the moment, have told; and the colonel watched his athletic young figure for some minutes. Then he turned, smiling, went into his private office, shut the door, and opened his desk. He sorted over some papers, mechanically.

“Oh, what’s the use?” he muttered. “I’ve got to do it.”

Sitting down, he opened the drawer which contained his memoirs, as far as they had gone. He took up the top sheet, read a little; then he drew his pad towards him and began to write.

Meanwhile Eben, anxious only to escape observation, was making his way homeward through back streets. Suddenly he saw Miss Mervin. He would have obeyed his first impulse, which was to run for it, or to slink away; but he saw that it was too late. Abbie had seen him. She must have seen him unless she had been stricken with sudden blindness, for she almost ran into him as she came around a corner. She was very near; so near that he heard her low exclamation perfectly well.

“Oh, Eben!” she cried. “I have — have wanted to see you. I — I wanted to ask you” — She hesitated. “Suppose I walk up to the house with you.”

Eben was apt to be dominated by his manner. It was a habit, bred in the bone, it seemed. His manner did not desert him now. His smile expressed just the right amount of deference, just the right degree of intimacy.

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“That would be nice of you, Abbie,” he said; “very kind, indeed. But shan’t I go with you, to your house, or wherever you are going? Harriet is away, you know.”

It would have been foolish for Abbie to pretend that she did not know it. Eben, whenever she saw him, appeared to be all that could be desired. It was only when she was not with him that she had doubts; doubts of him and of herself. She owed it to her conscience — or did she? She wished, devoutly, that she knew.

“I had forgotten,” she replied; “I did n’t think of it. I will walk up with you, part way, at any rate.”

They walked on together. Abbie was wondering how it would seem to be looking forward to walking with Eben all her life. Somehow, she was not ready for that prospect; she could not make up her mind to it. If there were only somebody that she could ask! She felt the need of advice, which she did not, usually. She despised advice, and she made no bones of saying so. There was William. His advice was good, and he would be a dispassionate adviser. Possibly she could frame her question so as to disguise its true import. William was not quick to see what he was not meant to see. Abbie thought only the more of him for that.

Suddenly she realized that she and Eben were walking on together and saying nothing. That would not do.

“Where have you — Oh, the ‘Susan’ sailed this morning, did n’t she?” she said. “Is that where you’ve been, to see her off?”



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“Yes,” answered Eben, slowly. He was very grave; almost solemn. “I—I wanted to go in her very much, Abbie. I wished, very greatly, that I might sail in her.” It seemed to be a relief to Eben that he had said it.

Abbie looked up at him in surprise. “Why should n’t you have gone, Eben, if you wanted to?” she asked. “The colonel would have been glad, I am sure, to have her take a passenger.”

“Passenger!” Eben cried. “I would n’t have gone as a passenger. If I had gone at all, I should have wished to be one of the crew. I have had experience.”

“In what capacity would you have gone, Eben?” she asked gently. “Supposing that you had gone.”

“In any capacity,” answered Eben, almost passionately. It was painful to hear. “In any capacity, from mate to the greenest hand before the mast. I was ten years at sea.”

“Ten years!” said Abbie, wondering. “Ten years, and you —”

“I have been many thousand miles,” said Eben, simply, smiling mournfully down at her; “many thousand miles. They were the happiest years of my life — and the most trying.”

“Tell me about it.”

They had turned a corner. Eben glanced up, and his manner changed instantly. “Some day, Abbie. Some day I will. Don’t tell anybody,” he added hurriedly; “not *anybody*. Here’s Jack.”

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Abbie nodded, partly to Eben and partly to Jack. "Very well, Eben," she said, low. "I won't."

Jack was with them, his sketch-book under his arm. "Where are you two people going?" he asked, smiling. "Or is it none of my business?"

Abbie smiled back at him. "Eben is going home," she said, "and I met him. Now, I think I will let him go and — but where are you bound for?"

Eben looked grateful for the announcement; he also looked relieved.

"I?" said Jack. "Why, I don't know, yet. Wherever duty calls, or the spirit moves me to go. I had n't decided. Out of the town, somewhere."

"The sight of a yellow cart would decide for you, perhaps?" Abbie asked mischievously.

Jack laughed. "It might," he said. "There is no telling. But let me tell you, in strict confidence, that, for comfort in riding, the yellow cart might be improved upon. I like to walk."

"Well," said Abbie, "just as a protection, I will go a little way with you — two squares."

"Come on. That will be lovely. I wish you would go all the way with me. Won't you come too, Uncle Eben?"

Eben smiled gravely. "Thank you, Jack; I'll go right home, I think." He nodded to them. "Good-by."

"Some day, soon, Eben," Abbie said.

Eben nodded again; he was not noticeably glad.

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Abbie noticed that, and she was surprised to find that she did not care. It only amused her.

So Jack and Abbie went on gayly, laughing and talking. It would have been impossible for those two to walk soberly. Two squares beyond, Abbie called Jack's attention to the yellow cart in the distance. A girl was driving and she was alone. The cart was too far away for them to be able to recognize the girl, but they could make a pretty good guess.

"Aha!" cried Jack. "My carriage! It's of no use to try to escape, and I don't know that I really want to. I will go to meet my fate."

Abbie laughed at him. "Absurd boy!" she said. "Well, go along."

So Jack went along, and Abbie turned in the opposite direction. She may have just happened to turn that way; it may have just happened that the bank was on the next corner. I don't know. It may have just happened that William Ransome was coming out of the bank just as Abbie approached. That probably did just happen. It was great luck, whatever the reason. Abbie particularly wanted to see William. He was turning away, in the direction in which she was going, and he had not seen her. William never did see what was before his eyes.

"William," Abbie called softly.

He heard, and waited for her, smiling. It was only a few steps. Abbie found that William's smile was just the greeting that she had most wanted. She flushed

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prettily, that rose-tint upon porcelain that made her seem almost beautiful. And the flush grew slowly and, when it had reached perfect proportions, there it stayed. All that Abbie was aware of was that she was suddenly content.

“I wanted to see you, William,” she said, a little out of breath. “I — I will go along with you a little way, if you don’t mind.”

William smiled again. “Mind?” he said. “Of course I don’t mind. At least, I don’t object. I may mind, more or less.”

“Is that meant for a pretty speech, William?” she asked. “If it is, I want to thank you. I hear so very few pretty speeches.”

“So that you don’t recognize them when you do hear them?” asked William. “You ought to hear them oftener—there is every reason why you should. I will undertake to supply the demand, although mine are not all that could be desired.” William had not meant to say so much. He was abashed accordingly. “My — my last remark was intended for something of the kind. It was n’t a very successful attempt.”

Abbie dropped a curtsey as well as she could. “Thank you, William,” she said. “I shall hold you to that promise.” She was breathing fast. Her hurry, for half-a-dozen steps, perhaps, might have been sufficient to account for that, although Abbie Mervin was sound in wind and limb. She could run much farther than half-a-dozen steps without breathing hard.

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“Don’t expect too much,” said William, “and I will try not to disappoint you. What —”

“Just let me get my breath,” Abbie interrupted hastily. She spoke fast, as though to gain time. “The ‘Susan’ sailed to-day. Eben was down to see her sail; hiding somewhere, no doubt. He distresses me. He seems —” She remembered in time and stopped.

“I know,” William returned. “We wish that he did n’t — that he was n’t so retiring. I have faith that he’ll get over that, in time. He has improved already.”

“Yes,” said Abbie. She went on to say many things: about Eben and Jack and Nan Hedge, anything rather than the thing that was uppermost in her mind, until William stopped before a door.

“I am sorry, Abbie,” he said, “but I have to go in here. Shall you be walking this afternoon?”

Abbie flushed again. “I think so,” she replied, “about as usual. I am bothered, thinking about a difficulty a girl I know is in. Perhaps you can help me.”

She went on to tell him of her own case, trying to put it so that he would not suspect. It was easy to do that, for William was apt to take things at their face value and to have no suspicion that there was anything withheld. He was so straightforward, himself — the dear!

Abbie made an end of it, at last, rather more out of breath than she had been before.

William laughed gently. “I’m afraid my advice would be no help,” he said. “I don’t know anything

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about love affairs. The girl will have to settle it with her own conscience. But there's one thing, Abbie," he added earnestly, "that I can say. She should be very sure of the man's feeling, not only what it is now, but what it was in the old days that you speak of. A man's feeling is often, even generally, in such cases as I am thinking of, exaggerated by — er — by the ladies concerned — and by their mothers — until the man himself would never know it. I know a good many instances where a man is reported to have been very much in love with a girl — usually reported by her mother — or the same as engaged to her, when such a thing never entered the man's head. Naturally, he says nothing. There is no such thing as the same as engaged. Either they are engaged or they are n't. A man, if he is worth having, knows enough to ask for what he wants."

Abbie seemed to droop a little. "Thank you, William," she said, in a low voice. "That is worth knowing." She turned and went away, slowly, leaving William wondering whether he could have said anything to hurt her.

MacLean saw them. He seemed to see everything that he should n't, MacLean. This tickled him immensely. He spoke of it, that same afternoon, to Doctor Olcott.

"Weelliam Ransome'll be e'en makkin' oop to Abbie Mairvin," he said, with an awkward kick of his leg, and a chuckle. "Is he no, doctor?"

The doctor turned and glared at him, making a deep

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sound in his throat. "How the devil should I know?" he said. "I don't go about prying into other people's affairs."

MacLean was in no wise put out by this rebuff. "I'm thinkin' he'll be," he said. And he muttered something about a pair o' au'd fu's.

Doctor Olcott did not hear MacLean's mutterings. He only rumbled in his throat again.

"An' there'll be Jack Catherwood an' Nan Hedge," continued MacLean. "He'll be —"

The doctor was in a towering rage, MacLean could not see why. "Why should n't he?" he growled, almost purple in the face. "Why the devil should n't he? Damn it, MacLean! Very proper. Very proper, indeed."

He went out and slammed the door; and got into the old buggy and drove the astonished Polar Bear up the street on the run.

MacLean was glad he was gone.

## CHAPTER XVII

ABBIE had had it out with her conscience. She had tried to quiet that unruly member, and had failed signally. So, taking her courage in both hands and trembling a little, she had gone in to see Eben. As she went in, she was conscious of wishing, whimsically, that her conscience was less active. She was even aware that she felt a certain reluctance to do what she had made up her mind that she ought to do, but she did not stop to analyze her feelings. It was her duty to take this step, and — well — one's duty was always more or less disagreeable, anyway. She did not go so far as to put this thought into words; but the idea was there, inchoate. And it is to be feared that she had not considered her duty to herself and to anybody else who might be affected by her decision. She did not allow herself even to think that she had a duty to — to William. That would have been considered indelicate, at least by Harriet. As for Abbie, herself, she would have been glad if — if — and that is as far as she went. Her duty to herself, if there was such a thing, was of no mortal consequence. But her duty to Eben seemed clear. She sighed involuntarily as she went up the familiar steps.

Eben met her as she went in. He saw that she had a high color and a determined look, as though she had



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screwed her courage to the sticking-point, whatever that point was. So far as Abbie's courage was concerned, Eben believed that any point would be a sticking-point. So, although Abbie's look was kind, even inclined to be tender, if determined, Eben was a little frightened.

He did not show any signs of the panic that was overtaking him. "Harriet is not back yet," he said gently, after greeting her. Abbie had not thought of greeting.

"I wanted to see you, Eben," she began. "I am rather glad that Harriet is not back." She spoke without embarrassment. "It will be easier. Come into the library."

Eben's panic was perilously near; but still he showed no sign of it. He led the way into the library, and Abbie seated herself on the faded green sofa, at one end. Although the empty end contained a very plain invitation, Eben sat in his chair by the window. His face would be in shadow, there.

"What is it, Abbie?" he asked quietly.

Abbie had some difficulty in beginning. There did not seem to be any beginning. She knew that she ought to have been hurt by Eben's taking that chair when he might have sat on the sofa beside her. She knew, too, that she was not hurt, but rather relieved. The knowledge did not make her duty any the easier.

"Eben," she said, at last, "you remember the old days, before you went away." She spoke quite firmly and easily, now that she had made a beginning. She had made up her mind to it. "I want you to tell me

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the naked truth. You said, you remember, that you had forgotten nothing — or I think you did. Now tell me, is it true — with all that — that memory implies?”

Eben, as he sat there, dreading, he did not know what — but that is not true; he did know what — Eben, I say, sitting there and dreading it, had an inspiration. He *would* tell the naked truth — part of it. It would, at least, head off the thing which he dreaded.

“Abbie,” he said, “I have not forgotten your goodness to me in those days. I should be glad, more than I can tell, if — if I had done nothing to forfeit all claim to it now. But, Abbie,” he hesitated and seemed overcome with shame, “I — I have. I’m married.” He blurted it out at last. “I’ve repented, in sackcloth and ashes. My — my wife was not — is not, for all I know — everything that could be —”

“Eben!” Abbie cried. “How sorry I am! Oh, how sorry I am! Can’t you — can’t you *do* anything about it?”

Eben laughed shortly. “No,” he replied. “I did everything that I could — everything, before I left her. That was years ago.”

“Oh!” said Abbie, pityingly.

“I suppose that I could have got a divorce easily enough,” continued Eben, with no evidence of feeling. “I thought of it, but — but — it would have led to — to complications. I made up my mind I did n’t want it.”

“You don’t want it now?” Abbie asked.

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“No,” Eben answered decidedly. “I don’t.”

Abbie’s face had lost its look of high determination. She seemed the more attractive for having lost it. In her expression, as she looked at Eben, was nothing but sympathy; sympathy and something of the maternal feeling that is latent in all women. It was less latent in Abbie Mervin than in many women. Eben had got himself into trouble and she longed to get him out of it.

“It’s a shame, Eben,” she cried; “a wicked shame! You deserved a good wife.”

Again Eben laughed shortly. “I got what I deserved, I guess.”

“You did n’t,” said Abbie, hotly. “You shan’t say such things of yourself. Why, I should have been glad —”

“I know, Abbie,” Eben said hastily. “I was a fool.”

Abbie blushed and laughed frankly. “Well, there is no reason why I should n’t say it, now. I *should* have been glad, then, Eben, and I think that you would have been.”

“I should have been, Abbie,” said Eben, solemnly and very gently. “I said that I was a fool.”

“You were not a fool, Eben,” returned Abbie, “but we were both very young.” She was looking out of the window at the row of spruces, apparently; but she was not seeing them. The branches were dropping their loads of snow, under the warm sun. “That was a good many years ago,” she said, at last, thoughtfully, as if to herself.

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“That was a good many years ago,” assented Eben. “There has been time for a good many things to happen. They have happened,” he added, with another of his short laughs. Abbie did not like to hear them, for there was no mirth in them.

“Does Harriet know, Eben?” she asked. “Have you told her?”

Eben shook his head. “Oh, no, Abbie,” he said; “and you must n’t tell her. You must n’t tell anybody. I have told you more than I have told anybody else yet. Some time when I can make up my mind to do it, I will tell them. Not yet, Abbie, please; not yet.”

“Very well, Eben,” said Abbie, gently. “I won’t. You may rely upon it.”

Miss Mervin went down the steps, a few minutes later, her heart singing. Eben had seemed relieved at her going. That made her happier still. The world seemed very bright to her; a brighter and pleasanter place than it had seemed a half hour before. She was absurdly happy. When she came to think of it, she was a little ashamed that she was so happy. There were a plenty of people who were not and — and there did not seem to be any sufficient reason for her happiness. She considered the matter, briefly.

“Well, I don’t care,” she said, “I am.”

She said it to herself, quite recklessly. No doubt she felt, somehow, that it was ungenerous in her to be in that exalted state when there was so much unhappiness in the world. But happiness was a duty that she

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owed to others; a duty in which Miss Mervin seldom failed; a duty which was so easy, now, that she had some doubts of its being a duty at all. She considered this, too, briefly. She was just coming to a conclusion upon the matter of duties in general and, in particular, upon the question of her own happiness as a duty, when she saw the Polar Bear coming down the street.

The Polar Bear was coming at a most unusual rate of speed, for him; with head and tail up and wisps of his long white fur sticking out in every direction, he seemed a very reckless and abandoned animal. Although the good doctor held the reins, it was nothing but excess of happiness that impelled the Polar Bear to such reckless speed. The doctor would never have asked it of him; he would never have driven him with such abandon. Was he not coming from Mrs. Houlton's? And had not the doctor confided to Sammy, with many superfluous swear words, the fact that his suit had been successful? "Hola! We are young again, the doctor and I. Who dares to call me a ramshackle skate, now?"

Doctor Olcott sat in the sleigh, a smile of mingled surprise and delight upon his ruddy face. When he caught sight of Miss Mervin, staring at him from the sidewalk, he reined in his fiery steed.

"Whoa, Sammy! Whoa, there! Damn it, I want to speak to Abbie Mervin. Don't you understand, Sammy?"

Apparently, Sammy did understand, for he was al-

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ready drawing in to the curb. Having drawn up exactly opposite the point where Abbie stood, Sammy looked around to assure himself that the doctor was attending to his part of the business.

“Is it a case of life and death, doctor?” Abbie asked, smiling. She knew very well that it was not.

The doctor looked admiringly at Sammy. “Is n’t it marvelous?” he said. “I did n’t suppose he had it in him. He’s lost twenty years in the last fifteen minutes. The damned old skate!” he added lovingly.

Sammy looked around, reproachfully, at that, as if to say, “Just wait! Wait until you’re ready to start again! Then I’ll show you who’s an old skate.”

Abbie laughed. “I would n’t call him names, doctor. He does n’t like it.”

The doctor rumbled a little at that. “Been in to Harriet’s?” he asked. “Did n’t know she ’d got back.”

“She has n’t.” She blushed at the question. She could have choked herself for doing it. “Where are you coming from? It’s early for you to be through your rounds, is n’t it, at this season?”

“Not through,” growled the doctor. He had not noticed the blush. “Not through, by a long shot. Have n’t begun yet. Been to see Mrs. Houlton.” Doctor Olcott smiled sheepishly. “Rebellious patient. But I’ll get her where I want her. She’ll *have* to do as I say. I’d like to see her refuse. I’ve — but you’ll hear it soon enough.”

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“May I congratulate you, doctor, — and Mrs. Houlton, too?” Abbie asked.

“For what, Abbie?” challenged the doctor. “Because I’m going to get her where she can’t flout me? Because she’ll have to do what I tell her? Oh, well,” seeing Abbie’s smile broaden, “perhaps you may. But it’s rather new to me yet, Abbie. I have n’t had time to get used to it.”

“You deserve happiness, if any man ever did,” returned Abbie. “I wish you as much as you deserve.”

“Thank you, Abbie, thank you,” said Doctor Olcott. “I don’t know whether an old fellow like me can make a woman happy. That has been bothering me in the last few minutes. I’ll try. I’ll try. But I wanted to see you to ask you to go in to see Hitty Tilton. She worries me a little. Got a cold which she can’t seem to throw off. It’s nothing to be worried about, but Hitty’s an old woman, Abbie. Go in to see them both, will you?”

“Of course I will. I’ll go this afternoon.”

“Knew you would,” growled the doctor. “Knew you would. Good-by. Get along, Sammy.”

Sammy, who had been waiting for this chance, whirled the doctor off in a cloud of flying snow. The doctor, in his surprise, let out a shout, like the great overgrown boy that he was. It is a pity that there are not more overgrown boys in the world. They are stimulating to others as well as to their Sammys.

Abbie watched the cloud of snow raised by Sammy’s

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flying hoofs and by the warped runners of the doctor's old sleigh; watched it until it disappeared around a corner. Then she turned and rambled on. Rambled is the word. She seemed to be going nowhere in particular and, in consequence, she soon found herself in the neighborhood of the bank. And she looked up, in — no, not in surprise; she was not surprised that she should be in that neighborhood. It was the most natural thing in the world. She was absorbed in her happiness and — and William — and, having got that far in her thoughts, she was very much ashamed. She had a high color and her mouth was set firmly as she turned about, resolutely, and set off, as straight as she could go, for the Tiltons'.

But she saw William. They had been accustomed to take a walk together in the late afternoon. It was a practice of not very long standing, and had grown fast, as such practices do. At first, it was purely accidental. They had happened to meet, after William's day's work at the bank was done, and he, having nothing in particular to do, had walked with her. Abbie had been glad enough of his company. In spite of the fact that she had known him all her life, she was just beginning to find out how much of interest there was in his life, which his quiet manner had not led her to suspect, before — his manner and his long devotion to Harriet. For ten years or more, he had as much as been labeled "Taken." Now she had found that it was time for the label to be removed; he had as much as said



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so. She was discovering him afresh; something that Harriet would not have done — could not have done — in a lifetime of intimacy.

Then the meetings had been by a sort of subconscious design, perhaps, on the part of each of them. If they failed to meet and walk together, either because of some unforeseen engagement of Abbie's or because the bank claimed William longer than usual, they were both restless and dissatisfied for the rest of the day. William, when he did get out, at last, was apt to moon about in a morose state until supper-time, not quite knowing what was the matter with him. It is to be supposed that Abbie was similarly affected, for she would generally manage to see him on his way down town the next morning and give or receive an explanation, whichever the case required.

There was no pretense of accident in their meetings now. William found Abbie walking to and fro on their corner and he smiled contentedly. Abbie waited for him to come up.

"Abbie," he said, without other greeting, "let's walk out on the old Boston road. It's quiet there."

She could not help laughing. "As if it were not quiet anywhere in Old Harbor! And it's almost dark now. All right, William," she added hastily, seeing symptoms of distress on William's part, "I'll go, with pleasure. I have not the least objection in the world. I only wanted to call your attention to the obvious."

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William laughed too. "No doubt I need it," said he. "I know my failings, some of them. But there 's always some light, with snow on the ground — as much as we shall need, and the snow's not deep. If we find it hard walking, we can come back."

"Calling my attention to the obvious, too, William?" asked Abbie.

They both laughed again, contentedly, and walked on in silence. They had no need to say anything.

It was dusk when Abbie spoke again. The street lamps were just being lighted, and they met the belated lamplighter hurrying about with his ladder on his shoulder.

"William," she asked, apropos of nothing in particular except her thoughts and of William's, as it chanced, "are you writing anything now?"

"It is safe to assume," answered William, "that I am always writing something; or I am trying to. It is, like all bad habits, almost impossible to shake off."

Abbie gave a little cry. "But, William," she said, "surely you are not trying to shake it off!"

"No," replied William, quietly, "I am not trying very hard. But everything that I do falls so far short of my wish — of my intention when I planned it — that I am tempted. I shan't, Abbie. The habit has me fast."

"I am glad," she said. "It would be simply wicked even to think of giving it up. As to your finished stories falling short of your desire, — that is a hopeful

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sign, is n't it? When a man's aim is no higher than his performance, his condition is pretty nearly hopeless. And," she added, with a little laugh, "I have no fault to find with the finished product."

"Thank you, Abbie," said William.

"I wonder that you have never tried to get them published," she continued. "Why have n't you?"

"Too bashful, Abbie; I could n't bear the disappointment of having my things returned."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Abbie.

She did not pursue the subject further. William seemed curiously reluctant to talk about his writing. She would have liked to ask him what he was doing now, but she knew very well that he would only put her off with an evasive answer, and she did not want to risk the evasion. She wished that she bore such a relation to William that he would feel like talking freely; that she had the right to ask — and, at the thought, she found herself blushing furiously in the darkness. But William could not see.

"William," she said softly.

William turned toward her, with a start. "What is it, Abbie?" he asked.

Abbie laughed. "Thinking about your new story, whatever it is?"

"Yes, I was," he confessed. "I beg your pardon. But you gave me a start."

"Oh, you have my permission to think about your stories as much as you like when you are with me,"

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she said. "I shall not be offended. I'm going to give you some material, which you are at liberty to use, properly disguised."

"It would be well disguised," said William, laughing, "if I used it. You would never recognize it. What is it?"

"You remember, William," she said, "that you gave me some advice, the other day, for the guidance of a girl that I know?" William assented. "Well, that girl — girl by courtesy — was I."

"I knew that, of course, Abbie," said he, gently. "Did your conscience impel you?"

"It did. I went to see him this morning." She had taken William's arm. It was quite dark now, except for the faint light from the sky and the snow. They had left the dimly lighted streets behind them and were at the Old Green. They were even able to see the little old house with the sagging roof and the great chimney in the middle of it.

"Oh," said William; "and Eben — what did he say?"

There was a strange absence of personal interest on William's part. At least, it seemed strange to Abbie. If it were his case, now, and she were listening, waiting to know whether some other woman was to have him or not — well, she would not be so uninterested; her heart would be in her throat. The evening had suddenly grown chill. There was nothing attractive in the dim Old Green lying there under the stars; nothing

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beautiful in the old post-road that stretched away into the darkness; nothing lovely in the ghostlike outlines of the old house with its sagging roof and its single lighted window. The world was a cold place, in which it was always winter.

"Of course you knew that it was Eben," she said. "Perhaps you know what he said, too." She spoke with some bitterness.

William laughed; looked at her and laughed. "How absurd, Abbie!" he said. "Do you want me to guess?"

"No," she replied. "I will save you the trouble. Eben would not have me. He did n't let me get to the point of asking him, but he made it clear. Eben is a gentleman —"

"Of course he is," William interrupted impatiently.

"Of course he is," Abbie agreed. "There was a reason why it was impossible. He told me the reason, but I promised not to tell."

"Was Eben's reason a good one?" asked William. He did not seem to care about knowing what the reason was. To be sure, Abbie had said that she had promised; but — but if he had urged her — she was prepared to tell him. In her secret heart, she knew it. He did not urge.

"It was a good one," answered Abbie; "excellent. It was the best of reasons." And there she left it. William might draw what inference he pleased. If he inferred that Eben did not care for her, why, he might not be far wrong. "Let's turn around. I find it colder

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than I thought it would be. When I came out of the Joyces' this morning," she added irrelevantly, it seemed — what could that have to do with it's being cold? — "I was overjoyed. I had satisfied my conscience — and — and Eben had done what I hoped he would, I found."

William laughed again. "Are n't you overjoyed now?" asked William. But he did not speak softly, as he might have done if — if —

"No," she said, "I am not. I must turn around here, William."

William was puzzled. "Why, Abbie, what's got into you? Just as we've got to the beginning of our walk! There's light enough."

"Well, there's light enough if this is all the light you want. I like more light. And the cold's got into me, I guess."

William sighed, but he turned around obediently. He tried to talk; but Abbie answered him in monosyllables or not at all. They were walking faster than when they came. He gave up trying, soon, and they walked on in silence.

Abbie was busied with her own thoughts. They were not altogether pleasant ones. She had realized, with a shock, what was the reason of the sudden change in her feelings and why she had been so absurdly happy that morning. She knew now, — she could not disguise it, — that she had given William an opportunity, a great opportunity, and he had not only failed to avail

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himself of it, but he did not even know that it had been given. No man, she thought bitterly, could fail to be aware of a chance like that, if he wanted it. She may have been wrong in that. William Ransome was William Ransome. And she had the feeling that she had been disloyal to Harriet. The fact that William's attitude towards Harriet was pretty well understood, at least, by William and by her, had nothing to do with the matter. His attitude was beginning to be understood by Harriet herself. Poor Harriet!

At her own gate, Abbie bade William good-night, and would have left him rather abruptly; but he was solicitous.

"I hope you have n't caught cold, Abbie," he said anxiously. "I don't see how you could have, but I don't see how I can account for it in any other way."

"You don't have to account for it, William," Abbie replied indifferently. "Not that I know what 'it' is." She repented instantly. "It's nothing, William. I've had rather a trying day, I suppose. Being refused, virtually refused, by" — she had almost said two men, but she caught herself in time — "by Eben is enough, one would think."

"I am very sorry," said William, slowly, "that you should have thought you had to go through with such an experience. But — but I gathered that you did not regret the result. You would hardly have told me of it, if you did."

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Abbie smiled a very little. "No, no, I don't regret it. I am glad, I think. Good-night, William."

"We shall have our walk, to-morrow?" asked William, still somewhat anxiously.

Abbie sighed. "Oh, I suppose so," she answered, turning away. "Good-night."

"Good-night, Abbie," said William. He watched her as she went slowly up the walk. Then he turned away, too, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Well," he remarked to himself and to the night in general, "I don't understand 'em."

There's many another man, William, has said the same thing.



## CHAPTER XVIII

WILLIAM RANSOME did not find that he understood 'em any better as the winter went on, although he made many an honest effort to that end. But he had reached the stage of "taking notice." Abbie Mervin was straightforward and truthful, both in word and in act; but she was a woman, and she backed and filled, as the best of women will, just enough to keep William guessing. And William kept guessing, in spite of himself, and found it more and more difficult to write. That bothered him, too. He needed a free mind for that, and a free mind was just what he could not have, under the circumstances.

If it had been the case of another man, now, William would have been able to recognize the symptoms right away. If, for instance, it had been Jack Catherwood who was being led on by Nan Hedge, William would have watched the pretty game with amusement. Indeed, he did watch that game with amusement; an amusement which was shared, apparently, by both of the players and by all their friends. It would be more truthful, perhaps, to say that all of Jack's friends were amused, for it was by no means certain that Nan had any. But Nan plied all her arts transparently, and Jack knew them for arts and smiled at them. The fact

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that they were transparent was no small part of their attractiveness; which, it is to be supposed, Nan knew very well.

At any rate, however that may be, Nan devoted herself, heart and soul, to the task. Jack, who was young enough to like to play the game for the game's sake, devoted himself to it with equal ardor, so far as any one could see. It was to be hoped that Nan was not practicing other arts that were not transparent at all. Perhaps Nan was not practicing arts; it is conceivable that she was merely following her impulses as truly as Abbie was. But all that any one in Old Harbor knew of her history and antecedents was not in favor of that hypothesis. It may be objected that nobody in Old Harbor knew anything of Nan's history. That fact would not have affected their opinion. It never did, in any case that I ever heard of.

Mrs. Catherwood, at least, was not inclined to take the charitable view. Knowing that Jack went to see Nan regularly now, and twice a week at that, — Jack made no secret of it, — she became more and more worried. It was of no use to remonstrate with Jack; he only laughed at her fears, which were but very thinly veiled. The colonel was nearly as bad. She had spoken to him about it several times, without result. She tried it again, one night toward the end of February. They had gone upstairs, after waiting for Jack. Jack had not been late; he never was late. One would have thought that Mrs. Catherwood could just as well

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have chosen another time for her communication. But, curiously enough, she was apt to choose bedtime for the discussion of any matter that worried her, unconscious, apparently, that she could not have chosen a worse time. If the matter in question worried the colonel, he might not be able to sleep. A man does not want to have to think of things that may worry him, when he is about to go to bed. He wants to go to sleep; to have his mind sponged clean of everything that may, by any chance, interfere with his accomplishment of that desired end as quickly as possible. It will be time enough to consider such things in the morning, when his brain is fresh and cleared for action. But that is just the trouble. The thing that gives his wife so much concern at night may not trouble her spirit at all in the morning. She must get it off her mind while it worries her.

"Frank," began Mrs. Catherwood, "I wish that Jack did n't go to that Hedge girl's so often."

The colonel did very little worrying; none at all about Jack. He did not mind her speaking of it.

"Well, Polly, dear," he replied, "if it bothers you, I wish he did n't." He removed his necktie in his usual leisurely fashion, folded it carefully, and laid it on his bureau.

"It does bother me," she said. "You know," she added, after a pause, during which the colonel had said nothing at all, "she sent him a perfectly absurd valentine a few days ago. At least, I am sure she sent it."

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"Why are you sure?" the colonel asked.

"There is no one else who would get anything so expensive for a valentine. Of course it was absolutely useless."

The colonel laughed. "Harmless play," he remarked serenely. "I don't know of anybody who is better able to spend money for expensive and useless things than that Hedge girl."

"Well," said Mrs. Catherwood, smiling and sighing at once, "it may be harmless, but it does n't strike me so."

"Polly, dear," observed the colonel, "it occurs to me to ask whether you know Miss Nan Hedge."

"No, I don't," she confessed. "Do you?"

The colonel laughed again. "No," he said. "I have to acknowledge that I have neglected what may appear to be an obvious duty towards my prospective daughter-in-law."

"Don't make a joke of it, Frank, It is n't a joke."

"Well, I won't. But, Polly, don't you think that you might, at least, scrape up a little personal acquaintance with her before you condemn her utterly?"

"Frank, *why* do you take sides with her? Has she bewitched you, too?"

The corners of the colonel's mouth were twitching. "No, she has not. I would not be worth her while, of course," he answered gently. "And I am not taking sides with her. But fairness, plain fairness, seems to require that you should know her before passing judg-

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ment on her. You are undermining our free institutions, Polly, if you don't. A man is entitled to be heard in his own defense, and shall a woman have less? Never!" The colonel waved a sock. "She is even entitled, by one of the fundamentals of our free institutions, to a trial by a jury of her peers; which, in this case, would necessarily consist of twelve women. But," he continued reflectively, "if I were she, I should pray to be delivered from the judgment of twelve women. I am not talking for publication," he added hastily.

Mrs. Catherwood laughed. "I should think not. I don't know what the women would do to you."

"Tarred and feathered and carried in a cart," the colonel remarked.

"That would n't be a circumstance to it," said Mrs. Catherwood. "I should probably have to join them, for the sake of my principles. You can be very absurd, Frank. But I'll go and call on Nan Hedge within a few days, although that is just what she wants, likely enough. It will seem like stamping the affair with my approval. But I'll go."

"If you are of the same opinion still," said the colonel, "I may have a scheme that will relieve your mind. My scheme is not worked out yet, or I would unfold it to you."

## CHAPTER XIX

NAN HEDGE was driving in a very smart Russian sledge. She was driving at a breakneck speed, to the great discomfort and surprise of her horse, and she was alone, to MacLean's great surprise, apparently. He stood in his door, as she passed; not an unusual place for him, with business as slack as it was.

"Ho, ho," he cried softly, to himself. "She canna find him. She'll be in an ill temper, na doubt."

Nan was in an ill temper, if one could judge by the little that could be seen of the face under her veil. But she did not stop for MacLean; she did not stop for anything. If she was looking for him, whoever "he" was, it was dollars to buttons that she would find him before she got through. Nan was not easily turned aside from her purpose, and it was apparent to the most casual observer that she had a purpose. She turned into the road that led to the old shipyard, still at the same reckless speed. There was no speed limit yet placed upon horses in Old Harbor; indeed, there was no speed limit on anything, for motor-cars had not penetrated its seclusion. She came in sight of the shipyard and pulled the wheezing horse to a walk, while she carefully scanned its whiteness. The old scaffolding loomed more skeleton-like than ever.

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“Not there,” she murmured. “Well, get up!” She emphasized the command with a swish of the whip.

The horse was startled, as any well-brought-up horse would have been. He jumped, snapping Nan hard against the back of the sledge, and began to run.

Nan was not frightened. “Oh, no, you don’t,” she said. “Oh, no.” She got a good hold of the reins, and she sawed him down to a trot. “There! Durn you!”

She turned him into a cross-road and came out at the Old Green; then went on, past Mrs. Loughery’s, on the old stage-road. Suddenly she pulled the horse up short and gave a low laugh of satisfaction. It was a pleasant laugh to hear. I should have been glad, I am sure, to hear it and to know that it was for me. There is no reason to think that the young man who was seated on a big stone on the sunny side of the wall was any less glad than I should have been. It was a very ancient stone wall, overgrown with grass to its very top, its chinks all filled with sods that had, no doubt, been formed from the dust of more than two hundred years. For it was on the line of the old stages; and two express stages a day, each way, can raise a deal of dust, even from the hard back of that old road. There was snow on the old wall, now, in patches, and the stones peeped through, here and there. The young man had been sketching, and the wall made a good foreground. He looked up at the sudden stopping of the bells and at that low laugh.

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“Well, Jack!” Nan said. She was leaning forward in the sledge and smiling. “Well, Jack,” she said again.

“Why, Nan!” he exclaimed. “Just wait until I get my things together.” He began to gather up his things and stuff them into his pockets.

“I’ve been all over the township, looking for you, Jack,” said Nan, then. “I’ve no doubt that I’ve afforded amusement enough for all the MacLeans in the country. But I don’t care if I have. Do you?” she added; and she looked away, as if embarrassed. Nan was not embarrassed — not in the least, but she knew that she ought to seem so.

Jack laughed. “I don’t if you don’t, Nan,” he answered. She threw back the robe and made room for him beside her. Jack noticed the steaming horse. “What’s the matter with your horse?”

Nan laughed shortly. “Oh, he started to run,” she said, “but he changed his mind. Naturally, he’s rather heated.”

“Run away with you, Nan?” asked Jack, concerned. As may be guessed, his concern pleased her mightily.

“That seemed to be his idea,” she replied. “I’ll let him walk, going back, until he’s cooled off. It won’t hurt him.”

“Yes,” said Jack, “let him walk, by all means. I would n’t have any harm come to him.”

They both laughed at Jack’s speech, although it is difficult to see what there was in it to laugh at. The



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sledge was turned around carefully, — Nan did not wish to break her harness or her shafts, just then, — and the horse, still steaming, began to walk slowly toward town. As they went, they talked in low voices, and smiled and joked about things that were of no manner of interest in the world, even to each other. They might as well have said that it was a beautiful day, over and over. Nobody would have disputed it. Nobody would have disputed it if they had said that it was cold and raw and chilly and generally miserable — which it was not. What they said was not important, but the fact that they were saying it to each other was important; so was their manner of saying it. At last, Nan spoke of the sketching and asked, jokingly, when Jack meant to begin his study in Paris.

Jack did not joke. "I wish I could, Nan," he said, sighing. "I wish I could. But I can't; at least, not yet." He smiled rather wistfully. "Did you mean to insinuate that I need the study — that my sketches showed it? I flattered myself that they were rather good."

"I meant," Nan replied, "as you know, that they are so good that it seems a pity you should n't go as far as you can."

Jack flushed. "Thank you, Nan."

Nan was leaning out, looking down at the runner. "I don't want you to go away to Paris, Jack," she cried softly.

"Thank you for that, too, Nan," said Jack.

Nan looked up quickly and laughed. After that

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they said little, and Jack wanted to get out at a certain corner, for he said that he had to go to the office.

“A lot of need there is for you to be at the office!” Nan cried impatiently. “But I’ll leave you at your corner and go in to see Miss Hitty and Miss Susie. Shall I give them your love?” As Nan asked the question, there was a mischievous twinkle in the eyes behind the veil, but her lips did not smile.

Jack smiled, though. “If you think it best, Nan,” he said.

The Tilton girls occupied two spacious rooms in another old square house. Every house in Old Harbor that made any pretensions to dignity was square, and this one, in addition, was built of old English bricks. To be sure, the Tiltons had to go up two flights of stairs before getting to their rooms, and going upstairs was not so easy for them as it had been; but the stairs were easy and wide, and had a fine rail of mahogany, well polished by much use. After all, there was some advantage in having rooms at the top of the house. They were low-ceiled, of course, as all rooms of their period were, above the second floor; but their situation, in the front of the house, with no stairs going up from the hall, gave them an atmosphere of privacy and seclusion which the two old ladies valued highly.

The Tilton girls were sitting at the windows of one of their rooms. To be exact, it was Miss Susie’s room; but the bed and the bureau and the washstand were tucked out of sight behind screens toward the back.

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It was a somewhat difficult matter to tuck all that furniture out of sight, for the pieces were not small. The bed, indeed, utterly refused to be tucked, for it was an ancient and massive four-poster, with carved posts and a canopy. And it looked out from behind its futile screens in fine scorn. But the room was not small, either, and the rest of the bedroom furniture was not obtrusive. There was enough, of a different sort, in front of it to distract the eye and forbid its seeing too far; for the front of the room was furnished as a parlor or a sitting-room or a sewing-room, according to the taste and preference of the observer.

There were sewing-tables and a writing-table and a centre-table and a fine old chess-table and a large book-case filled with books and other tables, wherever room could be found for them, against the wall; indeed, there were tables where one would think it impossible to find room. They supplemented the screens, in their office of screening, most excellently; but, with the chairs, they filled the room so completely that navigation among the different pieces of furniture was more than a little difficult. Miss Susie, with her near-sighted eyes, and her glasses that were forever falling off and being replaced, was continually upsetting some one of the more delicate pieces and bruising herself against those which refused to give way before her. She was safest, and the furniture was safest, when she was sitting still. Therefore, she sat still except when it was absolutely necessary for her to move about.

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She was sitting still now, her glasses stuck on her nose at a precarious angle, darning her stockings. Miss Susie did not need to darn, now, but darning had become a habit that she found it impossible to get out of; and she put in most beautiful and artistic darns, so that it would have seemed a pity to give up a thing that she did so well. Miss Hitty was not darning her stockings. She found no trouble in getting rid of a habit which she hated. Miss Hitty was doing nothing at all, apparently, except to look out of her window. She read a little, occasionally, in some one of the books from the big bookcase, but she was not fond of reading. The habit that Miss Hitty could not easily shake off was that of managing; nearly all her life she had had to manage to make almost nothing go, at least, a little way — to stretch it very thin. She could not quite get rid of this habit. That is why she was looking out of the window, although the connection between the two may not be obvious.

“There’s Nan Hedge,” said Miss Hitty, without moving anything more than her lips. “She seems to be coming here.”

Miss Susie’s glasses immediately fell off. “Oh, sister, where?” she asked eagerly. She fumbled for the glasses, and put them on again at a more precarious angle than before. She always did that when she was the least bit excited. Miss Susie was easily excited. She had to hold the glasses in place while she looked. “That must be her new Russian sledge that she told us about.”

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Miss Hitty made no audible reply.

"I wonder, sister," said Miss Susie again, "if it can be. It does n't look at all like the pictures — throwing the children to the wolves, you know." Miss Susie shuddered. "I never could understand their doing a thing like that — even peasants, although peasants must have a low order of intelligence. It is in one of our books. I forget which one."

"You must n't believe all that you read, Susie," replied Miss Hitty, dismissing the subject. "There 's Nan coming in now."

"Oh, sister!" cried Miss Susie. "Help me to put away this darning. I don't like to have anybody find me with — with stockings."

"It 's better than to find you without stockings," said Miss Hitty.

Miss Susie was fumbling again — fumbling with a drawer of the sewing-table.

"Oh, *sister!*" Miss Susie blushed faintly. She had got the drawer of the sewing-table open, and she hastily crammed the stockings into it so that it would not shut. Miss Susie did not notice that. Her glasses had fallen off again, of course.

She hurried out into the hall, nearly upsetting a low table, and bumping into another one that she could not upset.

"Oh dear!" she murmured. "I know I shall be black and blue. But I am black and blue now, from head to foot."

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Miss Hitty smiled slightly, but made no remark. Miss Susie, who was leaning over the baluster rail, heard the front door open and shut again.

“Nan!” she called softly. “Come right up, dear, will you?”

“Yes, Miss Susie,” Nan answered. “I’m coming.” And she ran up the two flights. I am not sure that she did not begin the second flight two steps at a time.

Miss Susie was not sure, either. “Oh, Nan,” she said, “you did n’t come up two steps at once!”

Nan laughed. “Would it shock you terribly?”

Miss Susie sighed. “It would be very nice to be able to do that,” she said. “I don’t know whether I should have the — the courage to do it; but I would like to have the energy.”

Nan laughed again and kissed her on the cheek. “Is Miss Hitty in, too?” she asked.

“Yes, she’s in,” Miss Hitty’s voice called, with a touch of asperity. The asperity meant nothing; nothing at all, except that Miss Hitty was old and felt it and was oppressed by her bodily ills. “Come in here, Nancy Hedge, where I can see you.”

Nan came in, accordingly, with Miss Susie, whom she steered around tables and chairs to her seat. Then she went to Miss Hitty and kissed her on both cheeks. Miss Susie had set her glasses on, temporarily, and saw it. The glasses fell off at once and she gasped at the sight.

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Nan laughed. "You don't mind, do you, Miss Hitty?"

Miss Hitty smiled grimly. "No," she said, "I don't mind. It would n't make any difference if I did. You'll always have your way, Nancy, wherever you go."

"To tell the strict truth," continued Nan, "you rather liked it."

Miss Hitty's lips were pressed together in a grimmer way than ever. "To tell the strict truth," she replied, "I rather liked it." There was a hint of affection in her eyes as she looked at Nan. "Do you find many, Nancy, that don't like it?"

"Well," said Nan, "I have n't tried them all."

Miss Hitty laughed, to Miss Susie's scandalized surprise.

From all of which it appeared that Nan had tried to cultivate the acquaintance of the Tilttons with some measure of success. She usually did succeed in anything that was of sufficient interest to induce her to put her heart into it. Whether she was playing a part or not, of course I do not know. Nan was an excellent actress.

The half-open drawer of the sewing-table caught her eye, with its bunch of stockings caught in it. Miss Hitty saw.

"Pull them out, Nancy," she said maliciously. "Susie darns very well."

"Oh, sister, no!" cried Miss Susie, half starting up.

Miss Hitty purposely misunderstood. "Yes, you do, Susie. Pull them out, Nancy."

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Nan glanced at Miss Susie's distressed face. "Not if Miss Susie does n't want me to. But I should like to see them."

Miss Susie was the color of a rose. "Take them, if you like, Nan, dear," she said. "I — I really have no objection — if — if you will pardon me liberty." She got redder than ever.

So Nan drew forth the stockings and admired the beautiful work. Then Miss Susie got up.

"If I can get around without knocking over the things, I'll make some tea," she said. "You can wait, Nan?"

"Oh, don't — now," cried Nan. "I want to take you a little way in my sledge, first — one at a time. Then we'll have our tea. I'll make it myself. Which of you will go first?"

Miss Susie's face was positively beaming with happiness. "Oh," she cried softly, "how perfectly lovely! I've never been in a Russian sledge. Tell me, Nan, is it a real Russian sledge? Because it is n't exactly like a picture we have — peasants throwing their children to the wolves, I think it was called. The sledge was pursued by a herd of wolves, you know. There are three horses, and they are just flying. It is rather awful."

Nan laughed. "I should think so," she said. "Horrid! I can't imagine it. Very likely the wolves would have preferred one of the horses. My sledge was made in New York, but they call it Russian. Now, which of you will go first?"



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"Take Hitty first," said Miss Susie.

Miss Hitty had been coughing a little, now and then; a gentle little cough, which she tried not to make evident. But it was evident.

"No," she said decidedly. "Take Susie. I am not sure that I ought to go at all."

Nan protested that the sunshine was bright and warm. It could not hurt her, surely, to go just a little way.

"Well, then," said Miss Hitty, with another of her grim smiles, "I'll go when Susie gets back. I don't mean to die but once."

So Miss Susie got ready and fluttered out to the sledge, and Nan drove her out upon the old pike a little way, and then home. And Miss Hitty was ready and waiting, and Nan wrapped her well in the robe and she settled back with a sigh of content. Nan drove her down the street on which were the Catherwoods' and the Joyces' and the old Tilton place. Miss Hitty's gaze lingered on the old place.

"I wish, Miss Hitty," said Nan, impulsively, "that you and Miss Susie would come back here and live with me."

Miss Hitty looked at her in amazement, while two tears slowly gathered and rolled down the withered cheeks.

"Thank you, Nancy, dear," she said. It was the first time she had ever called Nan "dear." "Thank you. It would be nice. But it is n't best." She spoke

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more gently than was her habit, and there was no touch of asperity in her voice.

“I’ll get you yet,” Nan replied almost gayly. “You remember, you said that I always get my own way.”

“Not in this; but it is kind in you to think of it.”

So Nan said no more about it. We may suppose that she was not sorry that Miss Joyce and Mrs. Catherwood saw Miss Hitty driving with her. They were surprised to the degree that they almost forgot to bow.

The drive was a very short one, for Nan would run no risks. At Miss Hitty’s door, she helped her out.

“Have you enjoyed it?” she asked. “You don’t think it has hurt you, do you?”

“My dear,” answered Miss Hitty, “I don’t know whether it has hurt me or not. And I don’t care. I have enjoyed it. Now, come in and have some tea. I guess Susie’s got it all ready.”

Nan went.

If only MacLean had seen them! It would have been a proper bit of gossip.

## CHAPTER XX

CONTRARY to Abbie Mervin's expectations, — although, to tell the truth, she thought very little about it, — Eben did not renew his confidence. Perhaps, being full of her own affairs, in which Eben had no part, she gave him no chance to do so. Perhaps, too, Eben saw exactly how it was with her. It was not that she was unwilling, but she simply did not think of it. Eben knew very well why. He was no fool. He would never force confidences upon her; he would, rather, shrink from them at all. So it happened that, as the winter went on, he became more and more lonely and drew more and more into himself. One would think that would be difficult. It certainly was hard for Eben. It seemed to be impossible to know him well. William had tried to renew their old friendship; but their friendship had never been very close, for five years' difference in age makes a close friendship very unlikely when either is under twenty. His attempt had not been a success, and he had given it up. Others had tried, and had given it up. Eben's manner, because of its very perfectness, had been an impassable wall. They could not get over it, and they could not see what lay on the other side.

The only man who could be called a friend of Eben's was Heywood, Colonel Catherwood's old deaf clerk.

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They took long walks together, occasionally, in silence and tranquillity. Heywood would say something, in the voice which, in itself, was restful in its slowness as well as in its tones, and Eben would nod and smile; or Eben would point at something, and Heywood would nod, in his turn, or make a reply in the same low, even voice, characteristic of the very deaf. That constituted their conversation. It was always about unimportant things, unexciting things, such as a pine tree loaded with snow, or the track of a rabbit or a squirrel or a fox, or a quiet landscape with a wide prospect, or the light of the setting sun upon the ice in the harbor. Those were the things which seemed to appeal to Heywood. It would be absurd to imagine making confidences to him. As well shout them from the housetop.

Harriet was very kind; kinder than she had been before she went away. Her vacation, which was to be of two or three days only, had drawn out into three weeks, and she had come home rested and refreshed. She did not say where she had been. Eben did not ask, except in a perfunctory way. Indeed, he had not missed her, except to feel dimly grateful for the lack of her supervision. Constance had got into the way of coming over, during Harriet's absence, to cheer Uncle Eben up. She was of a lively disposition, and seemed irresponsible, and that was just the sort of person Eben wanted. She did cheer him up, and, gradually, he got into the habit of talking freely to her; not so freely as to be dangerous, but more freely than to anybody else.

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Then Harriet had come back and Conny had come over less often. Eben felt it.

Harriet was very kind, but there was nothing in her kindness or in her personality to invite confidence of things that were — well — disagreeable, and Eben found his burden of secrecy almost more than he could bear. He brooded upon it. At last, one sloppy day in March, he set out for Doctor Olcott's.

He had no definite intention; he did not know what he should do when he got there. That would depend much on circumstances; but he hoped that the doctor would be at home and inclined to — to — well, to let him do whatever it occurred to him to do.

He was just about to ring when he heard the doctor's hearty laugh come from the direction of the barn. That meant, to Eben, only that the doctor was not in his study and that he was not alone. Indeed, he had been foolish to hope to find him alone, for the doctor had lost no time in getting married.

So Eben, with a sinking heart, went to the barn. As he turned the corner, he saw Willie Houlton standing on his hands against the side of that structure, and Doctor Olcott standing admiringly before him — not on his hands. The sun was shining warmly in at the barn door, and its warmth had cleared the snow from a wide stretch of gravel drive in front of the barn. In the doorway, little Jimmy Houlton was essaying the same feat as his brother, without much success. It was at one of his efforts that the doctor had laughed.

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Doctor Olcott turned at the sound of steps. "Hello, Eben!" he cried. "You're just in time for the performance. Give us another, Willie." For Willie had come down upon his feet at sight of Eben.

A man came in at the gate, grinning. "Doctor," he said, "she wants you again."

"Confound the woman!" exclaimed the doctor. "She does, does she? Think she'll live till I get there?" The man only grinned the wider. "Well, I'll come. It's Miss Wetherbee, Eben."

Eben, feeling rather blue and discouraged, left at once and walked in the general direction of home. He did not feel that he wanted to go there, right away, but he did not know what else to do, and he walked aimlessly, with his eyes fixed upon the sidewalk just before his feet. Suddenly there was a quick rustle and somebody took his arm.

"Where are you going, Uncle Eben?" said a cheery voice.

Eben smiled at the bright young face that was nearly on a level with his own. Constance was going to be a tall girl. It was getting to be the fashion for girls to be tall, it seemed.

"I am glad to see you, Conny."

"Are you?" she asked. "I thought, from your looks, that you were never going to be glad again. That would be a pity, when spring is just coming. Will you come for a walk with me?"

It was just what Eben wanted; and they turned into

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a road that led out into the country. It took but a few minutes to get into the country from any part of Old Harbor.

“Now, tell me, Uncle Eben, what you were thinking about that made you so low in your mind,” said Constance, when they had got away from the houses; “that is, if you like. Not if you don’t.”

Eben looked at her for a moment without speaking. “Well, Conny,” he replied slowly, “I don’t know that there is any reason why I should n’t tell you. I was thinking of a man I met in the course of my knocking about the world. I have knocked about a good deal.”

He stopped, and seemed to have forgotten her presence. She waited until she began to be afraid that he did not mean to say more.

“I suppose you have, Uncle Eben,” she said gently. “You must have seen a good deal.”

He started. “I beg your pardon, Conny. I was forgetting. Yes, I have seen a good deal, of a sort. Well, this man, that I spoke of, came out of a hospital one day. It was just about this time of year. He had had an accident, and he had lost his place — I should say, his job — in consequence. He had just one dollar in his pocket, he was not yet strong, and he must make that dollar last until he found something that he could do. So he looked about, all that day, for something to do, and he did not find it. He tramped the streets in just such slush as this. He felt tired and sick and discouraged. He had spent a part of his dollar

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for food, and he must spend some more of it for lodging. He knew that it could n't last much over the second night, and he expected to be really sick by that time."

"The poor man!" murmured Constance.

"Yes, the poor man," returned Eben. "The situation is not a new one. The only thing about it that made it especially hard was that he was not used to such things. His people were gentleness, and he had been well brought up. Well, he spent the next day in the same way, and managed to save fifteen cents for a lodging. On the second morning he went out without a cent in his pockets. He could n't get any breakfast, of course, without money. He tramped the streets again until noon, looking for work. It began to rain; a cold rain, that soon soaked him through. He had nowhere to go and he felt hardly able to stand, anyway. So he gave it up and went down on one of the wharves."

"What for, Uncle Eben?" asked Constance, mystified. "Did he expect to find work there?"

"He meant to drown himself, Conny, if he had the chance. He told me that he felt as if it would be nothing but a relief. He was sick and hungry and wet through and cold, remember. But the police won't let any man drown himself, and, if he tries it, they arrest him. This man did n't get the chance, that afternoon. When it was nearly dark, he dragged himself off that wharf, meaning to go to another. He thought



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that he might get a chance to drown himself after dark. On his way, he met a girl whom he had known before he was sent to the hospital. She was a young girl, and — and she knew him and took him home with her. He did n't want to go, but she made him."

"Oh," cried Constance, "a girl like me!"

"Not like you, Conny!" said Eben, fiercely. "Not at all like you. She was eighteen or nineteen; she did n't know her exact age, herself. She had — she was not at all like you!"

"Well, she was kind, anyway."

"Perhaps," replied Eben. "That was what the man thought, at any rate. He was very grateful, when he got well enough to be. She took care of him until he was quite well, she and some friends of hers. And — well, in short, he felt grateful and he thought she was kind — and — there were other reasons. She was rather handsome, in a sort of a way, but she was not at all the kind of a girl he had been brought up to think well of. But he married her."

"But," said Constance, "how about the girl? What did she think? Why should she marry him? It seems to me, Uncle Eben, that you have not presented her side of the case."

"What?" asked Eben, in surprise. "Well, perhaps I have not. That — that had not occurred to me. There were reasons, Conny, why — well, they were married, at all events. They had rather an unhappy time of it, so that, in the course of a few years, he went

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to sea. It was after he had got to be the mate of a ship that he told me the story. This season always reminds me of it."

"It is a very pitiful story, Uncle Eben, and it's too bad that this season reminds you of it. The season ought to be joyful, it seems to me. But I'm interested in the girl. I'd like to hear her side of it. I'd like to know what she did when he went away to sea. Did he ever go back to her?"

"He did n't tell me," replied Eben, in a low voice. "I suppose not. She got along, I think, very much in the way she had before he married her. I really don't know."

Constance made no reply, and they turned back and walked in silence.

"Uncle Eben," said Constance, at last, "I must leave you at the corner. Was it your own story," she asked softly, "that you told me?"

Eben looked frightened. "No, no, Conny," he said hastily; "no, no. The man's name was Bronson, Jacob Bronson."

## CHAPTER XXI

MRS. CATHERWOOD had not forgotten her promise to call on Nan Hedge; that was not the reason for her delay. She simply could not bring herself to the point of actually going. What would that Hedge girl think? What could she think, but that Mrs. Catherwood thereby sealed the affair with her approval? Jack did not delay, whatever his reasons. He went there, regularly — and irregularly. It had even got so far that the colonel and Mrs. Catherwood could assume, with some prospect of their being right in the assumption, that, if Jack was not otherwise accounted for, he was at Nan's. Even the colonel thought it high time that they see about having something done about it. The colonel said so, smiling, one day. The expression was a favorite one with him, as connoting a vagueness and distance of intention which he was far from feeling. The colonel's intentions were not vague.

“Don't you think, Polly,” he said, continuing his remarks, “that you'd better put on your bunnit and shawl and run in there, just to see what's up?”

Mrs. Catherwood sighed. “Very well, Frank, I will. I'll go to-day. But I can't pretend that I don't hate it.”

“Of course you hate it, Polly. So should I, on that

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errand. But I'd go, dear, just the same, if it would n't be making the bright face of danger too fearsome, and if it was right and proper. At any rate, she probably won't eat you."

So Mrs. Catherwood started, that afternoon. If she had only known it, there was no danger of that Hedge girl's thinking anything but the exact truth. Nan had had experience enough, of all kinds, I suppose, to make no mistake as to her purpose. She would make no mistake in regard to her feelings, either, but she knew very well how hard Mrs. Catherwood would find it, and how she hated it. But Mrs. Catherwood knew nothing of Nan's experiences; nor do I, for that matter.

Nobody had told Nan of Mrs. Catherwood's intention of calling. Nan knew, just the same. Her almanac must have had in it some such prediction as this: "April 4. About this time expect a call from Jack's mother." It just happened that Nan saw Mrs. Catherwood coming. She saw, too, that she stopped just before she got to the gate and turned down in the direction of the Tiltons'.

That seemed to amuse Nan. She gave a quick little laugh and spoke to Mrs. Haight.

"I'm going to see my dear old ladies, Octavia. Mrs. Catherwood seems to be heading that way, and I think it's my duty to make her duty easy for her. Will you ring for the victoria?"

Octavia smiled slowly and rose and went out. She

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did not say anything. There did not seem to be anything to say.

Mrs. Catherwood found the Tiltons at home. Miss Hitty sat by her window, while Miss Susie bustled about and kept dropping her glasses off her delicate nose and putting them on again; and she knocked over two light tables and bruised herself against almost every heavy piece of furniture in the room, while she prepared to make tea. Mrs. Catherwood made no secret of her errand, but asked Miss Hitty, quite frankly, her opinion of Nan. She could trust Miss Hitty to tell her the truth — she could trust both of the Miss Tiltons, for that matter — and not to gossip. They would see her point of view, in spite of the fact that they knew Nan better, probably, than anybody else she could have gone to.

Miss Hitty's reply was direct enough. No doubt it was colored, somewhat, Mrs. Catherwood thought, by her liking for Nan; for, on that point, Miss Hitty left no room for doubt. That was surprising, too. Miss Hitty Tilton was not an easy mark for strangers. If it had been Miss Susie, now, who saw nothing but good in anybody — but Miss Hitty!

Mrs. Catherwood sighed. "Well," she said, "I suppose I must be satisfied. It is a little hard for me, Miss Hitty. There are so many girls that I know all about. And to have this Miss Hedge step in, whom I know nothing of — well" — Mrs. Catherwood broke off and laughed. "After all, probably it is of no consequence. I was going to call on her this afternoon, — I am going

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to call, — and I thought I might as well learn something about her before I went.”

Miss Hitty ignored the latter part of Mrs. Catherwood's speech. “Why should n't you be satisfied, Mary Catherwood?” she said. Mrs. Catherwood had carefully avoided mentioning Jack's name in connection with Nan Hedge. Miss Hitty did not. “Jack might do very much worse. Jack is old enough to take care of himself. It's safe to say that he will, anyway. Nancy Hedge is, at heart, a” — Miss Hitty had turned to the window again, while she was speaking. Now she turned back again and smiled. “Here she is, now,” she added. “You can judge for yourself. It might have been simpler for you if you had called sooner.” Miss Hitty was forgetting what had been her own attitude. “Susie, here's Nancy.”

Miss Susie's glasses fell off at once.

“Oh, sister, is she?” And Miss Susie scrambled to the window, putting on her glasses as she went. “Why, sister, she's got the victoria. She must be meaning to take — oh, I'll go and meet her.”

They heard the front door shut and Miss Susie's soft voice calling, “Come right up, Nan, dear.”

And there was the sound of light feet running up the stairs and of two soft kisses. And Nan ran in and had kissed Miss Hitty on both cheeks before she saw Mrs. Catherwood. At least, so it seemed.

Miss Hitty kept hold of Nan's hand while she presented her. It was much as if she were presenting a

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daughter, of whom she felt particularly proud. Nan said a few words — it did not matter what they were — and took Miss Susie's place.

"Let me get the tea, Miss Susie," she said, "and you sit down."

Miss Susie sank into her chair with a sigh. "You are so good, Nan! I always bump into things so! You are so good!"

"I am not good," Nan replied. "I only seem so. But I can make tea."

Miss Hitty smiled affectionately at her and cast an indulgent eye on Mrs. Catherwood. Mrs. Catherwood was surprised at the smile and at the look; although she need not have been surprised at either. For Miss Hitty, as Mrs. Catherwood knew very well, had loved her neighbors all her long life, although she would have been torn in pieces by wild horses before admitting such a thing. She probably did not know it, herself. If she was finding it out rather late, that was no cause for surprise, but rather for thanksgiving.

Nan made the tea and fished some little cakes from some mysterious place behind a screen. Mrs. Catherwood observed it; she also observed that neither Miss Susie nor Miss Hitty appeared to think the fact that Nan was allowed to penetrate those mysteries worthy of remark. They took it very coolly, as though it was an every-day occurrence, which, indeed, it was, although it was not to be expected that Mrs. Catherwood should be aware of that.

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Then they all sat and sipped their tea from the Miss Tiltens' delicate old china, and they all talked about nothing. At least, Nan talked a good deal, and Mrs. Catherwood made an observation now and then, or replied to some question of Nan's. Miss Hitty and Miss Susie contented themselves with smiling, almost continually, at Nan's remarks. Even Mrs. Catherwood had to acknowledge that Nan was bright and amusing, and that she had been prejudiced against her. The prejudice was still there, and she knew it; but, before she had finished her second cup, Mrs. Catherwood found that she had asked them all to tea at her house.

"You must pardon the informality," she said to Nan; "I was intending to call upon you when I left here. I shall certainly do so within a day or two."

Mrs. Catherwood set down her cup and rose. Nan did likewise.

"Oh," she said, "you must let me take you home; that is, if you are going. I have the victoria outside."

Mrs. Catherwood protested, but in vain. She felt that, if she allowed herself to be seen driving with Nancy Hedge, she was lost. Nancy Hedge may have had somewhat the same feeling. We may guess that she preferred that Mrs. Catherwood should be lost.

"But," said Mrs. Catherwood, hesitating and hardly knowing what to say, "I have no doubt that you came to take Miss Hitty or Miss Susie out. You must n't let me interfere. It is only a step."



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Nan smiled brightly. "I take Miss Hitty and Miss Susie out every blessed day, don't I, dears?"

"Yes, indeed," said Miss Susie; Miss Hitty only smiled at Nan as she had before.

"So you are n't going to refuse, Mrs. Catherwood, are you?" Nan asked. "Because I shall feel hurt if you do." She stooped over Miss Susie's chair and whispered that she would be back to do the dishes. Think of it! Nan Hedge to do the dishes!

Miss Susie did not seem to regard the idea as so very unthinkable. "Oh, Nan!" she said. It looked as if the idea of Nan's doing the dishes might not be a new one, after all. Perhaps Nan was so immersed in duplicity as to have done that thing before — several times before. It is difficult to imagine it, from that motive. I confess that I am stumped; almost persuaded to believe in Nancy Hedge. Doing the dishes!

Nan stooped again over Miss Hitty's chair and whispered that they should have their drive. Then she kissed Miss Hitty again, and followed Mrs. Catherwood, whom she saw safely into the victoria. She did not mean that that lady should escape her.

It was but a short block or two to Nan's house. "Mrs. Catherwood," said Nan, when they were almost opposite the entrance to the driveway, — the horse showed some inclination to enter, but he was steered carefully away by Patrick, who sat with one ear cocked astern, waiting for orders; he knew Miss Hedge, — "Mrs. Catherwood," said Nan, then, "won't you come

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in now, for a few minutes? Just to save my face, you know.”

To save her face! Heavens! But Mrs. Catherwood did go in, graciously, for her few minutes, while Patrick waited. After that, she was driven home by Nan. She did not meet anybody except Harriet, who could scarcely believe her eyes.

Then Nan went back to the Tiltons' again, to do the dishes, — but Patrick did not know that, — and to take her dear old ladies for their daily drive. Suppose MacLean had known about those dishes!

## CHAPTER XXII

MRS. CATHERWOOD did not give a tea for Nan Hedge. She knew better than to do that. But she had asked a half-dozen people to come in on Friday afternoon, and Nan was one. Nan was *the* one. Probably Mrs. Catherwood knew it. There was nothing remarkable about the occasion; nothing that was at all unusual in Old Harbor. Harriet was there, of course, not approving of it at all, considering the circumstances. She did not know all the circumstances, but she thought that she did, and she remonstrated accordingly.

“I think it is rather shocking, Mary,” she said, with a little laugh; such a little laugh as would be expected of a maiden lady with somewhat strict ideas in regard to such matters, — “rather shocking that you should give a tea for that Hedge girl. That’s what everybody will think, that it is for her. If you had asked my advice, it would have been against doing anything of the kind.”

Mrs. Catherwood smiled quietly. She did not remind Miss Harriet that she had not asked her advice. Neither did she call Harriet’s attention to the fact that no one could predict what her advice would be, on any given subject. Harriet was full of surprises, and she was as apt to lean one way as the other. It did not occur to Mrs. Catherwood that, as Harriet’s nephew

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was involved, — her favorite and only, — jealousy was necessarily involved, too. She felt too much jealousy, herself, to make allowance for it in others. She might even have resented it.

“I ’m afraid it is rather late, Harriet,” she remarked. “The deed is done.”

“It will seem to commit you and Jack,” Miss Harriet said doubtfully.

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Catherwood, with a little sigh of regret, “I know. But seeming to commit me is not committing me, luckily.”

“It will make it harder for you,” Harriet insisted.

Mrs. Catherwood made no reply, for Abbie Mervin came in. She had come early, so that she should not miss any of the play. Then Miss Wetherbee arrived, consumed with curiosity, so far as her interest in her health allowed. Mrs. Catherwood was indiscreet enough to say that she hoped that Miss Wetherbee was well. It was an innocent remark, but Miss Wetherbee interpreted it literally.

“I don’t see how you can suppose I should be well,” said she, in a high and penetrating voice; a voice which was somewhat shaky. “I have my attacks frequently — two this week.” Mrs. Catherwood murmured something intended to be vaguely sympathetic, and final. It was not final. “I shall never be well again,” Miss Wetherbee continued. “Doctor Olcott is no better than a beast. He comes when he feels like it, and uses the most shocking language — horrible language.

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He has improved a little since he got married, but he is most unfeeling. Oh, is Mrs. Houlton — I mean Mrs. Olcott — here?” Miss Wetherbee seemed to have had an afterthought. She looked around. She was a tall woman and an old woman, hard-featured but with an anxious look in her eyes and a multitude of fine lines in her forehead. She had on a most wonderful hat; wonderful, at least, for an old woman, with many ostrich plumes, which were dyed a wonderful color.

Mrs. Catherwood smiled faintly. “Mrs. Olcott is not here yet,” she said. “She did n’t know whether she would be able to come at all.”

Harriet’s face was a dull red. She was fond of the stout old doctor, and she felt an overpowering resentment at Miss Wetherbee’s words. “I want to tell you, Miss Wetherbee,” she said, “that Doctor Olcott is not a beast. I have no doubt that he comes to you as soon as he can, and gives you the attention that he thinks you need.”

Miss Harriet came near forgetting where she was. It may be that she had quite forgotten; but Mrs. Catherwood laid her hand upon her arm and she subsided with an ill grace.

“Oh,” cried Miss Wetherbee, with a fine stare of astonishment, “are you there, Harriet Joyce? I might have known I’d stir you up.” Miss Harriet pressed her lips together and said nothing. “Well, I’m sorry Mrs. Olcott is not here. I wanted to speak to her about her boys. Every time they go by my house, they rattle

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on my fence-palings with a stick, the whole length of the fence, and they pound on the fence. It's enough to kill a woman that's as sick as I am. I'm going to speak to the doctor about it. Not that I have any idea he can manage those boys."

Mrs. Catherwood murmured again. Miss Harriet's face was still a dull red, and Abbie turned away to hide a smile. "All boys are alike," Miss Wetherbee went on. "They are brutal savages, that's what they are. Every few weeks I find my gate carried a square or two away. I have to pay two men to bring it back and hang it. I've had it screwed on, now. They can't get it off the hinges. I'd like to see boys done away with, by law. I never could see the use of 'em."

"They make men," Abbie suggested.

"Precious little good men do me," snapped Miss Wetherbee, "or you, either, Abbie Mervin."

Abbie turned as red as Harriet.

Miss Wetherbee had her back to the door. "Where 's that Hedge girl, Mary?" she asked.

"Here's that Hedge girl," said Nan, who had come in with Miss Hitty and Miss Susie. "Please be nice to her, after I have been properly presented."

Miss Susie gasped at Nan's audacity and Miss Hitty smiled. It was almost a giggle.

"Well!" exclaimed the astonished Miss Wetherbee. But she liked it, and thereupon suspended general hostilities. It was not important what Miss Wetherbee liked, but general hostilities are not conducive to

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harmony. They might have added to the gayety of the assembled company after the event. They do not constitute a recognized form of legitimate entertainment at such a function.

So Mrs. Catherwood presented Nan, as Nan herself put it, and Nan was as good and correct and proper as any one could have wished. No one could be more correct and proper than Nan when she wanted to be, and she did her best. Whatever might have been Mrs. Catherwood's intention, Nan was the centre of interest. There was no doubt about that. She met Miss Wetherbee's questions, which were undeniably personal and, many of them, impertinent, very sweetly, and she told that tiresome old woman as much as she thought she ought to know and no more. That was not much. When she was tired of being questioned so closely, she started Miss Wetherbee to talking about her health, in general, and her symptoms, in particular. That was mean of Nan, but she kept Miss Hitty chuckling away to herself all the afternoon.

This tea — it was not a tea, but I don't know what else to call it — was none of your crowded affairs where a person can run in and run out again — total time spent, less than five minutes — and never be missed. They all stayed. After an hour or so, when the conversation was beginning to languish and to separate itself into dialogues, as conversations in the best regulated families will do, William Ransome came in, with Jack. William had been impelled to come by a desire

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to see how such a happy family would have made out. He knew Miss Wetherbee, and thought it quite possible that an hour would be enough to set them all by the ears. He did not know Nan. Indeed, it is doubtful whether any one knew Nan thoroughly, even including Miss Hitty Tilton and Nan herself. William may have been influenced, unconsciously, of course, by a wish to obtain material for his stories. And Jack—well, Jack had concluded that he would get home early.

The arrival of William made Abbie uneasy and conscious, and it had the same effect upon Harriet. William was not uneasy or self-conscious, and he finally settled down, contentedly, by Miss Wetherbee. Jack's arrival made Mrs. Catherwood uneasy, but she hoped that she did not show it. It seemed to make no difference to Nan; but then, as I have said, Nan was an excellent actress. Jack, after a slight but evident flutter about her, settled down, in his turn, between Miss Hitty and Miss Susie.

Miss Wetherbee was clearly annoyed; which was not uncommon enough to excite remark.

"I thought," she said, in a whisper that must have been plainly audible, "that Jack Catherwood was attentive."

There was a silence that you could have heard; but Nan seemed unconscious. William smiled. "Did you?" he asked. "How's the cat, Miss Wetherbee?"

"I don't know what you mean, William," said Miss Wetherbee, staring. "What cat do you refer to?"



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"I don't know what cat it was last night," replied William, "nor what cat it will be to-night. Do you?"

Miss Wetherbee was somewhat upon the defensive. "Of course," she said, "I don't know what cat the boy will bring to-night. Last night it was a large cat with yellow stripes."

"Aha!" William exclaimed. "Our cat! He has not been home, Miss Wetherbee. Mrs. Gage is very much worried about him. I am afraid that you are technically guilty of abduction."

William had undoubtedly accomplished his object. He had the undivided attention of all present, which was, for the moment, withdrawn from Nan and Jack. He would have been glad to drop the subject there, but he could not.

"I am not guilty of anything of the kind," cried Miss Wetherbee, indignantly. "Last night, the boy — horrid little beast — came at the regular time, bringing a cat, which he held by the tail. I can't be expected to give much attention to the boy, but any one could see that the cat he was holding in that inhuman manner was a dead cat. He had the effrontery to say that I had n't said anything about the cat's being alive, and that that was a perfectly good cat. I commanded him to take his dead cat away, at once, and to bring one that was alive. So he did. After some delay, he appeared, carrying this large yellow-striped cat. He seemed to have some difficulty in holding it, and he insisted upon my paying him his five cents before he let the cat go. I

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did, and discharged him. I would n't employ a boy who would bring me dead cats."

"Of course not," William murmured. "Dead cats may be of use to the boy, but not to you. I have no doubt that that boy found a use for his."

"He hung it on my front door knob," said Miss Wetherbee, scathingly; "horrid little savage!"

William had seen it there. He did not say so, however.

"Please explain, Miss Wetherbee," said Nan. "That is, if you don't mind. I am quite in the dark."

"Certainly, Miss Hedge," began Miss Wetherbee, coldly. "I am troubled with mice. A cat is more trouble than the mice, if you have to keep it all the time. Always under foot. I hate cats. So I give a boy five cents a day to bring a cat every night at seven. It is shut in some room where the mice have shown themselves, and at half-past nine I put it out."

"Oh," said Nan. "A very ingenious arrangement."

"Yes," said William. "Makes use of the cats of the neighborhood. Impartial *and* exciting. Partakes of the nature of gambling."

"Where," Nan asked, "does the cat go at half-past nine?"

"It goes out," answered Miss Wetherbee. "I'm sure I don't know where. Very often it seems to stay around. The cats make a terrible noise in my yard, almost every night. But I've never harmed them."

"Until last night," said William, "that could not be

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disputed, Miss Wetherbee. What did you do with a certain large cat with yellow stripes?"

"I turned him out," Miss Wetherbee snapped, "at eight o'clock, William. He tore around my room as if he had a fit. He clawed the cloth off a table and broke a very valuable piece of china that my father brought home in one of his last voyages. I would n't have lost it for all the cats in Old Harbor. I got the broom and chased him out. It took me an hour."

"That is a very intelligent cat," William remarked. "If you have that yellow-striped cat brought again," he continued, "I wish that you would send for Mrs. Gage or me."

"I will, William," said Miss Wetherbee, grimly. "I will send for you. I shall have a new boy."

Miss Hitty Tilton rose to go. She was still smiling. "Mary Catherwood," she said, shaking that lady's hand, "I've had a beautiful time. I don't know when I've enjoyed an afternoon more. It was very kind of you to ask us."

Mrs. Catherwood did not know just how to take this speech of Miss Hitty's. It was usually safe to read into anything that Miss Hitty said all that it could be construed to mean. She smiled.

"I did n't realize that I was providing amusement for you," she said, in a low voice. "I am very glad that you liked it."

Jack seized that moment to lean over to Nan. "Tonight, Nan?" he whispered.

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Nan nodded, without looking at him, and moved forward to say good-by.

"Well, Polly," said the colonel that night, "how did it go? What of that Hedge girl?"

They were waiting for Jack to come in. "It went very well, as far as she was concerned," she replied. "Her behavior was irreproachable. But Miss Wetherbee!" She drew a long breath. "Oh, that woman! I will never ask her to anything again. William egged her on." She gave him an account of it.

The colonel chuckled. "So William did that! I would never have suspected him of it. I should not have thought him capable of it. To do the thing up brown, he ought to have gone home with her."

"He did," said Mrs. Catherwood. "But I don't like her."

"Like Miss Wetherbee!" cried the colonel. "Of course you don't. Who does?"

"I meant Nan Hedge," said Mrs. Catherwood. "I can't like her, in spite of her beautiful behavior, and in spite of the fact that Hitty Tilton, and Susie, too, evidently regard her as perfection. I don't trust her."

"Therein you differ from MacLean and all the other shopkeepers in Old Harbor. But I understand that she is good pay."

Mrs. Catherwood smiled fondly. "I believe you would make a joke of it, dear," she said, "if you were being tortured."

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“How do you know,” asked the colonel, “that it is not torture to me that my only and well-beloved son is going straight to the demnition dogs? That, I understand, is the gist of it. Can any good thing come out of New York?”

Mrs. Catherwood laughed. She could not have helped it. “If Jack was really in love with her,” she said, “I would welcome her and sink my own feeling for his sake. But” —

“Seriously, Polly, dear,” said the colonel, interrupting, “do you think she — any one — would relish that? Jack is old enough to take care of himself. Suppose we let him do it.”

“That’s just what Hitty Tilton said.”

“Hitty’s opinion strikes me as sound,” the colonel observed.

“Oh, Frank,” cried Mrs. Catherwood, “do let me have my own opinion for a while, at least. It can’t do anybody any harm.”

Colonel Catherwood was silent for some minutes. Then he sighed. “Well,” he said thoughtfully “I guess we might as well see about having something done about it. What I have in mind probably won’t do any lasting harm. I’ll tell you about it later.”

Mrs. Catherwood came over to him and kissed him. “Thank you, Frank, dear,” she said. “I knew you would n’t desert me.”

“Never!” cried the colonel, waving his book.

At that moment Constance appeared at the door.

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“Have you two people done talking about Jack?” she asked. “Because he is coming up the walk.”

The doings at the Catherwoods', that afternoon, would have made a proper bit of gossip for MacLean, too. They did; for, if he did not see, he heard, and at the third or fourth hand. That was better for his purpose. The gossip lost nothing by repetition.

## CHAPTER XXIII

EBEN did not go to Mrs. Catherwood's on that Friday afternoon. Harriet had made an attempt, half-hearted, at best, to persuade him, and, finding that he seemed to be afraid to go, and knowing very well that she would not be able to prevail over his obstinacy, as she called it, she had given it up. Harriet had had ample experience of Eben's obstinacy, in the last few months. She had tried persuasion, argument, and bullying; but although Eben said little or nothing, she invariably found him, when she got through her harangue, of exactly the same mind as when she began. It always made her feel peculiarly helpless, which was a feeling she did not like; and it always made her lose her temper, and occasionally made her forget her dignity, which was a condition that she liked even less. That distressed Eben, but did not make him change his mind a single jot. Once her feeling of helplessness had reduced Harriet to tears, which she liked least of all, and which had distressed Eben more than ever.

So Eben did not go to Mrs. Catherwood's, and he did not see Nan Hedge nor hear Miss Wetherbee. He started early, instead, and walked out beyond the old Green, where no Miss Wetherbees were; where no Miss Wetherbees could be. But if there were no Miss

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Wetherbees, there were song-sparrows in abundance, singing their sweet little cheerful songs at every opportunity. The song-sparrows had been about for weeks, and the robins were beginning to come, in small flocks — not the scattered individuals of two weeks earlier. The songs of the song-sparrows penetrated even Eben's abstraction, at last, so that he smiled in spite of himself. Then he looked up and found himself before the little house with the sagging roof and the great square chimney in the middle of it. Chickens were picking about in the front yard, and a robin rose at his approach and flew into a near-by apple tree. And an old woman, with a weatherbeaten face and a harsh voice that yet was very sweet, came out of the house and greeted him, showering blessings upon his head.

"Now, Mr. Eben, dear," she said, after you would have thought that she had exhausted her stock of blessings, "why don't you go over into the pines, if you're but strollin'? You'll find nobody there but Clanky an' my Joe, an' they're likely to be anywhere about. 'T is dry there after the warm wind we had. 'T is lovely in the pines, now, lovely. An' I'd take it kindly if you'd see Joe, now. He's that better!"

That thought suited Eben. He would meet no one but Clanky and Joe Loughery. They had had two days of a warm wind that had borne away the remains of the snow, bodily, and had hustled winter out of the way in great haste, to make room for spring. The old man with the flying white hair was not used to being



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treated with so little ceremony. He did not like it. He was accustomed to take his time and to move away with leisurely step, as befitted his age; not to be taken by the shoulders by a warm south wind, with a "Step lively now!" and driven before it at a most undignified pace, in spite of his grumblings and protests. That same south wind had left the ground dry, at least on the surface. Eben thanked Mrs. Loughery and struck over into the pine woods.

He followed the winding path that led across the fields from Mrs. Loughery's; the path which had been tramped several times a day by Clanky Beg in all weathers, at least once a day by Mrs. Loughery, and occasionally by Joe. It led him in through the fringe of young growth, through a break in a stone wall, stretching away among the pines and in among the old trees — tall columns supporting the green roof, far above his head. As Eben felt his feet pressing the soft brown carpet and heard the green crowns whispering gently over him, he had a sense of peace and content and of the quiet joy of living that was very strange to him, and very pleasant; more than pleasant.

He smiled — he was not aware that he smiled — and went on.

He came out in a little clearing just big enough to let in a small circle of sunlight; and in that circle sat Joe Loughery, on an old chair that had no back and that was propped against a tree. Joe spent most of his time in that clearing, following the sunshine about by mov-

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ing his chair from one tree to another. Clanky Beg sat near him, on a log — a log that could not be moved about from one tree to another. It was all the same to Clanky. He did not care whether his seat was in sunshine or in shadow, so long as Joe was happy.

Clanky and Joe greeted Eben at once. "I knew you were coming," Joe said. "Clanky always knows as soon as anybody comes into these woods. He slipped away and shadowed you, and then came back and told me who it was. I'm afraid I should not have remembered you."

"No, I suppose not," replied Eben. "But I'm sure that I came very quietly. How could Clanky know?"

"I don't know," said Joe, laughing, "unless it was by scent. It's not exactly pleasant to think of, is it?"

"Dear me!" cried Eben, softly.

Joe, seeing his face, laughed again.

Then Eben sat upon the log beside Clanky and listened to Joe's happy chatter, and once in a while he said something in return, gravely. It was not the Joe of a few months before, without hope of life, but bearing his burden bravely; it was quite a different Joe, hopeful and happy, looking forward to the time when he should be able to do his part. The outward change was as great; but Eben had not seen Joe before. Clanky was content to listen, too. Eben was at ease for the first time in — oh, in years. He was even happy. He was so happy that, before he suspected it, the afternoon had slipped away.

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Joe insisted upon showing him the hut before he went. It was just beyond the edge of the clearing; poorly built, of any remains of lumber that Clanky had been able to find, with a roof thatched with spruce boughs. Some of the chinks were so large that you could see through them. There were two small windows, and directly under each was a bunk. There was a stove, too, without fire.

"One of 'em's Clanky's and one's mine," explained Joe, eagerly, pointing to the bunks.

"Oh," Eben replied. "I suppose you don't have to open the windows at night. I should think air enough would get through the walls."

Joe laughed. "We don't open 'em. We take 'em out," he said. "There's air enough. It was pretty cold, all winter, but we were wrapped warm. In the morning, Clanky'd get up and put in the windows and make a fire, so it'd be warm for me to dress. And I'd be out all day, generally, sunshine or storm, except in the worst of 'em or when it rained. Oh, it's great," he added enthusiastically; "simply great."

"I like air," said Eben, slowly, "but I should think this would be almost too much of a good thing. You'll soon be well enough to sleep in a house again."

"Never!" Joe said decidedly. "That is, I suppose I'd be well enough, but I shan't sleep in a house again, never again, unless I have to."

"Oh," said Eben.

"You can't make up your mind to go back to a

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house," Joe continued, "when you've once got used to this. It won't be long, now, before we can sleep outdoors. This is about the same thing as outdoors, but think of having nothing over your head but the tops of the pines and the sky! Why, it's almost as good as being at sea."

Eben smiled. Almost as good as being at sea! It is to be supposed that Eben knew about that. It is to be supposed that he thought of the stuffy forecastle, crowded with men, smelling of wet clothes and old boots and other things that were even less agreeable. But there was no smell of wet clothes and old boots outside the forecastle. Eben had sometimes spent nights out there under the sky, in fine weather, when he was not too tired, which was seldom the case, and had watched the slowly swinging masts with their bellying black sails extinguish the Southern Cross, like the shutter of a camera. Such occasions were rare. He had generally been so tired, when it came time for his watch below, that he had been glad to tumble into his bunk with his clothes on, in spite of the smell of wet clothes and old boots. Joe's words stirred into activity a longing that had never died a decent death — or an indecent one; that had never even been scotched. It was a positive pain, that longing for the sea. Eben knew why he avoided, in his walks, any hill or high land from which he might have seen the ocean. There were a plenty of such points about Old Harbor. But the ocean could not be seen by any one within those pine woods, although it

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was in plain sight of the crowns, and, occasionally, it could be smelt, if the wind was the right way.

So, thereafter, Eben went, every day, to the pines, in search of solitude and of that sense of peace that was to be valued above rubies. It was about as good as being alone to be with Joe and Clanky Beg; fully as good to wander about with Clanky as his only companion. Clanky would roam the woods like a dog, only more silently, coming back to Eben, now and then, to see where he was or to exchange a few words. As a companion, he was as satisfactory as a dog; which is saying a good deal for Clanky. Even Heywood fell short of that one degree. Eben did not give up his walks with Heywood. Heywood was free only one afternoon a week, sometimes two. But Eben did not take him into the pines. The pines were Clanky's and Joe's and his.

He walked no more with Constance, but he avoided her. He had become afraid of Constance. She, after the manner of kind-hearted young girls, having noticed it, was vaguely sorry and thought no more about the matter. If Uncle Eben did not desire her society, why, he need not have it. Her only wish had been to please him.

Still, Eben was somewhat restless and uneasy, for he could not well be in his pine woods all the time. Clanky saw it. And, partly because he counseled it, partly, no doubt, because a sailor is, at heart, more than half a farmer, Eben determined to try his hand at gar-

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dening. Clanky helped him at it; and Doctor Olcott, hearing of it through Harriet, found Eben hard at work with his planting.

Eben looked up, at the doctor's chuckle, and smiled.

"That's right, Eben," said the doctor. "Dig! Dig! It's the best remedy for almost everything, especially at this season. I wish I could get William to digging."

"Why, doctor?" asked Eben, surprised. "Is William ill?"

"Thinks he is," answered the doctor. "Mortally afraid he is. Says his liver's upset. What does he know about his liver? Should n't know he's got such a thing. I tell him he has n't, and that scares him worse than ever. I know his symptoms. Had 'em myself. Liver!" And the doctor chuckled again. "Liver! That's what's the matter with William. He does n't know it."

Suddenly the doctor's chuckling stopped abruptly. He was remembering some gossip of MacLean's about William and Harriet and Abbie Mervin. Of course he had not paid any particular attention to it; he never paid particular attention to MacLean's gossip, but he usually let him talk on. He had heard but vaguely that William — But there! The fact that stood out in his recollection, if it was a fact, was that MacLean seemed to think that William had tired of Harriet; of his devotion of ten years or more. Well, well, that might be true. Damn it, yes. Ten years! He would get tired of

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that, himself; and it would n't take him ten years, either, even for Hattie's sake. As good a woman as God ever made, but — but — The good doctor stumbled over that "but." It was her brother that he had said it to — that poor joke about William's liver.

Perhaps Eben had not noticed. The doctor looked at him sharply. Eben was smiling gently. The devil of it was that you could never tell what in thunder Eben was smiling at.

"Well," he said, turning away, "keep it up, Eben. Keep it up! It'll do you good. I'll see what I can do with William."

William had gone to Doctor Olcott, not long before, afraid that he was getting sick. He could not write in his rooms, although he had been accustomed to do it easily; and other places were no better. He had roamed the country over alone, as Eben had, and had found his roaming no more conducive to work. He seemed to be unable to think; and it was then that he became alarmed.

Doctor Olcott had listened to it all, and then he had laughed, and William had been almost offended.

"Oh, don't get mad, William," said the doctor. "Don't get mad. I know what's the matter with you. I prescribe digging."

William was astonished. "Digging!" he cried. "Digging what?"

"Digging dirt, man! Digging dirt! Dig a hole in the ground, if you can't do better."

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"Perhaps," said William, smiling, "you could get me a job as sexton?"

The doctor was not a vestryman; he never went to church.

Doctor Olcott laughed again. "Don't you dig at me," said he. "That won't do your business. Dig the ground. You're a very sick man, William, but I guess you'll live a few hours yet. Work with your hands, out of doors. Expand your lungs and get your fill of this air and God's sunshine. Get tired. Get so tired that you ache to get to bed at night. It's spring, man, spring."

"It will be a little difficult," returned William, slowly, "to carry out the whole of your prescription, doctor. Is n't there some other remedy?"

"Well," replied the doctor, looking at William quizzically, "there may be — probably is. But I don't know which it is. The oracle has spoken. Better try the digging, as much of it as you can manage."

"Your utterance is somewhat cryptic," said William, dryly, "but that is characteristic of oracles, I understand."

He had tried the digging, mildly, and it had produced little result; then furiously, with little more, except that he was so lame that he could scarcely move about the bank. He saw Harriet, occasionally, and was glum and discontented and irritable. His irritability, he thought, was due to the fact that he wanted to write and could n't. If he had been able to, he would



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have been as serene as a May morning. But he could not talk with Harriet about it. She would not have understood and would have contended, stoutly, that it only proved how ill adapted he was to that business — that business that was scarcely respectable. She would have urged him to give it up; to stick to something dignified, like banking. It would all be in that superior tone, as if she was right, always, as a matter of course. He knew that tone; he had had all of it that he wanted. No, he could not talk to Harriet about it. So he was just glum.

Harriet was naturally a cheerful, buoyant, self-reliant person, but she had her faults, of a kind which were common in Old Harbor. She was fond of William; fonder, perhaps, than she had been aware. She never took me into her confidence, so that I don't know whether she was or not. I don't know whether or not her affection for him was of that mild, sisterly variety, which would gladly have kept his feet in that straight and exceedingly narrow path in which she kept her own. That path was very straight and very narrow, and it is conceivable that it might have led William where he did not care to go. Harriet could not imagine that. It never once entered her head.

However that may be, William seemed to balk at taking the path at all, judging from his glumness and irritability; and Harriet's natural buoyant cheerfulness could not save her from two days of perilous sharpness of tongue. It is to be supposed that William did

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not like the sharpness. It did not last more than the two days, — Harriet's good sense came to her rescue, — but two days of it seemed to be enough for William. Harriet did not get the chance to apologize to him for the things she had said, which she had fully made up her mind to do. Harriet did not like to apologize.

Abbie, on the other hand, understood and made allowances and comforted him. It is a pity that a good man must seem such a helpless infant, but many of them do, and do not even know it. We have no right to put upon the women the burden of dragging us out of our sloughs of despond, but we do, over and over. Generally, we are not aware that we are doing it, if that is any comfort. Do our women laugh at us, I wonder? They have the right to.

Abbie did not seem to think that William's writing was disreputable, or that writing was a disreputable occupation. She did not try to make him give it up. So it came about that he was with Abbie the more and with Harriet the less — none at all. When he found that he felt a little better, he explained his feelings to Abbie and apologized for them, and he related his conversation with the doctor.

Abbie laughed. She seemed to find something very amusing in it. William, because he had puzzled over it for a long time with no result, asked her if she understood what the doctor was driving at.

They were on a pleasant old road that went by the name of Lovers' Lane, guarded by rows of stump wil-

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lows. Nobody was in sight. There was only the ancient white house of Cap'n Armitage, himself an ancient man, a retired sea-captain, almost blind. Not that that had anything to do with it.

Abbie slipped her hand within William's arm. He found that agreeable, but took no notice of it, beyond crooking his elbow, so that the hand should stay there comfortably.

"Yes, you goose," said Abbie; "I understand."

"Well, what did he mean, Abbie?" William insisted. "Tell me."

"I — I can't tell you, William," said Abbie, softly. "You must find out for yourself."

Strange as it may seem, William said no more, of consequence, at that time.

## CHAPTER XXIV

NANCY HEDGE and Octavia Haight had just finished their lonely dinner; lonely, in spite of the air of ease and affluence, the abundance, the servants, coming and going about their duties in silence. Or it may have been lonely because of these very things. It might have added spice and somewhat diminished the loneliness of it all if they had had to wait on themselves, — to “do their own reaching,” — and if the door had opened mysteriously, disclosing an arm guiltless of sleeve and a hand holding a pie, and a raucous voice had suddenly appeared at the door, saying, “Here’s yer pie!” Or it might have added to the gayety of the occasion if a maid, who, in that case, would have been the cook as well as the waitress, had deposited an all too solid baked custard on the table before Nan, with an “Ain’t it fierce?”

None of those things happened, to stimulate Nan to mirth and to reduce Octavia to despair. Such things could not happen in Nan’s house. They had hurried through the meal — or Nan had; Octavia did not believe in hurrying through a meal. She had even complained that Nan never gave her time to finish a course before it was whisked out of sight. Nan had contented herself with the remark that she believed that Octavia

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was growing stout. So Octavia had said no more, but she followed Nan into the library in a state of deep discontent, and sank into an easy-chair with her hands across her lap.

Nan did not sit down. She wandered aimlessly about, straying from one thing to another. She was not restless. She seemed to have a heart at ease, and to be altogether content with things as they were. Nan had improved in the past few months. Her eyes shone more softly if, perhaps, less brilliantly than they had; her complexion no longer suggested doubts as to paint and powder. I have, to be sure, no reason to think that such doubts were ever justified, but it was generally believed in Old Harbor. It is certainly a sign of improvement that she seemed to have a heart at ease; that she seemed to have a heart at all. That may have been the secret of those changes that I have mentioned, and of others that were more elusive.

So Nan wandered about, contentedly, until Octavia could stand it no longer.

“Oh, Nan,” she exclaimed, with a little note of impatience in her voice, “do, *please*, sit down.”

Nan laughed good-naturedly. “Why? Do I make you nervous?”

“Well — ”

“Oh, all right,” said Nan, still with a patience that was no less than marvelous, in Nan. A few months before, she would have made some stinging remark which would have reduced Octavia to silence, if it did

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not drive her to her room. "All right. I'll go into the other room. It really does n't make any difference to me."

She started for the drawing-room, across the hall.

Octavia rose swiftly and went to her. "I beg your pardon, Nan. Don't pay any attention to me. Don't go away unless you prefer."

"It really does n't matter," said Nan, in some surprise. "I don't care what room I'm in. If it troubles you —"

"It does n't. It won't. If it should, it is my place to go."

"Nonsense!" Nan turned back.

"Nan," asked Octavia, hesitatingly, — it almost seemed wistfully, — "Nan, is he coming to-night?"

"Yes," answered Nan, promptly and with calm certainty.

"Then — then you are only waiting?"

"Only waiting," Nan said. "It does n't make any difference where I wait. I might go out on the piazza. It's warm enough."

Octavia made no reply and Nan looked over at her. She saw two tears roll slowly down her cheeks and drop into her lap. There was no motion to stop them.

"Why, Octavia!" Nan cried. "What ever is the matter?"

Octavia turned suddenly away and buried her face in the cushion. "I — I want *my* Jack," she sobbed.

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Nan was amazed and dismayed. "Jack Haight!" She found it hard to believe her ears.

"Yes, Jack Haight."

"But, Octavia, he has done all sorts of things that he should n't. I have no doubt that he abused you."

Octavia was sitting up now, wiping her eyes. She did not look at Nan.

"He did n't," she said. "Anyway, it was as much my fault as his. I want him."

Nan could not get over her amazement.

"Do you know where he is?" asked Octavia.

"No," replied Nan. "I have his address, but that is just the place where I should n't expect to find him."

"Nan —"

Nancy Hedge was wise in her generation. "Oh, I'll give it to you," she said. "If it's a mistake, the consequences be on your own head."

Octavia turned to Nan; but Nan had already gone to one of the long windows and opened it. She stepped out on to the piazza and walked aimlessly up and down. In less than ten minutes she came in again, leaving the window open, and began to whistle.

Nan was an expert whistler. She always whistled with a liquid smoothness like a bird's, and she could execute, in perfection, runs and trills and roulades and all the other things of which I do not, at the moment, recall the names. Names or not, Nan could whistle them; and she did whistle them now.

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Octavia smiled with pleasure. Octavia was ready enough to smile at anything, now. But it was not strange that Nan's performance gave her pleasure, for it was a very excellent performance. It gave somebody else pleasure, too, apparently; for when Nan paused, Jack Catherwood stepped in at the window.

"May I come in rather unceremoniously?" he asked, going up to Nan.

There was a welcome in Nan's eyes. "Any way," she said, giving him her hand, — "any way, so long as you come."

He turned and gave a good-evening to Octavia, who was looking tolerant, at least. Then he turned again to Nan. "I say, Nan, you never told me you could whistle like that. Why have n't you done it for me before?"

Nan smiled and swept him a curtsey. "Thanks, generous public," she said. "I have not told you because of my innate modesty. I like to surprise you, sometimes. If I did n't have a surprise for you occasionally, where should I be?"

Jack laughed. "I have no doubt that you'll have surprises enough for me, of one kind or another, to keep me guessing. Is n't the performance to continue?"

"If you like," said Nan; and she went to the piano and launched at once into an aria.

Nan swung about on the piano stool. "There!" she said. "Does that suit your highness? That'll be about all."



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Octavia judged that the time had come for her to go, and accordingly she went, with a word to Jack and a significant glance at Nan. Jack seemed very much elated about something; something more than Nan's whistling, although Nan would have had no objection to his feeling elated about that. But has a man a right to feel elated over the accomplishments of his — his —

“Nan,” said Jack, breaking into the current of her thoughts, “don't you want to come out on the piazza? I have something to tell you.”

Nan went, without a word, feeling elated, in her turn; and a curious choking sensation supervened, as, no doubt, a physician or a surgeon would have put it. But Doctor Olcott would not have put it so; he would have chuckled and gone home at once, thinking that he knew what it was that Jack had to tell her. Nan thought that she knew. The thought made her almost dizzy. It was curious that Nan Hedge should have been so affected by a mere thought. One would have supposed that the experiences Nan was believed to have had would have made her proof against dizziness from such a cause.

Nan seated herself on a little wicker settee at the end of the piazza. It was in the shadow and quite hidden by vines. Why she selected just that spot, I do not know; but she must have selected it, for she had moved the settee when she was out there earlier in the evening. It was not heavy. Being seated, there was just room

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for Jack beside her. Indeed, there was no other place for him to sit, unless he sat upon the piazza rail or upon the floor at Nan's feet. Either of those places might have proved uncomfortable, the railing being no more than a perch where the vines would have tickled the back of his neck; and Jack was no Oriental, to sit upon a floor with comfort. Not that Jack gave a thought to these matters, but it may be supposed that Nan had given them a thought, perhaps.

"Well, Jack," said Nan, softly, "what is the weighty matter that you have to tell me?"

Jack did not answer immediately. We may fancy him struggling with his emotions.

"I don't know just where to begin," he said, at last. "You know my sketching and — and those things."

Nan laughed. "Indeed I do."

"Well, dad has been keeping an eye on them, it seems. He never said anything about them but once. But he had a long talk with me to-day."

Nan was beginning to be afraid. "About the sketches?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Yes, primarily. He — in short, he offered to send me away to study, to New York or Paris, whichever I preferred, for a year or two."

When Nan spoke again, her voice sounded strained and queer. "No doubt you find that very attractive. Which shall you choose?"

"I think I shall try New York, first," said Jack. "Then I can go to Paris, if I find that is best."

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“I was in Paris, last, two years ago,” Nan remarked, trying to control her voice; she succeeded pretty well — pretty well, considering. “It is a year, almost, since I was in New York. I suppose you are to be congratulated, Jack. But I — I — ”

Jack thought it queer — at last. Anybody, knowing Nan Hedge, would have thought it queer. He could not see Nan’s face well — it was rather dark in that corner. He bent nearer, in order to see it better. He had to get pretty near; and then he saw that her teeth were shut tightly over her lower lip and she was looking down at her hands, without seeing them, perhaps because her eyes were full of tears. He did not know. And, because — but I do not know the reason — he did what he had not contemplated doing. At least, I have no reason to think that he had contemplated doing it.

He took Nan’s unresisting hand. “Why, Nan!” he cried softly. “Why, Nan! What is it?”

Nan leaned against his shoulder and cried gently. He took her in his arms.

“Why, Nan!” he said again. “Nan, dear, don’t; please don’t.” He kissed her, again and again. “Do you love me, Nan, a little?” He was whispering, very low, in her ear.

“Oh, Jack, Jack!” she said, hiding her face. “You do care, don’t you, Jack? I thought — ”

“Of course I care,” said Jack, interrupting her. He seemed to resent anybody’s thinking that he did not care, although, five minutes before, he might not have

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resented it; he might even have agreed. "Of course I care! How could I help it?"

Nan smiled somewhat bitterly; but Jack could not see it. "Did you want to help it? No, you need not answer. I — I thought that you would have gone away from me for two years without regret. And — and I lost control of myself. I don't often lose control of myself. I'm ashamed that I did then. Forgive me."

He kissed her again, passionately. "Forgive you!" he said. "It's lucky you did." Nan seemed to him, then, much to be desired.

She put up her arms and drew his head down to hers. "See, dear," she whispered. "I have never done this before, whatever people may think of me." She kissed him on the lips; a long kiss.

Jack still held her close. "Why, Nan!" he said indignantly. "What makes you think that people say such things of you? They don't; or, at least, I never heard them."

Nan laughed happily. "Of course you have n't, stupid. You would be the last person they would say it to. I did n't say they *said* such things. They only think them. I'm not a fool, and I know very well that the Old Harbor people think the worst that can be imagined of me, except the dear Miss Tilttons and Miss Mervin and Mr. Ransome and, possibly, your father and — and you, Jack, dearest." Again she hid her face on his shoulder, while Jack did — well, what

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would you think he would do? What would you have done, in his place?

“I’ve never done anything, really,” Nan went on, presently. “It’s only that our ways are not the same as your ways. I’ve had very, very few experiences that I might not have had if I’d been born here. I’m sorry for those few. They were only such as you might expect — we live a different life. I wish I had n’t!” she cried. “I wish I had n’t! I wish that I’d been born here!”

Why pursue them further? Jack did all that could have been expected of him by the most exacting girl; and Nan was not exacting. She seemed, rather, grateful. It is to be remembered that Nan had fallen in love with Old Harbor and its ways. She was starved for affection — real affection; not the affection that buys you a seal cloak and goes unconcernedly about its business. Nan had had her fill of the seal cloak kind of love; until within a few months, she had known nothing of the kind that the Miss Tiltens had to give. It is not strange, perhaps, that she liked it.

Jack was late in getting home that evening. He smiled to himself as he went up the long walk; he felt dizzy, as if he had been drinking too much. His mother was waiting for him, looking somewhat anxious. He did not tell her. He thought the matter would keep for two or three days. Indeed, he would not have known just what to tell. Was he engaged? He supposed so. Was he glad? Again, he supposed so. Nan

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Hedge was still much to be desired. And, in the happy frame of mind of the man who has been drinking a little too much, but not enough to give him a headache in the morning, he went up to bed and to sleep.

Nan went to bed, too, but she did not go to sleep for hours.

## CHAPTER XXV

FOR a long time after Jack had gone he wrote to Nan regularly and very often ; almost every day. Nan would have liked to write him every day, — perhaps even twice a day, — but she did not. She schooled herself carefully to refrain from indulgence in that pastime oftener than four times a week. Jack's letters were all that could be desired by Nan : just enough of the news and the rest just plain love-letter. Nan's were even better. She did not mean that he should be cloyed with sweets, and she gave him just enough of it to make him wish for more. Nan was very skillful at letter-writing, as she was at everything that she put her mind to. I am not going to give you samples of their letters, for I have n't any by me. If I had, I should n't publish them. There are some kinds of letters that should not be published, — a good many, doubtless, — and love-letters are of those kinds.

The temptation was strong for Nan to go and show Mrs. Catherwood parts of her letters, — *parts* of them, — and to be shown, in return, parts of Jack's letters to his family. She did not yield to that temptation. For we may be sure that Mrs. Catherwood's attitude was as obvious to Nan as it is to us. She even felt certain that Jack had said nothing to his mother of their rela-

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tions — their engagement. This humiliated her a little, but she did not show it. Instead, she made Jack feel that it was by her wish that he had not spoken of it. Really, it was due to nothing but laziness on Jack's part. He does not seem to be much of a hero, does he? He was not; only a thoughtless, well-intending, essentially good and clean-minded young man. There are many such.

If Nan could not have the satisfaction of showing parts of her letters to Mrs. Catherwood and getting something that she very much wanted in return, there were the Tiltons. Jack wrote to them frequently; not every day, nor anything like it, but often. Nan went there every day, as she had done for a long time, and she usually had some letters of Jack's concealed about her, somewhere.

She read, to her interested audience of two, Jack's account of his arrival, his unavailing hunt for any of those whom he had selected as possible masters. Of course, they had scattered to the four winds at the approach of warm weather.

"Why, Nan," said Susie, in some surprise, "does n't *anybody* stay in New York in the summer?"

Nan laughed. "Well," she replied slowly, "nobody that can get out of it. It's getting to be pretty much deserted."

"Oh, sister!" cried Miss Susie. "Think of it! That great city, of millions of inhabitants, deserted!" Miss Hitty laughed. "But, Nan," continued Miss Susie,



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much puzzled, "do they shut up all the shops and the offices? How do those people manage to go away? It must cost a lot."

Nan did not laugh, this time. "Oh, they stay. They have to. I've no doubt they are very comfortable; much more comfortable than they would be if they were shut up in a little box of a room at a summer hotel, for instance. The climate of New York is n't half bad. In the tenements, I suppose, it's not comfortable. I don't know anything about them."

"Oh, the poor people!" sighed Miss Susie.

"I don't know whether you could drag them away," Nan returned. "I doubt it. They would be the poor people wherever they were, most of them. But I ought to have thought that Jack would n't find anybody he wanted."

Another day she read, to the same audience of two, the account of Jack's finding, at last, one of the men he was after, who had retired to the mountains, as was his custom during the summer, with his class at his heels; reminding one, for all the world, of a hen with a brood of chickens.

"It's not so very far," said Nan, when she had read it all, and had shown both the Miss Tiltons where it ought to be, in their old atlas — an atlas fifty years old. "It's not more than two hundred miles. He ought to be able to get home once in a while."

The next time Nan went there with a new letter, Miss Susie hailed her delightedly from the upper landing.

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“Oh, Nan, dear, we’ve got something to show you.”

“Have you?” Nan replied. “So have I.”

Miss Hitty heard her, and Nan found her laughing quietly, in her chair by the window.

“So you’ve ‘got something to show you,’ have you, Nancy?” she asked, holding her off by both hands. “Won’t you show it to us?”

“No, you old dear,” Nan answered promptly, “I won’t. I’ll read you selections from it. Expurgated, you know. I don’t think it would be suitable to put into the hands of a female of your tender years.”

“Fiddlesticks, Nancy!” cried Miss Hitty, laughing. “So that’s the kind of letter that Jack writes you!”

Miss Susie had listened in wide-eyed horror. “Oh, *sister!*” she cried, in distress. “Of course Jack’s letters to Nan are not — not — improper.”

“Don’t be a fool, Susie,” Miss Hitty said dryly. “Nobody supposed they were.”

Nan was blushing. It was very becoming. “They are not improper, Miss Susie,” she explained; “but I can’t give them to you and Miss Hitty to read, because — because —”

“I understand, Nancy, dear,” Miss Hitty said, in a low voice, leaning toward Nan to pat her hand, “perfectly. I’ve no doubt Susie does, too. I’ve had the same kind of letters myself, fifty years ago, — bless me, it’s nearer sixty, — when a letter meant more than it does now. After all, I don’t know as it did,” she added quickly. “Mine did n’t. Mine were from —

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but I won't tell you. You might have known him — or of him. Let's have your selections."

Nan had pressed Miss Hitty's hand gently when she spoke of her letters, but she said nothing. She began turning over the sheets of her letter, reading a passage here and there, and once she read a whole page. There was no news of consequence, and Miss Susie could scarcely restrain her impatience; she could not disguise it.

When Nan had finished, she looked up. "You two people don't seem to think much of my selections."

"They're too thoroughly expurgated," said Miss Hitty, smiling. "Besides, we've got more news than you have. Show it to her, Susie."

At which Miss Susie unfolded a letter which she had been holding crumpled up in her impatient hand, and put it in Nan's lap, with a flourish. "There!" she said; "read that."

Nan could not help a feeling of jealousy that anybody should have more news from Jack than she had, but she read their letter through. It was not nearly so long as hers. That made her feel better. As she got near the end, her face lighted up.

"So Jack's coming home to-morrow," she said softly. "I don't wonder that you thought mine tame. But I confess that I'm jealous. Why did n't he tell me?"

"I've no doubt he wanted to surprise you, dear," said Miss Hitty. "I thought it would be a pity to deny you the pleasure of knowing."

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“Thank you,” Nan said simply.

The explanation that Miss Hitty gave may have been the correct one. It did not thoroughly satisfy Nan. Jack came home for three days, and, if he had had any sneaking idea that he would not see Nan, he abandoned it. Indeed, he was at Nan’s for the whole of three long evenings, although he knew that he was thereby risking having to tell his mother more than he was ready to tell yet. But he was not called upon to tell his mother anything, and he went away unconsciously hoping that she had not guessed. Mrs. Catherwood had not guessed it all, but she had guessed enough to make her very uncomfortable, and to make her watch Nan more closely.

She would not spy upon Nan as Miss Wetherbee would have done in a similar situation; as Miss Wetherbee would have liked to do, even as matters were, if she had been able. Nan might have had something to say about that; it is conceivable that she might even have said it, for she was without fear. So, if Mrs. Catherwood did not attempt to spy upon Nan, she used every legitimate method of knowing more about her, even to calling upon her twice in the next three weeks. It was rather a strain; the more so, as she was unable to discover anything that was not to Nan’s credit. It is to be feared that Mrs. Catherwood was not cut out for a detective.

“Mary Catherwood,” said Miss Hitty, one afternoon, not long after, when Mrs. Catherwood had dropped in there, — if one can be said to drop up two

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flights of stairs, — “Mary Catherwood, what possesses you to be so down on Nancy Hedge? She’s a good girl — a dear girl. I know.”

Mrs. Catherwood smiled rather ruefully. “My own opinion,” she replied, “is being forced in that direction. But she has ways that — that — ”

“Ways!” sniffed Miss Hitty, scornfully. “Fiddlesticks! Everybody has ways. No doubt our ways, here in Old Harbor, seem just as queer to her and just as objectionable. We have ways that are — what is the word? — provincial. Oh, there’s no doubt about it.”

For Mrs. Catherwood plainly resented being called provincial, although there was some allowance to be made for Miss Hitty. She was Miss Hitty Tilton, and there was nobody in the whole world just like her. There could not be. There might be others in some other Old Harbor that were tarred with the same brush. There was no other Miss Hitty. In spite of her brusque manner, everybody liked Miss Hitty, even MacLean.

“Has she called us provincial?” asked Mrs. Catherwood, quietly.

“Of course she has n’t,” snapped Miss Hitty, as though she was ready to bite her visitor’s head off. “Of course she has n’t. Nancy does n’t say such things. She does n’t call us names, although I’ve no doubt much worse things have been said of her — the stranger within our gates — by our own people.”

“Not by me.”

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“No,” said Miss Hitty, grudgingly. “You would not, but plenty have. She is every bit as good as Jack. You know that I’m fond of Jack, but I believe that I’m fonder of Nancy.”

Mrs. Catherwood laughed. “Jack has his faults. I should be the last to contend that he had n’t.”

“Well, not to hurt. He’ll get over most of ’em.”

Then Miss Susie came in and they dropped the subject; and soon after, Mrs. Catherwood went home feeling pleased, although she could not have told why.

The next time Jack came home and was starting out for the evening, his mother went out into the hall to see him safely off. Jack was somewhat apprehensive.

“Good-by, Jackie,” she said. “Give my love to Miss Hedge.”

To say that Jack was surprised would be putting it too mildly. His face expressed all shades of astonishment, and he laughed in embarrassed fashion.

“It has hardly reached that point, mother,” he said, “but I will. She’ll be glad to get the message, no doubt.”

Then he went out, hastily. Once outside, where he had a chance to think, he was half of the mind to go back and tell her. He had had the opportunity, and in his haste and confusion he had almost lied. He had to confess to himself that he had not shone. He had not toed the mark. Instead, he had failed, lamentably, to show himself the man he thought he was. But he did not go back. He was already at the gate, and it would

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be time enough when he got back. So he went on to Nan's. By the time he got home again, everybody had gone to bed. Jack was rather glad. Some other time, soon, would do. Jack had had his chance. Never again would it be so easy for him to tell his mother what she had a right to know.

It was some time after that that Miss Hitty began to notice that there was something the matter with Nan's spirits. Once forced upon her attention, she was aware that it had been going on for some weeks and getting worse. It is a progressive malady: progressive in one direction or the other. It was her way to be direct, and she spoke of it. Miss Susie was out.

"Now, Nancy," she said, "you are not as sprightly as you used to be, or as you ought to be. An engaged girl ought not to be down in the mouth."

Nan betrayed no emotion unless her smile expressed amusement. "Perhaps it is because I don't try. If I 'make some effuts,' as our German teacher used to urge me to, I might be more so. But what makes you think I am engaged?"

"Chut, Nancy!" said Miss Hitty. "Don't try to deceive me. I know it as well as if you had told me. Now, what's the matter? Has Jack done anything?"

"No," Nan replied, with a patient smile which wrung Miss Hitty's heart; "no, Jack has n't done anything. Perhaps that's the matter — or maybe I'm not altogether well. I think I can be more sprightly without working too hard."

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“Well,” observed Miss Hitty, grimly, “when Jack comes home again, I’ll see him and I’ll settle that young man. If he has n’t done anything, he’s responsible, anyway, for our Nancy’s good spirits.”

Nan seized her hand. “Oh, thank you for the intent,” she cried, “but please don’t.”

“Don’t what?” asked Miss Hitty.

“Don’t settle him,” said Nan; and she kissed the old woman on both cheeks. They both laughed softly.

Miss Hitty kept tight hold of Nan’s hand. “Well, Nancy, dear,” she said, looking into her face more affectionately than one would have thought that Miss Hitty could look, — “well, Nancy, dear, if you don’t want me to, I won’t. But I mean to keep an eye on you, and if I think it absolutely necessary to speak to Jack, I shall have to do it. We are all responsible.”

When Miss Susie came in, Nan bespoke their careful attention. She had something important to ask them. “You want to do something that will please me very much, don’t you?” she asked.

Miss Susie assented enthusiastically, Miss Hitty no less certainly; but she wanted to know what it was before she agreed to it.

“Well,” said Nan, smiling, and with a pretty color, “you know that I am a wild young thing and commit shocking improprieties unless I am properly looked after.”

“Oh, Nan,” cried Miss Susie, “how *can* you say such things?”



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Miss Hitty smiled at her and patted her hand.

“Oh,” said Nan, “that’s nothing, only an instance. Octavia’s much worse than I. Besides, I don’t feel sure that she’ll be able to stay a great while longer. I — I thought it would be very nice — very nice for me — if you would move back to your house again.”

“Nancy, Nancy!” Miss Hitty said, very gently for her, — for anybody, — still patting Nan’s hand and smiling. There were tears in her eyes.

Miss Susie did not take it in immediately. “Why, Nan,” she asked, in bewilderment, “what do you mean? We have n’t any house now.”

“Come and live with me,” Nan said quietly; “both of you. You shall have your old rooms and anything else you want. Please!” she urged, seeing Miss Hitty’s face. “I need you.”

“Oh, Nan!” began Miss Susie. “I —”

“Nancy, dear,” said Miss Hitty, interrupting her sister, “you know we can’t. It is dear and kind in you to want us, but we can’t.”

“Now, why not?” Nan insisted. “I said I needed you.”

Miss Hitty smiled again, with amusement this time. “Oh, but you don’t,” she said. “You can’t fool me.”

Miss Hitty had been growing gradually feebler as the summer went on. Nan had seen it; she was one of the very few who were aware of it. Miss Hitty herself was another.

Nan looked as if she would like to cry, but she did

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not. "Do you know," she asked, "that it is very selfish and mean in you to refuse my invitation and to deny to a poor, unprotected girl the solace of your presence? It is mean in you to make me downer in the mouth than ever. How can you expect me to be sprightly?"

"You know us," remarked Miss Hitty, "and I know you, Nancy Hedge."

"I'm going home," said Nan, with an injured air, "with my despised invitations."

She got up and kissed Miss Susie; then, saying, "You don't deserve it — not in the least," she kissed Miss Hitty and went out.

"Oh, *sister!*" cried Miss Susie, when Nan was out of hearing. "How *could* you be so — so decided? I'm afraid that you hurt Nan's feelings."

"Fiddlesticks!"

"It *would* be so nice," continued Miss Susie, wistfully, "if we could go back to the house with no anxieties about keeping it in order."

"Well, we can't," snapped Miss Hitty. "I'm ashamed of you, Susie. You're a — no, you're not a fool, but you don't understand. Nancy does."

At which Miss Susie began to cry softly. Her crying always irritated Miss Hitty.

It was not long before Jack began to have dealings with the magazines; very slight relations they were, at first, entered into through his teacher. Jack was enthusiastic. His letters to Nan were full of that important matter, to the almost total exclusion of everything else.

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Nan missed the everything else. She found that she did not care much for the matters that Jack found so interesting. And, with important business as his excuse, he wrote but once a week.

Nan threw down the third of his weekly letters, with an exclamation of impatience.

“I don’t care a yip” — shocking expression — where could she have picked it up? — “for his durned old magazines,” she said to herself — an even more shocking expression. “I want a different kind of a letter.” She sighed. “I’ll take it around to my old ladies; I can give it to them to read, unexpurgated. I suppose that I ought to be interested. I should be, if he had only written a page of the other kind.”

Sighing again, she started for the Tiltons’. On her way, she came upon Constance, who gave her a very friendly smile. Nan drew up to the curb, quickly, on the impulse of the moment, and asked if she did n’t want to get in. Constance got in, very readily. She had just come from the post-office, where she had found a letter from Jack, all her own; and Jack had said — and Constance rattled on, giving Nan the news with which she was already familiar. But it was a comfort to have Constance beside her, and to hear her talk about Jack. Nan did not go directly to the Tiltons’, but drove aimlessly about the streets as long as Constance would. No doubt MacLean saw them several times.

Jack, in his enthusiasm, even wrote to his father, urging him to write some of his recollections of the Civil

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War. "Anything about the war goes, now, dad," he wrote, "especially if it is personal. It can't be too personal. There must be stacks of things that you could haul out of the pigeon-holes of your memory. Do it. The writing of them will be all right. Make them intimate — just talk. They would go like hot cakes. I'll venture to say that I could dispose of them at the first publisher's I tried; very likely to the first magazine I tried. Colonel Francis Catherwood's 'Memoirs of the Civil War.' Will you do it?"

Colonel Catherwood pulled out a drawer full to the top with closely written sheets, and then another drawer half full. He chuckled as he looked at them.

"I'll think of it, Jackie," he said. "I'll think of it. Perhaps I will."

## CHAPTER XXVI

NAN and Octavia had finished their dinner in a silence that was almost complete, and Octavia had seated herself in an easy-chair, as was her custom, and had folded her hands and had been doing nothing, apparently with great satisfaction, as was also her custom. Not that Octavia Haight was an idle or an inefficient person, but only that, when she had nothing to do, she believed in doing nothing. Even her brain seemed to be a blank; but that effect was not sufficiently unusual to attract attention from those who knew her well.

Nan wandered about, as she had done on another occasion, aimlessly, in and out of the long window, doing nothing as truly as Octavia, but making hard work of it. Her restlessness irritated Octavia, who looked up occasionally, but said nothing. The silence continued. Octavia's method of doing nothing irritated Nan, too. Octavia might have been a marble statue, wonderfully colored by some great artist. She did not move so much as a finger or her eyes; only her breast rose and fell slowly, with her deep and regular breathing. Nan watched it for some time.

"Octavia!" she said suddenly. It would have startled most people. Octavia only looked at Nan quietly, moving her head slowly for the purpose, but she did not speak.

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"Octavia," said Nan, impatiently. "I wonder if you would sit as immovably if I stuck a hat-pin into you."

Octavia smiled slowly. "If you stuck it into me in the right place and quickly enough, I might be even more immovable," she said. "But don't you try it, Nan."

"I'd like to try it," Nan replied maliciously. "I'd like to shake you."

"You may try that, if you like. I'm stronger than you."

"Oh, you make me angry," Nan cried. "How can you sit quietly in that stuffed chair, this hot night?"

"I'm very comfortable," said Octavia, with another of her slow smiles.

Octavia's smiles irritated Nan, too, and her coolness and her calmness generally. Nan was forgetting that Octavia's olive skin marked her as suited to hot weather. Nan was feeling rather low in her mind, though she would hardly confess it to herself, much less to Octavia. I suppose she was unduly irritable, — not wholly well, perhaps, — and therefore not accountable for the state of her temper.

"Is he coming to-night, Nan?" asked Octavia.

"I don't know, I'm sure," answered Nan, impatiently. She showed none of that calm certainty which she had displayed on that other occasion of which I have spoken.

"Don't you know whether he came home or not?" persisted Octavia, surprised.

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“Yes, I know that he came home,” Nan replied, more impatiently than before, “but I don’t know whether he is coming here or not. Men have been known to change their minds before now, Octavia, as I reminded you once before. I don’t know whether he would have to change his mind to come or to stay away. You will see, if you wait long enough.”

“Oh,” said Octavia, quietly, turning a dark red. “I suppose you are only waiting, then, Nan?” she continued sweetly.

“Only waiting,” answered Nan, trying to keep a clutch on her temper. She muttered something under her breath.

Octavia had heard, and she laughed aloud, low and lazily. Nan turned, her eyes blazing.

“Octavia!” she began; then her eyes encountered Octavia’s. Octavia’s eyes seemed to hold a quiet scorn of herself. She was laughing more at herself than at Nan. Nan relented. “Are you in hard luck, too?” she asked. “Have n’t you heard from him yet?”

“Not yet; not a word. I have written three times. I can’t do more in self-respect.”

“I’m sorry, Octavia, and I beg your pardon. I’m nervous and tired and hot, and your appearance of coolness and calmness exasperated me. Come,” she said, with a change of manner, “let’s be gay. I’ll whistle for you.”

So she did, Octavia sitting calmly, with no more expression than the marble statue that she had seemed

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to resemble. At the end of an hour, Nan stopped and whirled about on the piano stool.

“I guess that’ll be about all,” she said. “My lips are tired.”

“Yes,” rejoined Octavia, “they must be. Thank you, Nan. There are other exercises for the lips that would be more agreeable, are n’t there?”

Nan flushed slowly, and rose, without reply, and passed out of the long window, which was open. She threw herself down upon the seat in the corner of the piazza, — it was shielded by vines, you remember, and was well in the shadow, — and put her head down upon her arms. It was long after nine. Again she rose and went in.

“I’m going to bed, Octavia. Will you put out the lights when you come up?”

Octavia nodded. “So you’ve given him up, Nan?”

“It’s much too late for him, now,” Nan replied.

“You may have observed that the customs here are not those to which you have been brought up.”

“I could never get used to them.”

“I could if I had the chance, and I would. But our Jacks seem to be Knaves — both of them. Good-night.”

Nan went up to her room; but not to bed. She sat in the dark for hours at her open window, and watched the lights go out in the other houses which she could see through the trees, and watched the stars and listened to the quiet noises of the summer night. The



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crickets throbbed overpoweringly in a chorus which seemed to keep time with the beating of her heart.

What Nan could not know was that, although Jack Catherwood had come home that afternoon, he had come home very nearly ill. Mrs. Catherwood had promptly insisted upon his going to bed, a course which he was too dull and feverish to oppose. He had the idea that he would be able to get up, by evening; but when the evening came, he did not remember Nan or his engagement, and he naturally did not remember to send her word, which he would certainly have done if he had had his senses about him. Mrs. Catherwood might even have done it, if she had not been too much occupied to think about it. She was sitting by Jack, listening to his disconnected mutterings in his uneasy sleep, and learning much that she had been able to do no more than conjecture. It gave her something to think about. She roused Jack enough to give him a mustard foot-bath and a dose of some simple old-fashioned remedy. I don't know what it was — nitre, perhaps; and it may not have done a particle of good, but she had faith in it, and faith, we are told, is the most potent agent. Though whether faith acts vicariously to produce auto-suggestion is a rather nice point, which I will not attempt to decide, nor will I attempt to trace the connection between auto-suggestion and the typhoid bacillus.

At any rate, Mrs. Catherwood piled the bedclothes on Jack, — enough to smother him on ordinary occa-

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sions, — and left him, in the most absolute faith, to sweat it out. Jack, being young and strong and well supplied with white corpuscles, if they have not been supplanted by something else, by this time, — with whatever makes the fight for a man, at all events, — proceeded to do so. In the morning, he found himself rather weak, but perfectly clear in his mind, and his first thought, we may suppose, was for Nan. At least, he made several attempts to get word to her. There was some obvious difficulty in that without telling more than he was yet prepared to tell. Then, thinking that he would certainly be well enough to go to see her that evening, he gave up trying.

When evening came, Jack was not quite well enough to go out. His mother had no great difficulty in persuading him of that, which was undoubtedly true, nor in persuading him to go to bed, instead, at eight o'clock. For Jack had faith in Nan, that she would most willingly forgive his absence when she learned the reason. He would write her about it on Monday, as soon as ever he could. It did not once occur to him that she might not believe all that he should write about his illness, that she might consider it an excuse and nothing more; "indisposition" is capable of more than one interpretation. Nan could not know that Mrs. Catherwood made some effort to send word that night.

In this case, vicarious faith did not seem to result in auto-suggestion. Instead, Nan went up to her room early, and again she sat in the dark at her window.

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She had been able to make very little pretense, with Mrs. Haight, of feeling other than wretched; but even Octavia, making allowance for the pretense, was not aware how utterly miserable Nan, alone in her own room, seemed to be. She did not cry at all, which was a pity. But if you have had similar feelings, you will know just how she felt, without my enlarging upon the matter; if you have not, no words of mine could make you understand.

Nan went about, much as usual, for the next two days; she said little, and there were dark rings under her eyes, but there was no other sign. On Tuesday, she got Jack's letter. No doubt Jack had made a mistake in writing rather slightly of his illness, which his mother had nipped in the bud; no doubt he had made an even greater mistake in writing of it as "indisposition." He had the young man's scorn of illness, and was naturally somewhat ashamed that he should have come so near being guilty of it. Because of that reason of Jack's, which is rather commendable than otherwise, Nan, feeling as she did, took no stock in his excuses; for excuses they seemed to her to be, and nothing more.

No, Nan could not know all of what was in Jack's mind when he wrote, although she may have known enough to justify her action; and Jack knew even less of what was passing in Nan's mind. Failing thus of a complete understanding, it is not strange, perhaps, that they should have fallen into a misunderstanding which was more or less complete.

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For Nan, having considered the case impartially for almost two days, was forced to the conclusion that something was due her self-respect. Seeing no escape, — the two days were devoted to the search for some way of escape, which would, at the same time, save her self-respect, — she wrote him, releasing him from the engagement. It was necessary to assume that there was an engagement from which to release him; but Nan had no compunctions about that, as she was about to release him from it. Her letter was very gentle and very dignified and very friendly, and she was an inordinately long time in writing it. She must have wanted Jack very much; too much, it is to be supposed, to be willing to allow him to humiliate her so much. When she had got the letter written, at last, and posted, and had burned all of her bridges, she went up to her room. She wanted to cry a little, but she did not. She sat at her window, looking out and seeing nothing, and Octavia had to send up for her three times before she came to luncheon.

Jack's reply to her letter came with suspicious promptness, and in it he accepted all that Nan had said, with dignity and gentleness and great friendliness and readiness; almost too readily, Nan thought. But Jack was unconscious of any wrong which he had done, and he was stiff-necked accordingly and hurt — more hurt than he would have believed possible. Knowing that he was guilty of nothing, he was forced to believe that the engagement, such as it was, had been broken

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solely because of some whim of Nan's. Jack was too young not to be proud — too proud to be willing to question Nan's decision or to ask her real reasons. It might have done no good at all to ask them; but it is conceivable that it might have. If Jack had only known enough to know it, Nan was waiting and hoping for some such excuse. To Jack, Nan Hedge seemed more to be desired than ever.

Miss Hitty saw it all. Nan could not hope to hide it from her. She asked Nan about it, and she even wrote to Jack when she found that she could get no satisfaction from Nan.

“Jack Catherwood,” she wrote, “what have you been doing to our Nancy? Answer me, and tell the truth.”

To which Jack answered, truthfully enough, that he had not done anything; that Nan, herself, had written him, releasing him from the engagement and giving no adequate reason for her action. He did not see that he had any standing at all; there seemed to be nothing for him to do but to acquiesce. He supposed that Nan was tired of it, for he could see no other possible reason.

Miss Hitty did not show this letter to Nan nor to Susie. It was her own private affair with Jack. But she wrote him again. “Nan is not tired of it. She is almost broken-hearted. There is some misunderstanding here. I shall keep my eye on you two young folks, — too young things, I might as well have said, — both .

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of you too proud to do anything to clear up misunderstandings. Don't let it go so, Jack. Don't do as I did — There! it's out. I might have been your own grandmother, if I had not been a mule. This is between you and me. Don't you go and tell. And hurry up about your business. I may not last very much longer. Don't you tell that, either."

Jack made no immediate reply to this, but Miss Hitty did not expect any reply. She knew him.

As for Nan, she had taken to driving incessantly; or as nearly that as was possible with but one horse that she cared to drive. That horse lost flesh over it, and became as lean as a horse should be. Nan may have found solace in driving over the roads where she had been used to find Jack; over those roads, again and again, stopping now and then to let her imaginary companion get some good bit of composition, then driving on. She may have done that or she may not; she never told me, and nobody else could have spoken with authority. But as she was coming in over the old Boston stage-road, one day, she saw Eben Joyce come out of the woods. Moved by some impulse which I will not try to explain, she drew up and waited for him. Nan seldom tried to analyze her impulses, but acted on them. To be sure, Eben Joyce was Jack's uncle; but it is doubtful whether Nan consciously remembered that fact.

Eben saw the horse and cart, and noted that they seemed to be waiting for him. He hesitated, conquered

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his impulse to retreat and go home some other way, and advanced resolutely towards Nan. It took a good deal of resolution. When Nan asked him, in the most commonplace tone and as if she had known him all her life, if he would n't rather be driven home than walk, he got in beside her, somewhat dazed. Here was Nancy Hedge, whom he had never met, asking him to drive with her. Obviously, there was but one thing to do.

To his great surprise, Eben found himself talking freely. Nan did not say much, but the little that she did say was well calculated — if it was calculated at all, concerning which there is a reasonable doubt — to keep Eben going. Presently Eben began to speak of Jack; whether by his own design or by design of Nan's, there is the same reasonable doubt — or larger; for Eben, in such matters, was no fool. He may have been mildly intoxicated by Nan's nearness. She sometimes produced that effect.

“My sister Harriet said,” observed Eben, “that Jack came near having a serious illness the last time he was at home.”

Nan sat up — I do not mean that literally, for Nan always sat erect when she was driving; she turned to Eben so quickly that she startled both him and the horse. For a minute, she had to devote her attention to the horse.

“What did you say, Mr. Joyce,” she asked, when she had the animal quieted again, “about an illness?”

“I said,” Eben answered, “that Jack came near

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being seriously ill when he was at home last. Or so Harriet told me.”

“Oh, I am sorry to hear it,” Nan said. There could be no doubt of her sincerity. “Tell me about it.”

So Eben told her, reporting what Harriet had said to him that Mrs. Catherwood had said. It is to be borne in mind that Jack was a great favorite of Harriet’s and that Mrs. Catherwood was his mother. It is not likely that the tale lost appreciably by repetition. Nan listened to Eben’s story in silence.

“Thank you,” she said simply, when he had made an end of it. “I am very glad that Mrs. Catherwood was able to bring him out of it so well.”

“It is very fortunate,” Eben replied.

“Very fortunate,” Nan echoed. She could not say anything more. She had forgotten where they were going, and the horse had passed MacLean’s twice — MacLean, himself, was at his open door, looking out — before she remembered to leave Eben at his gate.

Nan was regretting, bitterly. She was regretting everything: her action, which now seemed to have been hasty, her looks, her bringing up, her age. There was no need. Although she was a year or two older than Jack, she was not very old; and, certainly, there was no need to regret her looks. She did. She regretted everything that made her different from the others. She wished, passionately, to be like them, and to have them like her. In the midst of her regrets she looked up and there was Constance. Without stopping to consider what Con-



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stance might think of her action, she called to her and asked if she would not drive a little way with her. Constance, somewhat surprised, got in beside her.

"I am almost home," said Constance, "but that does n't matter. I'll go anywhere you like."

Nan was grateful. She began, at once, to question Constance about Jack and his illness. Constance answered with entire frankness. Constance was no fool and she liked Nan, and she could give a pretty good guess at the situation; and, if she could help Nan, she was quite willing to do so.

"I'm going to have a good talk with Jack," she said, when she had finished her story, "the next time he comes home."

She did not say what the talk would be about, and Nan did not ask.

"Are you?" she asked. "Will you tell him that I am sorry he came so near being ill? Tell him that I am very sorry for what happened to him. Will you?"

Constance looked up quickly. "Yes," she said; "I'll tell him just that." She seemed to think that the subject ought to be changed, at this point. "Do you know," she continued, laughing, "that our Nora came to mother in a great fright yesterday. She thought she had seen a ghost."

"Indeed!" said Nan. She was not interested in Nora.

"Yes," said Constance; "she thought it was the ghost of Mike Loughery that she had seen the night before. She had been up pretty nearly the whole night,

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saying prayers for him. She must have just about worn out her rosary."

"From what I have heard of Mike Loughery," replied Nan, "Nora's prayers would n't hurt him. Might it not have been Mike himself?"

"Oh, no. Mike sailed on the 'Susan' last spring. She can't get in for nearly a month."

Nan murmured some reply. It did not matter what she said. She was still filled with regrets, and there did not seem to be anything that she could do to mend matters. Jack must make the next move. If he should n't, after that message, — if her intuition should prove to have been right, as is apt to be the case with woman's intuition, — Nan would not think of it.

That summer had not been a happy time for Nan. She had not had many really happy times in all her life.

MacLean kicked out his leg as he told his freshest bit of gossip to the first man who came into his shop. That man, unhappily for MacLean, happened to be Doctor Olcott.

"Eh, mon," he said gleefully, "what'll the Hedge girl be doin' noo, d' ye think? She'll be takkin' oop wi' Eben Joyce, puir mon! She drove —"

"Damn it, MacLean!" the doctor broke out, sharply. "Damn it! Will you leave Nan Hedge alone? Can't a girl do anything without setting your damned tongue to wagging? Hinged in the middle, MacLean! Damnable gossip!"

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The doctor, still rumbling wrathfully, wheezed out and slammed MacLean's door behind him; slammed the door behind him, in spite of the fact that it was never shut at that season, but stood open, with a chair against it.

## CHAPTER XXVII

EBEN was lying stretched at length on the pine needles, happier than he had been for many a long day — for many a year, for that matter; since that time, back in the dim past, when he had run away. Clanky Beg and Joe were stretched beside him, and they were happy, too. It was nothing unusual for them, perhaps. All three watched the patch of blue sky above the little clearing, and the white clouds drifting past it, and the tops of the pines that waved lazily in the summer breeze, and they listened to their soft whisperings. None of the three said anything. They were content to lie there and breathe the spicy air and watch the summer day drift by. It brought up old memories to Eben; memories of Oriental ports, perhaps, and tropical seas and the spicy smell of his cargo mingled with the smell of pine tar and bilge-water — the smell of a ship. Eben loved that smell.

Suddenly, Clanky sat up and peered about; then he got to his feet and vanished noiselessly. It made Eben uneasy and his content was at an end; for Eben was not used to being happy, and at the first suspicion of alarm, the feeling left him. It was an elusive feeling.

“What is it, Joe?” he asked.

Joe laughed, care-free. His conscience did not

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trouble him. "Oh," he said, "nothing, I guess. Probably Clanky thinks somebody has come into the woods. There 's no reason why they should n't. The woods are n't ours."

Eben lay back again; but he was uneasy, and not at peace. Because he was uneasy, he could not lie quiet there, as he had been doing for more than an hour, but in five minutes he sat up again. Opposite him, on the log which had been Clanky's favorite seat all winter, sat a stranger. He was a slightly undersized man, but inclined to a beery corpulence, which was kept in check by underfeeding. His eyes were puffy, and on his flabby cheeks was a stubble of beard; and his face wore an expression of a sort of specious geniality.

At the sight of Eben a smile that was, no doubt, meant to be jovial overspread this gentleman's fine features; a smile that was most thoroughly belied by the expression of his eyes. In them was a look like that of a bird of prey — or a wolf.

He slapped his leg. "Why, *damn* me!" he cried, with a laugh intended to be round and jolly. "Damn *me*, if it ain't Jacob Bronson! Why, Jacob," he said, rising and advancing toward Eben with a slightly rolling gait, "who 'd 'a' thought to find you here, snoozin' away in this quiet spot? Looks like you ain't got a thing on your conscience. Why, Jacob —"

For Eben had given a low cry of terror, had leaped to his feet and fled. The stranger, with an excited chuckle of delight, put out after him. He could not

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hope to overtake Eben, for Eben was not corpulent, nor was he underfed now, and fear winged his heels; but at least, he could have the joy of the chase.

All this had passed too quickly for Joe to have a hand or a foot in it. He could only sit up, when it was too late, and watch the stranger until he disappeared, which he did with a rapidity that was astonishing, and listen to the sounds of the chase. "Oh, Jacob! Oh, Mr. Bronson!" the stranger was calling continually, his calls being as continually interrupted by his laughter. These sounds were becoming momentarily more distant.

Joe wondered; then he saw Clanky Beg slipping through the wood with what speed he was capable of. Poor Clanky! He did not run well, because his legs were wobbly. He knew it well, and it was a source of unending grief to him.

"Go it, Clanky!" called Joe, softly. "Go it! I'm sorry for that man if you get your hands on him."

Clanky did go it. It did no good, for the more he ran, the farther he was behind. Clanky himself perceiving that fact before he got to the edge of the wood, his grief was so heavy that he leaned against a tree and wept. As he was weeping his heart out, there was the sound of mocking laughter; and Clanky looked up, surprised, and there stood Mike Loughery, only a few steps away.

Clanky's surprise did not prevent him from acting quickly. He threw himself upon Mike in a fury, before Mike could stir a foot.

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“Now Clanky’s got you,” he said, calmly enough, as his strong arms wound about the struggling Mike. “Clanky’s going to kill you, Mike. Mike’s a thief and a liar, and he’s going to die.”

Mike began to believe that Clanky spoke the truth; but he made a mighty struggle.

Now it happened that William Ransome had been out beyond the pines, to a point from which he could get an unobstructed view of the sea. He had been sitting with his back against a great rock, for a long time, engaged in introspection and in looking out over the wide waters. He was tired of being unable to write, tired of having something the matter with him and not knowing what it was, and he had set himself the task, deliberately, of searching his soul to find out, if possible, what was wrong.

He had selected the spot instinctively and unconsciously, but his judgment had been sound. At least, I think so. There is nothing that so helps a man to a true searching of the soul as an unobstructed view over wide waters. I cannot imagine a man’s dealing with anything but truth in the presence of the sea. All the littlenesses of life fall away before it. The only trouble with it, for a purpose such as William’s, — if it is a trouble, — is that it soon becomes an effort to keep your soul consciously before you for examination. Your soul becomes a hidden witness, none the less revealed to you for that, and you are lost in contemplation before you know it. Then the truth dawns on you, not sud-

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denly, but like the rising of the sun, and becomes as clear as day. You know it for truth, and wonder that you could have failed to see anything so palpable. You even laugh at yourself for a fool.

So William, after much gazing over the wide waters, and much pleasant musing, his conscious searching having been long abandoned, laughed, on a sudden, aloud.

“Well, William,” he said, “you are — you certainly are a fool. I’ll go and tell her now.”

He did not mention who the “her” was; but he knew and, I suppose, we have known for a long time. Perhaps we have been inclined, more than once, to call him a fool for not knowing. He sprang up, like a boy, and strode off, still laughing.

He was walking over the fields of wiry grass, and he had just come to the fringe of young growth near Mrs. Loughery’s, when he saw a man dart from the woods like a frightened deer. Within the woods were sounds of gasping and broken chuckling and an occasional exclamation. He thought he knew the runner.

“Eben!” he called. “Oh, Eben!”

Eben did not turn his head, but only ran the faster.

“Well, what’s the matter with him?” said William, impatiently.

As he spoke, a second man came from the woods. This man was a little undersized and inclined to corpulence; and he was almost breathless with the unaccustomed exercise of his running and weak with mirth.



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“Ah, *damn* me!” cried this gentleman to himself — he had not yet perceived William. “Oh, Jacob! Mr. Bronson — I say — don’t ye be in a hurry, now,” he called, as well as he could for laughing. “*Damn you, Jake Bronson,*” he added, muttering, “I got you, now, I have.” There was quite a different expression in his face as he finished his muttering. “I don’t care whether you gets away at the present go off or not. I’m out o’ this race.”

He sat down on the grass, and alternately laughed and chuckled and pressed his hand over his heart. “It’s a powerful strong stitch,” he said; and he swore a string of oaths at the stitch in his side.

William had come up and stood close behind him. “Well, my friend,” he said, “you seem very merry and to have lost your wind.”

The man looked up, surprised. “Hello, bo!” he said. “You come along mighty quiet. Might startle me so ’t I’d have heart disease. Nothin’ but a damned stitch, though. Takes me sudden, sometimes, ’specially when I run. That’s why I don’t run none to speak of. But merry’s the word. You’d be merry ’f you’d ’a’ seen him start.”

“Why were you chasing Mr. J — that man?”

“Well, ’tween you an’ me, ’t was ’cause I wanted to catch ’im.” A cunning leer went with this reply.

“Why,” continued William, imperturbably, “did you wish to catch him?”

“Well, bo, is it any business o’ yours?”

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"Yes," said William.

"How?"

"I am a friend of his."

"Oh," said the stranger. "Well, I'm a friend o' his, too. So, there you are."

"What is your name?" asked William.

"Well, ol' pal," — the manner was becoming less jovial, — "that's no business o' yours. They ain't no doubt about that. But I'll tell you. My name's James Gunn, Esquire, at your service. What's yours?"

William laughed. "Mr. James Gunn, Esquire, my name is Ransome."

"On the Grampus hills me father fed his flocks," continued James Gunn, Esquire. "A humbil swine. Kind o' low down in him, callin' his father a swine, wa'n't it? Say, I'd forgot I knew that. I learned it once when I was a kid at school. That's a long time ago."

"I can readily believe that," William remarked.

"These the Grampus hills?" asked Mr. Gunn, with a wave of his hand.

"They may do duty as the hills in question," answered William, laughing again.

"Leavin' the hills alone," said Mr. Gunn, "I ain't never done nothin' to you, have I?"

"Nothing," said William.

"Well, then," returned Mr. Gunn, triumphantly, "what you down on me for?"

"What were you chasing my friend for?"

"Jake Bronson?" asked Mr. Gunn, a wave of illu-

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mination breaking over his face. "So that's it. Jacob Bronson an' I was shipmates together."

"Indeed!" William sat down on a stone. There might be information to be gathered here.

"Yes, indeed," continued Mr. Gunn. "Maybe you 've been shipmates with 'im."

"No," said William. "I have never been to sea."

"Indeed!" returned Mr. Gunn, with a very good imitation of William's manner. "Well, sir, all I can say is that you have missed a great pleasure."

William laughed again. Mr. Gunn seemed an amusing rascal. "I believe it," he said.

"Yes, sir," Mr. Gunn went on, "you have missed an experience, sir, that is well worth having. If you want to be in hell, clear down to the bottomless bottom of hell, just you ship as a common sailor in a ship that sails with Jacob Bronson as mate, and on a long voyage where you don't touch anywhere for three or four months — not long enough to get out of it."

"So?" asked William. This was a new phase of Eben's character, supposing it to be true, which it probably was not.

"So," said Mr. Gunn. "I just happened to be passin' through this piece o' woods when who should I see but that self-same Jake Bronson, snoozin' under a tree, as quiet an' peaceable as if he had n't got nothin' on his conscience. Wantin' to shake han's with an' ol' pal like him, jus' natu'lly, I spoke to him. He looks up an' sees who it is, an' jus' flies." Mr. Gunn was overcome

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with mirth, at this point. "Yes, sir, he jus' flies fer home. That did n't make no difference in me feelin's towards him, an' I, still wantin' to take 's han' in mine, I puts out after 'im. But he beat me out." Mr. Gunn gave way to his mirth, and chuckled until he had to roll on the ground.

William made no reply of any kind. Mr. Gunn, having had his roll, first sat up, then got somewhat laboriously to his feet.

"Yes, sir," he resumed indignantly, "there he was, snoozin' as peaceable as if he did n't have nothin' on his conscience. An' he has. Has n't he? I asks you, has he or has n't he?"

William was obliged, in the interests of truth, to confess to himself that Eben did seem to have something on his conscience. But he did not confess it to Mr. James Gunn.

"I asks you," Mr. Gunn went on, "an' you don't answer. Now, what would you say if I sh'd tell you 't Jake Bronson did a murder at sea, on a voyage the like o' the one I spoke of — near four months at sea, we were — a murder of a sailor what was givin' no offense?"

William smiled. Mr. Gunn had ceased to be amusing, "I should say," he replied, "that it was probably a lie."

Mr. James Gunn seemed to be much excited. "A lie, damn you! Me lie?"

William rose from his rock. Mr. Gunn was apparently meditating an attack. "Yes," he said, still smiling, "undoubtedly a lie."

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At the word, Gunn launched himself at William and aimed a blow at his face. William parried, without difficulty, and promptly returned a right arm swing which took Gunn behind the jaw, lifted him off his feet, and sent him sprawling. He lay quiet for a minute and William watched him; watched him while he sat up, dazed and dizzy, and looked about him. Then he saw William.

“Now, Gunn,” said William, “if you want to follow up the matter you were speaking of, you can arrange to be at Colonel Catherwood’s office to-morrow morning. Anybody will direct you to it. I will agree to produce the man you call Jacob Bronson, and you can make any charges you have to make.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Gunn, humbly. “What did ye say was the gentleman’s name, sir?”

“Catherwood; Colonel Catherwood.”

“Catherwood—Catherwood.” Gunn was still half dazed, which was not to be wondered at. “Seems to me, sir, our owners had some such name. Maybe he owns the ‘Susan.’ Do ye know, sir?”

“Yes, he owns the ship ‘Susan.’”

“’T is the same ship. If I c’d collect me wits, which you knocked out of me, — or into me, — I sh’d say’t me podner told me that. An’ where is me podner? — Me podner that promised to be wi’ me in a jiff? Where in — in — these Grampus hills? If ye know, Mr. Norville, it ’ll be a favor to tell me. He ’d help me. Maybe he ’d direct me to the colonel’s place. He

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lives hereabouts, som'eres. Me podner, I mean, not the colonel."

William was laughing again. "I don't know your partner."

"Course you don't, sir," said Mr. Gunn. "How thoughtless of me! *You* don't know a devil like Mike Loughery —"

"Mike Loughery!" William exclaimed. "Is he here? How did he get here? Where did you meet him?"

"I'll answer your questions in order, Mr. Neville," Mr. Gunn replied. He was sitting up, now, gesticulating. "He is here, or he was a half hour ago. He — we — got here by fast freight, which is none too fast, it takin' us a good three months, makin' use of the hospitality of the hostelry kep' up at the public expense. An excellen' good hostelry, Mr. Neval, an' I'd recommend it freely. I met Mike in front of a bar in Second Avenue. He'd just lef' the 'Susan,' secretly an' by night, as ye may say, not carin' much fer goin' to South Ameriky. He ain't no sailor, Mike ain't. Now, *I* am. By the by, Mr. Naval, is the colonel ye spoke of a magistrate?"

"No," said William, "he is n't. But he is a man of considerable influence in this town. Any man that he considers an undesirable citizen is apt to have to go in one way or another."

"Oh!" Mr. Gunn looked thoughtful. "As much as to say — but we won't say it, as 'tween frien's. Grand

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panjandrom, is he? Fast freight an' the public hostelry to be preferred, eh? Now, Mr. Nuvalle, I'll be goin' to look up me podner, if ye'll help me a bit. Ye made me 'dizzy wi' joy, ye did."

William did not move. Mr. Gunn looked indignant.

"Will ye help me up or will ye not? I asks you. Will ye leave a poor victim grovelin' on the groun'? Never fear, sir."

"I have no fear," said William, smiling.

"Nor y' have n't any need to," Gunn muttered. "I know."

"Give me your knife," William returned, "and I'll help you."

Gunn looked the very picture of injured innocence. "Me knife? What knife?"

"The sheath knife that is in your belt just by your hip."

"Why, coitainly. I clean forgot that knife, sir. Sailors allus carries one, sir."

William made no reply, but took the knife, sheath and all, which Gunn held out to him.

"Now, sir," said Gunn, "if you'll lend a hand — Thank ye, sir."

They set off together into the woods. "Ye're a sharp un, Mr. Naville, *you* are," said Gunn, after he had taken a few unsteady steps. "Ye handle y'r fists pretty, too. Do ye do that often, jus' for amusement, so to speak?"

"No," William answered. "Not now. I used to spar

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pretty well, I think. But I'm long out of practice — twelve or fifteen years."

"Oh," said Gunn, a note of respect in his voice. "Then I'm glad I did n't run agin ye when ye were in practice. I'd be a corp' at this minute. Say, ye would n't teach me that punch ye handed me? Do, now, sir, Mr. Norvulle. It'd be a handy one f'r a sailor man to know."

"No," said William.

Mr. Gunn sighed deeply. "I thought as much," he replied; "I thought as much. They're all down on us lads."

They were well into the pines by this time, and faint sounds came to them from near at hand. Mr. Gunn pricked up his ears.

"They's murder bein' done," he cried. "I know the sound of it. Come on, quick."

He broke away from William and ran, unsteadily. William followed, and overtook him just as he threw himself upon two figures on the ground. The figure that was uppermost was that of Clanky Beg. William knew the misshapen legs. The under man was about gone. His legs twitched spasmodically.

"Clanky!" William cried. "Clanky! Let that man up."

Clanky threw off the groggy Gunn, and rose.

"Yes, sir," he said, beginning to weep again. "Mike's a thief and a liar, and I was killing him. It was 'most done. He ought to die."



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Gunn sat where Clanky had thrown him. "Well, blast *me!*" he said, in astonishment. "He's a rum un. Do ye have many o' them aroun' here, Mr. Narvalle?"

"There's only one Clanky Beg," said William, smiling involuntarily. Mike was beginning to gasp. He raised his hand to feel his throat.

"Well, that's lucky," Gunn returned. "Say, young feller, if ye go to murderin' all the liars, ye'll have y'r han's full. It'll keep ye busy."

"Clanky," said William, solemnly, "you must n't do that. You must never do that. Never try to kill anybody. Promise me that you will not. Will you promise that, Clanky?"

"Must n't Clanky kill Mike?" he asked. "Mike is a thief and a liar."

"You must never try to kill him or anybody. Promise me that you will not."

Clanky Beg gave a sigh of regret. "Well, I won't, then. But Clanky's sorry you came."

"I suppose so," said William; "but I'm very glad. It was very lucky, Clanky, — Hello!"

For Mike had taken advantage of the talk with Clanky Beg and had crawled to Gunn; and they had both got upon their feet and were making off unsteadily. Clanky would have started after; but William laid a hand on his arm.

"No," he said; "let them go."

Gunn turned and waved his hand. "Don't ye wait f'r me, bo, if I ain't there," he called.

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William watched them out of sight, and then he let Clanky go. He did not see Abbie that afternoon, and he did not much care. The news had kept so long — there was no hurry — it would keep a day or two longer. He was content.

Eben did not stop running until he was safe within his own door. Panting and breathless and stricken with fear, he threw himself down upon the settle in the hall. Harriet heard him and came out to him.

“What in the world’s the matter with you, Eben?” she asked, wondering.

“I’ve killed a man, Harriet,” whispered Eben.

“Mercy on us!” cried Harriet, laughing lightly; she did not take Eben seriously. “How exciting! There are several men I would like to murder. When was it, Eben, just now?”

“Don’t, Harriet,” said Eben, shuddering. “Don’t joke. I — I shot him, and then I broke his head with a belaying-pin — an iron pin. It was four years ago.”

He got up, and with his head sunken upon his breast, he went slowly up the stairs and locked himself into his room. He would not meet Harriet’s eyes; he knew how they would be filled with horror and pity, and with hate of his deed. It was a pity that he did not meet her eyes. She knew that he spoke the truth, and her heart was filled full of sorrow for Eben and sympathy, and her eyes showed nothing else.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

THERE was an unusual amount of little sicknesses about, for the season — colds and such ailments. The doctor had just come from a visit to Miss Hitty; a call which was, ostensibly, social and non-professional. He often dropped in there and dragged himself, wheezing, up two flights of stairs to satisfy himself of her bodily condition, if he could be said to satisfy himself when he was as dissatisfied as possible.

He went in to find his wife, — she was waiting for him, just inside the door, — and, incidentally, to get ready for supper. It was not a desolate supper, but a very merry one; one that the doctor was in no hurry to get through. Although, at this season, it was eaten by daylight and not by lamplight, the period of unshaded lamps was over. Not a single unshaded lamp was tolerated in the house. Even the housekeeper and cook, who had resolutely declined to leave Doctor Olcott under any circumstances, unless removed by force, was resigned to the change. In evidence whereof, she had a shade for the lamp in her own room; a wonderful shade, delicately tinted a shell-pink above and a beautiful pea-green below, and tastefully adorned with birds and flowers such as never were on land or sea. At least, she was overheard by Sophy murmuring some-

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thing about the light that never was on land or sea, and if she did not refer to her lamp-shade, what in the world did she refer to?

The doctor had not quite got through with his journals, that evening, when there came a knock at the door. He looked up, surprised, and then glanced at the clock. It was not time for the housekeeper and cook to appear with the beer; it lacked five minutes of beer-time. Never, in all his experience, had the doctor known her to be so far off as five minutes. Perhaps the clock was wrong. He compared it with his watch, which he could depend upon. No, the clock was just right. The knock was repeated, more timidly this time. That was never his housekeeper and cook.

"Come!" called the doctor; and he swung half around in his chair, taking down one foot in order to execute that manœuvre the better. His "Come" sounded like a clap of thunder.

The door opened slowly and Eben came in.

"Why, hello, Eben," the doctor cried, taking down the other leg and getting to his feet as fast as he could. "It's kind of you to come around to see an old man. Here, sit down."

He tumbled the books off an old easy-chair. The books made a tremendous noise as they fell to the floor; such a noise that Eben could not help the start he gave, although he had been expecting the noise. The doctor drew the chair up opposite his own.

"There!" he said. "Now, sit down. The old chair's

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comfortable, if it is n't very handsome. Hope you don't mind smoke." The doctor smiled and looked around at the dim and smoke-filled corners of the room, and at the slowly waving green wreaths that still hung above his own chair.

"But perhaps you'll have a pipe? I've got one — another one — right here."

"Thank you, not now. I came to tell you my story, if you'll listen to it."

"Listen to it! I've been dying to hear it, any time, these eight months and more. Drive ahead — wait a minute. Here's my housekeeper."

There was another knock at the door, — not a timid knock this time, — and the door opened and the housekeeper appeared. She had in her hands two bottles of beer and two glasses, and on her face a grim smile. The smile was new, since the doctor's marriage, and she had not got wholly used to it, yet; but it was there, and she was beginning to get used to it.

"Here's your beer, doctor," she said. "I thought, maybe, Mr. Eben'd like some, too. So I brought two bottles."

"Why, that was thoughtful," replied the doctor, surprised; not so much surprised as he would have been some months before. "That was kind of you. Pretty smoky in here, is n't it?"

"None to hurt," was the curt answer. "I guess 't won't hurt none. Good-night, doctor."

"Good-night," said the doctor, "and thank you."

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"No call to thank me," said the housekeeper; and she went out and shut the door softly behind her.

Eben opened his beer in a manner that showed that his hand was used to the operation. And the doctor filled his pipe afresh and lighted it, and then he opened his bottle. But he said nothing.

"Doctor," began Eben, at last, "you remember the night when I ran away?"

"I remember the next day well," replied the doctor. "Your father came to see me, and he was very much distressed."

"He might have been. I have been sorry for him, but I should do the same thing, if I had it to do over again," Eben said. His lips were compressed—a trick of Harriet's.

"Yes, damn it, an unfortunate business," said the doctor. "Most unwise, Eben, although he thought he was acting for the best. But let that pass. It can't be helped."

Eben was silent a little while, musing; then he roused himself. "I'll begin with that night," he said. "My adventures may be said to have begun then."

"I knew you fairly well, Eben," remarked the doctor, smiling, "up to that night. At least, I thought I did. Then I began to wonder whether I had known you at all. But go ahead."

Eben thoughtfully sipped his beer. "I had no money," he said at last. "I never had much, but after

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that — that thrashing, I felt that I would rather take my chances of starving than take any of my father's money, although he had given me some only a few days before. I left it on my bureau, I remember. The thrashing was for some little peccadillo such as boys are continually committing. Five minutes' kind talk would have done the business. But father did n't believe in that method of bringing up boys."

Eben fell silent again. The doctor said nothing, and after some minutes Eben resumed.

"It does n't do much good for me to get to thinking," he said, smiling gravely, "and I will go on with my story. I concealed myself on the night freight. Before getting far, I was found by the crew, and, the next morning, taken to the man they called the yard boss. I made up a story, which consisted of parts of the truth, and asked the yard boss for a job. I don't know whether he believed the story and was sorry for me or not, but he gave me a job which soon developed into that of freight brakeman. My name, for fifteen years, was Jacob Bronson. Why, for some months, I went through here every other night. I was glad enough that it was in the night. Once or twice a week, I coupled in a car here. It was a wonder that I did n't get smashed in doing it, for I was very nervous; but the smash was to come.

"You may wonder why I was not found; I wondered. It would have been easy to find me. At last, I got so nervous with thinking about it, that I man-

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aged to get transferred to another run, and, within two years, I was running into the Mott Haven yards, still a freight brakeman. I was a pretty good brakeman, though. Then I came upon a gang of freight thieves."

Eben raised his hand to hide his face. "Then I fell down. They persuaded me, — no doubt they found me easy, — and I let them get away with some of their plunder. I got my share, of course. But that was a lesson to me. It got to be a regular thing for something to be stolen from my train. It was too regular and I remonstrated; and they laughed and said they could n't let a good thing go quite so soon. Since that time, I have been strictly honest; a noble trait that, that is enforced by experience, is n't it, doctor? Honesty is a policy which may or may not prove to be the best. That is beautiful teaching."

Eben laughed shortly. The doctor rumbled in his throat; he seemed enraged at something.

"Well," said Eben, taking up his story again, "I was coupling cars in the big yard, and I was nervous, for I did n't know how soon I would be found out; I knew they must have their eyes on me, and I got caught between two cars and was smashed up. Not very badly, — several ribs broken, — but it sent me to the hospital for six months. No doubt it saved me from jail, too; but I lost my job, and did n't dare make a fuss about it. It would n't have done any good, anyway. I used up all my money there, in the hospital. Why,



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when I walked out of that hospital, I had just one dollar in my pocket, and that was given to me by one of the internes. I was n't well enough to be sent out, considering the weather. The streets were a mass of slush, and it came on a cold rain the second day.

"I had spent every cent by that time, and I had been looking for work all the time. But I was n't able to work, and, no doubt, I showed it. I could n't find any work. Everybody seemed to have more help than was at all necessary, and to be on the point of letting some of the men go. By afternoon, I was tired and wet through, and cold and hungry, and more than half sick and thoroughly discouraged. I felt as if it would be a relief to be dead, and I went down on one of the wharves to try to drown myself. Not that I preferred that manner of killing myself, but I had no money to buy a revolver or poison or chloroform. I should have preferred chloroform, I think, but, probably, if I had had the money to buy it, I should have kept going a little longer. The police would n't let me drown myself in peace."

Doctor Olcott had been fidgeting in his chair. "Damn it, Eben!" he said then. "Damn it, why did n't you let some of us know? We'd have taken care of you."

"I know, doctor, — I could n't. It was impossible. I would rather die, and so would you, in my place."

Again the doctor rumbled in his throat. Eben went on.

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“About dusk I went off the wharf to find another less frequented. On the way I met a girl; a girl whom I had known when I — when I was running with the gang. She was handsome; strikingly handsome, in a way, and young, — she could n’t have been more than eighteen or nineteen, — but old in her knowledge of the world — her world. In short, the less said about her, the better. She persuaded me to go with her. I was so sick that I hardly knew what I was about, and I went. She nursed me through a long illness.”

“Who was she, Eben?” asked the doctor.

“She did n’t know, herself,” Eben answered. “She was brought up in the streets. She did n’t even know how old she was. If you’ll excuse me, doctor, I’d rather not talk about her. But she took care of me through my sickness. I was very sick. When I got well, I felt grateful to her — and I married her.”

“What!” cried the doctor. “You married, Eben? Well, it might have been a good job, too.”

“It did n’t turn out to be a good job. Life with her began to be unbearable, almost at once. I need n’t go into the reasons, doctor. In the course of the next three years, I sounded the uttermost depths of wretchedness. I left her, — I have never seen her nor heard of her from that day to this, — and I went to sea. I had always longed to go to sea. Those were the first days of anything like happiness that I had known for years. Even the fore-castle, filled with bad smells, and with men of all sorts, good, bad, and worse, — mostly worse, — was like a

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home. I was contented, in a way. I have been all over the world, as much as a man can be, in sailing-ships, in ten years.

“Well, in the course of seven years I had risen to be first mate; Jacob Bronson, mate. You would not have known me, doctor. I was a reckless man, worked my crews hard, though no harder than I worked myself, and I have no doubt that Jacob Bronson had a bad reputation among the men, although I know that his reputation with owners was good. I maintained strict discipline, but I never had had to use force. Then I shipped in the ‘Susan.’”

“What!” cried the doctor. “Frank Catherwood’s ‘Susan’?”

“Yes,” replied Eben, smiling, “Frank Catherwood’s ‘Susan.’ I shipped in New York and intended to leave her in New York. But a little mutiny brewed just before we got in. There were only three or four men concerned in it. It was directed against me. I had to shoot a man; and, as the shot did n’t stop him, I grabbed an iron belaying-pin and hit him. I heard the bone crunch as the heavy pin hit his skull.” Eben shuddered and covered his face as he recalled it. “That moment,” Eben resumed, taking down his hand after a while,—“that moment fear seized upon me; fear of what I had done and of the possible consequences. But I was not to blame, doctor,” he said earnestly; “I was not to blame. The man was coming at me with a knife in his hand. He was mutinous, and there were three

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others coming behind him. Jim Gunn was one of them.”

“Jim Gunn — who’s Jim Gunn?”

“I’ll come to him in a few minutes,” Eben replied. “He was one of the three others. It happened that we were practically alone on the deck, at the time. There were some more of the men there, but they were away up forward, half hidden behind the foresail and the other gear. It is n’t likely that they knew that anything was going on.

“Well, when I hit the man and he went down in a heap, that ended the mutiny. I don’t think I showed that I was afraid. At any rate, I had no trouble — no more trouble. I had enough.” Eben laughed; but not merrily. “I managed to keep up appearances before the men and before the captain. The man was n’t dead when we got in, — it’s extraordinary what hold they have on life, — and I had not been confined. The captain seemed to think that I had done the right thing. He kept me at work. He intended to send the man to some hospital; not that he thought it would be of any use, for he did n’t see, and I don’t, how any man so hurt could possibly get well. He must have died within a day or two. I did n’t wait to see.

“We got in to quarantine along about dark, and were kept there overnight. I slipped away in a quarter boat and rowed quietly for some time, until I was out of sight of the ‘Susan.’ Before morning, I had boarded an Italian barque, outward bound, and shipped as a

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common sailor. My conscience was easy about the quarter boat, for there was pay enough coming to me, which I did n't get, to pay for more than one boat. Frank did n't lose anything by me.

"The Italian carried me to several Mediterranean ports, and I shipped on an English vessel for India as a common sailor. I could have done better, but I did n't dare. Well, I knocked about the world for almost three years more, with that obsession of fear upon me. It made it worse. I should have been ready to back up my action. That was my mistake in running away from the 'Susan.' I saw it long ago. At last, I drifted back to this country, landed at Savannah a year ago last May, and began to beat my way north. I had no definite idea of coming here, but it seemed as if I simply had to come. It took me nearly six months to get here, and I was pretty nearly done. You know the rest."

"Ought to have come sooner, Eben. You might have been happy, just as well. Eben Joyce could have gone to sea as well as Jacob Bronson. Frank would have seen to that."

"Yes," said Eben, "I know he would."

"Eben," the doctor went on, "as to that man you knocked in the head, it served him just right; it is n't likely that will ever be raked up. If it should be —"

"Doctor Olcott," said Eben, interrupting, "I saw Jim Gunn this afternoon, and he saw me and knew me. Like a fool, I ran; I had no time to think. And he ran

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after me, calling to Jacob Bronson to stop. It is raked up already. I was in the woods with Clanky and Joe."

"H'm!" said the doctor, looking at Eben thoughtfully. "What do you intend to do about it?"

"I've been wrestling with that question for the last three hours," replied Eben. "I've come to a decision. I'm going to try to find Gunn again, and I'm going to take him to Frank and put the whole case before him, fully. I want to stand trial for it, if that is necessary. But whether it is or not, and whatever the outcome — I'm tired of being afraid. I'd rather hang."

"Good, Eben!" the doctor cried. "Good! Do you want me to go with you to Frank's office, to-morrow? I shall be glad to, if you do. That is," he added, smiling, "if no one needs me worse than Miss Wetherbee."

"Thank you, doctor. I don't know whether I do or not. I've got to find Gunn."

"H'mph!" the doctor growled. "Gunn! Guess you'll have a job. I would n't waste any time over him. If you do find him, just call me, will you? I want to be there."

Eben smiled and nodded. He rose. "Well, doctor, I'll go along. It has been good of you to listen. I feel better than I have for years."

## CHAPTER XXIX

EBEN did not find James Gunn, Esquire, although he searched for him faithfully. But he did find William Ransome, who gave him the latest news that was to be obtained of Gunn.

“That Gunn seems to have gone off,” said William, smiling quietly; and Eben laughed with a heartiness that was new to William, and they went to Colonel Catherwood’s office together. It was the middle of the afternoon, for Eben had wasted the whole of the morning in his fruitless search for Gunn.

The colonel seemed to be waiting for him. He nodded to William and took Eben’s hand in his.

Eben smiled. “I’m afraid,” he said, “that you know my errand already. Doctor Olcott must have been here.”

“He has been,” replied the colonel; “and he has told me the story that you told him. Eben, why — why in the world could n’t you have told some of us sooner? I could have saved you much unhappiness. That sailor that you laid out did not die; he got well after four months in hospital. The surgeons said it was a most extraordinary case. But even if he had not, you had nothing to fear. And, Eben, here is a chair.”

For Eben seemed to have grown weak in the knees,

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suddenly, and was looking about him in a dazed way. The revulsion of feeling was too sudden. He sank into the chair and put both hands over his face; but only for a minute.

“Thank you, Frank,” he said then, looking up; “thank you. It takes a weight off my mind — a great weight. It is a great responsibility, the life of a man, even although it was necessary to take it to save my own life; and justifiable. I am more glad than I can tell you that he got well.”

The colonel smiled. “It may not be a benefit to the community,” he returned. “I believe he is a hard character still — as bad as he was before. But I am glad, for your sake, Eben. I am glad, too, to know Jacob Bronson at last. I have been looking for him for some years. He was the best mate that the ‘Susan’ ever had.”

The colonel was still looking down at Eben and smiling. “Was he, Frank?” asked Eben, wistfully. “Do you mean it? Would you — would you give him that berth again?”

“If he would take it. That is the main reason why I wanted so much to find him.”

“I’ll take it!” Eben fairly shouted. “I’ll take it! Frank, I have n’t been so happy for — oh, ever.” He sprang to his feet and wrung the colonel’s hand. “Now,” he said, “now, Frank, I must call you Colonel Catherwood and be most respectful. For are you not my owner?”

The colonel laughed. “Bosh, Eben!” he replied. “I



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don't believe William knows what we are talking about."

"Partly," said William. "I am a pretty good guesser. A part I can't even guess."

"Don't you think, Eben," the colonel suggested, "that you might tell William the story? He is sure to hear it, and he had better hear it from you."

"Of course," said Eben. "I meant to tell him."

William sat down, and Colonel Catherwood sat in his chair, again, before his desk, and absent-mindedly took up some loose sheets that he seemed to have been looking over, and slipped them into a drawer. William's practiced eye noted it. Eben told his story again; but he said no more than he was obliged to about the girl, and he did not mention his marriage.

William listened well, but toward the end of the story, he surreptitiously looked at his watch twice. When Eben had made an end of it, William thanked him for it, and expressed his interest. He had really been interested in Eben's story; but he was much more vitally interested in something else. He excused himself, on the score of an engagement, and left Eben with the colonel. William, it must be confessed, had no engagement; but he had hopes. He went up the street hastily; almost on a run.

As he got near the head of the street, he saw her. She was walking slowly, as if she hoped that somebody in particular would overtake her; at least, that seemed a possible explanation. William whistled, and Abbie

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looked around, quickly; and, seeing her look, William waved his hat and began to run. Abbie, in the most brazen and barefaced manner, waved in return and stood stock-still and waited for him, smiling as though the very somebody in particular had turned up, at last.

William came up, rather breathless and rather excited.

“William, William,” Abbie said, “you must n’t run so. You get all out of breath, and it might be bad for your heart. You are not so young as you were.”

“No,” retorted William. “Neither is anybody else. Do you know why I envy Sir Launcelot?”

Abbie laughed quickly. “No,” she said. “He has been dead a long time.”

“That is not the reason. Sir Tristram was accounted a big man, and a strong knight of his hands, but Sir Launcelot was better breathed. That is not in quotation marks. They must, all of them, have been well-breathed men.”

“I am afraid, William, you have —”

“Oh, yes,” William interrupted, “I have been reading Sir Thomas; second volume — I don’t remember the page, but about the middle. As for my heart, we will speak of that later.”

“William,” asked Abbie, laughing, “what is the matter with you?”

“Nothing,” William replied; “nothing at all. There was something the matter, and I did n’t know what it was. Since I have found out what it is, it is not a matter

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any longer, although I am just as much affected as ever; more so, I think. Do I make myself clear?"

"You certainly do not. I should call you just a plain lunatic. But come along and tell me where you have been these last few days."

William laughed delightedly. "I have been engaged in introspection; trying to find out just what was the matter with me. It was n't until yesterday that I discovered. I was coming, as fast as I could, to share my guilty secret with you, when something occurred to detain me. To-day, I just missed missing you by the skin of my teeth. And you rebuked me for running!"

"You deserve the rebuke," replied Abbie, "for allowing anything to detain you yesterday, if not for running to-day. What was it, William, that detained you? Account for yourself."

Accordingly, William launched forth into the story of Eben Joyce, incidentally including that of Gunn. It took some time.

"Eben did not tell me the whole of it," he said, when he had finished; "I am certain of that. I don't know the rest. Perhaps you do. I could guess it, I think."

Abbie did not reply directly. "So Eben is likely to be a man again. I am very glad, very glad."

"Likely to, in time," William returned. "A man can hardly be expected to shake off the habit of fear at once. But let us hope it won't take long."

Abbie echoed his last words. "It won't take long. Mike Loughery is back again."

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“He seems to have deserted the ‘Susan’ in New York. But, Abbie, enough said about Eben, for the present. He’s happy. There’s a little affair of my own that I want to talk about.”

They had got well beyond the houses while William had been telling Eben’s story, and they had come to a little patch of oak woods. A wood-road, little used, went winding in among the trees.

“Well,” Abbie replied, “why don’t you talk about it, then?”

“I will,” said William. “Come in here. It looks inviting.”

“Just as if we did n’t know, exactly, every road and path within reach!” But Abbie went, willingly enough.

Just as if you did n’t know, Abbie, exactly what William was going to say! But Abbie did not know exactly. If she had known, it is to be supposed that it would have made no difference. The same old formula seems to possess the same old attraction for all of them, when it is attractive at all.

“My heart, you know,” said William, smiling; “we were to speak of that later.”

Abbie was looking at the ground before her feet, and she was smiling, too.

“Oh, were we? Well, your heart — what’s the matter with it? Not your running, I hope.”

The grass-grown road on which they were walking so very slowly took a turn here. William waited until they were well around the turn.

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“No, Abbie, not my running.”

There was a venturesome pine tree which had grown in the road, between the rut and the hoof-track; had grown just as high as the axles which passed above it. William would not let a tree come between him and Abbie. Perhaps he was superstitious. He crossed to her side. There was hardly room for two.

“I find, Abbie,” said he then, “that my heart — Well, I have n’t got it.”

As he spoke, she, walking on the edge of the rut, almost lost her balance. William put his arm about her quickly.

She did not draw away; to be sure he had not expected that she would, but she raised her eyes to his. Her eyes were very soft and shining.

“Oh, William,” she cried gently, laughing low, “how absurd we are! Just like two young lovers.”

“Well,” he contended stoutly, “we are.”

“Not young,” said she; “not so very young.”

“As young as youth itself,” he said. “I will not yield in that matter to the youngest youth ever made love. And I hold you to be as young as the youngest woman ever was made love to.”

“You hold me, it is true.”

He raised her chin and kissed her full on the mouth.

“You should n’t have done that, William,” she said, with a fine color. “You are not to think that I did n’t like it; for I did. But you should n’t have done it.”

He was plainly astonished. In that, he showed his

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inexperience. If he had had experience of women, he would never have been astonished at anything a woman did or said.

"Well, why," he asked, "for heaven's sake?" But it is to be noted that he kept his arm about her.

"We are not even engaged."

"Not even engaged!" William laughed.

"You have n't asked me anything yet," Abbie answered demurely.

"Will you have me on my knees?" asked William. "Wait until I find a soft spot." He dropped upon one knee. "Abbie, I love you. Will you be my wife?"

Laughing, she put both her hands upon his shoulders. "Yes," she said promptly. "I will, if you will promise to let me read everything that you write as you write it, and talk to me freely about it."

"I'm dying to," William said, jumping to his feet. "Now, Abbie, are we engaged?"

"Yes," she answered, raising merry eyes to his.

"And I may kiss you?"

"If you want to."

"Like the other?"

She only nodded. But he did not have to raise her chin; her arms were about his neck.

"Oh, William, William!" she sighed contentedly.

## CHAPTER XXX

“ABBIE MERVIN,” said Harriet Joyce, decidedly, “now that Eben is all settled and fixed nicely, I want to get you and William off my mind.”

“Why, Harriet,” replied Miss Mervin, falteringly, — it was not like her to falter, — “what makes you think — ”

“Fiddlesticks, Abbie! You have been looking positively beaming for more than a week, and so has William, when I have seen him. Did you think that nobody would know unless you told them?”

Abbie laughed happily. “Forgive me, Harriet,” she said. “I should have told you at once, but — but — Oh, why make any bones of it? I was afraid that you might not like it. William was devoted to you for so long! But *I* don’t care.”

“Truly, why make any bones of it?” smiled Harriet. “If I could n’t make up my mind in all that time, it is n’t likely that I should grudge him to you now. It would serve me right if I did. I am not a dog in the manger, I hope. To tell the truth, I find that I am rather relieved. William was a tremendous responsibility. I suppose I should have taken him at last, merely on that account. But I am happy to resign him to you, Abbie. I wish you happiness.”

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"Thank you, Harriet," said Abbie, coldly.

Harriet noticed it. "Now don't you go and get mad, Abbie," she said. "I know very well that I had nothing to resign. It was merely a figure of speech. When are you going to get married?"

A slow blush mounted into Abbie's cheeks, the rose-tint upon porcelain. "I don't know. William wants to very soon. I guess we shall, Harriet; I guess we shall."

"I'm glad, Abbie. Then I can keep you both," said Harriet, with satisfaction. "I give you warning, I shall ask you to tea often, and I shall expect you to come. That will suit me very much better than having to get married myself. I was not cut out to be a married woman."

"What nonsense, Harriet!" cried Abbie, indignantly. "Every woman is cut out for it. Your thinking so only shows that William was not the right man. And I'm glad of that."

Abbie kissed her. Harriet sniffed contemptuously, and withdrew.

"I am not your William," she said dryly.

Abbie laughed gayly. "Did you think that I mistook you for him?"

"No, I did n't. Have you made any plans, Abbie? Where shall you live? Has William thought of a house?"

"Well, yes, he has. But I've got a surprise for him. We may as well live in my house; that is, if William agrees."



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“If William agrees!” cried Harriet. “If William did n’t agree to such an eminently suitable arrangement, I would n’t marry him.”

Again Abbie laughed delightedly. “But, Harriet,” she said softly, “you know it will have to be as William wishes.”

Harriet looked at her as if she could not believe her ears. “Faugh!” she exclaimed, in disgust. “Abbie Mervin, do you mean to tell me that you have n’t any more to say than a cat? I had better say a dog, for a cat would, at least, live where she wanted to.”

“So shall I live where I want to. I want to live where William does.”

“So would a dog.”

“So much the better for the dog,” returned Abbie, undisturbed. “He puts a higher value on the society he keeps than on the mere place. But let’s not quarrel about it, Harriet. I have no doubt William will agree readily enough. He’s an agreeing person.”

“No doubt,” said Harriet, rather scornfully; although it is difficult to see what William had done to deserve it. “With only your mother and your aunt in that great house, it does seem as if you ought to be able to find room. It’s convenient to the bank.”

Abbie flushed again. “Any house in Old Harbor would be convenient to the bank, for that matter,” she replied. “But, Harriet, prepare for a shock. William has promised me that he will give up the bank.”

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Harriet was as shocked as anybody could have wished. "Give up the bank!" she cried. "He has promised you! Abbie Mervin, are you crazy?"

Abbie positively chuckled at it. "No," she said, "I'm not. He's going to have time to write, and he's going to write. It's a shame that he has n't been able to devote his whole time to it. I'm going to give him the southwest front room, — father's old room, you know. It's a nice, sunny room, where he won't be disturbed. Of course, he does n't know it yet."

"Well!" Harriet said. "Well! I can't find words that would be at all suitable for me to say. Doctor Olcott might help me out, or even Eben. He does n't use bad language, but he must have heard a lot. What are you going to live on?"

"William has some money and so have I, you know. That will be enough until he makes some with his writing."

"Makes money with his writing!" cried Harriet, incredulously. "Sell that stuff! You are a fool, Abbie."

Abbie did not resent it; she only laughed. "Wait and see," she said. "It won't be any great harm if he does n't. He'll be doing the work that he loves." She glanced out of the window. "Here's Eben, now. You might get him to supply you with language, Harriet. My, how it blows! And it's beginning to rain. I guess I'd better be getting home, Harriet."

Eben came running up the walk and burst in at the front door. "Harriet!" he called.

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“In here, Eben,” Harriet answered calmly. “What’s the matter? Is the house afire?”

“No,” said Eben, laughing. “Hello, Abbie! Where are my oil-skins, Harriet? The ‘Susan’ ’s sighted, and it’ll be blowing a living gale o’ wind in three hours. She gets in in the nick o’ time, with this dirty weather coming.”

“Oh,” said Harriet. “I’ll get your oil-skins, Eben. I hung them out in the back hall.”

She was gone only a few minutes, and came back with the oil-skins and sou’wester. Eben took them from her.

“I don’t know when I shall be back, Harriet; probably not to supper. Don’t sit up for me. I may as well get a bite of something now.”

He went as suddenly as he had come.

“I can’t get used to Eben’s new ways,” Harriet remarked. “They are very different from his old ones.”

Abbie murmured something — it did not matter in the least what it was — and began to put on her things.

“Eben’ll be sailing as soon as he can get the ‘Susan’ ready,” Harriet continued. She laughed a little. “To tell the truth, Abbie, I shan’t be sorry, and it will be a welcome change for him. I shall feel rather relieved to have my house to myself. And he will be doing what he likes best in the world.”

“That’s the way I feel about William’s writing.”

“But, Abbie,” Harriet remonstrated, in tones which she could not keep from seeming shocked, — not that

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she tried, — “our — we have been sea-captains and ship-owners for — oh, as far back as I know anything about us. It’s so different!”

Abbie laughed. “I really believe, Harriet,” she said, “that you can’t see through a — Well, good-by.”

She went out, and the wind, careering around the house, seized upon her, and had blown her off the walk and up against one of the great elms before she knew what it was up to. Then, in pure joyousness, she laughed aloud; and, entering into the freakish spirit of the wind, which had not settled down to anything in particular yet, but came in gusts, she struggled back to the walk and out at the gate, and at last, home. It had not begun to rain in earnest; only a hard, driving mist, coming with the gusts of wind.

Nobody in Old Harbor slept much that night, except the children. They, for the most part, would have slept soundly through anything. Such small things as the lashing of the rain upon the windows and the roaring of the wind and the breaking of branches and the occasional crash of a tree and the thunder of the surf upon the distant beaches would not bother healthy children. The roar from the Middle Breaker was tremendous; it sounded as if the surf were just outside the windows.

Abbie, having dismissed William and warned him to be careful and to go right home, went to bed to lie awake, listening happily to the noise of the elements. And William, having listened smilingly to Abbie’s

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warning, went down to Colonel Catherwood's office to offer his help. William and the colonel and Eben and many another good man worked hard all that night, and went home in the morning drenched through, after making the "Susan" as safe as she could be made and seeing her ride out the storm until daylight. Most of the lesser vessels were safe, too; but three of them were blown ashore at the upper end of the harbor. Nobody took the trouble to count the dories and skiffs that were smashed up. The old shipyard was devastated, and the scaffolding, which had stood for so many years, was knocked down and carried off by wind and tide, to be distributed along the shores. A row of fishermen's huts which had stood on a long sand-spit was swept clean away during the night; the sand-spit itself was not there in the morning, and the sea had even breached the sea-wall that had stood at the root of it, and had carried the stones away, or covered them so deep with sand that they could not be found to make repairs. The wall has not been repaired yet. And another long sand-spit now runs in over what was once a meadow.

It was at this break in the sea-wall that Clanky Beg was found, drenched with salt water, sitting in the rain beside Mike Loughery's dead body and weeping as though his heart would break. To those who found him there, he would say nothing, — nothing intelligible, — but to call for William Ransome. William had just got home; but he went out again and down to the re-

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mains of the sea-wall — and to the remains of Mike. Clanky had resolutely refused to leave Mike, and still sat beside his body; and all that William was able to get out of him was a passionate denial that he had killed Mike, and a lament that he had not been able to save him. Mike's death remained a mystery. Clanky seemed to be satisfied when he had, in a measure, accounted to William. Clanky felt an obligation, dim and hazy, no doubt, to satisfy him. Then he went with him, readily enough, to Mrs. Loughery's.

Miss Hitty Tilton and Miss Susie had tried to occupy themselves as usual, the evening before, but they had not been able to. Miss Hitty found herself listening to the increasing roar of the Middle Breaker, and Miss Susie was plainly nervous.

"I don't know as I ever heard Old Middle so loud," remarked Miss Hitty, calmly; "any way, not since the September gale of sixty-nine — or was it sixty-seven or seventy-one? When was it, Susie? When was it that old Mis' Marsh got blown across the street and broke her leg? Don't you know?"

"I'm afraid I don't, sister," answered Miss Susie, plaintively. "Don't you know? I depend upon you to remember all those things." Miss Susie laughed to conceal her nervousness. A fiercer gust shook the house and lashed the rain against the panes; it seemed to have blown off Miss Susie's glasses, which dangled now at the end of their black ribbon. "Mercy!" she cried. "Oh, *sister*, was n't that awful? Do you — do you

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suppose there's any danger that the house will blow down? I'd like to be prepared."

Miss Hitty laughed. "Well, Susie, you can't do better than get your stockings all darned up. Then you'd better put on your best pair and go to bed. I'd advise you to lie out straight and fold your hands across your stomach. It'll look better and save trouble."

Miss Susie looked relieved, and secured her glasses again by running her fingers quickly down the ribbon; a movement made perfect by long practice. She stuck the glasses on her nose again.

"Now, sister, you're poking fun at me. But, really, it seemed as if there might be danger that the house would blow down. It shakes so at every gust."

"This old house has stood many a harder blow than this," said Miss Hitty, dryly. "Don't you worry, Susie."

"Well, I won't, if you think there is no danger. But I'm sorry for the sailors out at sea."

"So am I," agreed Miss Hitty, quickly. "So should every one be that knows anything about sailors. But don't you remember the poem? 'Don't you hear it roar, now? Lordy! But I'm sorry for all unhappy folks ashore, now!'"

"I seem to remember it," replied Miss Susie. "But, if you'll pardon me, sister, it does n't strike me that you have quoted it just right. It seems to me to have too many feet."

"Feet, hands, ears, or eyes!" sniffed Miss Hitty, in

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disgust. "It is the sentiment I wished to make you see; the point of view of the sailor. Although I don't believe," she continued, "that any sailor ever looked at it in that way. If he did, he'd be a fool. Can you quote it any better, Susie?"

"I'm afraid not."

Miss Hitty was silent for some time. A great limb crashed down from one of the trees.

"Oh!" Miss Susie cried. "I wonder what branch that was."

"I've got it, Susie," said Hitty, with satisfaction.

"Oh, have you, sister? What tree do you think it was?" Miss Susie laid her work in her lap and looked up.

"Not that, Susie," said Miss Hitty, impatiently; "the quotation. 'Oh, Lordy! How I pities all unhappy folks on shore, now.' There! Now I'm going to bed." She got out of her chair with the quick motion that had always been characteristic of her. It was not easy for her to move quickly, now; no one knew how hard it was. "Good-night, Susie. The house won't blow down. But remember to lie out straight with your hands clasped over your stomach."

"Oh, *sister!*" cried Miss Susie.

But Hitty was gone. She got herself into her own bed, settled herself with a sigh, and was lulled to sleep by Old Middle. Miss Hitty could never understand how any sensible person could be kept awake by the noise of the surf. Although she went to sleep readily,



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she woke long before light. It was one of the penalties of old age. She lay there patiently waiting for daylight; and when it began to be gray and there was light enough to see, she dressed herself quietly and sat by her window, looking out at the devastation.

The street was covered with leaves and twigs; and there was a huge limb torn off one of the elms, nearly opposite her window, that pretty nearly blocked the street. She could see the long scar running down towards the ground, where the bark had been stripped from the tree. It made her wonder how their own trees had fared — Nancy's trees, now. There was one near their fence that she was afraid — it was an old tree, and she was afraid that it might have gone. In half an hour she had made up her mind.

"I'm not going to die but once," she said cheerfully, to herself; and she got her things on — her old bonnet and her long cloak — a present from Nancy — and her rubbers. "It's not much use to take an umbrella," she murmured, "but I'll take it — a sop to Cerberus. It *will* be a sop." She laughed at the fancy.

As she opened her door, she heard Susie pottering about in her room, and she stole downstairs quietly, chuckling to herself and feeling like a guilty child.

It was still blowing hard, although not nearly so hard as it had been, and the rain came down in hard, driving showers. An umbrella was of no use, and Miss Hitty took hers under her cloak. She made her way slowly

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and with difficulty past the fallen limbs and amid general ruin toward Nancy's. At the corner she saw Abbie Mervin.

"Dear me!" she said to herself. "Now I'm in for it. I'll hold on here and perhaps she won't see me."

So she held to the fence, — she was glad of that support, she found, — but Abbie had seen her, and came over.

"Why, Miss Hitty!" she cried. "You ought never to be out in this weather. Let me take you home. You might catch your death."

"Now, Abbie Mervin," Miss Hitty said decidedly, "if I want to risk my life, I'll take the responsibility. I'm going to Nancy Hedge's to see if any of our trees have been blown down. It's only a step farther. Don't you try to manage me. You'll have your hands full managing William."

Abbie blushed. "I'll go with you," she said. "It's not that I want to manage you, Miss Hitty, but that it's important to all of us to have you take care of yourself. Will you go in to Miss Hedge's?"

"Yes, I will, if that will satisfy you," replied Miss Hitty, smiling, "and be glad enough to. I know, as well as you do, Abbie, that I had no business to come out this morning, but I just had to. What are you up to?"

"Oh, I'm looking for William," answered Abbie, sighing. "I had a presentiment that he had not gone right home last night, as I told him to, and I've been

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down to see. He was n't at home all night. And no sooner was he back this morning than he went out again. I don't know why. Now, I'm looking for him. What ever am I to do with him, Miss Hitty?"

"Marry him," snapped Miss Hitty. "Marry him right away. He'll never take care of himself. You won't be making any mistake, nor he, either."

Abbie laughed. "That's what I'd about made up my mind to do."

They had been going on as fast as Miss Hitty was able, and now they were almost at Nan's gate. Miss Hitty saw that her old tree that she was anxious about still stood; but almost half of it had split off and lay in the yard. She stood silent, her eyes full of tears, for some minutes. Then she began to cough and to shiver. Abbie looked about her and saw William coming. She beckoned to him.

Nan had been standing at the library window. It was really too early for Octavia, and Nan was compassionately regarding the ruined tree. "There's Miss Hitty," she said suddenly to herself. "She has no business to be out in this storm. I'm going to get her in." Before anybody could have stopped her, Nan had darted out into the rain, just as she was.

She met them, William and Abbie supporting Miss Hitty, halfway to the house. Miss Hitty smiled and her lips moved. Nan bent down.

"Yes, you dear," she said. "It shall be all patched up, with bricks and cement, as good as new. Come

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in quickly. You are going to your very own room, Miss Hitty, and I'm going to send right off for Miss Susie."

"Well, Nancy, dear," whispered Miss Hitty, "I'm glad."

## CHAPTER XXXI

MISS SUSIE came, in the closed carriage, bringing with her some of Miss Hitty's things. Nan gave her her old room, too. There were rooms enough in the old house. Miss Susie fluttered about, her sole aim being to be of some use and comfort to Hitty, and her sole wish, beyond that, to be reassured as to her condition. Doctor Olcott, poor man, could give her but little reassurance; he only patted her on the back, as if she had been a child, and mumbled something about being as cheerful as she could. Miss Susie went to her own room and cried softly.

Nan waylaid him as he was going out. "Well?" she asked.

The doctor shook his head. "Not well, at all, Miss Hedge," he said. "Damn it, it is n't well. Be as good to her as you can, my dear, for we are all as fond of her as you are." Nan's eyes filled. "Hitty Tilton is a wonderful old woman, with an extraordinary amount of vitality and a will that has kept her alive for the last six months," continued the doctor; "but she's as stubborn as a mule. Damn it, there is n't a mule that can hold a candle to her. She may pull through this yet, but I won't hold out any false hopes; I don't expect it. Damn it! Good-by." The doctor went out hastily, and shut

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the door softly after him, — Nan knew that he would have liked to slam it, — and ambled down the walk to the Polar Bear.

For the next two days their hopes and their fears alternated; then their hopes dwindled. Nan was sitting beside Miss Hitty, on the late afternoon of the second day.

“Nancy, dear,” whispered Miss Hitty.

“What is it?” asked Nan. “Have you any pain?”

“Not a mite,” was the cheerful reply. “Nancy, will you look after Susie? Is it too much to ask?”

“No, you dear. She’s come home, and here she stays, and so do you. You’ll get well, Miss Hitty, if you only make up your mind to.”

Miss Hitty smiled merrily. “Fiddlesticks, my dear!” she said, with some approach to a return of her old energy. “Stuff and nonsense! If Doctor Olcott told you that, he’s a fool, and you can tell him I said so. He knows better.”

She was silent for a minute, gathering strength. Nan made no reply, but pressed the withered old hand she held.

“I’m a stubborn old woman, Nancy. But if I’ve got to take as much care of myself as though I was a china doll, I don’t want to live. Thank you about Susie, Nancy, dear. There’s one more thing I want to ask.”

Nan bent low. “Anything, Miss Hitty, that you would like, I promise.”

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Again Miss Hitty smiled. "Don't be rash, my dear. I wanted to ask you if you would be willing to find room for our furniture. There's a good deal of it, but they're all nice things. I want to get them back in the old house, and I want you to have 'em, Nancy; that is, if you want 'em."

"I shall be glad to have anything that has been yours," Nan replied, smiling through her tears, "after you have got through with it. You and Miss Susie can use the things here."

"Oh, I'm through with 'em," said Miss Hitty, dryly.

"Can't you find anything harder to ask me?"

"I guess I can, Nancy. Will you send word to Mary Catherwood and Jack that I'd like to see them? Jack's at home, is n't he? This is his day."

Nan nodded. "I believe he is," she said. "But — but, Miss Hitty, if it's anything to do with me, please don't."

"Fiddlesticks, my dear!" said the old woman. "Stuff and nonsense! Why should it be? If you won't send, Nancy, I'll have to ask somebody else. But I guess to-morrow 'll do."

So Nan sighed and sent. When the morrow came, Mrs. Catherwood and Jack appeared. What Miss Hitty had to say to Mrs. Catherwood that was of such importance, I do not know. It did not take long for her to say it — not more than five minutes. When Mrs. Catherwood came out, looking anxious but relieved, too, Nan was waiting for her.

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She did not waste any time. "How does she seem to you, Mrs. Catherwood?" she asked. "I have been seeing her constantly, of course, and can't judge."

"She seems surprisingly strong," Mrs. Catherwood replied; "much better than I had any reason to expect. I really don't see why we should give up hope yet, Nan, dear." Then Mrs. Catherwood flushed and smiled. "You must pardon me. The name slipped out before I knew it. But I should be glad if you would let me keep on using it. You are one of us, you know, and you have been very good to Miss Hitty and Miss Susie and to my Jack. Do you mind?"

Nan's eyes filled quickly, and her lip quivered a little. "It would make me very happy if you would," she answered. "I have wanted so much to be one of you." She gave a little flicker of a smile. "But I don't deserve any credit for being good to Miss Hitty and Miss Susie. Nobody could help it; and I have denied myself nothing. I only hope Miss Hitty will be willing to stay here if she gets well."

"Let us hope that she will. There is no reason for giving up yet." Mrs. Catherwood put an arm around Nan impulsively and kissed her.

Meanwhile Miss Hitty was talking to Jack. She spoke very low, — that was to be expected, — but with vigor. Knowing Miss Hitty, you would have expected that, too.

"Well, Jack Catherwood," she said, "you have gone and got into a pretty mess with our Nancy. Explain



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yourself, sir. What do you mean by making her unhappy?"

"But, Miss Hitty, —" Jack began, smiling and stammering.

"Oh, I know just what you would like to say," said Miss Hitty, stopping him. "It would be a waste of time to let you. Of course, it's her fault; we'll take that for granted. What do you propose to do about it?"

"I was n't going to say that at all," Jack returned. "I've no doubt it is my fault, although I don't see how. But neither do I see how —"

"Oh, fiddlesticks! Never mind whose fault it is, and never mind how. Make it up with her. She'll meet you more than halfway. I'm very fond of Nancy, Jack, even more fond of her than I am of you. I came very near being your grandmother, Jack. If I had n't been so stiff-necked and stubborn, bothering about such unimportant matters as whose fault it was, I should have been saved many an unhappy day. I just won't have Nancy going through my experience. But would you like to make it up with her?"

"Very much, Miss Hitty," acknowledged Jack, soberly.

"Well, then, go and do it right away. Your mother won't object. I've been talking to her. Now, run along. I'm tired. It's all because of you, you bad boy."

"I hope not, grandmother," said Jack; "I hope not." He bent over her and kissed her.

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Miss Hitty smiled. "There, there!" she said, "now run along. Tell her that I'm going to sleep, and don't want to be disturbed for an hour."

Miss Hitty closed her eyes, and Jack went out. He saw Nan down the hall, and caught her before she could reach her own room.

"Come, Nan," he said. "I have something to tell you. Miss Hitty is going to sleep, and she wanted me to say that she did n't wish to be disturbed for an hour." Nan smiled faintly at the transparent ruse; but she went. Jack stopped before the door of the library. "Is there anybody in here?"

Nan shook her head. Jack drew her inside and closed the door.

What passed behind that closed door, I do not know. Miss Hitty's hour was very nearly up when those two came out again, and Nan looked very happy and so did Jack. Jack kissed her at the door, — it is to be presumed that I shall not be far wrong if I say that he kissed her *again* at the door, — after making sure that nobody was in sight. And Nan, — she would not have cared whether anybody was in sight or not, — she put her arms about his neck and returned his kiss.

"There!" she whispered. "It would never do for me to keep it."

"I shall stay," Jack said, "until — until there is no need."

"Will you come in every day?"

Jack smiled. "Well, rather!" he said. "I have no

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doubt I shall be in several times a day — three or four. Good-by, dear.”

“Good-by.” Nan smiled at him as he went down the steps. Then she turned and ran up the stairs to Miss Hitty’s room. She was sure that it would be good for Miss Hitty to hear the news; not too much of it.

Miss Hitty was awake, and she did not know Nan. Her mind seemed to be wandering about among the mazes of that time, more than half a century before, when she had had her own misunderstanding and had been too stubborn to clear it up. Nan was alarmed and sent for Doctor Olcott.

Thereafter, for nearly a week, the good doctor was at Nan’s even more than Jack was. He got a nurse for Miss Hitty; not a trained nurse, — there were no trained nurses in Old Harbor, — but just a plain, middle-aged nurse. The ways of that nurse did not meet with Miss Hitty’s approval. Miss Hitty had her lucid moments, and during one of them, she seemed to want to say something. Nan bent low.

“What is it, dear?” she asked.

“That nurse is a fool,” whispered Miss Hitty. “Send her away.”

Nan smiled at the characteristic speech and sent the nurse away.

“Damn it,” said Doctor Olcott, explosively, when Nan told him; “just like her, just like her! But what are we going to do now? Nurses don’t grow on every bush.”

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"I will take care of her," said Nan.

"You, my dear?" asked the doctor. "It is hard work, hard work. It may wear you out, — the hours and the anxiety."

"It won't wear me out," Nan replied, smiling quietly. "If a nurse can stand it, I can. Perhaps Miss Susie can help me."

Doctor Olcott shook his head. "She is willing enough; anxious enough. But I doubt the wisdom of it. She would n't be much help."

"Don't deny me, doctor. I'll make it go, somehow. I'm sure that Miss Hitty would like it."

"Like it!" growled the doctor. "Of course she'd like it. Who would n't? You're a jewel, my dear. Jack Catherwood should be a proud man."

Nan blushed very prettily. "He is," she said.

The doctor was just going out. He stuck his head in at the door again.

"I'm a fool," he said. "I'll get Hattie. It's just her chance, and she's just the woman."

He got Hattie; and she stood watch with Nan, and, incidentally, she came to know her. She knew Nan better, in those few days and nights, than Octavia knew her, after all her years of acquaintance.

There came a night when Harriet, in giving up her place at Miss Hitty's side, paused at the door. She was smiling.

"She is sleeping quietly," she said. "I have hopes, Nan."

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The tears came into Nan's eyes. "I'm glad," she sighed. "Oh, I'm glad!"

Miss Harriet kissed her; and then, as if ashamed of such an unaccustomed display of emotion, she passed out quickly.

Daylight was coming in under the close-drawn shades and around the shutters when Miss Hitty opened her eyes and smiled at Nan, sitting there. Nan smiled back at her.

"*Now* you're all right, dear," she said.

"Nancy," returned Miss Hitty, faintly, "I've about decided to get well. I've changed my mind. It'll be a good joke on the doctor, and I want to see you and Jack married before I go."

"I'm thankful," said Nan. And she put her head down on the bed and cried for a minute, softly.

The doctor came very early. He had more than half expected to be sent for during the night, and he had lain awake for hours, awaiting the sound of his bell. It would never do to tell that to the profession; though his patients, I am afraid, were so lost to the sense of fitness that they would only have thought the better of him for it. Nan was waiting for him.

"Well?" he growled. "You did n't send for me. How is she? Living?"

Then Nan told him. "She has changed her mind, doctor. She is going to get well. She said so."

The doctor's face broke into a smile. "Damn it!" he said. "*Damn* it! The old jade!" He laughed and

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went wheezing and chuckling up the stairs, damning it delightedly at every step.

Miss Hitty's recovery was as rapid as was to have been expected, under the circumstances; and that is not saying much. But Nan, thinking it best that her bridges should be burned before she was well enough to use them again, had her furniture moved one day. In spite of carefully closed doors and explicit instructions to the men, it was impossible to keep from Miss Hitty the fact that something was up.

"Nancy," she said, "what in the world are you up to?"

Nan laughed. "Oh, nothing of consequence."

"It sounds like men tramping through the house," continued Miss Hitty, "and trying to keep quiet."

Nan laughed again, merrily. "So it does."

"What are they doing, Nancy?" Miss Hitty looked sharply at the merry girl. "Nancy, I do believe that you've gone and had my things moved."

"You don't have to guess again," said Nan. "Right, the first time. Forgive me, dear. I was afraid that you might change your mind about it. I warn you, I shall make it as hard as I can for you to do that."

Miss Hitty put out a hand to Nan's. "No," she said. "I shan't change my mind about that. Maybe you'll come to wish I had. You might just tell those men that they don't have to keep quiet. They can't, anyway, and it makes me nervous to have them trying."

So Nan went down to tell the men. Seeing the door

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of the drawing-room ajar, she looked inside before she shut it. What she saw almost took her breath away.

“Well!” she said. “Jack Haight!”

For there stood Octavia, her head on the breast of a tall man with a handsome face that was marked with many fine lines. It was a handsome face, as I have said, but it seemed to repel Nan; a face that was full of scorn, and doubt — of something — the motives of others, perhaps, as well as his own. But I do not know; I did not know Jack Haight. Nan did, it is to be supposed.

“Oh, how d’ ye do, Nan,” he remarked. “Pardon my not offering my hand. As you see, it is otherwise occupied.”

Nan inclined her head. Octavia turned to her a face full of happiness. “You see, Nan,” she said, “I shall be going this afternoon. You don’t need me any more.”

Nan smiled. “I see, Octavia,” she replied gently. “May you keep your happiness!”

As Nan went out, she heard Jack Haight laughing. It was not a pleasant laugh.

## CHAPTER XXXII

PERHAPS you have seen a copy of "War-Time Memories," by Francis Catherwood, late Colonel of Cavalry. It is Harriet's joy and pride.

"*That*, now," she says to her friends, when she is showing them her autographed copy, — "*that* is worth while." Which is as much as to say that this kind of thing is not; concerning which point there may well be an honest difference of opinion and her view of it the right one. She has made her remark to me. She has not made it, I have reason to believe, to William Ransome — she wants to be considerate; but he has no illusions as to her opinion. It does not disturb him.

Jack Catherwood found the manuscript of "War-Time Memories" while he was rummaging through his father's desk after something else, on the day the "Susan" sailed away with Eben. He seized upon the pile of written sheets, and held them up and shook them at his father.

"So you've been at it, dad!" he cried. "Contraband — plainly contraband. Findings, keepings. I shan't give up my prize." He laughed.

Colonel Catherwood started to take his precious papers away from Jack. Then he laughed, too. "Well, Jackie," he said, "you may take them if you want them.



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I have had my fun in doing them, and they're finished. If you find them good for anything, I shall be very glad. I don't suppose they are."

Jack was reminded of his half-forgotten intention to try to induce William Ransome to publish, too. He went to William and used all his powers of persuasion; and William listened with a smile upon his face.

"I shall have to refer you to my wife," he said, when Jack had finished. "She is my agent. I may say, in confidence, that she is my manager, as well. Don't let her know that I know it."

Abbie, who was present, blushed — William always liked to make her blush; he contended that her blush was lovely — and protested. "William!" she cried. "When you know that the only reason I married you was so that you should take proper care of yourself! Gratitude!"

"I am afraid that gratitude has no place, my dear; no standing at all," said William.

For Abbie, true to the determination she had expressed to Miss Hitty, had married him within the month. But all this bother about manuscripts and stories, which are of no manner of consequence, came after the sailing of the "Susan."

The "Susan" sailed on the tenth of November. Colonel Catherwood was there, of course; and Eben, equally of course. The ship could scarcely sail without her mate. Indeed, Eben had been as busy as a mate should be in getting her ready. Eben had changed

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much in those few weeks; and if there was still, occasionally, a trace of the fear which had become a habit, it was but a trace, and the colonel had faith that it would disappear. It takes more than a few weeks to get rid of a habit of years' standing.

They were all there to see Eben sail, even to Miss Hitty, who had been driven down with Nan and Miss Susie; for it was one of those warm and beautiful days that we sometimes have in November. They all gathered about the carriage — all but Eben. A mate has no time for standing about carriages when his ship is sailing. Clanky and Joe stood a little apart, with Mrs. Loughery, who looked somewhat mournful, as was only fitting. She even had on a black dress, in honor of Mike. Had he not kept out of jail, and died — so far as anybody knew, unless Clanky knew; and he had not told — and died, so far as anybody knew, in the honorable pursuit of an honorable calling? She had not thought it best to inquire too closely about that. It was best to let sleeping dogs lie; a comfortable habit that has much to recommend it. On the whole, Mrs. Loughery seemed relieved; which was but natural, too, in the circumstances.

Eben came ashore, at the last minute, to say a brief good-by. He shook hands with Miss Hitty, who leaned out to pat his shoulder and to say a few words; and he had to submit to being kissed by Mrs. Catherwood, and Miss Harriet, who displayed no emotion, but presented a sisterly cheek. Constance called out to him, gayly,

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and he smiled at her as he replied. He had called on Abbie and William the evening before, a distinction which surprised and pleased them. Now, he went to Doctor Olcott and took his hand in a close grasp, but said nothing. The doctor smiled at him and said nothing, in his turn. Then Eben turned to Clanky and Joe where they stood waiting.

Clanky and Joe had known Eben better than anybody else in Old Harbor, and he seemed to have more to say to them than to any of the others. Clanky Beg was crying,—he made no effort to conceal it,—and Eben put his arm about his shoulders and talked to him for some minutes. I do not know what he said, but Clanky's blubbering ceased and his face brightened. Eben said good-by to the smiling Joe and to Mrs. Loughery, who overwhelmed him with her blessings. Then, with a shake of Colonel Catherwood's hand and a wave to them all, he was gone.

They watched him as he went up over the side like a cat. The anchor had already been hove short, and, as he came aboard, they could hear the slow clank of the chain. The jibs went up, one at a time, and the clank of the chain continued, and they saw the shank of the anchor rise out of the water like some ungainly sea-animal with great blobs of mud on his head; and, the wind being gentle and fair, and blowing straight out of the harbor, the "Susan" sailed slowly out, without help, unfolding one sail after another as she went, with great deliberation. There was no hurry. Eben waved to them

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again, and they watched the ship until she was far out upon the broad ocean with all her wings spread, dim and vague; a dream ship.

Doctor Olcott spoke to Miss Harriet. "So you'll be living alone again, Hattie."

She turned to him and smiled. "Yes," she said, — it seemed to the doctor that she spoke with some satisfaction, — "yes, I shall live alone, now; alone with my silver and my china and my habits. And I'll tell you, doctor, in confidence, that I think I shall get a cat. Miss Wetherbee is not very near."

And the doctor laughed and went to look for the Polar Bear. On his way up the street, taken by a sudden impulse, he stopped at MacLean's. That gentleman was at his door, with his nose flattened against the glass. He made way when he saw the doctor clambering out of his buggy, and he opened the door.

The doctor mounted the three steps, smiling, and to MacLean's unbounded surprise and somewhat to his discomfort, gave the little man a resounding clap upon the back.

"Ouch!" he cried. "But, doctor, it'll be a love-pat, — nae mair?"

"No more than a love-pat," the doctor replied. "Why should it be? What do you think of it, MacLean?"

"The ship's sailed, I tak' it," said MacLean. "That'll be the last o' Eben Joyce, I'm thinkin'." He

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wagged his head wisely. "They 'll a' be gey fou 's. But they 'll be happy eneuch, I mak' na doubt. An' that Nan Hedge, I didna think it o' her, that she'd be sae guid ta' puir Miss Hitty. I didna think it o' her. It 'll be aye t' her credit."



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